A KRISTEVAN READING OF MİNE SÖĞÜT'S NOVELS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

ZEHRA ÇİFTCİ

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

APRIL 2024

Approval of the thesis:

A KRISTEVAN READING OF MİNE SÖĞÜT'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

A KRISTEVAN READING OF MİNE SÖĞÜT'S NOVELS

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April 2024, 154 pages

This thesis delves into Mine Söğüt's novels through the theoretical lens provided by Julia Kristeva, mainly focusing on Kristeva's concepts of the semiotic and the abject. Söğüt's narratives are characterized by their exploration of unsettling themes, the portrayal of marginalized women and queer characters, and the incorporation of unconventional narrative elements. As such, this study undertakes both thematic and structural explorations of Söğüt's works, linking the unsettling themes to Kristeva's concept of the abject and the unconventional narrative elements to the concept of the semiotic. Through a Kristevan framework, readers are guided to confront the disturbing themes present in Söğüt's narratives, such as violence, unconventional relationships, and the experiences of marginalized individuals, whether mentally or physically disabled or people conducting nonconventional relationships. Furthermore, the concept of the semiotic elucidates how semiotic ruptures in traditional narrative structures disrupt established norms and values, fostering a rejection of metanarratives. Ultimately, this thesis contends that by applying Kristevan theories, Söğüt's novels serve as platforms to deconstruct the dominant ideologies and disrupt the status quo. Through their challenge to the established norms, Söğüt's narratives defy and subvert patriarchy and heteronormativity, thereby advocating for resistance and revolt.

Keywords: Julia Kristeva, Mine Söğüt, the abject, the semiotic, subversion

ÖZ

MİNE SÖĞÜT ROMANLARININ KRISTEVACI BİR BAKIŞ AÇISIYLA OKUNMASI

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Nisan 2024, 154 sayfa

Bu tez, Julia Kristeva'nın teorik bakış açısıyla Mine Söğüt'ün romanlarını incelemekte olup, özellikle Kristeva'nın semiyotik ve tiksinç (abject) kavramlarına odaklanmaktadır. Söğüt'ün anlatıları, rahatsız edici temaların keşfi, marjinalleştirilmiş kadın ve queer karakterlerin betimlenmesi ve geleneksel olmayan anlatı ögelerinin dahil edilmesiyle ayırt edilir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma Söğüt'ün eserlerini hem tematik hem de yapısal olarak incelemekte, rahatsız edici temaları Kristeva'nın tiksinç kavramına ve geleneksel olmayan anlatı ögelerini semiyotik kavramına bağlamaktadır. Kristevacı bir bakış açısı aracılığıyla, okuyucular Söğüt'ün anlatılarında mevcut olan, şiddet, geleneksel olmayan ilişkiler ve ötekileştirilmiş bireylerin deneyimleri gibi rahatsız edici temalarla yüzleşmeye yönlendirilir. Ayrıca, semiyotik kavramı, geleneksel anlatı yapılarındaki semiyotik kesintilerin, normları ve değerleri bozduğunu belirtir ve metaanlatıları reddetmeyi teşvik eder. Son olarak, bu tez, Kristeva'nın teorilerini uygulayarak, Söğüt'ün romanlarının egemen ideolojileri değiştiren platformlar olarak hizmet ettiğini ve statükonun bozulmasını sağladığını iddia eder. Baskın ormlara meydan okuyarak, Söğüt'ün anlatıları ataerkilliği ve heteronormativiteyi altüst eder ve bunun aracılığıyla direnişi ve isyanı savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Julia Kristeva, Mine Söğüt, iğrenç, semiyotik, alt üst etme

To the loving memory of Vassil Hristov Anastassov

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fulden İbrahimhakkıoğlu, my supervisor, whose guidance, support, patience, and expertise have been the cornerstone of this thesis. Her insightful feedback, encouragement, and dedication have been instrumental in shaping my research and academic development.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Nurten Birlik for her invaluable contributions and constructive comments during the jury process. Her expertise and insights have significantly enhanced the quality of this thesis. Additionally, I am deeply thankful to Assist. Prof. Dr. Seval Arslan for her support, insightful comments, and unyielding belief in my abilities. Her guidance has been indispensable throughout this endeavor.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Arif for his consistent support, encouragement, and invaluable contributions throughout this journey. His steadfast support has provided a guiding light during the most challenging times.

Special thanks are also given to Ümmühan and Kamil Tayyip for their invaluable assistance, insightful discussions, and unwavering encouragement.

I cannot overlook the companionship of my beloved cat, Irma, whose presence has been a source of comfort and solace during challenging moments.

Lastly, I want to express my deepest appreciation to my students for their support and encouragement. Their enthusiasm and commitment have been truly inspiring and have fueled my determination to strive for excellence.

And to my dear mom, whose unconditional love, endless encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been my guiding force throughout this journey, I owe the deepest gratitude.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM iii

ABSTRACT iv

ÖZ vi

DEDICATION viii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

TABLE OF CONTENTS x

CHAPTER 1 1

INTRODUCTION 1

1.1. Mine Söğüt in Turkish Literary World 1

1.2. The Aim of the Study 5

1.3. The Significance of the Study 6

1.4. The Methodology of the Study 7

1.5. The Structure of the Study 11

CHAPTER 2 15

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 15

2.1. Feminist Literary Criticism 15

2.1.1. French Feminist Literary Criticism 17

2.2. Julia Kristeva and Her Oeuvre 22

2.2.1. The Semiotic and the Symbolic Function of the Language 22

2.2.2. The Abject and Abjection 28

CHAPTER 3 36

AFFIRMING THE ABJECT THROUGH UNSETTLING THEMES 37

3.1. Violence against Women 42

3.1.1. Physical Violence 43
3.1.2. Sexual Violence 51
3.1.3. Structural Violence 57
3.2. The Abject Body: Vulnerability and Homelessness 65
3.3. The Abject Mind: Reclaiming Madness 67
3.4. The Immoral and the Transgression of Law 73
3.4.1. Unorthodox Human Relationships 74
3.4.2. Sex Work as an Occupation 79
3.5. Conclusion 81
CHAPTER 4 83
THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE SEMIOTIC AND THE SYMBOLIC: UNCONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE ELEMENTS 83
4.1. Intertextuality and Metafiction 84
4.2. Repetition 95
4.3. Ambiguity between Reality and Imagination 100
4.4. Conclusion 104
CHAPTER 5 106
CONCLUSION 106
REFERENCES 117
A. SUMMARIES OF THE NOVELS 129
B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET 141
D. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU 154

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a powerful mirror that reflects the dynamics of society and cultural norms of its time. It lets readers know the cultural and social norms prevalent in a particular place and era. In this introductory chapter, the historical framework of Turkish literature is briefly outlined, providing context for understanding the pivotal role of Mine Söğüt within the literary world. By contextualizing Söğüt's position, the basis for understanding the significance of her narratives is established. The chapter lays the groundwork for this study's aim and its significance to the literature. The methodology used in the research process is explained, offering insight into the approach taken. Ultimately, the chapter concludes by offering a brief preview of subsequent chapters.

1.1. Mine Söğüt in Turkish Literary World

The rise of the Turkish novel dates back to the Tanzimat period. Many authors of early novels in the Tanzimat period depicted women as virgins and innocent angels in the house or independent and sexually active evil women (Moran, 1981). Besides the binary dominant in primarily male writers, some writers, including early women writers of the Republic of Turkey such as Nezihe Muhittin and Fatma Aliyye, displayed female characters prone to psychological illnesses innately, which almost resulted in biological essentialism that deemed women to hysteria by nature and lacked social, economic, and structural factors (Aydın, 2014).

The 1960s marked a turning point and brought about significant changes influenced by the modernity movement. This era also saw the emergence of identity issues in Turkish literature. Political movements and women's political movements evolved from state feminism to a more diverse approach. Women authors began giving voice to characters who had been previously silenced (Irzık&Parla, 2004).

After the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the new legislation and regulations led Turkish literature to take a new direction, embracing innovative and experimental writing styles akin to its counterparts in other parts of the world (Moran, 1994). Due to this shift and the rise and emergence of poststructuralist theories, the role of the author has also undergone significant transformation in Turkish literary history.

This transformation requires a more engaged reader who is encouraged to construct meaning by eliminating the author's authority, which, as a result, highlights the fluidity of meaning (Barthes, 1968). This shift brought up genuine writing styles, adding plurality and perspective to the narrator's voice. The novel no longer required a traditional sequence of events, an omnipotent narrator, consistent characters, and a linear progression built on cause-and-effect connections that were no longer considered essential (Moran, 1994).

Alongside the shift in methods, changes have also occurred in portraying characters and events. The focus has now extended to the margins, giving voice to those previously unheard of – marginalized characters, excluded individuals, women, queer individuals, people with disabilities, and those with mental illnesses, among others.

The 21st century has been marked by a rich proliferation of literature that amplifies previously unheard voices. Among the women authors who focus on marginalized women or queer individuals, figures "such as Leyla Erbil, Sevgi Soysal, Gülten Akın, Latife Tekin, Tezer Özlü, Şebnem İşigüzel, Aslı Erdoğan, Sevim Burak" (Sarı, 2016, p. 24), and Mine Söğüt stand out. These authors delve into unconventional narratives of marginalized female characters.

Mine Söğüt stands out as a notable Turkish woman writer from the modern era, employing her narratives as a platform for marginalized characters, primarily women and queer individuals, to express themselves. These marginalized characters represent everyday individuals who are often disregarded and frequently labeled as mentally unstable due to their non-conforming actions and behaviors. United by this common aspect, Mine Söğüt is among the contemporary women writers who use marginalization to address broader societal, political, and familial issues.

Söğüt's body of work encompasses a range of literary genres, including biographies, novels, short stories, research pieces, essays, and interviews. The titles of her works are as follows: *Adalet Cimcoz / Bir Yaşam Öyküsü Denemesi* (Adalet Cimcoz / A Life Story Try, Biography, 2000), *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (The Five Sevim Apartment, Novel, 2003), *Sevgili Doğan Kard*eş (Dear Doğan Kardeş, Research, 2003), *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time, Novel, 2004), *Aşkın Sonu Cinayettir/ Pınar Kür ile Hayat ve Edebiyat* (The End of Love is Murder/ Life and Literature with Pınar Kür, Interview, 2006), *Dolapdere/ Kürt Kediler Çingene Kelebekler* (Dolapdere/Kurdish Cats Gypsy Butterflies, Essay, 2009), *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (Madam Mr. Arthur and Everything in Her/His Life, Novel, 2010), *Deli Kadın Hikayeleri* (The Mad Women Stories, Short Stories, 2011), *Darbeli Kalemler* (Pens with a Coup, Essay, 2011), *Gergedan/Büyük Küfür Kitabı* (The Rhinocores/The Great Profanity Book, Short Stories, 2019), *Alayına İsyan* (Revolt Against All, Essay, 2020), *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (The God of Others, Novel, 2022).

As well as her literary works, her journalistic experiences involve first-hand confrontation with everyday occurrences, resulting in harsh critiques of societal norms, authority structures, patriarchy, and its dominance over women and queer individuals. These instances invite severe backlash from the government[1], which positions her as a politically- protest author. Due to the protest nature of her writing and being directly targeted by the government, Söğüt emerges as a politically conscious author and journalist, driven to oppose conventional norms and hegemonic forms of oppression, notably about family, home, and the state. Throughout her works, one can find underlying critiques directed at the institution of family, the paternal role within it, the state, and its responsibility to include and safeguard all its citizens.

Her protest is immediately noticeable in her works' structure, theme, and characters. Söğüt articulates her concern regarding sovereign power and portrays this concern by weaving it into her narratives through marginalized characters:

> The protagonists in my novels are usually individuals pushed to the outskirts of society, not conforming to conventional norms. This is

[1] Erdoğan criticizes Söğüt for telling girls to leave unsafe parental houses. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/erdogan-yazarimiz-mine-sogutun-sozlerini-hedef-aldi-1819072

> because, in my writing, I grapple extensively with the issue of power. The most savage, cruel, and dangerous forms of power become evident in these characters' lives upon closer examination (Can Yayınları, 2022, 00:25).

Besides the characters, Söğüt's fiction is defined by themes of fear and gloom, focusing on emotions and situations like death, violence, pessimism, and powerlessness, and these elements collectively form a distinctive hallmark of her authorial identity (Hatiboğlu, 2023). Her novels and stories have been worked on academically, primarily focusing on unconventional storytelling methods and characters.

Six master's theses are listed on YÖK's website on Mine Söğüt. Merve Kızılok (2015) studied the folkloric elements incorporated into her novels, focusing on how she harmonizes reality with fantastic elements in her narratives. Betül Sarı (2016), on the other hand, examined the depiction of femininity intertwined with madness, considering its potential ramifications on societal gender norms in Söğüt's texts. Bilal Kas (2018) analyzed her works in the context of merging the abundant resources of Western and Turkish literature through intertextual references and metafictional elements, creating an engaging playground that places the reader at the center. Büşra Hatiboğlu (2023) focuses on displaying details of malevolence from diverse angles, reflecting her views on the concept through content and style, leaving room for open-ended interpretation by readers in her narratives. Seda İşcan (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of the portrayal of modern society in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and Mine Söğüt's *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (Madam Mr. Arthur and Everything in Her/His Life), examining how characters in these novels navigate and respond to the challenges presented by their respective societal critiques. Zuhal Aydın Derdli (2023) examined Mine Söğüt's novels *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* and *Beş Sevim Apartamanı* in the context of Todorov's theory of fantasy literature.

Other studies on Söğüt also exist, such as Ayan's (2020) exploration of abandoned characters, Güneş's (2012) examination of women driven to insanity, Önder's (2018) feminist critique of her stories, Şahin's (2022) analysis of schizophrenia in her works, and Güllük's (2022) study on how women are victimized by being pushed into

madness. These studies underscore that Söğüt employs social and feminist themes, creating diverse characters that mainstream literature tends to avoid.

1.2. The Aim of the Study

This thesis delves into the exploration of themes and narrative elements within Mine Söğüt's novels through a Kristevan reading. Central to this study is the examination of Kristevan concepts, the abject and the semiotic, which are utilized to dissect Söğüt's narratives. By employing these concepts, the thesis contends that Söğüt's narratives incorporate unsettling themes and unconventional narrative techniques as subversive tools to challenge and resist oppressive norms and patriarchal power structures. As a result of the subversive potency of Söğüt's texts, her narratives stand out as platforms for political protest.

Söğüt's narratives harness their subversive power through her fearless exploration of unsettling themes like violence and madness. In doing so, she directs our attention to the societal margins where her characters exist as marginals, transcending the norms and conventions. Through her storytelling, she disrupts the perceived perfection of the meta-narratives and introduces readers to a multitude of perspectives. Differences which have been formerly erased or suppressed by the dominant ideologies are brought to the center in her novels and presented with agency.

This "othering" and marginalization process prompts us to delve into the complex realm of identity, both at the individual and collective levels. Drawing from Kristevan theory, the concept of the abject helps shed light on how subjectivity is formed and how the notion of a threatening "other" is constructed through the repression and suppression of perceived threats.

Söğüt's narratives oblige readers to reconsider the binary categories of sex, gender, and sexuality because her characters are multiple, gender-troubled people who survive at the crossroads of multiple identities. Their identification is beyond the identifiable and categorization, destabilizing the normative and conventional.

Söğüt's texts boldly confront taboo subjects such as sex work and incest. By narrating these so-called deviant acts, she effectively inserts the censored and prohibited into the realm of culture and language, namely literature. As a result, her texts serve as vehicles

for deconstructing the boundaries between what is considered legitimate and illegitimate, self and other. This blurring of boundaries opens up avenues for subversive interpretations and challenges prevailing societal norms.

In addition to exploring disturbing themes through a multitude of characters, Söğüt's narratives offer a rich array of storytelling elements that transcend traditional methods. Repetition occurs when Kristevan *semiotic* wants to disturb and contest the hegemony of the *symbolic*. As such, incorporating a blend of news, dreams, and events, she leads readers into a realm where fact and fiction intertwine, challenging notions of reliability. This deliberate blurring of distinctions between reliable and unreliable sources undermines their authority, diminishing the dominance of meta-narratives such as history or religion.

In light of the above statements, my discussions circle around these research questions: How do Söğüt's narratives disrupt traditional notions of identity, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality? How does Söğüt's exploration of taboo subjects destabilize social norms and boundaries? How does the use of unconventional narrative elements contribute to the subversion of meta-narratives?

1.3. The Significance of the Study

This study stands out for its comprehensive analysis of Mine Söğüt's novels, delving into recurring themes and narrative elements across her complete body of work. Rather than focusing on a single novel or a selected few, this approach offers a more nuanced understanding of her literary oeuvre.

Unlike many analyses of Söğüt's novels, which tend to focus narrowly on a single theme, this thesis takes a broader approach, exploring several commonly applied themes across her works. By delving into multiple themes, it offers a more comprehensive understanding of Söğüt's narratives and their complexities. Moreover, the thesis goes beyond traditional examinations by incorporating discussions of unconventional narrative styles, enriching the analysis and providing a deeper exploration of Söğüt's literary techniques.

In this study, Söğüt, through her radical storytelling approach, emerges as a feminist author challenging traditional norms and values within her narratives. By applying

themes in a manner that defies conventional expectations, she subverts established societal constructs. Her unique narrative style serves as a vehicle for dismantling patriarchal and heteronormative structures, positioning her as a beacon of feminist literature. Through her work, Söğüt not only invites readers to reconsider entrenched beliefs but also engages in a profound subversion of established norms.

With a Kristevan perspective, especially with the revolutionary implications of Kristeva's concepts of the abject and the semiotic, this research conducts a thematic and structural discussion of Söğüt's narratives, directing attention to the marginalized perspectives. This exploration disrupts traditional notions of identity, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. Kristeva's theories, specifically those concerning the semiotic and abject, enhance readers' understanding of how subjectivity and identity are formed and their interconnectedness with psychoanalysis and language.

1.4. The Methodology of the Study

I started this research by exploring the portrayal of gendered issues in contemporary Turkish novels, driven by whether and how such depictions could incite societal resistance. My focus shifted to the works of Mine Söğüt due to their contemporary nature and her courageous approach to depicting events with a keen emphasis on feminist, social, and political themes. Furthermore, Söğüt's bold narrative style made her narratives compelling for further exploration.

Although Söğüt's body of work includes both fiction and non-fiction, I chose to proceed with discussing Mine Söğüt's fiction as my main intention is to explore the intersection of literature both as an artistic expression and a political tool. I aim to uncover literary texts' complexities, which serve as platforms for aesthetic purposes. Also, I extensively explore whether and how this platform can function as a means of social critique to deconstruct the oppressive norms and values which erase differences and force heteronormativity and patriarchy.

While Söğüt's narratives include short stories and novels, and these short stories share similar motifs and themes, I decided to focus on her novels. There are several reasons for choosing her novels over her short stories. First of all, novels offer a greater depth and complexity of narrative. As a result, they allow more extensive character

development, detailed plots, and themes that span more extended periods. Besides, novels have richer insights into cultural and historical contexts and social dynamics. This breadth provides a rich ground for exploring various forms of oppression, discrimination, and resistance. Also, I decided to focus on all her novels to provide more comprehensive research about her literary style. Overall, these factors contribute to a more thorough discussion of her thematic concerns, narrative structures, and their implications for social critique and subversion while highlighting the significance of her literary legacy in the larger context of Turkish literature.

I underlined the recurrent themes and narrative elements that can have gendered references after *close reading* of Söğüt's novels which is "the method of interpreting the detailed use of language" (Kusch, 2016, p. 31). In this process of close reading, I identified the themes of violence, madness, and unconventional relationships. These themes effectively center on women and queer characters, looking at their experiences through a gendered perspective. The theme of "vulnerability and homelessness" is predominantly explored in her latest novel. Nevertheless, its inclusion is noteworthy since vulnerability and homelessness from a gendered perspective are uncommon in Turkish literature. Additionally, these themes are instrumental in understanding the factors that marginalize certain characters through abjection. The alignment of these themes with my research objectives also underscores their significance, offering insights into power dynamics that play a huge role in women's and queer individuals' marginalization.

Furthermore, these themes are closely related to the experiences of women and queer individuals in Turkish society, providing valuable insights into the challenges they face and power dynamics that contribute to their marginalization. Söğüt's journalism background mainly facilitates this close alignment, which enables her to incorporate these factual events into her narratives. This integration lends authenticity, depth, and a political stand to her fiction.

I also recognized the unconventional narrative elements in Söğüt's novels. This observation made me realize that themes are not exclusively confined to the content of the novels. These themes are intertwined with how the narratives express them, so content and structure are inseparable regarding the overall understanding of the

narratives. In other words, structure matters as much as the content, and both contribute to the overall significance of the research. As a result, I decided to add a structural discussion to the study, which focuses mainly on the unconventional narrative elements that may provide an area for subversion.

When selecting the narrative elements, I paid attention to the recurring narrative devices, especially those that actively engage readers in critical reflection. All the structural elements chosen - repetition, ambiguity, intertextuality, and metafiction - demand a more participative reader who is constantly forced to construct meaning and interpretation. Besides, these structural elements emphasize the prevailing themes in Söğüt's novels, enhancing the portrayal of marginal characters and their experiences.

While conducting this research, I chose discourse analysis as the primary methodological tool for my thesis. Michel Foucault's contributions to discourse analysis have been pivotal, shaped by both theoretical exploration and empirical investigation. Foucault describes discourse as:

> a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation; it does not form a rhetorical or formal unity, endlessly repeatable, whose appearance or use in history might be indicated (and, if necessary, explained); it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined (Foucault, 2002, p.131).

Furthermore, he underscores the inherently historical nature of discourse, seeing it as both a component of history and a mirror of broader historical contexts. Placing events within historicism implies that discourse is dynamic, evolving within specific historical circumstances, thus providing a broader context for discourse analysis.

In addition to his focus on historicism, he delves into institutionalism, which explores the formation and regulation of discourses. Through this approach, discourse, for Foucault, functions as a means of "institutional patterns that make seemingly disparate empirical occurrences, as products of enunciations, (and it) belong(s) to a common frame of reference or institutional structuring" (Keller, 2017, p. 73).

He posits discourse as a series of regulated practices situated within historical contexts governed by institutional norms rather than individual intentions. According to Foucault, discourse is a social act that constitutes reality while becoming the

foundation for meaning-making and the construction of knowledge, which influences how reality is perceived and understood (Keller, 2017).

Drawing on Foucault's notion of discourse as a series of regulated practices situated within historical and institutional contexts, discourse analysis seeks to uncover the underlying structures and power relations "with the investigation of language, both written and oral" (Griffin, 2014, p. 93). It serves as a powerful tool to uncover the ways in which language reflects and shapes social reality. As a result, it makes visible the underlying power dynamics of our world.

In accordance with the uncovering of dominant narratives and power relations, discourse analysis seeks to dismantle the structures that are often accepted unquestioningly. Its goal is to reveal that the prevailing organization of society is not inevitable but rather the product of political processes, which carry significant social ramifications (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In sum, discourse analysis is "careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization and functions of discourse" (Gill, 2000, p. 188). Building upon the principles of discourse analysis, which aim to unveil dominant narratives and power dynamics, this research extends its inquiry to the realms of literature. In doing so, it seeks to apply the analytical tools of discourse analysis to the examination of narratives in Söğüt's novels.

The relevant theoretical framework of this research draws on Julia Kristeva's concepts of the abject and the semiotic. They provide revolutionary implications while exploring how Söğüt's narratives challenge dominant societal norms and power structures. The thematic discussion involves examining the portrayal of marginalized characters, particularly women and queer individuals, and their experiences of violence, homelessness, mental illness, and taboo subjects within Söğüt's novels.

On the other hand, structural exploration investigates the narrative techniques Söğüt employs, such as intertextuality, metafiction, repetition, and ambiguity, to disrupt conventional language functions and convey deeper contextual meanings. By combining these analytical approaches, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Söğüt's novels serve as instruments for social critique and subversion, shedding light on the complexities of subjectivity and gendered identities.

1.5. The Structure of the Study

This thesis is comprised of five chapters and an appendix, including this introductory chapter and a conclusive chapter in the conclusion. The first chapter, after the introduction part, initially provides a brief overview of the achievements of French Feminist Literary Criticism in the literature thus far, focusing on the methodological aspects. The chapter analyzes the differences between the three stages of feminism and their reflections in literary analysis. It concludes by explaining three prominent French feminist literary critics often associated with poststructuralist theories, which emphasize difference rather than equality. In short, it explores how narratives provide readers with a critical lens and a way to resist dominant norms. It discusses how Feminist literary criticism, primarily through Julia Kristeva's theories, helps readers understand literature better.

The second chapter centers on Julia Kristeva's theories, specifically delving into her ideas regarding semiotic and symbolic functions of language and the impact of abjection on forming subjectivity. Kristeva introduces semiotic and symbolic concepts in her dissertation, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), and asserts that literature, particularly poetry, can and has the power to disrupt and challenge normative structures of language and social norms. According to her, this challenge is through the introduction of a new modality of the signifying process: the semiotic, which is "a signifying operation based on traces and marks rather than signs, the marks of the drives on the speaking body, the traces of what Freud calls the primary processes" (Margoroni, 2005, p. 79). As for the other modality of the signifying process, the symbolic Kristeva links it to a linear 'masculine' chronology involving language acquisition and its regulations, confines, and fixed states (Kristeva, 1981). The semiotic ruptures open up possibilities for subversion and resistance. Another Kristevan key concept is the "abject," which she discusses primarily in both *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) and *Powers of Horror* (1982). Kristeva defines abjection as distorting the boundaries between the self and the other. This sense of threat to the boundaries of one's subjectivity evokes a feeling of discomfort, unease, and disgust. Social rules and norms uphold society's integrity, like the boundaries between the self and the other. People displaying deviations and differences from these norms and regulations are pushed to the margins to prevent any threat to social cohesion.

Abjection of certain groups, as a result, manifests itself in the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies and power dynamics through exclusionary practices of abjection.

Chapter three provides a framework for understanding Söğüt's novels from a Kristevan perspective of the abject. This chapter primarily explores various topics concerning the abject elements, ranging from the characters chosen to the recurring themes. Through the categorization under the recurring themes and characters, I aim to analyze the structural motives for the marginalization of specific individuals. This approach helps readers confront the experiences of the overlooked characters, fostering critical thinking. The recurring themes and characters are explored in separate sub-chapters in detail.

In the first sub-chapter, I delve into the prevalent theme of violence in Söğüt's novels. I explore the different types of violence - physical, sexual, and organizational - that marginalized women and queer characters endure. Söğüt's novels reveal that violence is not arbitrarily but intricately linked to societal power dynamics. Power-holding groups and agencies exercise various forms of violence against individuals who are considered threatening to the social order and cohesion; as a result, these people become deprived of fundamental human rights, and they are marginalized. Women and queer characters make up a more significant part of these marginal characters in Söğüt's novels, which allows readers to encounter the arbitrary and oppressive nature of gender-related norms and values. Through such encounters with her depiction of events and narrative style, which includes rhetorical questions and critical commentaries, Söğüt's narratives deconstruct the metanarratives, the religion and culture that deem certain people to marginalization.

The following two sub-chapters explore the lives and experiences of the vulnerable, homeless, and those struggling with mental health problems in Söğüt's novels. Through her depiction, readers encounter the inherent narcissistic wound - a metaphorical wound that represents threats to one's self-esteem. Söğüt's portrayal converts this fear into words; as a result, she depicts various forms of oppression and discrimination these vulnerable individuals face. Through these depictions, readers are reminded of the deep-rooted and widespread nature of oppression in society. Ultimately, Söğüt's narratives encourage readers to notice that the world is not an ideal

and coherent place that brings peace and happiness, but instead, it is a place of corruption and distortedness.

The last sub-chapter explores themes that challenge social norms, focusing on taboo or socially unacceptable topics. Specifically, it explores unconventional human relationships - those that do not fit traditional molds of acceptability - and the portrayal of sex work as a common occupation in Söğüt's narratives. By addressing these taboos, Söğüt invites readers to confront the diverse and plural experiences of individuals pushed to the peripheries by prevailing moral standards. By presenting these characters' unjust treatment and exclusion, Söğüt prompts readers to consider the unjust power dynamics.

In addition to these thematic discussions, the fourth chapter introduces Kristevan concept of the semiotic and its influence on the structural elements found in Söğüt's novels. Accordingly, this chapter aims to resolve language functions to uncover deeper contextual meanings. The structural elements, categorized under semiotic ruptures, include intertextuality and metafiction, repetition, and the ambiguity between reality and imagined. These elements aim to reveal more decadent layers of meaning through the semiotic functions of the language. This discussion showcases a departure from traditional storytelling methods in Söğüt's works, highlighting how emotions and pre-linguistic elements play a role in conveying meaning. Additionally, it seeks to uncover the psychological and social motives behind these non-conventional narrative elements.

Also, the summaries of the novels are included in the appendix to give readers an overview of the narrated events in each mentioned novel.

To conclude, adopting a Kristevan perspective when discussing Söğüt's novels will give readers a critical perspective on the themes, characters, and literary structures available in her works. This approach encourages readers to directly confront the unsettling and disturbing elements in Söğüt's novels. When narrated and interpreted within the social and historical context, such a confrontation doubtlessly offers a deeper comprehension of the persistent power dynamics that influence specific individuals. It becomes apparent that such a consistent power exertion is manifested through norms, values, and religious and political ideologies. These manifestations

create a collective identity that excludes those who do not conform to the established norms. The thematic and structural discussions give readers a holistic understanding of Söğüt's novels' functions in challenging the status quo regarding the semiotic functions of language and the abject's function in forming subjectivities.

Collectively, these elements subvert patriarchy and heteronormativity, offering a critique of the social oppression and discrimination faced by Söğüt's marginal characters. They also invite readers to question the established norms and values.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes the ideas of Julia Kristeva as its theoretical framework to discuss the novels written by Mine Söğüt. In this chapter, I provide a brief contextual overview of the position of French Feminist Literary Criticism within the broader feminist literary criticism, emphasizing its unique attributes compared to traditional feminist literary criticism.

In the next part of this chapter, the focus shifts to Julia Kristeva's theories that focus on language's subversive power and the concept of abject, examining its role in shaping one's sense of self. Utilizing these theories offers a crucial methodological tool to discuss Mine Söğüt's novels. This approach enriches our understanding of the complex interplay between language, subjectivity, gender, and power dynamics in Söğüt's narratives. Additionally, it allows a more profound comprehension of the formation of subjectivity, mainly through Kristeva's perspectives on the notion of abject and semiotic. Such an engagement with Kristeva's perspectives enriches our analytical tools and enables a more comprehensive exploration of textual dynamics in Söğüt's novels.

2.1. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism centers on various aspects, such as analyzing women's portrayal in texts authored by men, rediscovering overlooked women writers and their works, introducing fresh approaches to language and interpretation, and encouraging readers to embrace new ways of writing and reading, thereby fostering a feminist stance (Humm, 1994).

Literature provides a platform for marginalized women characters to voice their own experiences. It can have an emancipatory impact through their narratives, the language

employed by the author, and the messages conveyed, although there are instances where it might inadvertently perpetuate marginalization. Therefore, literature has the power to affect the world. Feminist literary and cultural criticism draws from these theoretical approaches while always recognizing that literary texts are not direct reproductions of reality; they are representations (Warhol, 2012).

Feminist critics have accordingly examined literary texts to make sexual stereotypes more visible (Kate Millett, 1970; Mary Ellmann, 1968; Phyllis Chesler, 1971; Adrienne Rich, 1971; Alice Walker, 1974; Annette Kolodny, 1975). Historically, feminist literary criticism could be said to date back to Virginia Woolf's work, *A Room of One's Own (*1929), which addresses severe questions about female difference and its literary aspect. Woolf states that women in literature might attack the traditional language order and that women might have a language of their own (1929). Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics,* explains through literary texts of men and women authors that literature functions as a site of the emergence, expression, and sustenance of sexual politics that oppress women (Plain & Sellers, 2007). Therefore, the literature analysis would be emancipatory (Plain & Sellers, 2007). Later, in the middle of the 1970s, Elaine Showalter introduced a new term, gynocriticism - the study of women's writing in her work, *Towards a Feminist Poetics.* Gynocriticism aims "to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience" (Showalter, 1985, p.131).

Many feminist critics worked on formulating an anthropology of women's literature, including Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Josephine Donovan's *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1975). This era cherished the emergence of acknowledgment of the existence of women writers in literary history. Now that women's literature has a historical foundation for analyzing their language and literary expressions, it becomes possible to consider replacing the dominant masculine voice and power. *Literary Women* by Ellen Moers (1976) proved women could do literature as well as men: "Now women seized the pen, and female self-consciousness brought heroinism to literature" (121). These works were critical of male dominance in literary history and canonical thinking. They asserted that women were part of literary history and demanded the unity of women writers as a category (Plain & Sellers, 2007). *The*

Madwoman in the Attic (Gilbert & Gibar, 1979) includes textual analysis of literary texts of women writers such as Jane Austen, the Brontes, Emily Dickinson, and George Eliot. She celebrates women's writing with an analysis of female characters in texts. Although it seems similar to the texts of male writers, the dichotomies of women - sane/insane, chaste/unchaste, etc. - and the representation of mad women are the reflections of confinement and challenges female writers encountered in the Victorian era. As a result of these challenges, Gilbert and Gubar conclude that the opposite images of docile selves in the texts function as surrogates (1979).

Although gynocriticism introduced the long-forgotten literary women and aimed at initiating a literary tradition, the critics, especially in the 1980s, looked back on them as essentialist and totalizing (Plain & Sellers, 2007). Toril Moi, in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), discusses methods in feminist literary criticism and defines two blocks of feminist criticism: Anglo-American and French. After examining works of Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), and Gilbert & Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), she concludes that Anglo-American feminist criticism "was too empiricist, too essentialist and hostile to change" (Humm,1994, p. 16). Moi criticizes the adherence to the unity of text and the author and problematizes it claiming, "this emphasis on integrity and totality as an ideal for women's writing can be criticized precisely as patriarchal or - more accurately- a phallic construct" (1985, p. 65). Instead, she centers her arguments on French feminist criticism and its focus on language and psychoanalysis.

2.1.1. French Feminist Literary Criticism

To truly understand French Feminism in literature and language, it is important to carefully explore France's historical and philosophical context, especially before and after the significant French Revolution. During the First Wave Feminism, which was heavily influenced by the prevailing Sartrean Existentialism, especially by the influential work of Simone de Beauvoir, French feminists underwent a shift with the emergence of structuralism and poststructuralism. These new intellectual currents, which strongly emphasized psychoanalysis, gave French feminists refreshed ideologies and approaches (Cavallaro, 2003). Regarding this philosophical

background of the French feminists' work, we can assert that “the work of ‘French’ feminism is more overtly theoretical” (Barry, 2009, p. 120).

The May 1968 socio-political revolutions marked the beginning of a 'second wave' of feminism in France, characterized by a shift from emphasizing Equality to embracing Difference (Oliver & Walsh, 2004). Fueled by a deep distrust of politics and the notion of the individual, this new wave of feminists seeks to transform the patriarchal system radically. Instead of directly challenging the unequal status of women compared to men or the concept of femininity versus masculinity, they aim to subvert the idea of Equality itself, which they perceive as a tool of male dominance (Oliver & Walsh, 2004). Centered on the notion of "Difference," these proponents of feminism have been chiefly shaped by the intellectual underpinnings of post-structuralist thinkers, notably Jacques Derrida, who places significant emphasis on the concept of deconstruction, contending that “subjectivity is fluid and that it is fashioned by language systems which are likewise unstable” (Cavallaro, 2003, p. 28). According to Derrida, “If there is no totality with a center to determine interpretation and meaning, then interpretation and meaning emerge from the equivocations and contextuality of signs within discourse” (Stocker, 2006, p. 185). It highlights that difference, diversity, and multiplicity are integral to understanding meaning and existence, challenging traditional binary frameworks. According to Derrida's extensive body of work, the notion of meaning is inextricably intertwined with the concepts of deferral and difference.

Besides the implication that meaning is always deferred, not unified, and fleeting, Derrida also stresses the aspect of “difference” as “to be not identical, to be other, discernible” (Derrida, 1982, p. 8). The primary focus is the erosion of inherent and unchanging meaning attributed to a particular sign. French feminists, in particular, employ this term in multifaceted ways, with one notable emphasis being the goal of breaking down binary oppositions. Deconstruction can introduce an alternative organizational framework by deconstructing binary oppositions and establishing a fluid exchange of terms instead of rigid definitions. This new system would not prioritize the construction of false unities based solely on binary oppositions, although it may not continuously or automatically do so (Poovey, 1988).

Along with Derridean philosophy focusing on deconstruction and *differance*, French feminists have also been inspired by psychoanalytic works - reassessments of Sigmund Freud's works- of Jacques Lacan (Cavallaro, 2004). "Offering the insight that the unconscious is structured like a language" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 27), Juliet Mitchell asserts that analyzing sexual differences in cultural contexts is also feasible. Psychoanalysis is therefore crucial in the analysis and comprehension of female subjectivity, without which it would be risky "to capitulating to a purely materialist understanding of women, or settling for a very reduced account of fantasy, sexuality, and subjectivity" (Rabate, 2003, p. 235).

Psychoanalysis is also crucial in shedding light on identity, subjectivity, sexuality, and our connection to society. It presents fresh perspectives by suggesting parallel realms to explore the structural similarities between language and the organization of the self. This proposition highlights the idea that the way language is structured mirrors the intricate structure of one's self.

In conjunction with post-structuralism, which primarily examines social organizations and their cultural values, psychoanalysis plays a vital role in comprehending the subjective functions of the self, its connection to language, and the intricacies of consciousness. By filling the theoretical gap, psychoanalysis contributes to understanding women's subjecthood within society.

Despite the potential danger of essentialism, which attempts to categorize all women under a single umbrella, French feminists have employed it to highlight individuals' diverse and multifaceted nature. Lacan's emphasis on language and the crucial moment of language acquisition in infancy, leading to their engagement with the symbolic world within cultural contexts, effectively avoids making conclusive assumptions about identities. This nuanced perspective recognizes the complexity and intricacy involved, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of individual identities and the influence of cultural factors.

Ultimately, even when with the adoption of universalistic Freudian perspectives, psychoanalysis emphasizes the continual instability of the Self and the ever-evolving nature of femininity and masculinity within one's identity. Consequently, the

assumption of a gender role arises inevitably from cultural customs that shape our identities in temporary and conditional manners (Cavallaro, 2004).

Another critical focus of French feminists is language, and their commonality is their interest in the relation between language and gender and their use of post-structuralist Lacanian psychoanalysis. Therefore, the linkages between language, sexuality, literature, and psychoanalysis have since been at the core of feminist literary criticisms.

In short, French feminists have elevated feminist criticism by shifting the focus from traditional approaches to literary analysis, concentrating on elements like characters, the author's perspective, and events. Instead, they have enriched the field by prioritizing issues such as the plurality of voices. This fresh perspective highlights the importance of diverse perspectives and challenges conventional notions in feminist literary analysis.

When considering the prominent followers of French feminism, three eminent thinkers come to mind first: Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva (Barry, 2009). These three writers are connected by their high emphasis on the process of language through which power codes are generated and thus are to be deconstructed.

The majority of feminist criticism employed in Kristeva's work has primarily focused on the connections she establishes between concepts such as "feminine," "maternal," and the semiotic/symbolic distinction as they are presented in her writings (Oliver, 1993). Her primary focus lies within the realms of language and psychoanalysis. Her theories, which include language, psychoanalysis, and the introduction of concepts such as the "semiotic," "symbolic," and "abject," are primarily centered around the formation of subjectivity, consequently influencing the construction of identity. When applied within her framework, these theories are pivotal, facilitating a deeper exploration of individual and collective identity formation.

This theoretical framework also allows for a more profound analysis of contextual nuances, thereby revealing the power dynamics inherent in various identities, particularly those marginalized within society. Using this theoretical framework, readers get a touch of an essential political aim in Mine Söğüt’s works. This aim is to

raise awareness and consciousness regarding the formation and the existence of the "other" while challenging discrimination and inequalities at the same time. In this thesis, I will use Julia Kristeva's theories of the abject and semiotic as the primary methodological tool to discuss Mine Söğüt's novels thematically and structurally.

In exploring Söğüt's novels thematically, this study looks into unsettling themes, primarily focusing on the concept of the abject to comprehend and discuss the use of disturbing elements. These themes often center around marginalized women and queer individuals, revealing their experiences. For instance, I will closely examine the theme of violence against women, categorizing it into physical, sexual, and structural violence. This categorization enables this work to reveal the complex layers of suffering these characters endure. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the narratives but also uncovers the mechanisms through which violence perpetuates the exclusion of these characters.

Another prevalent theme is the marginalization of vulnerable characters, including homeless people, in addition to the portrayal of characters struggling with mental problems. These characters often face various forms of oppression and discrimination. The frequent use of such a theme enables readers to understand how the idea of madness forms and persists and how it is associated with specific individuals.

The final theme examines how Söğüt portrays socially unacceptable and immoral behaviors in her characters and the development of her novels. Exploring the abject in these themes offers insights into the multiple levels of marginalization and exclusion. Consequently, discussing these themes using Kristeva's concept of the abject adds a richer dimension to social and cultural analysis.

The fourth chapter focuses on unconventional structural elements using the Kristevan notion of the semiotic and how they manifest through narrative ruptures. Söğüt's narrative structures comprise various ruptures that serve as semiotic disruptions. These narrative ruptures in her novels are examined in terms of intertextuality, repetition, and ambiguity between reality and imagined. This thesis explores these elements in their contextual, psychological, and social contexts to better apply the interdisciplinary approach of Kristevan criticism.

2.2. Julia Kristeva and Her Oeuvre

Julia Kristeva, originally from Bulgaria and a French philosopher, psychoanalyst, feminist theorist, and literary critic, has profoundly affected multiple academic fields, including literary theory, psychoanalysis, and feminist philosophy. Her intricate works explore the formation of subjectivity in terms of linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural factors.

This section will prominently explore the role of language in constituting the development of subjectivity and how semiotic elements provide opportunities for disrupting the dominant influence of prevailing power ideologies.

Along with focusing on the semiotic function of the language, this part will also discuss Kristeva's theory on the abject and its role in shaping one's identity and perception of others. This discussion will help us understand how breaking down the boundaries between self and the other contributes to challenging the power dynamics that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of certain groups.

2.2.1. The Semiotic and the Symbolic Function of the Language

In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva (1984) explains the processes of signification through semiotic pulsations in the symbolic element of language by the speaking subject. Furthermore, what she means by 'poetic language is not, as stated in the introduction part of her work, "sub-code of the linguistic code" (Roudiez, 1984, p. 2) nor "deviation from the norm" (Roudiez, 1984, p. 2). Instead, all language acts are embodied inherently in the poetic language, and as Kristeva states:

> (...) literary practice is seen as the exploration and discovery of the possibilities of language, as an activity that liberates the subject from a number of linguistic, psychic, and social networks, as a dynamism that breaks up the inertia of language habits and grants linguists the unique possibility of studying the becoming of the significations of signs (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 178-79).

She emphasizes the transformative power of literature and the richness inherent in literary practice that prevents it from being confined to writing and reading but allows it to extend to daily life expressions and communications. Thus, literary practice has

many inherent potentials, allowing the practice of multiple and plural meanings that transcend norms and established orders.

In exploring the transformative power of literary practice, she comes up with concepts like the semiotic, the symbolic, and the signifying practice- signifiance. The signifiance is not a united entity but a process disrupted unceasingly by the pulsions. This process is heterogeneous and is not an "anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage"; instead, it is a practice of "structuring and de-structuring" and "a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 17). While defining the meaning of the signifying process, Kristeva gives an account of two recent models of defining notions. The first is about the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified. In short, the signifying process contains the interplay of two modalities, "the semiotic" and "the symbolic." They are always concerned with one another. Their relation to each other in any kind of signifying system (poetry, music, communication, etc.) is never reducible to one, but as Kristeva points out, both of the modalities constitute the subject, and "no signifying system he (the subject) produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 24). She emphasizes the dependency of two models on each other and that any signification is a process rather than a static entity. Kristeva points out that the meaning-making process is dynamic, and the two language functions are interdependent: no meaning is purely symbolic or semiotic. This dynamic interplay and interdependence among the two language modalities emphasize that meaning is not restricted to established rules. Instead, it consists of emotional processes, silences, laughter, and bodily expressions. This unrestricted nature highlights the plurality of meanings, challenging the notion that meaning is derived solely from rational utterances. Furthermore, such an interdependence offers the coexistence of multiple subjectivities and identities and celebrates diversity.

Kristeva's opinions on language have been highly affected by psychoanalysis, primarily unconscious and subjectivity, which will require a deep understanding of the relationship between the formation of self and language. As for the semiotic concept, Kristeva refers to Freudian psychoanalytical thoughts of drives and energies while explaining the etymological use of the word "distinctiveness." She states that before

the norms and taboos socially constitute the subject, the energies and drives are all around the body; however, after the formation of the self, they are restricted and allowed on certain conditions to a certain degree depending on the social structure of the society and family (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25). The semiotic, therefore, is always there, waiting readily for an opportunity to break into the realm of law and order. In metaphors, sound patterns, and preverbal aspects, "the semiotic can thus be understood as pre-thetic, preceding the positing of the subject" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 36). In addition to this modality of signification, Kristeva comes up with a Platonic term, "Chora: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their states in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25).

Chora, for Plato, means something like a receptacle (Oliver, 1997). Kristeva uses this term as a process of semiotic formation of the self through signification practices. In Kristeva's understanding, Chora is "both maternal and nourishing, a place without deity prior to the creation of unity and order" (Sellers, 1991, p. 49). It is also associated with sounds and rhythms through which signification might occur before the infant's misrecognition of the self in the mirror stage (Oliver, 1997). What is stressed along with this is that it is heterogeneous and not-definable by the symbolic and cannot be defined by the conventional explanations of linguistic theory. The symbolic modality does not regulate Chora. Chora is not unified, either. Instead, it is subjected to "a regulation process" that is put forward by the "natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes" (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 26-27). Before the subject acquires language as a system of signs, she goes through a stage known as the semiotic stage, where her drives play a significant role. Kristeva defines these drives as "pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges" (1984, p. 27). Through these drives, a connection occurs between the body and the mother, and the body becomes a mediator between the drives and the regulatory principles, such as social relations (Kristeva, 1984).

In conclusion, the semiotic chora encompasses the ability to both generate and negate a subject simultaneously, owing to the inherent dualistic nature of drives. The drives operate in opposition to existing states while also being instrumental in forming those very states. This duality of drives leads to the coexistence of creative and destructive forces within the semiotic chora.

The division between symbolic and semiotic realms of language is associated with Lacanian concepts: the imaginary and the symbolic. Semiotic is more of a realm of drives where there is no distinction between the mother and the child. Since the drives are positioned around and according to the mother's body and have no existence outside, semiotic might be associated with maternal. Kristeva explains what constitutes this realm: "The drive-energies which bond the child to the mother involve articulations and rhythms expressed through gesture and voice" (Sellers, 1991, p. 49). Besides this, she uses the term 'transverbal' while defining the semiotic realm of identity formation, and she stresses that the semiotic is not separate from language; instead, it intertwines with language and, under its influence, gives rise to alternative configurations of meaning that go beyond mere signification which manifest as rhythmic and melodic articulations (Kristeva, 2002).

On the other hand, the symbolic realm is static and contains meaningful utterances. It relies on and obeys the paternal law, which "refers to the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law" (Roudiez, 1984, pp. 6-7). Semiotic traits are repressed or delayed through symbolism, which is necessary for signifying. The traits of semiotic, for example, the outburst of laughs, "contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences, and absences" (Moi, 1986, p. 13), sometimes appear during the signifying process, disrupting the coherency of the symbolic process. Therefore, the semiotic chora is not always hidden, but it might exist suddenly, subverting the logical constitution of the Law. The semiotic cuts and disrupts the social and signifying stability, and it always precedes the symbolic model of the signifying process and establishment of the self. In order to be more explicit about the process of signification, it is helpful to give examples through Seller's statements:

> (…) the pre-Oedipal or semiotic phase is marked by drive-energies that are expressed in the child's babblings, their attempts to copy sounds, and gesture and body movements. The constraints imposed on drive-energies during the Oedipal phase are the necessary precondition for the creation of independent subjecthood and the acquisition of language. Without these constraints, the human being cannot function in the real world of social and linguistic relations (Seller, 1991, p. 98).

Consequently, the repression of drives becomes a necessity. However, the disruptions caused by the drives of the semiotic realm breaking through the symbolic order have a subversive impact on established regulations. These disruptions are crucial elements in Kristeva's understanding, as they hold the potential to incite revolutionary change.

As stated above, the signifying process is not stable but is bound to disruptions and pulsions of semiotic chora. Chora is not a new language or a repressed space of images. It rather is "a rhythmic pulsion," and it "constitutes the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory" (Moi, 1986, p.13). Thus, the two are necessary for the signification process; as Oliver puts it: "All signification is possible through dialectical movement between semiotic and symbolic, negativity and stasis" (1997, p. 24). This dialectical movement is realized through what Kristeva calls thetic break: "a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality" (1984, p. 43). In essence, signification operates within a realm of positions, and this positionality is only possible through this break from the realm of semiotic. As such, Kristeva further explains that "All enunciation, whether of a word or a sentence, is thetic" (1984, p. 43), meaning that all forms of expression involve taking a position. This positioning involves identifying and differentiating elements, such as separating images from objects, to connect and create meaning. This phase acts as a gateway between the symbolic and semiotic realms, where the symbolic encompasses the semiotic. However, their unity is disrupted by a break or a rupture known as the thetic break.

All these disruptions within the symbolic realm of the signifying process prevent the subject from being unified. Therefore, the speaking subject is always in the process, a concept Kristeva refers to as the "subject-in-process" (le sujet en procès). Rather than being united or structured, the subject evolves like a text. The argument that identity formation is an ongoing process results from the disruptions caused by the semiotic, which has been suppressed by the symbolic. When the regulation of symbolic over the semiotic halts for a time, the stable sense of self dissolves. In other words, the unitary subject is overshadowed by the signification. Hence, Kristeva asserts that the subject is inherently unstable and fluid, devoid of a fixed identity. In her theory, the speaking

subject is divided between two realms of signification: one linked to unconscious drives and the other to conscious motivations.

Consequently, the speaking subject is perpetually subject to the conflicting dynamics between the unconscious and conscious states of mind. This viewpoint challenges structuralist approaches to language and refutes the idea of a unified subject. Instead, it sees the subject as fragmented and meaning as ever-changing and prone to constant transformation.

These dissolves manifest as disruptions, such as silences, outcries, and laughter. These are essential interruptions within the semiotic realm, challenging existing norms and enabling revolutionary acts. As Oliver suggests, "Without the symbolic function within the symbolic order, the semiotic could never be transformed into a practice, and certainly not a revolutionary practice" (1993, p. 9). Through the Kristevan kind of revolt, changes can occur in the signifying structure, reflected through images, texts, and speech. Semiotic activities constantly reshape the subject's entity and the unity of the text, multiplying meanings and giving rise to Kristevan's term intertextuality (Sellers, 1991). Kristeva emphasizes the power of non-verbal elements to offer profound meaning and understanding and challenge the established norms. Language, in this respect, serves as a tool for subversive practices. Therefore, comprehending the way language functions is undoubtedly a significant tool to get an insight into social structure. How language is produced can uncover repressed elements, effectively voicing the silenced perspectives. As a result, language "represents social meaning and a social code; to use one of the motifs of structuralism, it demonstrates how all social structure is language structure" (Feral et al., 1976, p. 16).

In conclusion, language can disrupt and dismantle order, hegemony, hierarchy, and domination systems. This decoding process can occur beyond the confines of the symbolic realm, where linguistic signs are conventionally and coherently produced. The interruptions, such as laughter, silences, and gestures during a clear and structured discourse, offer opportunities to subvert the symbolic realm. According to Kristeva, screaming and gesturing encode language with elements that society tries to suppress or eliminate during its self-formation process; henceforth, they become powerful ways

to represent what is repressed or silenced within societal norms and structures (Midttun, 2006).

2.2.2. The Abject and Abjection

Kristeva explores the concept of "abjection" in her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* as a profound and aggressive rebellion against existence, directed toward a perceived threat that originates from an overwhelming external or internal source (Kristeva, 1982).

Examining the psychoanalytic and linguistic construction of subjectivity within Kristeva's theories is necessary to understand the concept of abjection. Therefore, this analysis should also explore how her ideas intersect with and diverge from the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the two prominent thinkers in psychoanalysis.

After analyzing several patients with psychological disorders, Freud found out the importance of the psychosexual development of an infant and placed significant emphasis on the function of the unconscious mind and its influence on human behaviors, which, according to him, housed repressed desires and emotions, and which he asserted, could show up in various ways such as dreams, slips of tongue, psychological disorders and so on (Tura, 1996). His psychosexual development stages are as such: During the oral stage of psychosexual development, the primary focus is on the baby's oral activities; specifically, their desire to suck at the breast, and this stage is closely tied to the development of the mother-child bond and is often associated with the prototype of sexual intercourse (Mitchell, 2000). The next stage is the anal stage when the child starts to explore its anal region and is characterized by self-sufficiency (Mitchell, 2000). The next is the phallic stage which centers around the child's discovery of their genitals, specifically the penis for boys and the clitoris for girls (Mitchell, 2000). Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasized the influence of repressed sexuality and unconscious desires on both conscious and unconscious aspects. Freud explored how the unconscious mind shapes human behavior and experience through the lens of sexuality, and he saw sexual drives as a fundamental driving force in human psychology.

On the other hand, Jacques Lacan, a prominent post-Freudian psychoanalyst, shifted focus to language and highlighted the crucial role of language in shaping individual behavior and the construction of social structures. He famously stated, "The unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language" (Lacan, 2001, p. 179), emphasizing the deep interconnection between language and the workings of the unconscious mind.

Lacan also introduced the mirror stage concept in his psychoanalytic theory to explain the emergence of the ego and the growth of the self. In this stage, Lacan suggested that a child comes across their own reflection in a mirror or any other reflective surface. The child perceives itself as a complete, integrated entity for the first time, in contrast to its previous encounters with fragmented bodily sensations. This moment of self-awareness in the mirror leads to a feeling of wholeness and consistency; therefore, the mirror stage can be called "as an identification" (Lacan, 2001, p. 1). Besides the infant getting a unified sense of self, the infant gets into "the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (Lacan, 2001, p. 3). This succession of phantasies arising during this phase form ideas, images, and occasionally misrecognitions that construct a sense of self-perception, identity, and subjectivity. In summary, while the mirror stage situates the child within a physical, psychological, and familial context, it does not allow the child to function as an agent or subject within a broader linguistic and economic community (Grosz, 1990). The mirror stage is also crucial in an infant's recognition of lack, as the discrepancy between the idealized image of self and the actual self inevitably leads to the realization of absence. After forming the Imaginary, starting through the mirror stage, another significant Lacanian stage stresses the acquisition of language: a trial to compensate for the lack and absence through symbols: The Symbolic. This phase serves as a way to fill the lack caused by the Imaginary (Grosz, 1990). The Symbolic realm encompasses a broad spectrum of elements such as laws, regulations, customs, norms, social conventions, and cultural influences. Collectively, these components contribute to shaping human subjectivity and mediating interpersonal relationships. According to Lacan, as Elizabeth Grosz (1990) elucidates, the relation between the self and the other, such as the infant and the mother, requires to be mediated through a symbolic father figure known as "the-name-of-the-father" through which "the child is positioned beyond the structure of dual imaginary relations within the broader

framework of culture, where genuine exchange may become possible" (Grosz, 1990, p. 47).

In conclusion, the formation of subjectivity can be conceptualized through three distinct dimensions: The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic, each of which is manifested, respectively, through notions of "need, demand, and desire" (Grosz, 1990, p. 61). Needs pertain to biological drives such as hunger, thirst, and sleep. They are the fundamental physical survival requirements directly linked to bodily functions. On the other hand, demand is distinguished by its concentration on specific objects, actions, or conditions that individuals believe will fulfill their desires. It involves expressing explicit requests or demands for particular things or outcomes perceived as essential for satisfying one's desires (Mitchell, 2000). As for the third notion, Desire emerges from a deep-rooted lack or absence inherent in human subjectivity, which perpetuates a sense of incompleteness and acknowledges the impossibility of fully satisfying one's desires. This fundamental lack or absence fuels the ongoing pursuit and yearning for fulfillment, even though it is unattainable. Whereas desire can uphold societal norms and values, it also has the potential to undermine or defy them mainly because it is rooted in suppressed, socially unacceptable, and repressed urges, which can challenge established social order and expectations (Grosz, 1990). Lacan places significant emphasis on the role of these three concepts in shaping the formation of the self and, more importantly, in establishing relations with "the Other." Needs can be fulfilled through demands, but the underlying desires cannot be satiated because they involve the complex interplay between the self and the Other. Desires inherently connect the dynamics of human subjectivity and the intricate web of relationships with others, making their complete fulfillment elusive. Juliet Mitchell summarizes the functions of three notions (need, demand, and desire) and underscores the distinctive characteristics of the last one:

> Need can be satisfied by an actual object; demand is for something whereas desire is the desire to have one's desire recognized - it is a yearning for recognition. Desire can thus be recognized but never satisfied, for, as the desire for what the other desires, it necessitates the wish to be the other one, or not to be different from the other one: the child desires to be what his mother desires he should be for her (Mitchell, 2000, p. 396).

A crucial element in forming subjectivity, language plays a highly pivotal role in expressing needs, shaping and formulating demands, and navigating the complex terrain of desire. It functions as a tool to engage in the symbolic order. However, since the language depends on a broader linguistic system, limiting the meaning to subjectivity would deny the more encompassing function inherent in the linguistic and social system. Lacan distinguishes language from other signs of communication:

> For in a language, signs take on their value from their relations to each other in the lexical distribution of semantemes as much as in the positional, or even flectional, use of morphemes, in sharp contrast to the fixity of the coding used by bees. And the diversity of human languages (langues) takes on its full value from this enlightening discovery (Lacan, 2001, p. 63).

Based on the quotation above, it can be concluded that the linguistic relation is relative, diverse, and dynamic. On the one hand, it allows for the development of a sense of identity. On the other hand, it reminds us of the inherent lack or absence, deferring complete fulfillment of desires. This nature of language highlights the complex nature of human existence and the ongoing negotiation between presence and absence, belonging and lack.

Julia Kristeva also focuses on psychoanalytic processes of the formation of subjectivity. She holds a contrasting view from Lacan regarding the moment the infant starts distinguishing itself from its mother. Instead of identifying this separation occurring during the mirror stage, she positions it earlier, before it. At this earlier stage, the infant starts expelling what it finds disagreeable from itself, a process she refers to as abjection (McAfee, 2003). In broader terms, Kristeva proposes that a preceding state is required before the full emergence of the symbolic realm, which involves repressed desire and the symbolic (Lechte, 2012).

The concept of abject in Kristeva's work, which refers to the suppression of threats and revolts against individual identity or social cohesion, is frequently associated with Freud's term "uncanny" (*das Unheimliche*). This connection provides a foundation for Kristeva's exploration and elaboration of the abject concept (McAfee, 2003). For Freud, “the uncanny [unheimlich] is secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (Freud, 2003, p. 30). On the other

hand, Kristeva presents a state of a more profound horror that goes beyond the uncanny, and it is not associated with a specific thing or object but rather with a potentiality. This field pulls the subject away from its right place to a space where the unity and existence of the subject become negligible (Becker-Leckrone, 2005).

The main underlying idea of Kristeva in proposing a prior stage is that the symbolic realm alone is insufficient to ensure the separation of the individual from the mother figure. The mother must undergo a process of abjection, where she is symbolically rejected or expelled. This process plays a vital role in establishing the symbolic order and facilitating the development of individual subjectivity. To put it differently, the process of abjection, involving the figurative expulsion of the mother figure, holds great significance in shaping the symbolic realm. This expulsion creates a distinction between the self and the other, enabling an individual to enter the realm of the symbolic and construct its own sense of self. Kristeva's emphasis on abjection highlights its transformative and disruptive nature in shaping one's identity and forming meaning. It highlights the crucial role of this process in defining personal boundaries, constructing subjective experiences, and, ultimately, forming one's own subjectivity. Abjection also helps self-protection, as Kristeva exemplifies the abject as "what one spits out, rejects, almost violently excludes from oneself: sour milk, excrement, even a mother's engulfing embrace" (McAfee, 2003, p. 46). Along with human waste and filth, Kristeva discusses various examples and themes that evoke feelings of abjection. Decomposing bodies and decaying food, reminding human mortality and evoking a sense of horror, are also mentioned as abject: "corpse seen without God, and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). In the case of death, the corpse serves as a reminder of life's transient nature and the physical body's eventual disintegration. These reminders of mortality can trigger feelings of disgust, horror, or discomfort because they challenge our desire for stability, order, and the illusion of eternal existence. Henceforth, the abject challenges the notion of a coherent and unified identity by introducing elements that resist easy categorization or assimilation. It represents a state where distinctions blur, challenging established structures.

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders,

> positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior… (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

The presence of the abject highlights the inherent ambiguity in human experiences and identities, reminding us that not everything can be neatly categorized or integrated into a unified whole (Lechte, 2012). Kristeva underscores the disruptive nature of the abject, which defies conventional notions of identity by introducing elements that resist categorization and disrupt established frameworks. She, thus, draws attention to the ambiguity and complexity inherent in human experiences, serving as a reminder that identities cannot be neatly categorized or confined within rigid boundaries and making subjectivities elusive.

Actions that violate societal norms, transgress laws or taboos can also evoke abjection (Oliver, 1993b). This occurs because such violations undermine the significance of societal rules, values, and norms - the Symbolic law - which is crucial for maintaining order and regulating social interactions in a community. Those actions also disrupt social order since the potential of threat reminds us of the fragility of a stable social order. Besides, these violations often evoke a sense of repulsion and exclusion because they clash with societal norms, leading to people being marginalized or cast out. This is done to repair the damaged sense of coherence and to restore unity within a social group. Hence, the "abject is what does not respect boundaries" (McAfee, 2003, p. 46). Each society establishes its foundation on the construction of the abject, which involves setting boundaries and rejecting antisocial elements; however, every society may possess its own form. In all instances, the abject threatens the cohesion and identity of society and the individuals within it. Therefore, it raises doubts regarding the boundaries upon which society and individuals are constructed (Oliver, 1993b).

Regarding the Kristevan abject, the commonly controversial issue is the abject mother. As abjection emerges initially during the infant's imaginary union with its mother, prior to the mirror stage, the stage of recognizing its own reflection in a mirror, before the acquisition of language and entry into Lacan's symbolic realm, the infant's mother is the first to abject. According to Kelly Oliver, abjecting the mother is crucial as it represents "a phase in which the child must abject its mother in order to separate from her" (1993, p. 104). Separation from the mother is vital for developing one's own

subjectivity and forming an independent, autonomous self. However, this separation process is challenging as the infant has long imagined being united with the mother's body. The child, therefore, becomes entangled in a paradoxical situation, experiencing conflicting desires as such: While there is a strong wish for a narcissistic connection with its primary caregiver, the child still has to detach from this union so as to gain its own autonomy and establish a sense of self (McAfee, 2003).

To avoid misinterpretations regarding Kristeva's concept of the abject mother, Oliver (1993a) emphasizes that the object of abjection is not the mother herself but rather her physical body:

> Actually, what the child must abject is the "maternal container.'' It does not need to abject the mother's body as the body of a woman. It does not need to abject its mother herself as a person. Rather, it needs to abject the "maternal container" upon which it has been dependent in order to be weaned from the mother (p. 104).

The distinction is made to clarify that the abjection is not a rejection or negation of the mother as a person but rather a symbolic separation from the maternal body. Through the process of abjecting the maternal body, the infant is able to have a distinct sense of self and start to develop its own subjectivity. This act of abjection enables the infant to detach themselves from the physical and psychological reliance on the mother's body. She also underscores that it is not Kristeva's theory that reduces women to motherhood; it is, on the contrary, Western culture that does not distinguish between maternity and women, and due to the inseparable connection between the maternal role and perceptions of women or femininity, women themselves have been subjected to abjection within western societies (Oliver, 1993a). Regarding this matter, Kristeva draws upon religious texts, particularly the biblical references to the Virgin Mary. She asserts that in biblical narratives, the Virgin Mary's impregnation by the Word, representing the Father's divine presence, serves as a means to establish paternity and reverse the remaining influence of matrilineal societies in order to ensure both paternity and the passing on of inheritances through the Name of the Father (Oliver, 1993b). Hence, women have often been associated with negativity, leading to the marginalization and exclusion of all women, regardless of whether they are mothers. This association contributes to the process of abjection, evoking disdain and rejection.

Even though it is suppressed, the abject remains an ever-present force. This is not a transient phase. On the contrary, it is a constant companion. Kristeva argues that religions have set up rules and rituals to provide methods of cleansing or purification, just as certain religious practices prohibit specific foods or behaviors not due to inherent qualities but because they jeopardize one's identity or societal order (McAfee, 2003).

Regarded as a threat to the unity of subjectivity, abjection represents an encounter with an unparalleled, primal horror that plunges the individual into an immensely distressing crisis. However, certain forms of communication have managed to confront and articulate this horror rather than suppressing it (Becker-Leckrone, 2005). Literature, in Kristeva's view, holds a crucial role in expressing and delving into the concept of abjection, which she claims functions as a space where taboos or repressed emotions can be explored and experienced:

> In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task – a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct – amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless "primacy" constituted by primal repression. Through that experience […] "subject" and "object" push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable, abject. Great modern literature unfolds over that terrain: Dostoevsky, Lautréamont, Proust, Artaud, Kafka, Céline (Kristeva, 1982. p. 18).

In the above quotation, Kristeva argues that the aesthetic task involves exploring the foundational aspects of the symbolic construct, particularly during periods when the boundaries between subject and object become blurred. She emphasizes the importance of delving into repressed or suppressed emotions that exist at the unconscious level. By citing examples of modern literature authors, Kristeva illustrates how literature reflects this blurriness, and the authors explore disruptive elements that challenge the unified identities and boundaries of the self and society, founding a connection between aesthetics and politics, art, and revolution (Margoroni, 2005).

The subsequent chapters explore the intricate relationship between literature and its revolutionary power by incorporating Kristeva's theoretical framework into Söğüt's narratives. Through such incorporation, these chapters aim to shed light on how

Söğüt's narratives challenge deep-rooted power hierarchies and encourage readers to have a social critique of oppression and discrimination that specific individuals have to endure. Söğüt's unsettling themes and unconventional narrative structures prompt readers to engage in critical reflections, contradicting prevailing ideologies and leaving spaces for interpretation. Ultimately, these explorations and functions illuminate the subversive power of literature, underscoring its role as a catalyst of resistance and transformation.

CHAPTER 3

AFFIRMING THE ABJECT THROUGH UNSETTLING THEMES

Mine Söğüt started journalism in 1990 and wrote fiction, interviews, biographies, and monographs (İşcan, 2023). The dominant mood in her works revolves around emotions and circumstances commonly associated with fear. Her narratives encompass themes like death, violence, pessimism, and a sense of helplessness. While she depicts the lives of regular people with keen detail, she skillfully captures often overlooked moments through intricate story-telling and vivid imagination. Despite the prominence of fantastical elements in her stories, she adeptly maintains their plausibility (Kocabıçak, 2020). Her complete body of work demonstrates her dedication to portraying the experiences of marginalized individuals residing on the fringes of society. Her writings often confront everyday issues that disturb ordinary people and portray unsettling, abject elements such as death, injuries, disturbing actions, tragic fatalities, and violence. The way she depicts these issues presents a sense of revolt: the speech of the long-ignored. In addition, she refrains from presenting her characters in a didactic and coherent manner, avoiding stable and unified characters. The characters in her novels inhabit the fringes of contemporary society, often overlooked and disregarded by many. In an interview discussing her latest work, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (The God of Others), she responds to a question regarding her preference for "unusual characters" with the following response:

> The characters you describe as "unusual" are characters that we refuse to see but exist within a crowded community of people around us, even among those closest to us. It is not about getting used to them but noticing their presence, thinking about them, worrying about them, and feeling responsible (Özsoy, 2022).

Through her writings, she emphasizes that these frequently overlooked characters are all around. She clarifies that they are not visually distinct or extraordinary; the problem

lies in their frequent unnoticed existence despite their closeness to us. She believes that their presence deserves recognition because they challenge and destabilize the social order, namely the patriarchy and heteronormativity. In depicting these characters, her style aims to evoke a sense of alienation, allowing readers to objectively comprehend and evaluate them rather than resorting to emotionally manipulative techniques. Söğüt proficiently presents her characters in their moments of vulnerability, weakness, and strength, allowing readers to relate to them more deeply and genuinely.

It is essential to highlight that these characters have multidimensional nature, which sets them apart from the often-stereotypical portrayals found in mainstream media. They are richly developed individuals with nuanced personalities, motivations, and emotions. In contrast to the superficial representation, where queer characters are sometimes reduced to one-dimensional stereotypes used for marketing purposes, Söğüt's approach offers a refreshing alternative. Her characters defy expectations and challenge conventional norms. They embody the complexities of real-life issues. They grapple with issues of identity and belonging in compelling and authentic ways. Through the intricate construction of these characters, Söğüt depicts these marginalized characters as fully realized human beings with agency and depth.

She dismantles the notions of binary distinctions between good and evil in her narratives, enabling her characters to grapple with moral dilemmas. This approach establishes a strong and secure connection between readers and the characters, simultaneously evoking feelings of acceptance and rejection. As readers encounter the rejected aspects within themselves through these characters, they undergo a cathartic experience, and literature serves as a purifying art form, not suppressing the rejected abject elements but allowing readers to confront and embrace them.

In Mine Söğüt's novels, themes of death, pain, darkness, violence, pessimism, and powerlessness permeate the atmosphere. She offers extensive social criticism through her characters and events, indirectly exploring various flaws and issues in political, cultural, and social contexts (Balcı, 2022).

Consequently, as her narratives unfold in graveyards, abandoned buildings, wounds, and blood-filled settings, which often stir feelings of disgust and unease, engagement

with her literary work challenges the clarity of meaning, personal identity, and social unity. She constantly "delves into the unsettling nature of truth; as a result, there is naturally much bloodshed and much suffering" (Özkan, 2013).

She critiques unjust power dynamics by exposing harrowing aspects of truth. Societies construct particular identities and attach certain aspects to these identities to create a united and cohesive identity. Those who do not conform to these aspects and belong to these unwelcomed identities are pushed to the fringes of society, where they are subjugated to the discrimination and unjust exercise of power. Portraying these abusive experiences as sites of abject, Söğüt invites readers to think critically about the dynamics that perpetuate such abuse. These portrayals allow readers to notice the marginalized and the silenced groups. She masterfully develops her narratives, indicating that identity categories such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and class can sometimes intersect, which multiplies these people's oppression.

Narrating the stories of the oppressed from multiple perspectives, including multiple truths from several points of view, especially from that of characters, as mainly argued in women's studies, aligns with this belief "that both the study of and the advocacy for the oppressed must come to be done principally by the oppressed themselves" (Alcoff, 1991-1992, p. 7). Furthermore, Söğüt emphasizes in an interview that her narratives offer plural truths by allowing each character to express themselves in their own unique way:

> In all my stories, I am probing the jolt of reality. Nevertheless, in doing so, naturally, there is much bloodshed and much pain. To make this pain bearable, I amplify the truth. Alternatively, instead, I underline the diversity of truth. In essence, what I do in my novels is akin to what we all do to survive. It becomes unbearable when reality confronts us in its singular and harshest form. One way to endure it is to approach it from different angles and tinge it with a small amount of fable and folklore... There may be a singular truth, but this singular truth is multi-dimensional. Hence, comprehending and sharing it often proves challenging (Özkan, 2013).

By adopting this approach, Söğüt gives up her position as a sole authority, enabling readers to derive their own interpretations from her narratives. The interaction between the author and reader fosters active participation, leading to the construction of

personal understandings. As a result, readers engage in a more critical reading of her narratives, which permits them to interpret the events and meanings as Söğüt's texts are mainly construed as sites of multiplicity, critical thinking, resistance, and subversion.

Drawing on similar notions of multiplicity and resistance, Julia Kristeva introduces the concept of abjection to literature in her work *Powers of Horror* (1982). She focuses on the boundary that separates the "subject-in-process" from *the other* and the notions of purity and contamination. Abjection is crucial due to the construction of subjectivity and "the state of rejecting what is other to oneself - thereby creating borders of an always tenuous 'I'" (McAfee, 2003, p. 45).

Even when controlled and discarded, the "abject can still threaten the social, the Symbolic order" (Oliver, 1993b, p. 56). Expelling physical and mental elements that do not align with its pure and proper identity initiates the construction of a distinct self even before entering the mirror stage of development and gaining language (McAfee, 2003). Abject elements "signal bodily functions which a 'rational consciousness' cannot accept" (Grosz, 2012, p. 90). However, it is impossible to completely dismiss them, as they portray a body in the rebellion that consciousness disowns but cannot ignore (Grosz, 2012).

Abject is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). This quote indicates that the abject is something society attempts to reject or avoid, yet individuals find it challenging to separate themselves from it completely. Unlike a typical object that can be easily discarded or shielded against, the abject tends to persist, lingering uncomfortably within our awareness.

The concepts of "abject" and "abjection" can offer insights into comprehending the social and political identities related to gender and whether these identities are embraced with hostility within a society. As a result, they help to uncover complex dynamics and power structures operating within that group.

Just as individuals develop and evolve, societies also shape themselves by constructing potential threats from external sources and defining what fits their cultural order. These perceived threats also function as abject disturbing norms, values, and social and cultural order. Kristeva states, "Defilement is what is jettisoned from the 'symbolic system'. It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary accumulation of individuals and, in short, constitutes a classification system or a structure" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 65). The primary emphasis of this chapter centers around the concept of the abject, mainly focusing on individuals subjected to defilement and consequently marginalized from the realms of socially sanctioned lifestyles. Excluding these individuals leads to imposing oppressive and controlling measures, often characterized by violent means, rendering them practically invisible.

Nonetheless, Söğüt's narratives operate as an agent of rebellion within this context, offering avenues for subversion and resistance. It achieves this by granting a platform for the narratives of these marginalized individuals to be acknowledged and comprehended within the framework of power dynamics.

Therefore, this chapter shifts its primary focus to the individuals who have been marginalized and relegated to the status of the abject, aiming to delve into the intricate process by which they have been pushed to the margins. Through a thorough examination, readers can gain insight into the underlying dynamics within the context of the aforementioned society, Turkey. This exploration of abjection will mainly center around women and queer people, delving into the intersection of gender, sexuality, and ethnic identities, which compounds their oppression. Within this analysis, various forms of violence - ranging from physical to sexual and structural - will be discussed, with a concentration on the most prominent form within this category.

This chapter will explore the theme of violence against women and queer individuals, as well as the experiences of those marginalized due to disabilities, mental health conditions, and unconventional relationships. Through Söğüt's portrayal of the abject and various experiences, she destroys metanarratives and hegemonies that condemn these characters to marginalization through several methods. As a result, this discussion chapter also challenges the criticism that accuses Kristeva of confining

women to marginality. Instead, it highlights how her theories function to comprehend better personal and political, as demonstrated in Söğüt's narratives. This merge of personal and political elements becomes powerful when considering the complexities of gender, history, society, and economics.

3.1. Violence against Women

Violence takes on various forms and is not limited to a singular aspect; it manifests as emotional, verbal, sexual, physical, and cognitive expressions (Hearn, 1994). Likewise, it emerges as a recurring motif in several forms in Söğüt's novels, expressed through instances of political assassinations, domestic homicides, femicides, and patricides. While depicting these forms of violence, Söğüt does not hesitate to portray dismembered body remains, corpses, bloodshed, and lasting wounds. As reminders of one's unitary, these depictions allow readers to directly confront the abject in her narratives. Notably, corpses are one of the specific abject elements as Kristeva remarks upon the significance of their presence: "A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is indistinguishable from the symbolic—the corpse represents fundamental pollution" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 109). The pollution associated with the corpse is profoundly ingrained and significant as the deceased body is depicted as a vigorous symbol of decay, impurity, and the physical dissolution of life, in addition to posing a threat to the unity of the self. As a result, readers frequently find themselves unsettled by the portrayal of these menacing elements that challenge their sense of identity and the unity of self. These encounters serve as poignant reminders of the inherent susceptibility of the self, evoking feelings of dread and delicacy.

Söğüt deliberately crafts these disruptions to the cohesion of body and self, portraying them as intentional rather than natural phenomena. Moreover, she provides a political critique of these unsettling events. These diverse dimensions of violence include gendered forms and explicitly illustrate how both structural and individual gender contexts influence violence. This approach prompts readers to confront these disturbing manifestations courageously.

Söğüt skillfully incorporates murders, corpses, and disintegrated bodies into the background stories of her narratives. She presents these elements in a straightforward and unexaggerated way, depicting reality without excessive dramatization or emotions. These events are portrayed as everyday occurrences. Her portrayal does not seek to normalize violence; instead, it highlights the pervasive nature of violence to expose harsh realities. By urging readers to confront the shocking and disturbing commonality of violent occurrences, she promotes recognition of the vile aspects of the settings where these acts take place. This encounter, in turn, enables readers to critique the social norms and conditions that perpetuate violence, motivating them to challenge and subvert harmful social constructs and norms. Through her novels' settings and characters, Söğüt explicitly indicates the unjust social conditions, unequal power dynamics, and cultural norms that prolong and extend violence.

Söğüt employs violence in her narratives as a critical response to unjust power relations through various methods. She does not depict violence as random or inherent but rather links it to political contexts, often involving assassinations by governmental or paramilitary entities. Additionally, she explicitly incorporates gendered perspectives into the theme of violence, portraying femicides and emphasizing the commonality of women's experiences with violence.

The first section focuses on physical forms of violence, while the second section examines sexual violence. Additionally, the third section emphasizes the structural forms of violence. Although distinguishing between these forms of violence can be challenging due to their interconnection, the primary focus will be on the most prevalent form. Overall, this part encourages readers to look into how Söğüt depicts the unsettling theme of violence for subversive purposes, shedding light on the abjection of women and queer individuals and the power dynamics inherent in everyday or political situations.

3.1.1. Physical Violence

Krantz and Garcia Moreno (2005) describe physical violence as "exercised through physically aggressive acts such as kicking, biting, slapping, beating, or even strangling" (p. 819). Söğüt graphically demonstrates examples of physical violence at both interpersonal and organizational levels in her narratives. Narratives are perceived

as a platform for storytellers to construct different portrayals of reality and actively participate in social change (Somers, 1994). Besides offering valuable insights into the historical and cultural backdrop, these narratives serve as dynamic instruments, effectively portraying power dynamics by giving voice to multiple characters (Morrow, 1994). Furthermore, they actively challenge established norms, and by doing so, they become agents of resistance; consequently, these narratives can be aptly described as subversive (Kushner & Morrow, 2003).

In order to achieve the above functions, it is crucial "to examine what is told within a story from a sociological perspective" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 119). Söğüt's narratives depict events from different time periods in Turkey, including contemporary Turkish contexts. They encourage readers to adopt a broader range of perspectives and critically examine the distressing instances of physical violence.

In her first novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (The Five Sevim Apartment), the protagonist is a psychiatrist named Doctor Samimi (Doctor Sincere). The events revolve around Doctor Samimi's five patients and the woman after whom the apartment is named. Each character shares experiences related to some form of violence. Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım (Miss Five Sevim Huriye), who could not bear a baby boy despite the wishes of her husband, unpacks her story of violence: "When I gave birth to my second child, the man became furious, he beat me, and he cursed at the baby. The poor thing did not live long; she passed away two months later" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 36).

Söğüt recounts women's stories about their pasts and abject selves. This story of Beş Sevim Huriye is not an unfamiliar story that readers cannot relate to; instead, it is a familiar narrative that mirrors everyday occurrences. By exposing Beş Sevim Huriye's past, Söğüt validates her experience and provides a platform for her story to be heard.

Besides affirming Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım's story, Güllük suggests that portraying events that drive Huriye to madness also illuminates her position as a passive victim (Güllük, 2022). The characters, including Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım, in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*

> lose their sanity due to traumas stemming from societal gender norms. Huriye suffers violence from her husband each time she fails to bear a male child, and

> furthermore, every daughter she gives birth to dies from neglect and lack of care. She herself becomes withdrawn and isolated due to the same neglect and indifference, becoming excluded from society and leading a semi-reclusive life, seeking solace in cats (Güllük, 2022, p. 119).

However, I argue that while Söğüt delves into the causes behind women's descent into madness following experiences of male violence, this portrayal does not render them passive victims. Instead, Söğüt amplifies their voices, providing a platform for their stories to be told and understood from their own perspectives of reality. In doing so, she challenges the notion of victimhood and happy family. Her characters have agency and reclaim control over their narratives despite leading a series of violent events.

Söğüt's depictions of these instances strongly emphasize the presence of power dynamics. Portraying these dynamics, she also highlights how they often exploit the vulnerable. Mainly through the instances of physical and sexual violence against female bodies, such exploitation reveals that violence is inevitably and inherently linked to gendered identities (Butler, 1990).

Continuing with the tale of the first resident in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, readers learn of his unconscious fears of being murdered by his mother. As his mother's story unravels, readers discover that she eloped with her lover without her parents' consent. However, the man deceives her with the promise of marriage, and they end up living together through a religious marriage. Due to poverty, the man begins selling her to other men after a few months (Söğüt, 2023). Ultimately, she cannot bear this and takes her partner's life as a response to the unceasing cycle of violence. Drawing from her extensive experience as a journalist, Söğüt's portrayal of these distressing incidents often stirs up a confrontation with the news found in daily newspapers. Özkan (2010) suggests that Söğüt's career in journalism unintentionally nurtured her writing skills, with her primary focus being on unraveling the question of "why." As a result, readers often find a sense of familiarity in the events depicted in her novels, given her pursuit of exploring the underlying reasons behind them.

While acknowledging the sense of familiarity, readers are also aware of the fictional nature of the event. This encounter leads to a confrontation with the ambivalent essence of the abject. The abject remains ever-present, impossible to dismiss entirely

(Kristeva, 1982). However, this representation is not solely about exposing the abject aspects of the event; it serves as a means of revealing its power dynamics. The vulnerability of female bodies to abjection is not solely social but also structural. Therefore, Söğüt also condemns the absence of institutional regulations safeguarding those susceptible to violence. For some individuals, the exclusion of marginalized people results in violence, and violence becomes prevalent when the lack of legal protection is evident (Agamben, 1998). The world Söğüt presents readers is full of threats and dangers, which condemn the sovereign power's protecting rights and providing security.

Söğüt consistently depicts women who have experienced violence, which prompts readers to question boundaries and shape their subjectivity through this confrontation. The encounter with the abject and the resulting discomfort leads to the formation of a renewed self that is acutely conscious of its boundaries:

> Discomfort, unease, and dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10, emphasis in the original).

A sense of discomfort marks this intricate engagement. The ambiguity that exists between one's own identity and that of others incites a potent rejection of this lack of definition. As readers confront the violence depicted, they gain the ability to establish distinct boundaries and demarcations from the abject. This process of setting up boundaries prompts a thoughtful examination of the inherently unsettling nature of the event, thereby creating a space for subversion.

Another example of violence against women is seen in the novel *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time). The character Mahmut Abi (Brother Mahmut), a friend of Hüsran's father, expresses his intention to kill both his runaway wife and her lover violently after they have eloped: "I will gut both of them with this (pocketknife) once I find them" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 49). Hearing these words, Hüsran's mother attempts to console her daughter. At the same time, her father tries to calm Mahmut Abi down: "Do not worry, Hüsran. Mahmut Abi is very angry, that is why he is talking like that. Do not be scared; he will

not do such things" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 49). In addition to this dialogue, the author clarifies that Hüsran's mother does not honestly believe in the reassurances she offers to her daughter (Söğüt, 2022a). This implies that she acknowledges Mahmut Abi's ability to commit horrifying acts.

On the one hand, there is an attempt to diminish abject, but its persistent existence continues. Although the abject is tried to be eliminated primarily due to its horrifying and threatening nature that disturbs social and individual cohesion, it "is radically excluded, but never banished altogether" (McAfee, 2003, p. 46). The readers feel the unease caused by the persistent nature of the abject; what is more, as human bodies become more than mere biological entities, they are intricately intertwined with psychological, emotional, and cognitive encounters; ergo, experiences that are distressing or disruptive, like violence, wield a profound influence on our minds, bodies, and sense of self (Becker-Leckrone, 2005).

In Söğüt's storytelling, she not only highlights the disturbing nature of violence but also depicts that violence is not a random act; instead, it is deeply ingrained in social expectations. Therefore, the man whose wife eloped with someone else automatically has the motive and the capability to resort to violence against his wife.

In another novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (The Five Sevim Apartment), Söğüt portrays a scene where the death of an abusive man - a husband and a father- brings a sense of relief. Through her storytelling, she captures the moment of death as a relief from oppression. Also, she diminishes the man's role from that of the family provider to that of a troublemaker. Her narrative exposes the pervasive violence while dismantling revered images of men as family providers:

> It was not the pillar of the house who died; it was the hunchback. That is why Kader never felt sorry for Haydar leaving her life this way. After all, she was the one who brought money home by cleaning, taking care of the child, cooking, and also enduring beatings. At least now, the house budget would not be wasted on alcohol, and she would not be kicked and beaten in the middle of the night to be dragged out of bed (Söğüt, 2023, p. 119).

Thus, her narration uncovers an alternative truth behind the illusion of a happy family. It diverges from the mainstream narratives and challenges the conventional glorification of the family structure.

Kristeva highlights the subversive potency of art, including literature, to challenge established norms, drawing from the Freudian unconscious, which is evident in dreams and artistic instruments. (Lechte, 2012). However, Kristeva further claims that art, particularly avant-garde, is not only the reflection of subjectivity but also a means of constituting it (Sjöholm, 2005). Söğüt's depiction of violence as abject may produce a sense of negativity by disturbing the boundaries of the self. However, this negativity is not inherently destructive but rather generative. As such, literature assumes a vital political role in presenting challenges and advocating for deconstruction and subversion:

> Literature acts as a substitute for religious meaning in that it reproduces the tertiary structure of transference and metaphorical support in which meaning is produced. More importantly, however, meaning is a product of conflicting forces and a matter of politics in itself. A politics of meaning consists of the challenge of the breaking down and the reconstitution of the imaginary field that defines a society (Sjöholm, 2005, p. 66).

In this context, generating meaning is a dynamic process. It includes challenging prevailing norms, deconstructing established ideas, and reconstructing new frameworks within society's collective imagination.

Söğüt's narration offers commentary and vivid examples of the several forms of violence inflicted upon women. Each portrayal is rich with references to Turkey's social and political landscape. As a result, readers may find themselves disturbed rather than shocked, as many tend to avoid confronting such realities to maintain a sense of cohesion in their identities.

Another common form of violence is portrayed in the novel *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (Madam Mr. Arthur and Everything in Her/His Life). A sex worker named Nagehan is depicted conversing with a fortune teller in the hotel lobby where she resides and works. The fortuneteller claims to have wings emerging from apparent scars on her back. Although the fortuneteller believes these scars give rise to

wings, the receptionist reveals that “her son stabbed her in the back upon confronting her mother engaging in sexual activity with a client” (Söğüt, 2022b, p.13). The mother performing sex work now appears as abject since she is marginalized and considered impure according to the social and religious values of Turkish society. Being familiar with these norms and values, readers recognize the stigma imposed upon such individuals.

Throughout the story, the novel's fable-like quality suggests recurring events, including violence against marginalized individuals. Sacrifice, a common theme in her narrative, serves as a mechanism to cope with defilement that threatens social cohesion and individual integrity. The sacrifice ritual has often been employed throughout history to cleanse impurities without accountability.

Therefore, it can be suggested that these coping mechanisms intensify the exclusion of what one considers abject or impure. As such, Kristeva emphasizes the connection between defilement and the practices that validate or reinforce the sense of impurity: “Defilement, employing the rituals that consecrate it, is perhaps, for a social aggregate, only one of the possible foundings of abjection bordering the frail identity of the speaking being” (1982, p. 68).

Along with the rituals that degrade and increase the fragility of specific individuals, they also shape collective beliefs and values. Killing the perceived impurity, such as a mother engaging in sex work in the context of Söğüt’s narrative, reflects the overarching belief system -patriarchy- that controls women's bodies on a societal level.

Through such examples, it is easily noticed that women, children, and nonbinary individuals are depicted as more vulnerable to physical violence and lacking control over their bodies in Söğüt’s narratives. Söğüt's storytelling unveils the cultural codes prevalent in these communities, shedding light on the disturbing realities without glorifying them. By presenting the narrative as it is, she allows readers to become acquainted with the trauma and scars endured by these individuals. This presentation can also be considered a commentary on the societal pressure imposed on women.

In another background story in *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time) (2022a), the author introduces a prison mate of Zaman Dayı (Uncle Time), who is sentenced to life-long

imprisonment for the murder of his children. As the narrative progresses, readers become acquainted with this character's story. Veysel Baba was left as a single parent to his four children, three of whom had disabilities, after his wife passed away. His oldest child, Şerife, who was just twelve years old, went out to play with her friends but never returned home. It does not take long for Veysel to discover that Şerife was subjected to rape and then brutally murdered at a construction site.

Söğüt's approach to conveying these events to the readers is by highlighting the ordinary nature of the occurrence, emphasizing its banality: “He was not the first father whose child was raped and murdered at a construction site” (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 152). Emphasizing the commonality of the rape event, Söğüt conveys her political stance as a critic against othering specific individuals and marginalizing them to such a point that violence against them becomes an ordinary act. These people are sacrificed without impunity, and legal and social protection does not include them.

Such a sacrifice, unlike the one against sex-working mothers, does not have an impure act at all. Readers notice that the presence of a female existence, be it a child or a woman, is also abject. That social stigma, which always blames women in the case of women murders in the Turkish context, has now no grounding. Söğüt depicts two contrasting events: the sacrificial act against a sex-working mother and one involving a female body devoid of any impurity. Doing this, she highlights the inherent biases and the ingrained notion that men possess a sense of entitlement over any female body.

While Söğüt frequently portrays these tragic deaths as everyday events to emphasize their ordinary nature, her intention is not to glorify murder but to highlight the disturbing nature of such occurrences by providing deep character analysis and letting them speak for themselves. Such a narration enables readers to see these characters with complexities rather than just stereotypical portrayals based on prejudices or victimizations. This challenges the prevailing narratives that often stereotype or overlook individuals who do not fit into conventional molds while presenting a vision of happiness and fulfillment centered around prosperous and healthy individuals. Her protest is against the protective system and social structure.

Portraying these events, her literary works emphasize the prevalence of rape and murder, offering commentary on the socially and politically unfair regulations that

perpetrate these heinous acts. Readers are encouraged to question the reasons behind the common occurrence of such events, which may indicate the impact of impunity and oppressive ethics on female bodies and their vulnerability in these territories. Another significant focus is on the victim's age, which critiques the insufficiency of agencies that can protect children from threats, whether from within the family or external sources.

Söğüt does not explicitly dictate what readers should think; instead, she provides the means and tools to reflect upon these abhorrent acts through her literary work. She intends to prompt readers to confront these issues and deeply contemplate the question of "why" such violence persists. Therefore, readers are made to have critical feminist inquiry since “narratives are thus embedded within historical, structural, and ideological contexts, social discourses, and power relations” (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 118). Her narrative aims to deconstruct the underlying system that contributes to the oppression, discrimination, and gender inequality in the domains of social, cultural, and economic life and everyday occurrences.

Critical thinking to understand social and political contexts challenges preconceived notions and prompts readers to encounter the chaotic world through such confrontations. Therefore, the narratives of Söğüt function as a catalyst for critical inquiry that immerses readers in complex social and political contexts displayed in her novels. Whereas the narratives evoke empathetic feelings, allowing readers to feel with the characters, the protest nature of her narratives goes beyond a mere emotional engagement. Her portrayal disrupts the notion of a secure world and exposes the dangers inherent in societal norms linked to patriarchy and heteronormativity. These norms perpetuate power dynamics and violence against those who deviate from them.

3.1.2. Sexual Violence

In addition to illustrating physical violence, Söğüt vividly and explicitly integrates instances of sexual violence into her stories. Her portrayal of sexual violence is not devoid of gender considerations. Sexual violence includes several ranges of topics to be analyzed: gender, body, sexual orientation, religion, and the psyche (Diken & Lausten, 2005). Accordingly, this chapter examines how the author portrays characters

becoming abject and explores how readers experience this through the lens of gender, sexual orientation, class, and ethnicity.

A rather disturbing example of sexual violence, exercising power on the female body, occurs in her second novel, *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time). One of the novel's main characters, Zaman Dayı (Uncle Time), has a past of killing a rape survivor, disintegrating her body in two parts. He throws the bottom part of the body into the sea. He carries the upper part with him to the village.

> When the girl died in his arms, he wished he had told them how he had tearfully separated the fish's body with his ax, thrown its scaly tail into the water, and brought the upper part of the girl's body to the village to bury it in the ground (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 177).

The disturbing presence of Zaman Dayı, holding a blood-drenched half-body, leaves villagers in shock and astonishment. Both the corpse, which is disintegrated, and the blood are unsettling images that the very existence of a corpse itself challenges the boundaries that separate life and death, intruding into the very core of existence (Gross, 2012). The existence of a corpse distorts one's sense of order and control over life and unity, exposing the vulnerability and fragility of human existence (Gross, 2012). Besides having the image of the corpse, which threatens the unity of self, the crime itself is abject "because it draws attention to the fragility of the law" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

In addition to these unsettling images, the event's content is disturbing, too. The real story behind this event follows an incident of continuous rapes of the girl by a neighboring boy. As a result, Söğüt unveils the actual story behind the girl's disappearance, revealing that a young neighboring boy caused her death:

> Yavuz found her half-conscious at the shore, but instead of carrying the young girl in his arms, crossing the rugged rocks, running through the fields, and taking her to the village, where he would wait by her side until she recovered and steal the heart of the beautiful Yadigar, adding another ballad to the legendary ones about lovers, Yavuz violently raped Yadigar for days. Then, thinking the girl was dead with her lower body covered in blood, he simply left her on the beach (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 181).

Readers' encounter with the brutal act containing several abject elements in Söğüt's narrative goes beyond superficial descriptions; it deconstructs the glorification of love. The author's portrayal of this violent act challenges conventional notions of romanticized love and exposes the darker realities that can exist within human relationships. Her narration aims to present a more robust and authentic portrayal of events, challenging the romanticized depictions of love relations commonly found in various forms of media such as folk songs, ballads, movies, and so on. By presenting the abject elements within the context of this brutal act, Söğüt strips away the veneer of idealized love, prompting readers to confront human relations' raw and unsettling aspects.

Similarly, on this matter, de Beauvoir (1956) asserts that the romantic idealization of love places women in a subordinate position, consequently providing a gateway to exert control over their individuality:

> There is no other way out for her but to lose herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as absolute, as the essential. Since she is anyway doomed to dependence, she will prefer to serve a god rather than obey tyrants - parents, husband, or protector. [...] She chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her the expression of her liberty…she will humble herself to nothingness before him. Love becomes, for her, a religion (p. 609).

Söğüt aims to deconstruct cultural narratives through which women's discursive subjectivities are constructed, allowing readers to delve into these harrowing stories. Henceforth, her narratives serve as deconstructive and subversive tools to empower women, letting them create their narratives without falling into the "justification of women's material exploitation" (Jackson, 1993, p. 47).

Söğüt's other noteworthy novel**,** *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (Şahbaz's Extraordinary Year, 1979), includes more examples of rapes and incestuous rapes. In earlier flashbacks to the past of Melih and Semih, two of the novel's main characters, Söğüt unveils the tragic murder of their older sister. Their 12-year-old sister is considered "immoral," and she has to be murdered by her twin brothers. The pretext behind her being labeled as "immoral" is first implied in the narrative. Afterward, the narrative elucidates that she engaged in actions or behaviors that the community did

not approve of: “The fear-inducing spirits resurrected from a haunted past entered Ayşe’s soul. They terrified her young body and drove her to madness. That is why Ayşe slept with her father…father…father…” (Söğüt, 2022c, p.93). The repetitive word “father” functions as a rhetorical device to underscore the sexual violence at the hands of a trusted family member. It also challenges the social perceptions and norms about the glorification of family.

The following statements imply that Ayşe is held responsible for the incestuous act; therefore, she has to be sacrificed. However, the act is an incest rape. Söğüt openly criticizes the institution of family, particularly how it oppresses the female body, especially among the younger members. This oppression is further intensified by societal norms that often fail to punish the wrongdoer but instead blame the survivor. Despite being perceived as a safe space, the family becomes a center of unequal power dynamics, particularly affecting the less powerful individuals, such as women and girls, in Söğüt's narrative and setting.

Similar events occur in the background stories, as well. A young boy slices his father’s throat in front of a courthouse after reading a news article with the title “The Immoral Father”: “The immoral father impregnated her daughter” (Söğüt, 2022c, p.59). Similar to the above labeling, the act of incestuous rape is highly deemed “immoral.” On that account, the abject elements also include distressing themes such as incestuous rape, prohibited by law and condemned by culture: “The abject threat comes from what has been prohibited by the Symbolic order, what has been prohibited so that the Symbolic order can be” **(**Oliver, 1993b, p. 56). Subject to definitions and alterations by various cultures and religions, “abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution” (Kristeva, 1982, p.17) or “as exclusion or taboo” (Kristeva, 1982, p.17). It is prone to conversion to “transgression of the Law” (Kristeva, 1982, p.17).

The novel highlights how acts of sexual and emotional violence perpetrated by blood-related individuals pose a significant threat to familial unity, necessitating their expulsion from the family. Despite the attempts to completely dismiss and erase these unsettling events, such as resorting to murder (even if it involves innocent individuals, as seen in Ayşe's, Melih's, and Semih's sister's situation), this banishment only serves

as a symbolic resolution. The abject element remains ever-present, resisting complete eradication.

Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey further explores the profound impacts of sexual violence on individuals, mainly through the character of Maria, a survivor of war and rape who flees from one of the iron curtain countries. In the novel, Maria and Madam Mr. Arthur have a complex relationship, and to cope with the trauma, they pretend that Maria is mute. It is clear from the narrative that dreadful experiences have silenced her voice and agency; she has chosen not to talk anymore. She spent those years in silence after all the turmoil she encountered during the wars in the Iron Curtain countries. Madam Mr. Arthur, supposedly guessing what Maria has gone through, never forces her to speak:

> Maria is mute.[...] Yet, Madam Mr. Arthur knows that Maria could speak if she wanted to. She chooses not to.[...] Madam Mr. Arthur wonders if Maria's silence is only towards her/him or to the whole world: Tell me about the country you came from. Was it Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, or Albania? Could it be Albania? Or was it Russia? Did those idiots who divided your country also shatter your mind, Maria? (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 38).

As a survivor of rape, Maria becomes the abject that readers are made to face. The utterings of Madam Mr. Arthur show that "abjection has a communal aspect, as well" (Diken & Lausten, 2005, p. 113). Söğüt's literary works underscore the enduring impact of the abject on both individuals and society, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. This is exemplified through Madam Mr. Arthur's compilation of the Iron Curtain countries' actions, emphasizing that unsettling occurrences can happen anywhere and are not restricted to specific contexts.

By portraying Madam Mr. Arthur as an anti-hero embodying governmental authority, Söğüt provides a critical perspective. This representation encapsulates the unbridled strength of such authority, illustrated vividly through her/his realization of imagined fatalities. Söğüt deliberately employs this portrayal as a literary tool to prompt readers to contemplate the perils associated with the misuse of omnipotent power epitomized by characters and the war events.

The abject persists in various forms and shapes, always lurking in the background, ready to resurface. The novels explore how attempting to suppress or dismiss the abject only offers temporary solution and relief, as its influence remains everlasting, impacting the characters' lives. However, the crucial step is encountering and recognizing it directly without completely surpassing it. Only through this process of confrontation and acknowledgment can people have some control over the abject and its devastating effects.

Söğüt's marginalized characters often experience violence, discrimination, and dispossession of power due to their marginalized status. Söğüt uses her storytelling to shed light on the injustices these individuals face, particularly women, children, and other marginalized societal groups. Ergo she criticizes the institutions (family, state, media, religion, and so forth.) and systems that perpetuate and reinforce such oppression.

Through her fearless and unapologetic approach, Söğüt confronts readers with unsettling truths about the extreme violence and control imposed on marginalized groups. She does not shy away from depicting disturbing acts such as murders, rapes, and other forms of violence that these characters endure. By presenting these unsettling truths that people tend to ignore, she challenges readers to acknowledge the painful experiences of marginalized people and confront the uncomfortable truths about our world.

The primary purpose of Söğüt's storytelling is to challenge sovereign groups. By spotlighting the experiences of the marginalized characters, she encourages readers to question the arbitrary nature of societal identities and norms. Therefore, her narratives prompt readers to examine how power dynamics are unjustly skewed, perpetuating violence and oppression against vulnerable groups.

In her narratives, the discomfort experienced by readers serves as a tool for challenging norms and highlighting the consequences of their enforcement. She unveils the insidious ways in which patriarchy and heteronormativity can wield power, leading to violence and marginalization against those who defy societal norms. Through her portrayal of characters who challenge these norms, Söğüt exposes the harsh consequences they endure, ranging from discrimination to outright violence.

Moreover, Söğüt's narrative dismantles the notion of an "ideal" world often portrayed as harmonious and conflict-free. Instead, she presents a reality abundant with power imbalances and oppressive structures, where individuals' lives are dictated by normative expectations. This critique subverts preconceptions of what defines a "good" or "safe" society.

3.1.3. Structural Violence

In Söğüt's portrayal, death is not depicted as a natural process resulting from aging and the gradual decline of bodily functions. Alternatively, her narratives frequently depict these deaths as murders, historically perpetrated by certain groups, often targeting individuals considered socially deviant. Readers come to understand that witnessing the murder, in particular, is not a welcomed experience.

Additionally, Söğüt emphasizes the continuity of murder, highlighting that it has been an ongoing process since the past, where societies and powerful groups have maintained control and secured their access to resources by resorting to deceitful and malicious actions. This portrayal sheds light on how power has been wielded throughout history to sustain dominance and authority over others.

In order to maintain their power, certain power-holding groups establish collective social identities, and those who do not conform to these identities are violently cast out. This confrontation with the excluded groups, namely the abject, prompts readers to reflect on how these power-holding groups instill fear by punishing marginalized segments of society. Söğüt achieves this by portraying characters who defy societal norms. Narrating their experiences, she allows readers to delve deeply into their stories, recognize their existence, and shed light on the often-overlooked narratives of these individuals through their interpretation.

States, particularly nation-states, established through competitive efforts, primarily led by men, have been created to uphold authority -albeit historically short-lived- over women (Hearn, 1994). In her novels, particularly in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2022c) and *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (2022b), Söğüt vividly illustrates how states exert absolute control over women through both military and

paramilitary organizations. These works delve into the prevalent political assassinations in Turkey's history during the 1970s and 1990s.

Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979 is the second novel by Mine Söğüt, initially published in 2007, and it consists of two parts. The first part includes twelve separate months, each of which features Şahbaz narrating "extraordinary" stories to a woman who "was about to die when Şahbaz found her" (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 20). Before starting the first part, Söğüt presents a fictional story in which a female character, Hacer, is killed by her twin brother, Mustafa, while she is dancing naked. Dancing naked implies potential mental illness in Hacer.

The second part serves as an almanac of news reports Söğüt collected from various newspapers throughout 1979. This section reminds readers that the supposedly extraordinary stories shared by Şahbaz are, in fact, quite similar to the actual events from the daily life of Turkey during the year 1979, which was the final year before the significant turning point of the military coup in 1980 in the Turkish Republic.

The author vividly portrays how individuals perceived as disruptive and threatening to the established political benefits and values are systematically eliminated through military means. The main character, Şahbaz, is a bird-like creature. He has omniscient knowledge, capable of changing shape and immersing himself in the violent stories he narrates. He meticulously narrates these incidents, providing a comprehensive account of a wounded woman he keeps in the basement of a supposedly police headquarters. These stories Şahbaz tells constitute Şahbaz's extraordinary year.

Both Şahbaz's extraordinary year and the actual events unfolding in Turkey during that period expose readers to a multitude of abject elements, such as corpses, death, and dismembered bodies, most of which have an omnipotent power behind it, called "Commander," whose real name is Melih. Melih represents the corruption of state and military institutions that sacrifice some citizens to maintain their power and ideology.

While Söğüt explores the abject notion by emphasizing the marginalization of specific individuals, she does not avoid approaching these exclusions from multiple aspects, including the political one. In her two aforementioned novels, the exclusion is directly

created and intensified by structural forces, namely the government and governmental organizations.

These marginalized characters are expelled, tortured, and murdered. These events and excessively violent control mechanisms indicate the perceived threat posed by these individuals, especially those with leftist and communist affiliations, to the authority of power-holding groups. Therefore, in this case, the very existence of the abject is a resistance to authority since "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (Kristeva, 1982, p.2). Also, as a result of these people's conflicting interests with the governmental authority, their murder is encouraged and carried out without impunity.

In addition to communists and leftists challenging governmental authority, the narrative also sheds light on the plight of women who are viewed as potential disruptors or even as witches, unsettling both familial and social equilibrium. Consequently, these women are subjected to fatal consequences without murderers facing any repercussions. The novel offers numerous instances exemplifying this phenomenon, centering around the central figures of Melih, Semih, and their half-sister Emine. As children, Melih, Semih, and their father gruesomely murder their elder sister, described in detail:

> The big man and two young children pressed the knife against Ayşe's throat as if preparing to sacrifice—the big man and two young boys... blood flowing in streams... the courtyard stones-stained crimson. Everywhere, there is the darkness of the moon… Ayşe is in a deep sleep, unable to stir… As if already dead but dying again in pieces (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 93).

The novel unveils that Ayşe is raped by her father; besides this, she is perceived as the root of malevolence within the village. Consequently, her murder becomes imperative to be exercised by her twin brothers. Women can be readily cast out and vilified, and their deaths often fail to prompt significant societal response due to their marginalized status. This phenomenon may stem from what is referred to as "the pathology of abjection: turning the phantasm of what is abjected into a dreaded object, an object of hate" (McAfee,2003, p. 53). The series of women's murders carried out by Melih, known as the Commander, exemplify women's being objects of hate. Mirroring the

earlier killing of his sister, whose body was dismembered into seven parts, Melih murders several women in his adulthood, too. Söğüt graphically describes each of these femicides:

> A week ago, Salih killed a woman. The police are finding pieces of the woman everywhere. In the trash, on the street corner, at the entrance of an apartment building... Yesterday, even in the cinema... [...] Her head emerged from a plastic bag. Her skin had been peeled off. It was left to the cinema seat (Söğüt, 2022c, p.80).

Femicide is a significant issue in Turkey. As in the case of her narrative, several factors condone violence against women in real life. These factors are social norms, inadequate law implementation, and lack of comprehensive support. Söğüt incorporates the influence of these factors while portraying each femicide while depicting each femicide, acknowledging the similarities and connections between them.

Eray Kaan Erkoca, in his master's thesis about the post-1980 military coup novels, focuses on similarities and connections among femicides in Söğüt's novel, *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*. He discusses the concept of "primordial femicide" while depicting the killing of the character Hacer as a root of various forms of violence (Erkoca, 2022). This act, reminiscent of Freud's primordial crime, symbolizes the establishment of social and cultural institutions through the father figure's death (Erkoca, 2022). Drawing a parallel between primordial femicide and primordial crime, he argues that this very early femicide performs as an initiation of masculinity (Erkoca, 2022).

Therefore, masculinity is always associated with a form of violence in Söğüt's novels. As time passes, this violence becomes so systematic that it is initiated, supported, and protected by several factors and institutions.

Söğüt intricately weaves these factors together within her narratives. Language is widely recognized for its efficiency, making it almost impossible to exert influence without its use. Thus, our internal capacity for narrative thinking enables us to constantly shape and reshape our self-perceptions as individuals existing within specific social, temporal, and spatial contexts (Hanne, 1994). Söğüt employs narrative

thinking as an initial step toward enacting societal change. She prompts the reader to encounter the commonality of hate towards women, resulting in effortless sacrificing of them without impunity in the following words:

> Weren't ceremonies like these always held in these lands thousands of years ago? Young girls in the depths of slumber, older men with sharp knives, and little boys, the earth tinged with crimson... vivid red blood... [...] From where did those mournful melodies seep into the shepherds' flutes, and weren't there enough laments sung for the murdered girls? (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 93).

As previously noted, the distressing quality of the abject transforms it into a symbol of aversion. Nevertheless, according to Kristeva, literature operates in a transformative manner while presenting the abject:

> By suggesting that literature is (the) privileged signifier, I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. Hence, its nocturnal power (1982, p. 208).

Contrary to the belief that literature does not hold a significant role in creating resistance and social transformation, it is a vital vehicle to represent profound crises, especially when dealing with the abject. In this case, Söğüt's narrative deconstructs the established views on women's evilness and forces readers to contemplate the occurrences in detail to accomplish better confrontation and transformation. The conventional narrative, which depicts women as inherently sinful, wicked, and accountable for what is repulsive, persists through repetition, reinforcement, and enactment (Lawless, 2003). However, women can potentially counteract this narrative by sharing their experiences of violence, thereby challenging and overturning it; however, this resistance requires initial recognition and understanding of the myth's prescriptive role in their lives (Lawless, 2003).

In another novel, *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (2022b), Madam Mr. Arthur's evil persona takes center stage, arranging all malevolent acts and occurrences in the narrative. The character's romantic partner, Keşşaf Hanuman, is also her/his accomplice in these evil acts. He is a photographer capable of capturing Madam Arthur

Bey's vivid imagination on film. Despite the novel's fable-like nature, the novel's setting appears to reference the 1990s era through the novel's details, such as the fall of Iron Curtain countries and events of political murders in Turkey, rendering the events a touch of the genuine.

The novel has a nested structure, containing a story within a story, which makes it difficult to express the complexity of events. As the character Olcayto, an author, begins writing, he is mysteriously summoned to the gloomy Kara Yalı (Dark Mansion) by the mysterious figure of Madam Arthur Bey. The character demands that Olcayto write and create a new life for her/him since s/he claims to have forgotten her/his past. S/he also provides a bag of photographs as a clue to her/his previous experiences. After returning to his hotel room, where he stays, Olcayto feels exhausted and decides to take a deep and relaxing sleep. Upon waking up, he is curious and decides to examine the photographs he obtained, with the wish of delving deeper into the life of Madam Arthur Bey, the central transgender character of his upcoming book. However, his expectations of finding ordinary details like friends, families, and dinners are shattered once he comes across truly horrifying images:

> They are all terrifying photographs, each one worse than the other. In the corridors, in dark, windowless rooms, and with trembling lights, there are pictures of wounded people.[...] Pho-tog-raphs of de-cea-sed pe-ople. Burned corpses.[...] Hanged people. Those shot in the head with bullets. Those with a knife stabbed in their leg (Söğüt, 2022b, pp. 68-69).

As the stories unfold, it is revealed that Madam Mr. Arthur represents the omnipotent and evil power behind the political assassinations. S/he represents one of the enigmatic figures from bygone times, now confined to the shadows. Söğüt (2022b) approaches the criminal and violent actions carried out by Madam Arthur Bey with a critical perspective:

> While those women in those dreams cried out in agony, it would be questioned how s/he (Madam Arthur Bey) could be so ruthless, how s/he could rape a woman with gouged eyes, tear the nails off young children, all the malice s/he committed in dreams, even if only in dreams, would be brought to account (p.132).

Amid dreary times, it is women and queer people who frequently face the risk of being marginalized and labeled as disruptive outliers within society. As a result, “once the woman was perceived as deviant in terms of the male subculture's norms about female behavior, rape became a form of punishment” (Baker, 1982, p.4). Likewise, structural violence assumes gendered manifestations, including instances of sexual assault. Sexual assault becomes a means of intimidation and control by organizations, reflecting a broader system of injustices. Understanding the gendered nature of structural violence and abjection, readers can comprehend how power structures, namely patriarchy, operate within a society.

Readers come across another example of the gendered structural power when Deniz, a transgender sex worker, unexpectedly meets Olga at the hairdresser's where Olga works. Olga, a fugitive from the Iron Curtain countries, mistakenly believes Deniz to be her long-lost daughter-son. Overwhelmed with emotion, Olga tries to communicate with Deniz, experiencing excitement she had not felt in a very long time, even “when she mistakenly thought she was in love with a soldier who had raped her” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 122).

Their intimacy leads them to share the same house despite not being related. After a while, Deniz's brothers raid the house, assuming Olga to be a pimp involved in selling their brother. In the process, they brutally beat her to death, unaware of her true intentions and mistaken identity, and they dump her from the trunk of their car in front of the Kara Yalı in the middle of the night. Noticing a moving thing in the middle of the street, Madam Arthur Bey runs to the street and takes her to the room under the stairs in the Kara Yalı where they live together for years: “For years, Maria has been living with him. However, Madam Arthur Bey has never asked her a single question. Not her name. Not her age. Nor where she came from or where she went” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 34). Therefore, he calls muted Maria “Olga.” Escaping from the Iron Curtain countries, Maria encounters various forms of violence described explicitly in the novel. These forms of violence, murders, and disintegrated bodies are depicted as a burden on Maria’s subjectivity. Maria bears witness to a series of brutal and violent acts perpetrated against women and children:

> Maria witnessed those who murdered women following rapes that occurred after forcibly being taken away from their husbands’ beds.

> She witnessed those who disembowel women and shoot between women's legs. She witnessed those who kill unborn babies with a buttstock, as well. She witnessed those who cut off an enemy's ear dry and preserve it as a memento (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 44).

Commonly, Söğüt depicts harrowing and disturbing acts of violence, exploring dark and intense occurrences that reflect various aspects of the human condition. They encourage introspection and self-reflection. Instead of suppressing or disregarding the abject, Kristeva argues that directly facing and engaging with it is essential (Becker-Leckrone, 2005). Her approach involves bringing the abject to light instead of dismissing or diminishing its importance, as historical practices of law, religion, and morality have sought to marginalize horror and abjection within the normative meaning and maintain authority through prohibitions and purification rituals (Becker-Leckrone, 2005).

In this context, Söğüt introduces readers to various forms of the abject, allowing them to encounter it directly. Rather than offering didactic explanations of right or wrong or attempting to guide readers ethically, she presents the abject elements that encourage self-reflection, allowing readers to explore their understanding and reactions to these unsettling aspects. Madam Arthur Bey's response to Maria's war witnessing can be seen as an example of neutralizing the heavy burden of what she has suffered, allowing readers to process these immense emotions through distancing themselves: "Nobody thinks they are doing something wrong while fighting in a war" (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 44).

In her other novels, numerous instances showcase the corruption of imbalanced structural power as it is directed at marginalized groups. In her other novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023), she portrays the intersection of ethnic marginality and gender: The last resident on the fifth floor is Melike, born into a gypsy family with unknown fathers due to her mother and grandmother's relationships with multiple men. Longing for a father figure, Melike invites a stranger into her house. He appears at the door asking for her mother, hoping he might be the father she yearns for. However, the stranger ends up raping her, leaving her traumatized.

Through this narrative, Söğüt reveals a dysfunctional social system that fails to provide equal safety for all its citizens. Romani citizens living in unsafe conditions devoid of social and financial security are a politically, socially, and economically marginalized

group of people. Söğüt allows readers to encounter them and the fundamental problems they have. She can subvert the constructed opinions and form a resistance through her literary work by portraying them.

It is not only the Romani people who are abjected. Her focus is also on the abjected female body. She exposes the unjust male power that seeks to control and dominate the female body and identity. The threat comes both within and from outside the household. Kristeva consistently describes this crisis as ambiguous borders, unmapped frontiers, and individuals like strays, exiles, or outcasts (Becker-Leckrone, 2005).

Söğüt intricately weaves narratives featuring exiled individuals, outcasts, and the homeless. Those who wield power and uphold dominant ideologies often marginalize these groups. Their very presence challenges the established societal order that powerholders seek to maintain. Those diverging from mainstream ideologies can serve as catalysts for questioning prevailing power dynamics and fostering transformative social shifts. Consequently, their existence is frequently considered abject, rendering them susceptible to being discarded without impunity.

3.2. The Abject Body: Vulnerability and Homelessness

The concept of being impaired or disabled is often portrayed negatively in narratives of vulnerability, and such narratives tend to diminish the value of individuals with impairments, reducing them to a "spoilt identity" (Hughes, 2019, p. 829). Therefore, vulnerability reminds people of the health and ableness they might lose, so vulnerability evokes horror in people. People try to avoid those vulnerable as they repress the abject to escape the potential threats it poses. The homeless and the vulnerable fit into these categories of abject as they signify the dirty and unhealthy because "Dirt offends against the order" (Douglas, 1984, p. 3). The abject is, therefore, transgressive.

The primary focus of Söğüt's most recent book, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (The God of Others) (2022d), revolves around individuals without a permanent home, whether by choice or due to circumstances beyond their control. They make a living through begging, stealing, and sex work. The critique of the lack of legal protection in cases of violence towards vulnerable people is overly emphasized in this book. The novel

represents homeless characters whom others and legal institutions ignore as they wander around the city. One of the characters, Efsun Abla (Sister Efsun), intentionally amputated her legs to prevent her young lover, Devran, from selling her into prostitution. Unfortunately, her extreme act does not reach the intended conclusion, and Devran abandons her: “She cut her legs herself. A few years ago. Because of Devran. For Devran. Despite Devran. Devran, a man, who does not love her much” (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 14).

Söğüt depicts a male character controlling the female body and using it as a commodity. Efsun Abla's lack of complete and intact physicality serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility and vulnerability of life, creating a sense of threat and uneasiness and, as a result, serves as a form of abject. Her lack of intact physicality is threatening, resulting in exclusion as the presence of a disabled person acts as a trigger for individuals without disabilities. Thus, it opens a wound to their sense of self-identity, a wound that is reminiscent of narcissistic injury (Kristeva, 2010). This narcissistic injury stems from occurrences that challenge one’s self-esteem and sense of unity. Due to the inherent fear of losing one’s sense of a coherent and unified self, characters like Efsun Abla force people to remember that their sense of physical completeness is not guaranteed. They can also become vulnerable, and realizing this causes stress, which results in excluding vulnerable individuals.

Additionally, Söğüt offers readers a deeper understanding of the diverse displays of violence and the opportunity to explore them critically. The narrative does not solely provoke an exploration of physical violence; it also prompts a critique of the exclusion of disabled individuals within the societal fabric. This portrayal of disability operates as a form of political subversion, shedding light on the factors behind such exclusion and the circumstances that enable it. As a result, readers are encouraged to face the concept of vulnerability head-on and become attuned to the sense of isolation experienced by those who are marginalized.

The isolation and exclusion of the characters are even evident in the title, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (2022d), which implies that the current authority, the sovereign power, overlooks these marginalized people whose existence and needs are sidelined. During a conversation between Musa and Efsun Abla, Efsun Abla stresses the exclusion they

are deemed to go through: “Who is God anyway? What about you? What about me? Has He done us any good? [...] Instead of debating the existence of God, debate His goodness; it will naturally fade away rapidly on its own” (Söğüt, 2022d, p.18). In Efsun Abla’s statements, God notions the power-holding agencies that do no good to them. Söğüt criticizes excluding these “other” people from every domain of life, stating that these people are ignored by not just people but the state.

Ingeniously, Söğüt assimilates Kristeva's notion of abject bodies into individuals lacking diminished political and social value who find themselves marginalized at the periphery of society. Söğüt's approach to portraying abject bodies within her novels invokes a persistent "why" that resonates throughout her narratives. This "why" question inevitably prompts readers to reflect upon themes of violence, oppression, marginalization, and exclusion. Rather than dictating conclusions, she compels readers to exert mental energy on the "why" behind these issues:

> In relation to the violence we experience in various domains, where we know that we can adjust the dosage by our own will, I am in pursuit of a language that prompts questioning of the position one chooses. I suggest approaching life from different angles around the " why " question and not ignoring taboos. Why do we fight? What is a homeland? What purpose do identities serve? Is family genuinely sacred? Why do we opt for an unjust life? Why do we construct cages for ourselves with rules we can never adhere to? (Akdemir, 2020).

Provoking readers to delve into the motivations underlying these actions engenders resistance and subversion against the backdrop of taboos, oppression, and violence. In her storytelling, she presents the fundamental causes behind these happenings to subert oppressive forces. This aspect of her storytelling highlights the transformative power of art, which prompts readers to face and challenge the status quo through such disturbing occurrences. She succeeds by engaging with unsettling events that can evoke cathartic experiences and, as a result, can function as a powerful tool.

3.3. The Abject Mind: Reclaiming Madness

One of the persistent themes in Mine Söğüt's narrative is the characters (usually woman characters) struggling with madness, which is intricately integrated into the structure of her stories. Throughout all her fictional works, she consistently explores

the theme of madness, and she frequently establishes a connection between traumatic encounters culminating in madness and the concept of womanhood, presenting these experiences as intricately linked or causally related (Sarı, 2016).

Her debut novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, initially released in 2003, delves into the life of a psychiatrist named Doctor Samimi (Doctor Sincere). In the narrative, he gathers five mentally ill patients from different places to his apartment called "the Five Sevim Apartment." Doctor Samimi stays on the basement floor; these patients reside on each floor of five floored buildings. The readers are guided through each patient's personal story, exploring their subjective experiences and the underlying truths. Simultaneously, the apartment's history and Doctor Samimi's life story are revealed. As is characteristic of Söğüt's writing, the side stories are imbued with similar thematic elements as the main plot.

Before exploring the five individuals' narratives, the author provides the readers with the backstory of the apartment's name. The Five Sevim Apartment derived its name from an older woman, Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım, who had five cats, all named Sevim, residing in her home. Additionally, she also fed numerous cats in the garden. Every day, she would tuck her five cats under her clothing and visit her neighbors, recounting the tragic tale of how she lost her daughters. Since the early days of their marriage, the husband expresses a strong desire for five baby boys, as he admires his beloved commander with five sons. However, with each attempt, they are only given baby girls, which leaves him not only disappointed but also raged with anger and hostility towards the babies and the wife: "When I gave birth to my second child, the man became furious, he beat me, and he cursed at the baby. The poor thing did not live long; she passed away two months later" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 36).

Söğüt depicts how Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım's story unfolds, revealing circumstances that have driven her to madness. This process is not unrelated to her womanhood: "She is blamed for not giving birth to a male child, and she becomes the target of the anger directed" (Güllük, 2022, p. 119). This story explains how the character Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım from *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* experiences the weight of dominant male authority. Countless narratives illustrate the detrimental impact of toxic masculinity on individuals, encompassing both children and women.

Within the same apartment resides a man whose childhood story explains that he never received affection from his mother. The absence of maternal love, coupled with his mother's involvement in his father's murder, led him to insanity. The account of the mother's tale unfolds as follows:

> The story is classic. Without her family's consent, a man abducted Gülsüm, an eighteen-year-old girl. He deceived her with marriage promises, performed a religious marriage ceremony, and confined her at home. (...) After a few months, as financial difficulties began to arise, the man attempted to sell his wife to other men. Initially, the woman resisted this and tried to return to her father's house, but when all doors were angrily shut in her face, she was forced to continue living at her husband's home (Söğüt, 2023, p. 56).

Söğüt's narrative includes deviation from rational and conventional prose, consisting of unsettling and disturbing realities. Themes such as "horror, death, madness, orgy, outlaws, war, the feminine threat, the horrendous delights of love, disgust, and fright" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 137) explore boundaries of human experiences and display the darker sides of human existence. Besides depicting these "other sides of the stories," Söğüt's narrative becomes a means of political and social criticism and subverts the dominant ideologies. They are not only some stories of mad people; rather, Söğüt narrates the experiences of these characters whose experience of abjection generally makes them voiceless and overlooked.

Moreover, they are "deeply embedded within various institutional structures" (Saris, 1995, p. 39). In Söğüt's scenarios, the primary driving force behind the instances of madness is patriarchy, a dominant institution that predominantly suppresses women based on their gender and sexual orientation. Betül Sarı, in her master's thesis about mad women's portrayal concerning gender and narrative in Söğüt's works, stresses the dominant aspect of the patriarchy, as well: "Madness weaved into the narratives of Söğüt demonstrates with great clarity and substantiality how people, especially women, in these texts are driven mad by the gender impositions" (Sarı, 2016, p. 64).

Sarı suggests that social pressures and expectations cause madness in Söğüt's narratives, and madness has a gendered nature. When women are repressed of their desires, denied agency, or forced into restrictive roles, they can experience madness. This experience of madness and the factors leading to it amplify their vulnerability and

marginalization. Narratives of Söğüt realize this by often giving voice to these characters. By letting them speak for themselves, the narratives reveal the “gender impositions” and struggles they face.

The destructive impact of such gender imposition is illustrated in each mad woman’s story. Elif, a woman resident in the Beş Sevim Apartmanı, descends into madness because her father unceasingly desires a son. Elif disguises herself as a boy during the night in an attempt to fulfill her father's preference and to protect her mother and herself from his violence. The damaging belief that prioritizes having a male child rather than a daughter becomes the catalyst for Elif's deteriorating mental state.

In the novel, the storytelling approach is multifaceted. Alongside the third-person narrative that outlines the contents of psychiatric documents, which detail the historical backgrounds of each mentally ill individual, readers gain insights into the underlying aspects of their stories. Additionally, the novel features first-person narrative chapters, where each resident shares their account from their unique perspective. This layered storytelling technique provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the characters' experiences as it delves into official records and individual viewpoints. According to Güllük (2022), “the language that represents madness is delegitimized against the language of power that presents truth by recording it as reality” (p. 111). While Güllük contends that male-dominated language suppresses the voices of women deemed mentally ill, my argument posits that Söğüt achieves a more comprehensive and holistic understanding by integrating individual stories with qualitative research findings.

Furthermore, while hegemonic masculinity may have a significant influence, it does not entirely determine the true stories behind these events. Other factors and perspectives also play a role in shaping the narratives. Söğüt's narrative approach delves into the intrinsic motivations behind these individuals' descent into madness. Their unique perspectives on the world intertwine both personal accounts and research outcomes for a richer comprehension because, as Roberts explains, “narrative preserves individuality, distinctiveness, and context, whereas quantitative methods and evidence-based guidelines offer a solid foundation for what is reliably and generally correct” (Roberts, 2000, p. 440).

Söğüt states that descending into madness is a coping mechanism to deal with the obstacles: “Going insane, loosely defined, seems to be the mind's escape to protect itself. When you cannot cope with life and what is happening, you are trying to protect yourself and alter your perceptions” (Avcı, 2011). The challenges she highlights stem from the gender and sexuality-based oppression her characters face in Turkey. Her role as a journalist enables her to offer a more precise portrayal of these challenges.

Even though Mine Söğüt's works set forth characters experiencing mental illnesses, amnesia, and loss of identity, it is essential to recognize that she does not glorify or praise insanity or the loss of one's mind. Instead, Söğüt explores these themes to shed light on the human condition and the challenges people may face when confronted with anguishing events, in this case, with the abject. This fact is noticed in Şahbaz’s responses to the thoughts of Melih, who seemingly experiences a loss of memory and questions his whereabouts and identity:

> People preparing to lead a life built on forgetfulness do not know what awaits them yet. They believe the cruelty loaded into their memories will suddenly engulf their lives in flames. Everything will burn away. The pain of the fire will never fade… (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 151).

Thus, the identity crisis manifested as memory loss does not represent the ultimate solution against evil. Still, the novel constantly portrays the afflicted individual failing to reclaim their true self.

In the basement of the Üç Kapılı Han (Three-Door Inn) in *Şahbaz’ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, Şahbaz takes care of a wounded woman, offering her nourishment in the form of a specific fruit each month, which he grows in his garden. Despite her inability to speak due to her wounds and bruises, she responds to the stories Şahbaz shares. Her body remains covered in unhealed wounds, pus, and blood from the tortures. On the other hand, the wounded woman whom Şahbaz nourishes declares her reaction to all the evil stories and the tortures she experienced:

> I will embrace everything I experienced here, you, your stories, and the new memories that have settled in my mind, and I will enter the hollow of an old tree. There, I will repeatedly tell them to myself and go mad. Is going mad a way of salvation, Şahbaz? I want to escape from the old

> truths by going mad. To create a new reality for me…(Söğüt, 2022c, p. 169).

The wounded woman declares embracing her experiences and taking refugee in madness. Despite her pain and sufferings, she finds solace in embracing her pain and madness. This suggests a rejection of norms and political values that have tortured her and pushed her into madness. The embrace of abject and the subsequent rejection of oppression serves as a means of reclaiming agency and autonomy.

In total*, Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* shows readers how power-holding groups in a society solidify their authority and assert their identities by exploiting and stigmatizing the abject individuals - the deviants and marginalized. These powerful groups instill fear, maintain control, manipulate reality, perpetuate violence, and demonize specific social groups. However, the literary depiction of these events offers a fresh perspective by giving a voice to the marginalized, challenging and subverting oppressive social norms, and dismantling power structures.

Readers often encounter narratives prioritizing power-holding groups' perspectives. Such narratives lead to overlooking the stories of the marginalized and less powerful. Söğüt's narratives serve as a platform that presents the perspectives of these marginalized and excluded individuals. These narratives vividly illustrate the significance of listening to alternative voices. Doing so can dismantle the prevailing oppressive ideologies, highlighting the importance of understanding multiple viewpoints to understand complex issues comprehensively. As a result, Söğüt's narratives can function as minor literature.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, explaining the characteristics of minor literature, state that "everything in them is political. [...] because it exits in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political" (Deleuze et al., 1983, p. 16). This quote implies that minor literature does not only depict political themes. Every element of the text, including the narrative styles and characters, carries political significance. Therefore, personal experiences and individual narratives from society's margins are inseparable from broader political contexts. They elevate that even though it might center around individual issues, even those individual issues are connected to a higher perspective to some other aspects, making this literature political (Deleuze et

al., 1983). These aspects of minor literature “stress the inseparability of the personal and the political as well as the unavoidably collective dimension of any individual effort by members of a marginalized group” (Bogue, 1997, p. 105).

Söğüt's depiction of immorality, rooted in personal experiences, aligns with the principles of minor literature and the feminist motto that the personal is political. Her narratives emphasize how personal dynamics are intertwined with broader socio-political contexts, revealing how norms and power structures shape intimate relationships. Through the lens of marginalized characters, Söğüt highlights the collective nature of their challenges, offering a political critique of injustices and inequalities.

3.4. The Immoral and the Transgression of Law

In Mine Söğüt’s novels, unconventional acts involving taboos and law transgression are abundant. These acts are considered threatening and unsettling, with disturbing moral codes for both society and the individual. For Kristeva, assuming “a symbolic position” (Grosz, 2012, p. 87) is only through “the disavowal of its modes of corporeality, especially those representing what is considered unacceptable, unclean or anti-social” (Grosz, 2012, p. 87). Instead of repressing disruptions and challenges to the boundaries of what is considered acceptable and by social norms, the abject in Kristevan terms, it is necessary to recognize the impossibility of entirely demolishing the threatening abject and confront it (Grosz, 2012; Becker-Leckrone, 2005). Söğüt’s novels allow readers to confront the abject and accept its unbanishable nature. Only after confronting and accepting, rather than denying the abject, do the readers begin to question the nature of the abject and can have a critique of it. As a result, this can convert into a transformative power that subverts individual and communally unjust power relations.

Within her literary works, despite the presence of diverse immorality and transgressive acts, Söğüt's primary emphasis revolves around two distinct motifs: unorthodox relationships and the utilization of sexuality for financial gain. By delving into these themes, particularly unconventional human relationships and engagement in sex work, Söğüt crafts a thought-provoking exploration of human behaviors that challenge established societal norms. Through her depiction of women involved in non-

traditional relationships and partaking in sex work, Söğüt skillfully captures individual and historical contexts, depicting the intricacies of everyday human existence. This, in turn, compels readers to directly confront the disturbing and unsettling aspects represented by these elements that exist on the fringes of society.

3.4.1. Unorthodox Human Relationships

There is control and "power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries" (Douglas, 1984, p. 99). Besides internal power dynamics with formed entities, there are also cultural and non-formative forms of power regulating entities such as cultures and religions. As such, abjection does not respect the boundaries of an individual or a society (Lechte, 2012). Henceforth, societal norms define abject elements, as well. In Söğüt's narratives, unconventional human relationships, especially sexual relations, are ubiquitously depicted as abject elements throughout Söğüt's novels, even within subplots.

In her second novel, *Kırmızı Zaman*, the character Leon, who later becomes the notorious executioner and is the grandfather of Halat Niyazi (Niyazi the Rope), is born as a result of what society deems an indiscreet extramarital affair. This affair occurs between a Jewish girl and a Gypsy boy during that period. As a result of the abject nature of Leon's origins and heritage, there is a desire to disembowel or eliminate this perceived source of shame or deviation, namely, the abject. This reaction highlights societal discomfort and attempts to suppress or reject elements that deviate from accepted norms of sexual conduct. As a corollary, the Jewish grandfather "immediately expelled the gypsy baby from the house as soon as he was born" (Söğüt, 2022a, p.74), and he sent his daughter to Paris on a ship.

Shortly after this revelation, it is revealed within the narrative that the act of a Gypsy impregnating a Jewish girl was perceived differently by their respective communities. The Gypsy community viewed it as a rare and unique occurrence, something to be proud of. In contrast, the Jewish community regarded it as immoral and inappropriate. Besides exhibiting the abject element, Söğüt also underscores the relativity of notions of morality and propriety depending upon societal expectations. The exploration of the proper and improper in the narrative of Söğüt encourages readers to ponder the concept of the abject and its dependency on social norms and cultural taboos. Cultural norms

and taboos about societal power dynamics are substantially structured and evolved. Exemplifying the relativity of the abject, Söğüt sheds light on how power dynamics and social hierarchies play a crucial role in shaping people's and society's perception of what is perceived as threatening or disruptive to the unity of the society. Söğüt unearths what is repressed because confronting the abject is essential because "through a refusal to confront the abject, therefore, a fundamental aspect of individual and social life remains in oblivion, and our understanding and capacity to cope are thereby greatly diminished" (Lechte, 2012, p. 158). In addition to enhancing the human capacity to cope with threatening others, Söğüt's narratives affirm their existence and challenge the norms that seek to silence them.

Another example of an abject element related to unconventional relationships is portrayed in the situation involving Botan's father. Along with the closure of his business, he abruptly leaves his wife and son, taking all their money with him without any prior explanation. Three years later, they discover through a news article that his lover has confessed to killing him and dismembering his body. Despite this revelation, the mother rejects the reality of the event and continues to hold onto the hope that her husband will return. Her persistent denial serves as a reaction to the abject elements presented in this unfortunate situation: the abandonment of the family for a lover and the subsequent death. This denial reflects her refusal to confront the disturbing and unsettling aspects of the event, instead clinging to the belief in her husband's eventual return. In Söğüt's narrative, there is an emphasis on the significance of societal expectations when confronting the abject. It is explicitly stated that the woman in question holds on to "the virtue she protected by not uttering a single bad word about his father to her son, the virtue she protected by not shedding tears in front of everyone" (Söğüt, 2022a p. 69). This implies that, in the eyes of society, maintaining a composed and dignified demeanor in the face of an abject is considered virtuous. By adhering to these expectations, the woman aims to preserve her reputation and maintain a sense of moral integrity against the disrupting and challenging nature of the abject.

In the novel, readers are also introduced to the story of Zaman Dayı's prison mate, who was convicted of murdering all three of his disabled children. This event occurred after her oldest child, Şerife, was murdered following a rape. As the story progresses,

it is revealed why the man's children were born disabled, a truth that Veysel Baba kept secret: "He could not tell that his wife was his sister. He would keep this painful secret hidden in the dark wells of his soul" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 153). Incest is widely recognized as an unethical and taboo subject; hence, it is socially and legally prohibited. Although the siblings in the novel fall in love with each other and decide to live together, the only way to handle this abject element is to conceal it, in other words, to repress and deny its existence. However, the repression of this taboo manifests itself in nightmares for Veysel Baba, who "fell in love with his sister at an early age" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 153) and whose love was not unrequited. The burden Veysel Baba (Father Veysel) carries is revealed through his sleep talk, which Zaman Dayı overhears. He "felt sorry for this man emitting the scent of sins with the burden of his cursed past" (Söğüt, 2022a, p.154).

In the novel *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979,* a similar unconventional sexual relationship occurs between the twins and Mehtap. Melih and Semih, unaware of their familial connection, engage in a sexual relationship with their half-sister Mehtap, formerly known as Emine. This leads to Mehtap becoming pregnant with twins. The backstory behind Mehtap being their half-sister also involves an unconventional relationship.

After Melih, Semih, and their father murder their older sister, their mother tries suicide but fails to follow through. Instead, she elopes with her husband's twin brother, resulting in the birth of Emine. The twins, Melih and Semih, remain with their fathers, who eventually marry the daughter of the Kör Ebe (Blind Nurse), who had previously instilled in them a belief that they must kill their sister. As their stepmother gives birth to a daughter, she fears the twins and does not want to live with them.

Consequently, their father sends them to live with their mother and uncle. In response to the abject nature of their mother's abandonment, the twins make a solemn vow to murder any child their mother and uncle may have. At the novel's end, Melih realizes his solemn vow and kills Emine just as he did with other women. These intricate web of family relationships offer abject elements that challenge societal norms. In addition to portraying elements that challenge societal norms, it highlights the unsettling reality that families, traditionally seen as sources of protection and belonging, can also be the

source of threats. Readers realize that safety is not guaranteed even within the family, as dictated by social policies, religious institutions, or schools. Instead, it can become a place that instills fear of violence and death.

In Söğüt's fourth novel, *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey,* unconventional relationships are portrayed similarly. The main character, Madam Arthur Bey, defies traditional gender norms, making the novel unconventional. Some revelations suggest that Madam Arthur Bey had a previous sexual relationship with Olga, resulting in the birth of Nagehan. Additionally, Şehnaz has a similar sexual relationship with a transgender person, Deniz. Şehnaz, who is Olcayto's half-sister, unknowingly develops a desire to have sex with Olcayto and invites him over for dinner at her house. However, Olcayto does not show up, and in his absence, Şehnaz ends up having sex with Deniz. During this process, Şehnaz reflects on the relationship between her father and Madam Mr. Arthur, which prompts her to make some connections or draw parallels. Şehnaz perceives her involvement with Deniz as uncomfortable and awkward, causing her to feel guilty for being sexually involved with someone considered inappropriate or unsuitable, “as she has made love with someone who will never be” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 111). The phrase "someone who will never be" suggests that Şehnaz acknowledges the unconventional nature of their relationship, contributing to her feelings of unease and internal conflict.

Another example of an unconventional relationship in the novel involves Keşşaf Hanuman, Ruhat Ran, and Nagehan. Towards the end of the story, it is revealed that Madam Arthur Bey kills both Keşşaf Hanuman and Ruhat Ran out of jealousy. However, before their fate, Keşşaf Hanuman and Ruhat Ran had engaged in a romantic affair. Additionally, both of them were involved in a simultaneous sexual relationship with Nagehan, which led to the birth of twins Olcayto and Şehnaz.

Indeed, Söğüt's novels often delve into the theme of "inappropriate" or unconventional relationships, and they may be depicted in various ways. These relationships can be portrayed as events in the narrative, where characters engage in complex and unconventional romantic or sexual connections. Additionally, dreams and fantasies may play a role in exploring characters' desires and subconscious thoughts.

For instance, later in the novel, Nagehan is revealed as Olcayto's mother. Despite not being aware of their familial connection, it is implied in the novel that Olcayto harbors a desire to engage in a sexual relationship with Nagehan, whom he continuously observes from his hotel window as she lives across the street. Olcayto assumes that his constant watches go unnoticed as he believes Nagehan "does not see him. Not his looks, not his desire, not his dreams…" (Söğüt, 2022b, p.27). Incestuous relationships, even when they occur unknowingly, are widely regarded as taboo in many societies. As a result, in Söğüt's narratives, such relationships become one of the ultimate abject elements, evoking strong feelings of discomfort, shock, and revulsion for the characters and readers alike.

In a parallel manner, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* also explores unconventional relationships, as seen with Musa, one of the main characters. Musa's decision to leave behind his comfortable life, including his wife and child, and then his falling in love with a disabled older woman who earns a living through begging represents an unconventional romantic involvement. Even Adnan Abi, another character in the novel, questions Musa's romantic involvement, likely reflecting the societal norms and expectations surrounding relationships: "'What are you in love with in this woman?' asks Adnan Abi" (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 33). The awkwardness of Musa falling in love with Efsun Abla is emphasized through the unconventional nature of their relationship. The stark contrast between Musa's previous comfortable life and the current situation in the abandoned coffeehouse with a disabled beggar like Efsun Abla adds discomfort and unease. Musa's feelings for Efsun Abla challenge the traditional notions of love. Furthermore, Söğüt's depiction of the love-making scene near the old city walls highlights the non-normative relationship between Musa and Efsun Abla. The surrounding environment, a filthy public space, adds an element of discomfort and an unconventional setting for such an intimate encounter. Moreover, the contrast between Musa, who is implied to be young, healthy, and good-looking, and Efsun Abla, an old and disabled woman living on the streets, further emphasizes the unconventional and unexpected nature of their romantic involvement. Söğüt brings to light the unconventional forms of relationships; therefore, she voices the unsilenced and the long-ignored. Musa's decision to reject a conventional life and embrace love with a disabled woman challenges society's notions of bodily harmony and beauty. Her portrayal of these relationships might be disruptive for the readers; however, readers

are encouraged to embrace the non-normative forms of existence and broaden diversity.

Indeed, Söğüt's portrayal of non-normative relationships challenges visual representations and critiques society's pressure to conform to beauty standards and idealized notions of a healthy body for women to be loved and accepted. She skillfully subverts these conventional notions, demonstrating that the opposite can also be true – that love and acceptance are possible outside the confines of traditional beauty norms. By such action, Söğüt highlights the importance of embracing diverse relationships and fostering body positivity and acceptance in society.

3.4.2. Sex Work as an Occupation

In Söğüt's novels, sex workers are consistently portrayed as individuals who frequently endure physical and psychological violence. Söğüt's narratives often delve into their personal histories, enabling readers to grasp the extent of their societal marginalization in addition to noticing the factors that push them to perform insecure sex work. For instance, in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, the character Oğuz's mother finds herself coerced by her partner into engaging in sexual activities in exchange for money. Subsequently, it is unveiled that even after serving time in prison for killing her partner, she continues sex work to sustain her income.

In another novel *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey,* Nagehan performs sex work at a hotel. As the narrative unfolds, Nagehan is depicted as the offspring of Madam Mr. Arthur and Olga. However, she was separated from her mother upon birth and placed in a boarding school. Another individual featured in the same novel is Deniz, a transgender individual who turns to sex work following their revelation of being transgender.

In *Başkalarının Tanrısı,* the novel delves into the disturbing reality that Hülya's father had a habitual pattern of physically abusing her mother, inflicting bruises and causing her to bleed. Tragically, not only did her mother suffer from his violence, but Hülya was also subjected to his beatings. These harrowing acts got more violent when Hülya was just ten years old and "when his father stabbed her mother to death in 21 different parts of her body" (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 76). After the tragic loss of her parents, Hülya is

compelled to take to the streets for survival. Another figure in the same novel is Efsun Abla, who was coerced into engaging in sex work by her romantic partner. Desperate to escape this situation, she takes the drastic step of amputating her legs to liberate herself from her partner's control. Similarly, Emine, in the novel *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979*, is left with no choice but to turn to sex work after being left alone in the wake of her parents' passing.

Sex work is approached from various angles, including viewing it as deviant conduct, analyzing its interaction with gender power dynamics, and recognizing it as a distinct form of employment. (Weitzer, 2009). Among these perspectives, the narratives of Söğüt predominantly highlight how individuals engaged in sex work experience oppression and subjugation. In an interview, Söğüt proposes her thoughts about sex work as such:

> In our country, women are like the unfortunate heroes of archaic tales; they can be deceived and forced into brothels, sold by their families, and are treated as undocumented "goods" without any legal protection. Someone profits from them, disregarding their safety (Gazi, 2012).

She holds a critical viewpoint regarding how women engaged in sex work are treated, and their narratives strongly resemble those found in traditional tales. Frequently, they are regarded as mere commodities with no legal safeguards to shield them. These factors contribute to their marginalization and exclusion, ultimately casting them into an abject societal state. Their marginalization is societal and institutional, as the state fails to grant legal protections to sex workers. Primarily, this arises from the discomfort their presence triggers within society, leading to their relegation to an abject position.

Although sex work is depicted as a realm where human rights are often disregarded, Söğüt does not solely present sex workers as victims. Hatipoğlu, in her master's thesis on Mine Söğüt's works and evil, emphasizes that it is also depicted as a means of agency or survival for some characters: "Additionally, sex work is presented as a realm where human rights take a back seat, serving as a means to survive, fulfill addiction needs, or seek pleasure" (Hatipoğlu, 2023, p. 249).

This approach provides a more realistic evaluation of sex work, people who perform sex work, and how they are devoid of any legal protection. Söğüt successfully portrays

several individuals' stories, highlighting sex work's complex and troubling nature. As a result, her narratives illuminate darker aspects of sex work, including violence and exploitation, which often result in death. This illumination gives readers a more nuanced perspective on an often-excluded group of people in society.

3.5. Conclusion

Mine Söğüt's deliberate incorporation of abject elements within her narratives is a powerful critique of society's pervasive inequities and unjust power dynamics. This chapter meticulously dissects these abject elements, organizing them into four distinct themes that underscore the multifaceted nature of patriarchy and heteronormativity.

The first theme unveils the harrowing experiences of women subjected to various forms of violence, their suffering echoing the shattered facets of society that remain unseen and unacknowledged. These narratives force readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the systemic oppression women face, urging them to recognize and address these pervasive injustices.

In the second theme, Söğüt exposes the plight of homeless and vulnerable individuals marginalized by society's failure to provide adequate legal safeguards and integration mechanisms. Through their stories, she illuminates the struggle to find belonging and dignity within a society that systematically marginalizes them, challenging readers to confront their own complicity in perpetuating such injustices.

The third theme delves into the experiences of individuals grappling with mental illness and homelessness, revealing the societal neglect and dehumanization they endure. Söğüt poignantly highlights the failure of society and the state to recognize their inherent worth and dignity, compelling readers to question the arbitrary distinctions between "respectable" citizens and those deemed "other."

Lastly, Söğüt explores characters who defy societal norms and engage in unconventional behaviors, casting them as abject figures that provoke discomfort and unease. Through their narratives, she confronts readers with the unsettling reality that societal norms are arbitrary constructs that serve to maintain power differentials and perpetuate exclusion.

Through her incisive portrayal of marginalized individuals experiencing harrowing events, Söğüt simultaneously critiques societal structures and governmental institutions. She exposes the dysfunctions inherent in idealized societal constructs, revealing the negative impacts of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and meta narratives. Through commonly unsettling themes, she challenges the idealization of family, beauty standards, a presumed protective legal system, and traditional relationship dynamics. Rather than presenting an idealized, Pollyannaish view, she portrays a harrowing reality that shocks readers and disrupts deeply ingrained belief systems.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that Söğüt's depiction of violence is not gratuitous for mere shock value. Unlike some forms of media that may fetishize violence for its own sake, Söğüt employs these elements with a deliberate purpose: to unsettle readers with a critical reflection on the systems that perpetuate violence. Her exploration of the taboo subject serves as a catalyst for challenging social norms and disrupting the status quo.

In her narratives, violence is not glorified or normalized but rather depicted in all its ugliness and complexity. By confronting readers with uncomfortable truths, Söğüt invites them to interrogate the power structures that underpin patriarchal societies and to consider alternative ways of being. This deliberate subversion of expectations and refusal to shy away from difficult topics is at the core of Söğüt's feminist project. In this way, her work transcends mere entertainment to become a powerful tool for feminist consciousness raising, challenging readers to confront uncomfortable truths. As a result, these recurrent themes function as tools for subversion, rendering her narratives politically revolutionary.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE SEMIOTIC AND THE SYMBOLIC: UNCONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Kristeva's doctoral dissertation, *The Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), challenges the notion of literature existing in isolation from society, positing that textual practices are a foundational element of history and society mainly because there is an interconnection between the signifying process and the formation of society, where the symbolic realm and society are intertwined (Lechte, 2012). Challenging the unitary and author-oriented literature, Kristeva also challenges the notion that language produces stable and unambiguous textual representations with direct connections to the real world or experiences (Becker-Leckrone, 2005). Therefore, her approach encourages readers to look at texts dynamically and innovatively.

Her concepts, *semiotic* and *symbolic*, are the two domains of subjectivity and signifying process, the former of which expresses "an evocation of feeling or, more pointedly, a discharge of the subject's energy and drives" (McAfee, 2003, pp. 15-16). In contrast, the latter conveys "an expression of clear and orderly meaning" (McAfee, 2003, p. 15). She proposes examples of avant-garde literature that rejects conventional narrative structures such as non-linear storytelling, fragmentation, word-play, and stream of consciousness and which "abandoned the traditional mimetic task of the arts and replaced it with an exploration of the properties of the artistic materials and a range of alternative, widely abstract forms of artistic composition" (Scheunemann, 2005, p. 43).

This chapter delves into Kristeva's focus on the dynamic interaction between two modes of signification, namely the semiotic and the symbolic, within Söğüt's narratives. This interplay between these modes gives rise to the coexistence of the geno-text and the pheno-text. The geno-text, as per Kristeva, is driven by emotions

and desires and is expressed through disruptions in the semiotic realm (Roudiez, 1984). Conversely, the pheno-text emerges from a more structured, meaning-conveying form of language, adhering to grammatical and societal norms. Consequently, this chapter explores how this interplay operates within Söğüt's novels and the potential revolutionary implications it might hold. The second analysis chapter is organized into three subsections to cover these aspects comprehensively.

The first sub-chapter examines the semiotic elements in Söğüt's novels, focusing on semiotic disruptions in conventional and rational storytelling. These semiotic ruptures include intertextuality, metafiction, and repetitive elements in Söğüt's novels. While exploring these interactions between the semiotic and symbolic modalities, it will be questioned whether these interactions can challenge and subvert existing power dynamics by giving voice to the suppressed and the unconscious at both individual and societal levels.

The final part investigates ambiguities in the rational texture of the narratives. It will analyze how these ambiguities might create spaces for questioning established norms and functioning as a source of resistance.

4.1. Intertextuality and Metafiction

The term *Intertextuality*, by Kristeva, asserts that a text is similar to a dynamic space where the focus of analysis is on the interactions and practices between texts rather than on fixed structures or end products (Alfaro, 1996). The flexibility of the term "intertextuality" to depict various power dynamics between texts and their contexts quickly drew the interest of feminists, queer people, and marginalized voices in cultural criticism mainly due to its capacity to disrupt dominant colonial narratives and acknowledge cultural gaps and non-white spaces (Orr, 2010). While the typical definitions of intertextuality emphasize interactions between texts, Kristeva's perspective centers more on "the interpenetration of two or more signifying systems" (Lechte, 2012, p. 104) rather than "references in one book to the other" (Lechte, 2012, p. 104). This suggests that intertextuality occurs when a meaning-making process is underway, and the semiotic element disrupts the established symbolic framework. This disruption directs attention to the need for contextual and cultural analysis. Therefore,

Söğüt's narratives are examined from this perspective, focusing on cultural and textual references.

Söğüt's narratives frequently incorporate elements reminiscent of fables, which serve to temper the stark realities and language she employs. This approach aims to make the narrative flow more bearable for the audience. These fable-like components often involve mythical elements, providing insights into her storytelling's underlying meanings and critiques. In her first novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, the opening statement sets the tone for the rest of the narrative: “Thanks be to the Creator who inspires certain secrets to some of His servants through dreams” (Söğüt, 2023, p. 9). This fable-like quality remains prevalent throughout the novel as it narrates the stories from the perspective of each patient. Additionally, the portrayal of the character who lends her nickname to the apartment carries a depiction reminiscent of a sorceress-like figure: “The witch or sorceress female archetype frequently encountered in fairy tales is also revitalized and modernized in the novel. Huriye Hanım, while preparing food for cats, is depicted by the cauldron as a skilled enchantress, resembling a witch” (Kas, 2018, p. 31).

Furthermore, Kas (2018) suggests the presence of Quranic verses and a style reminiscent of Divan Literature at the start of her novels. Additionally, she incorporates religious references, particularly from Islamic Sufism. An instance of this is observed when Miss Five Sevim Huriye's passing takes place within the confines of a religious figure's tomb.

On the contrary, I argue that Söğüt employs these Quranic references to illustrate the prevalence of people's belief in jinn and genies concerning cases of mental illnesses. Furthermore, the demise of Miss Five Sevim Huriye does not necessarily symbolize a sacred death. Instead, it serves to underscore her struggle to conceive a male child and the profound emotional toll of losing five daughters, which profoundly impacts her life and mental situation. Söğüt's primary motivations encompass exploring the intricate interplay of societal, cultural, and religious dynamics that drive individuals toward their chosen life paths. This exploration delves into the broader context of institutional and personal oppressions, uncovering how these oppressive forces shape people's aspirations and sufferings. Moreover, the focus extends to the role of

institutions in perpetuating these oppressive structures, thereby perpetuating a cycle of oppression.

In *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, each resident believes they are dominated by genies and fairies, reflecting their immersion in the semiotic realm. Through the narratives, it becomes evident that they are all struggling to shape their sense of subjectivity, primarily existing within the domain of the semiotic. In this realm, the unconscious holds significant sway, emphasizing their perceived lack of parental affection and an inability to establish equilibrium within the symbolic order. Söğüt contends that these challenges stem from lacking warmth and love from their families.

The novel features narratives of five individuals struggling with mental illness, each recounted from both their personal perspectives and official records. Dr. Samimi also provides his own commentary. These interruptions challenge the absolute authority of official records by introducing a relativistic perspective. Söğüt aims to undermine this authority by offering a multitude of narratives.

In the narrative of a particular patient, she directly expresses her experience of being unloved by her father. He abandons her with an elderly 'witch' following the demise of her mother, who passes away after the births and subsequent deaths of ten sons: “Then my father, my father who never loved me, one day out of nowhere, while looking at me blankly without any reason, said, ‘Your voice is as irritating as your body.’” (Söğüt, 2023, p. 62). These individual personal stories, acting as semiotic disruptions, challenge, enhance, and bring to light the hidden aspects that have been overlooked. As a result, these challenges provoke a resistance against the overpowering influence of established knowledge and the authority's control, particularly within the institution of psychiatry and family in their cases.

Söğüt exposes her narratives have problems with authority, namely the institutions considering them as the most harrowing elements in people’s lives: “If the largest and most dangerous institution is the state, then the smallest and most dangerous unit is the family because it has become a taboo, as it is revered” (Artı TV, 2022, 25:30).

The intense critique in her debut novel is aimed at the institution of family, which is portrayed not as a realm of "love and trust" but as a source of inherent malevolence

capable of leading to mental breakdowns, acts of violence, and abandonments. Consequently, the psychological struggles of each character, including Doctor Samimi, stem from their familial lack of affection (emotional violence) and physical and sexual violence. If not for these narratives serving as disruptions in the established norms, the fractures within the family structure might remain overlooked.

Critiquing traditional patriarchal dynamics within families, wherein women are subjected to oppression primarily for not bearing sons and where daughters might be unloved, the author also illustrates contemporary manifestations of patriarchal compromises where “women negotiate and strategize” (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 285) to navigate power dynamics. These strategies inadvertently contribute to the persistence of oppressive structures.

In his personal account within the narrative of *Beş Sevim Apartamanı*, Yusuf, born into a prosperous family, emphasizes that "his father raped him during his childhood" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 100). Consequently, the family decides to place him under clinic care. Upon learning that, Yusuf decides to kill his mother with his father's iron-heeled shiny shoes. Patriarchal bargain, in this case, perpetuates women’s subordination (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Söğüt's narratives employ non-linear storytelling techniques, deviating from traditional storytelling methods. These disruptions in the narrative structure create meaning characterized by incoherence, instability, and multiple interpretations of truth. In her work, *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey*, the characters are related to each other in one way or another, and going back and forth in time allows readers to consider events from multiple perspectives. This dimension provides a more nuanced textual exploration, allowing readers to explore how meaning is generated and rearranged within literary works (Becker-Leckrone, 2005).

Olga (Madam Arthur Bey calls her Maria) is a war and sexual assault survivor whose life in many dimensions is presented to the readers, offering her past and present, allowing readers to analyze the character in various examples. She is the muted servant for Madam Arthur Bey, who once calls her “Friday,” referring to the muted character in *Robinson Crusoe*: “Maria, Maria, come on in here! Owner is calling Cuma (Friday)

to her/his side" (2022c, p. 43). However, readers become acquainted with Olga's story, which relates her to Friday.

This connotation suggests that a master-servant dynamic similar to that seen in Crusoe's relationship with Friday is present in the story involving Madam Arthur Bey and Maria. In a parallel manner, just as Crusoe rescues Friday from a dangerous situation, Madam Arthur Bey also saves Olga from a near-fatal beating, showcasing a similar theme of intervention and protection. The unequal master-slave dynamic is further underscored by insinuated instances of sexual assault on Olga by Madam Arthur Bey. This highlights the narrative's criticism of relationships resembling the master-servant dynamic when characterized by inequality. The narrative emphasizes the significance of empowering individuals and establishing legal safeguards to ensure their well-being and maintain such relationships.

Crusoe, as a master and mentor instructing Friday in European customs, parallels the monologues uttered by Madam Arthur Bey to Olga. Madam Arthur Bey, representing a malevolent force with excessive power, discusses the imperatives of war: "War is not a bad thing, Maria! One must fight to win. For victory, blood is inevitably shed. You have never won, so you cannot understand the meaning of this" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 44). The statements undermine the principles of communism, suggesting the downfall of the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Söğüt takes a political stance, condemning the power-hungry and violence-endorsing winning side of capitalism, which triumphed over communism through unjust and inhumane actions like murder and rape.

Furthermore, Madam Arthur Bey openly employs sexist language that reinforces traditional gender norms. This language suggests that being recognized as a "genuine woman" requires conforming to societal ideals of elegance and flirtatiousness. However, this narrow definition overlooks a woman's intellectual depth, emotional complexity, and personal viewpoints, reducing her to mere physical attributes:

> Maria is always in her room. Who knows what she's doing? Masturbating? Is Maria really a woman? A woman? Was she ever a woman? Did she ever make love? Maria, mute Maria, actually resembles a log. With her tall stature, hunched back, and thick round legs, she's like a walking log. A log! This means a cut-down tree. Was

> Maria once as peaceful as an unaware tree in the forest of life? (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 42).

Madam Arthur Bey's comments diminish Olga's identity as a woman and strip her of her humanity, objectifying her. Her story involves discrimination and oppression based on her gender, such as rape and her son/daughter's running away from the country as she/his nonbinary gender does not accept her/him. Even though Madam Arthur Bey's remarks reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, contributing to the marginalization and devaluation of women, the novel itself condemns such viewpoints:

> Madam Arthur Bey doesn't truly understand what it means to be happy. His arrogance and aggression stem from this lack of understanding. How can a soul nourished by malevolence conjure beautiful dreams? How can it envision that good things might one day happen in life? In Madam Arthur Bey's life, everything exists except "hope." It's completely absent. That's why he constantly kills and dies. And that's why he repeatedly plunges his authority into his own heart like a dagger (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 42).

Söğüt demonstrates the plurality of meanings and the potent structure of language through which broader perspectives and transformation can be obtained. Doing this, she is not the didactic author whose intentions are supreme over the readers; instead, she pushes readers to interpret meaning in their own ways, as "text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and crash" (Barthes, 2014, p. 143).

Seemingly, although there are narrations that are tried to be rational and symbolic, there are always semiotic disruptions that pluralize the truth and existence. Söğüt's stress on the ruthless heart of Madam Arthur Bey is clarified by a change of narrative voice from the first person to the third person. Söğüt's remarks regarding Madam Arthur Bey's opinions on Maria center on the semiotic disruptions, explicitly referring to "semiotic motility as a disturbance of language and/or of the order of the signifier" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 50). These changes in perspectives create a sense of detachment to the readers, enabling a more analytical and critical examination of the characters or events. Therefore, with these semiotic disruptions, Söğüt's narrative seeks to challenge

the established order by disrupting and erupting into structures with a political intent of transformation.

Another novel of hers, *Kırmızı Zaman*, is divided into multiple sections. Each section commences with a definition around a critical concept that the particular chapter delves into. In one of those definitions, she elucidates the term “myth,” suggesting that “Human beings evade truths because they are inclined to believe in legends from birth” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 45).

In the chapter linked to this specific definition, a noteworthy occurrence unfolds. The protagonist's father retrieves a discarded book named "The Red Time" from a waste container. Strikingly, the content of this discovered book mirrors the thematic elements of Söğüt's own novel. Both texts expound upon concealed subterranean pathways beneath the historical fortifications of old Constantinople, present-day Istanbul. The recovered book delves into intricate relationships involving a king's spouse and a servant. However, portions of the text remain inaccessible due to pages sticking together. Nonetheless, the missing amount is envisioned and brought to life through the imagination of Hüsran, the young girl featured in the narrative:

> On that day, the emperor left work early. Upon arriving at the palace, he unlocked the door with a key. On the table in the hall, there were appetizers, raki, and two raki glasses. He caught his wife and the general together in the palace bedroom, completely naked. Enraged, the husband drew his pistol and killed his wife and her lover right there (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 49).

Hüsran's role in the story represents a significant shift in meaning as a rupture in the narrative structure. This semiotic rupture sheds light on the prevailing gender dynamics in Turkey. It becomes evident that her contribution to the narrative is influenced by the information she has encountered through news or newspapers, where instances of men killing their partners upon uncovering betrayal have been reported. Through such ruptures, Söğüt invites readers to consider the nature of such events and take a political stand here.

The story proceeds with a segment from the book that remains readable. In this passage, Hüsran contemplates, "He (the king) loved the wrong woman" (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 50). However, rather than maintaining the uninterrupted flow of Hüsran's stream of

consciousness on this matter, the external voice of the narrator interjects into the narrative with a critical viewpoint regarding the subject: “However, in the news articles, women were always loving the wrong men. In the end, it was always women who ended up getting hurt” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 50). These semiotic ruptures transform her narration into a subversive and dynamic process, characterized by a multitude of meanings and critical perspectives as “semiotic chora retains the capacity to irrupt - with potentially revolutionary force - on the scene of signification” (Lewis, 1974, p. 31). Employing these semiotic ruptures, Söğüt encourages readers to explore diverse interpretations and engage in a critical feminist inquiry that aims to discuss the events within the context of unequal gendered power dynamics.

In addition to the semiotic ruptures, there are implicit messages that the symbolic realm, particularly social norms and patriarchy, attempts to suppress particular drives and emotions. Söğüt’s narratives are intertwined, originating from distinct timelines, illustrating how these distressing events (having extra-marital relations) transcend time and location. Söğüt emphasizes the fundamental motivations and drives that often develop and get shaped within defined norms, asserting their potential to surface unexpectedly, regardless of when or where. For Kristeva, “the Symbolic order is the order of signification, the social realm. This realm is composed of both semiotic and symbolic elements. So, the semiotic is not strictly opposed to the Symbolic. Rather, the semiotic is part of the Symbolic” (Oliver, 1993, p.10). Therefore, the semiotic exists in the symbolic order; however, it is crucial not to suppress it entirely but to control it. These ruptures imply the need for change and subversion, not the whole eradication of the symbolic.

Besides the interwoven structure of her narratives, the concept of "myth" aims to highlight the arbitrary and constructed aspects of human beliefs, whether they pertain to religion or social values. This is exemplified by the scenario where the king is driven to take vengeance on his partner for "toying with his ego," leading him to kill his wife (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 49).

Within metafiction, the novel employs multiple instances of interruption where the author directly addresses the readers, prompting them to acknowledge the narrative's fictional construct. At the inception of the novel, a foreword is present, accentuating

the artificiality of the book: “The Istanbul in this novel, legends, people, fish, boats, docks, palaces, passages, severed heads, graves, hospitals, morgues, mermaids, murders, killers, executioners, and the mad – in short, everything – is fictional” (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 9). Söğüt openly expresses the fictionality of the events through a direct talk with the readers. Henceforth, readers are encouraged to interpret events, question their validity, and recognize their constructed nature through these semiotic ruptures. The readers’ involvement, in turn, calls for the subsequent deconstruction of these events, unraveling the underlying layers of meaning.

Umberto Eco (1989), in his work *The Open Work*, highlights the significance of poetics, explicitly emphasizing its revolutionary aspect:

> The new perception of things and the new way of relating them to each other, promoted by art, might eventually lead us to understand our situation not by imposing on it a univocal order expressive of an obsolete conception of the world but rather by elaborating models leading to a number of mutually complementary results (p. 150).

Eco's emphasis lies on the multiple dimensions of literature, leading to a transformative effect that provides authentic avenues for understanding and critically engaging with the world. As a result, this approach carries political significance as it challenges the flexibility of texts and presents a subversive perspective toward the univocal perspectives embedded within narratives. This subversive approach can be seen as a resistance against the dominant voices that seek to maintain a singular interpretation.

The novel's central theme revolves around a cemetery that serves as a common place for people from various backgrounds. Their stories occasionally overlap within the backdrop of this cemetery, weaving together with the historical context of the city they inhabit. A character in the narrative, Halat, undergoes a mental breakdown upon uncovering the unsettling truth that his father, in the early days of the Turkish Republic's establishment, held the role of an executioner known for his cruelty. Though in different historical contexts, this family legacy of being executioners persists through generations. Halat's grandfather served as an executioner during the Ottoman Empire's rule, while his father assumed the same profession following the empire's downfall. These intertextual references that bridge different time periods

expose readers to a critique of excessive power and its inherent irrationality. This critique suggests that such power structures are destined to crumble at some point in history despite all the suffering they have caused, while the new ones still continue to use unjust power, as well:

> The sultan, whom the people regarded as the caliph of the prophet, was overthrown. The order was rapidly changing throughout the country... Leon, along with many individuals close to the sultan, was tried for treason against the homeland in the Independence Court and executed. He was already pleased with the overthrow of the sultan and the arrival of that blue-eyed soldier who promised equality to everyone (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 234).

It is implied that although there was progress towards equality, there were other forms of continuity of the earlier injustices. Söğüt starts her novel *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* as if she starts to tell readers a fable:

> Long, long ago, when we were swung back and forth on the Earth like a pendulum by the hands of gods, in the foothills of a distant mountain where no birds flew and no caravans passed by, there existed a small village where people, unaware of lives elsewhere, lived (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 11).

The initial tone of this introduction resembles the style of fictional tales and fables. However, the narrative takes a darker turn as it unveils the tragic account of a girl's murder at the hands of her own brother. This introduction foreshadows the central plot, where Melih and Semih commit a similar act against their sister, setting off a chain of vicious events. Following this brief introductory tale, Söğüt's storytelling shifts to the character Şahbaz, who asserts that while names might differ, the events depicted in the story have taken place somewhere in the world (Söğüt, 2022c).

In this novel, there are three distinct voices: that of the narrator, Şahbaz, and the wounded woman. This diversity of voices and perspectives contributes to the richness of the narrative. The interplay among these diverse texts and voices accentuates the intensity of the events and stories being recounted. The interruptions from the wounded woman are seen as semiotic disruptions, a response to Şahbaz's unsettling tales. While these interruptions do not alter the course of the narratives, they hold significance in enabling the marginalized voice to represent the leftist movement of Turkey in the 1970s, which the wounded woman symbolizes even in the fact that she

lacks a specific name and, henceforth, the emergence of the semiotic "becomes revolutionary through the return of the repressed (maternal) within (paternal) symbolic systems" (Oliver, 2005, p. 78).

The wounded woman, who is about to die, resists all the malevolent and evil stories Şahbaz tells her; though her voice is unheard by Şahbaz, the readers read them. She says in one of her responses to Şahbaz:

> No, Şahbaz, I don't remember anything. I won't remember. I won't fall into your trap. I won't look back. Everything is over and done with. I will continue from where I stand. If this is a defeat, yes, I'm defeated. But being defeated doesn't mean dying. I will start again from somewhere else. I can assign entirely different meanings to the pains (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 216).

While the novel narrates various tales of wrongdoing, the wounded woman ultimately embraces her defeat, alluding to state-supported assassinations, torture, and the military coup during the 1980s that nearly obliterated leftist movements. Despite this, she advocates for hope and resilience, choosing to begin anew. Consequently, analyzing Söğüt's work without incorporating political and contextual analyses would omit an essential aspect.

In her final novel, *Başkalarının Tanrısı*, the narrative revolves around the experiences of homeless individuals who either suffer from physical or mental illnesses or lead unconventional lifestyles. In a video interview discussing the book, Söğüt emphasizes that her entire body of work, including this latest novel, is closely intertwined with the societal challenges faced by the world and especially Turkey since the external environment serves as a wellspring of inspiration that shapes the narratives and stories within her books (Artı TV, 2022).

In this novel, Söğüt skillfully introduces an element of doubt to the reader regarding the fictional nature of the events. For instance, the character Musa, a poet, takes a step by forsaking his home and abandoning his job and family to end his life. Nevertheless, his trajectory changes when he encounters Efsun Abla, with whom he falls in love, causing him to relinquish his suicidal intentions and instead engage in the struggles of street life alongside other homeless individuals. This narrative twist prompts readers

to question the authenticity of all events within the novel. This sense of uncertainty deepens as Musa, the poet, awakens in his own bed at the end of the story.

The whole story, told by the homeless people, is a semiotic disruption in that these homeless people are what state and institutions "repress in order to structure his own identity and to master the state, religion, and the economy" (Rabine, 1977, p. 45). Their existence is characterized by ambiguity, going unnoticed and being suppressed by individuals and institutions. This is vividly portrayed in one of Musa the poet's declarations when he and others begin sleeping on the streets: "Passersby in the darkness of the night cannot fully comprehend what they see from us. Are we dogs, trash, lost souls, criminals, mad people, or the dead?" (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 66). Söğüt focuses on the fact that these people are often overlooked in society; their appearance disturbs the symbolic order because "through a certain refusal on the part of the symbolic, the semiotic is taken up by the symbolic in a way that forbids its existence outside the parameters of discourse as already predicated on distinctions between subject and object, and signifier and signified" (Chanter & Ziarek, 2005, p. 6).

The novel's introduction of disruptions in the semiotic blurs the distinct boundary between the subject and the object. This blurring enables a rebellion against the stifling and constraining semiotic, which mainly focuses on emotions, instincts, and raw energies that do not adhere to conventional rationality.

4.2. Repetition

Kristeva argues in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* that "designating the genotext in a text requires pointing out the transfers of drive energy that can be detected in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation or rhythm)" (1984, p. 86). As mentioned by Kristeva, the genotext can be examined by delving into these devices, which convey both individual and societal psychological dynamics. These devices manifest and reveal underlying emotional energies and drives. In addition to the phonematic devices, Kristeva further asserts:

> The distortion of words, the repetition of words and syntagms, and hyperkinesia or stereotypy reveal that a semiotic network—the chora—has been established, one that simultaneously defies both verbal

> symbolization and the formation of a superego patterned after paternal law and sealed by language acquisition (Kristeva 1984, p. 152).

This statement discusses the existence of these elements in a text - word distortion, repetition, hyperkinesia, or stereotypy simply escape from the conventional use of language and revolts against the law, rules, and regulations of the conventional language the symbolic order represents. Likewise, these devices surface underlying unconscious desires, wishes, and fears that have been suppressed. Therefore, analyzing these devices is crucial in understanding a text's dynamics and breaking down the psychological and societal dynamics behind the mentioned event.

Söğüt often distorts words, including unfinished sentences and words; additionally, repetitive statements are standard literary devices in her narratives, emphasizing the particular event more deeply and intensely.

In *Beş Sevim Apartmanı,* Doctor Samimi, like all the other patients, feels unloved and unwanted by their parents:

> His mother... His mother. No, other people's mother. The mother of that thin, tall Barbie-like baby girl, born in America and not knowing a single word of Turkish, with not even a single freckle on her face... His mother who turned her name, Gül, into Rosa in America, and who wanted to be called Rosa even when she came to Turkey... Mother Rosa of Dara and Nora (Söğüt, 2023, p. 17).

The novel centers around portraying the emotion of being unloved or unwanted, which leads to the character's descent into madness. Söğüt unveils and demystifies the idealization of the holy family, the concept of loving parents, and the notion of a haven for children. Rather than being a place of affection and nurturing, the household and family can also be sources of violence and betrayal.

Another character's mother and himself are beaten by her husband ceaselessly: "Run to the kitchen and bring the salt... a kick... don't just stand there blankly... a kick... why the hell are you sleeping... a kick... this isn't my child, you whore... a kick... all of you... a kick…" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 85).

Both mother and son have been chronically subject to domestic violence, which "includes not only physical force, but also sexual violence and threats that cause fear alarm and distress" (Walby, 2004, p. 10). This places a psychological weight on those

who survive, and its destructive repercussions extend beyond just the survivors; they also extend on a larger scale. Therefore, Söğüt's portrayal of domestic violence encompasses a critique of institutions that lack comprehensive programs for preventing violence, as well.

In another novel, *Kırmızı Zaman*, Botan, waiting in front of the emergency service, encounters a mother screaming for help: "He was going to kill my son. That animal bastard was going to kill my son. Unthinkable, like his monstrous father. Go, catch him... hang him... get rid of him... Get rid of that bastard!" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 56). By utilizing these rhythmic repetitions, namely the semiotic, readers are prompted to question the essence of the incident. Instead of opting for intense terminology to depict the harrowing nature of the distressing occurrences, she fosters a deliberate sense of detachment. This approach allows for a deliberate distance, thereby encouraging better reflection on the matter of domestic violence and its pervasive existence affecting women and children within the household, prompting a fresh evaluation. As in her case, "a return to, or re-vision of, the mother and maternal rhythms and tones, of the semiotic element in language, could be a mechanism for subverting traditional literary representations" (Humm, 1995, p. 53). Unlike narratives that integrate semiotic elements into their prose and poetry, these conventional depictions guide readers in any desired direction. As a result, comprehending her story demands a significant amount of exertion and effort.

In the same part of the novel, Söğüt implies a potential sexual abuse Botan experienced as a child by older men or women. Söğüt comments on the introvertness of Botan, not playing outside with his friends: "Was she afraid? Was she apprehensive? Or had something wicked happened to her outside before? Or were there wicked uncles? Wicked aunts? Wicked other things?" (Söğüt, 2022a, p. 55). She warns readers to be alert and aware that abuse is a common phenomenon.

Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979 portrays elements intricately connected to the violence prevalent in Turkey during the late 1970s. An illustrative moment occurs when Şahbaz visits the wounded woman lying, resting, and healing in the basement of the Üç Kapılı Han (Three-Door Inn). During this encounter, Şahbaz presents a family photograph album, none of which the wounded woman appears to recall:

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost.

I got lost. I got lost. I got lost. I got lost (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 105).

According to Sarı (2016), the wounded woman feels "lost because she lost her voice because she is reduced to a body that can be tossed into some forgotten cellar and left there to die" (p. 52). Furthermore, her experience of feeling lost stems from a loss of subjectivity, rendering her incapable of perceiving herself and others. Her inability to recognize even her own family members places her within the domain of the semiotic, where she continually echoes the same sentence more than thirty times. Söğüt underscores the profound ramifications of violence, which seem to inflict greater pain when one's subjectivity is eroded, as opposed to mere physical well-being. Erkoca explores the textualization of trauma in literary texts, and by presenting the exact quotation, he suggests that the character's "subjectivity disintegrates" due to the extreme level of violence she has experienced (Erkoca, 2022, p.46). This loss of subjectivity silences her voice and agency and diminishes her ability to perceive others and herself. Her losing subjectivity and agency after having been tortured relegated her to the realm of semiotic, where she endlessly repeats the sentence. As Kristeva (1980) argues, subjectivity is intricately linked to the dialectical relationship between the symbolic, what constitutes meaning, and the semiotic, the drives and impulses.

As a social practice, language inherently assumes two dispositions combined in various ways to establish different types of signifying practices (Kristeva, 1980). These are indicated above: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic "passage through meaning, the effect of play or practice, helps to ensure that a sense of meaning as univocal, final, determined, or universal does not have a chance to become established" (Graybeal, 1993, p. 35). It provides a sense of ambiguity to the meaning; therefore, it is deviant and revolting to the established norms, rules, and regulations.

However, being immersed in the semiotic is also problematic since one cannot have a sense of subjectivity without entering the symbolic order where both semiotic and symbolic means function together.

Söğüt adeptly blends these two dispositions, enabling the semiotic to disrupt the linear narrative in a manner that fosters a critical vantage point. While these perspectives might evoke disquieting emotions within readers, they are prompted to adopt a gendered lens. This perspective facilitates the recognition of various forms of oppression tied to gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors, with gender being a particularly salient intersection in Söğüt's novels.

In the novel *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey*, one of the fundamental characters is Olga/Maria, whose silence is often repeated throughout the novel: “Maria, muted Maria, is on the low stool in the kitchen of the mansion. sitting (there), just like that” (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 36). Madam Arthur Bey calls Maria on another page: “Can mute Maria be deaf at the same time?” (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 43). Like the wounded woman, Maria has also encountered various forms of violence during the collapse of her nation, referred to as her "Iron Curtain Country" without explicitly naming it. She represents the malevolence intrinsic to war, as evident through the numerous instances of sexual violence she has endured. The diverse manifestations of violence that she has experienced encourage readers to adopt a gendered lens when reflecting on the topics of warfare and violence.

In her final novel, *Başkalarının Tanrısı,* the theme of violence also takes a central role. Musa, the poet, commits an act of violence by killing the former lover of Efsun Abla, who had abandoned her after she intentionally amputated her own legs so that Devran would not sell her to other men anymore. The narration goes on as follows:

> Devran. The man who kicked Efsun Abla out onto the street. He died. His body was torn apart and fed to the dogs.
>
> Devran. The man who kicked Efsun Abla out onto the street. They murdered him. They tore his body apart and fed it to the dogs.
>
> Devran. The man who kicked Efsun Abla out onto the street. I murdered him. I tore his body apart and fed it to the dogs (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 31).

Her portrayal emphasizes the male hegemony that men can have over women, even in romantic relationships. This topic is a regular one where romantic partners sell women to other men.

By introducing these interruptions, Söğüt beckons readers to delve into the text more profoundly. These disruptions defy readers' anticipations and nudge them toward scrutinizing the conventional structure of the narrative. While this method might trigger feelings of unease or disquiet, it equally acts as a trigger for fostering analytical thought.

4.3. Ambiguity between Reality and Imagination

Söğüt's narratives often depict marginalized characters struggling with madness, identity crises, and psychological problems that prevent them from wholly integrating into the society they are surrounded with. In her novels, the development of her characters, who are on the fringes of society, is highly related to the social and political events of their era. There are not many characters whose pasts are not depicted to the readers. Although usually not in a linear way, Söğüt's novels carry the aspects of Bildungsroman where readers observe the personal growth of the characters. However, her characters do not succeed in their dreams or achieve achievements similar to the characteristics of female authors in Turkey. According to Jale Parla (2004), "In narratives written by women novelists, another characteristic stands out when the personal development of female characters is portrayed. Very few of these narratives end with the woman achieving her development in the desired way" (p. 180). Therefore, readers do not meet coherent, successful, and ideal women characters; instead, they observe the marginals, the mad, people with mental or physical disabilities whose lives do not conform to conventional expectations.

While Söğüt does convey specific socio-political critiques, mainly focusing on forms of oppression related to gender and sexuality through the themes such as rape, suicide, murder, and abuse of these marginalized characters, she also entrusts readers with the task of thoughtful contemplation through the portrayal of events and characters in a non-linear and flexible manner. This approach introduces ambiguity and allows the text to be interpreted in various ways, explained with examples in this part of the chapter.

In her novel *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979,* Söğüt emphasizes the ambiguity surrounding the events she narrates. Within the narrative, Şahbaz takes on the role of a malevolent character, discussing the concept of free will as an impossibility, consequently fostering an atmosphere of despair. However, it is essential to note that Söğüt's intention in her novels is not to evoke a sense of hopelessness. Instead, she intends to portray the underlying structural influences that shape the events, moving beyond individual perspectives. Şahbaz explains this reflection at the very beginning of the novel as follows: "Some souls, indeed, embrace the true ardor of resisting fate, yet the just battle they fall into is neither a well-defined struggle nor a game with clear rules" (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 14).

From this perspective, fate above personal free will is a multifaceted structure with omnipotent power to exercise these maleficent and mischievous acts. The ambiguity here functions as a semiotic modality of the signifying practice, forcing readers to consider the structural forces of the event.

The novel's backdrop, including its title, effectively guides readers to consider the events of 1979 within a political framework. While dissecting these events within the political context, the author primarily directs her focus toward the pervasive dominance of patriarchy over women. She hints at these themes through subtle cues, entrusting readers with the responsibility of contemplation and introspection.

It is noteworthy that Söğüt divides the book into two parts: one comprising the fictional stories of Şahbaz and the other consisting of actual events collected from the newspapers in the year 1979. As readers read the almanac, they notice that every evil story recounted by Şahbaz to the wounded woman, though presented as fiction, mirrors actual past occurrences in Turkey. Alternating between reality and fiction engages readers deeply into the stories, encouraging deeper reflection and higher awareness of social and political issues.

In her master's thesis on expanding the horizons of law through literature and history, Selin Aksoy interprets the novel as an exploration of Turkish society's collective amnesia (2012). Even the protagonist, Şahbaz, seeks to erase the memory and experiences of the wounded woman (Aksoy, 2012). Aksoy argues that Söğüt's almanac directs readers to "Do not forget" (Aksoy, 2012, p. 43).

I agree that the almanac serves as a stark reminder of Turkey's historical pathologies. With this tool, she gives readers the responsibility to acknowledge the reality of these harrowing stories and take action against the injustices. Besides, Aksoy also categorizes the novel as devoid of hope, justifying her argument with the wounded woman's rhetorical questions and Şahbaz's commentaries on the defeat experienced by the leftists (Aksoy, 2012). However, I do not view the novel as devoid of hope; instead, I perceive it as deeply political in its critique of the despair following the events of the post-1980 military coup. The narratives recounted by Şahbaz take place in the past, specifically in 1980, with no commentary on the present-day or future context.

> However, it will calm down exactly one year later. Rebellion will give way to resignation. They will relax when they give up. They won't be happier. Nothing will improve. Nothing will get better. But they will relax. The fury of not being able to achieve what you want will also disappear when you give up... Şahbaz is a master magician in changing the meaning of everything (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 211).

As Şahbaz recounts the events in 1979, serving as an omnipotent and malevolent protagonist, he offers no hope for the upcoming year, 1980. However, Söğüt, by allowing Şahbaz and the almanac to depict the harrowing events and the subsequent passivity following the post-coup era, critiques those who abandoned hope prematurely. Instead, she asks readers to take greater responsibility for acknowledging the past malevolent acts and take action for today's events.

Another layer of ambiguity emerges in the characters of Salih and Melih. Initially, Salih is depicted as responsible for the demise of every woman he connects with. However, as the story unfolds, this assertion is refuted, ultimately revealing that Melih is the one who perpetrates violent acts, even towards his half-sister, Emine.

Söğüt employs ambiguity in this context to prompt readers to contemplate the impact of wicked deeds stemming from the cultural environments in which individuals are raised. Subsequent revelations show that both Salih and Melih were implicated in killing their sister during their childhood. This event casts a shadow over them, leading to amnesia, a state of mind, and the development of malevolent traits. Following the

demise of a girl Salih has been intimate with, he commits a murder (the identity of the perpetrator, Salih or Melih, remains unclear due to their twin status).

> The body, stained with crimson, reminded him of the women he had killed before. He had loved them all. He had never wanted to kill any of them. But he knew nothing else. You love women, and you kill them. Without knowing why. And then, you forget everything and start all over again. Life is this simple. Or complicated… (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 83).

Within patriarchal systems, gendered violence operates as a mechanism of control and domination, mainly targeting women and queer people. It is often justified by claiming that these groups deviate from societal norms, posing a threat to social harmony. While Söğüt does illustrate these patterns in various parts of her narrative, her current emphasis lies in portraying violence devoid of rational justification. Consequently, women become susceptible to fatal victimization without impunity, easily sacrificed to uphold prevailing norms.

This quotation also underscores the interconnectedness of love and control, suggesting that love can be utilized as a tool of authority over women, ultimately escalating into critical concerns like endangering lives. Additionally, his amnesia accentuates the impunity associated with his actions. The fact that Salih does not recall his malevolent deeds further underscores the lack of accountability for his actions. The impacts and the consequences of such actions are downplayed.

Both Salih and Melih are unpunished for their violent deeds; it is depicted through dreams that the early involvement in their sister's murder and normalizing it, even witnessing it (as for Salih), can perpetuate such harrowing events:

> [....] Şahbaz entered Salih's dream, who appeared to be peacefully falling asleep. He replayed an old film for him, bringing it back to life. Salih, who had hidden his past in seven dark wells, followed in the wake of Şahbaz and journeyed back into the distant past. He once again felt a close connection to that dreadful experience he had forgotten (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 83).

Söğüt's primary objective is to elucidate the underlying causes behind these events, unveiling the twins Salih and Melih's history of violence. The narrative overtly reveals that Salih and Melih continue their past pattern of murdering women, a behavior ingrained in them. However, their guilt surfaces in their dreams.

Likewise, the other novels have ambiguous occurrences as well. The novel *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* ultimately presents this ambiguity. After the building fire caused by Doctor Samimi, only his lifeless remains were discovered by the firefighters. Despite the neighborhood's firm conviction regarding the presence of others in the building, reports indicated that no additional individuals resided there. “They also looked at each of the five floors one by one. They could not find any trace of the five strange people that the entire neighborhood had no doubt about their existence” (Söğüt, 2023, p. 152).

Söğüt's ambiguous conclusion is far from uncommon; she deliberately keeps readers between reality and fiction. This intentional approach allows them to maintain a comfortable separation from the events within her novels. Consequently, this strategy encourages a more secure contemplation of the underlying issues. Furthermore, the deliberate ambiguity surrounding the authenticity of the events also spurs readers toward profound reflection on the topics and themes she addresses.

The emergence of ambiguity arises when the semiotic realm is disrupted, enabling suppressed elements to surface. Ambiguity and certainty are interwoven; neither holds superiority over the other: “The semiotic is not a transgressive, aggressive discourse, hidden underneath the symbolic. It is a dialectical construction, or theoretical supposition, neither preceding the symbolic nor holding a privileged place in relation to it” (Sjöhölm, 2005, p. 18). On the other hand, its presence functions as a form of resistance, enabling readers to engage in critical inquiry.

4.4. Conclusion

Mine Söğüt is a writer of protest, a notable literary presence who confronts the multifaceted power dynamics entrenched within a patriarchal society through her novels. Despite incorporating fantastical elements into her works, she retains the essence of a realist author, addressing themes such as murder, femicide, incest, rape, suicide, and homicide. Through her adept storytelling, she artfully unveils the intricate interplay between these themes and the pervasive influence of patriarchy. Her narrative challenges the established order that deems oppression. These challenges are emphasized through semiotic ruptures in her narratives, functioning the focus on the underlying meaning.

Like Kristeva, Söğüt's artistic rebellion takes place within the boundaries of the symbolic realm, a space characterized by established rules. As Söğüt creates her characters, she introduces alternate dimensions that challenge the status quo. Her narratives delve profoundly into themes of women and gender, continuously centering around marginalized characters.

The two fundamental modalities of signifying practice are skillfully interwoven in her novels: There are semiotic disturbances in the forms of metafiction and intertextuality, repetition, and ambiguity. This woven structure gives readers a dynamic reading experience, where readers are supposed to consider the presented issues deeply.

Adopting a gendered lens is of utmost importance when scrutinizing these themes, as it facilitates dismantling resistance against patriarchal control and power inequalities. Moreover, intersecting forms of oppression encompass aspects of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity. Through this gendered lens, readers are equipped with the tools to dissect societal frameworks and norms, comprehending their role in perpetuating various forms of oppression.

Her narratives are usually regarded as evoking unsettling emotions and, as a result, might challenge readers. However, it is crucial to face these challenges to understand the nature of complexities. All in all, including semiotic elements in her novels and encouraging gendered lens, Söğüt prompts resistance and revolt.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis is grounded in the notion that literature not only reflects society's norms, values, and issues but also possesses the transformative potential to subvert patriarchal hegemonic norms and values. It focuses on examining how Kristevan concepts, such as the abject and the semiotic, illuminate literature's capacity for subversion. Such an examination aims to deepen our understanding of literature's potential to challenge and transform societal norms and structures.

Mine Söğüt is an author and a journalist whose protest nature can be observed in her novels' themes and structures, which employ social, political, and feminist themes, exploring several forms of violence and injustices that marginalized women and queer identities encounter. A Kristevan analysis focusing on the theories of abject and semiotic enables a broader understanding of nuances of subjectivities and gender structured by power hierarchies. Hence, readers are prompted to get social awareness through the deconstructive power of Söğüt's narratives that represent how unjust power relations are structured.

Therefore, to better evaluate the themes and structures available in Söğüt's narratives through a Kristevan reading, this thesis began by providing a short history of the contributions of French Feminist Literary Criticism to literary analysis. With a particular focus on the interdisciplinary approach to literature and its functions to deconstruct the existing power hierarchies, the emphasis of the thesis has moved towards the two theories of Julia Kristeva, remarkable in the formation of subjectivity: the abject and the semiotic.

The abject is typically defined as that which poses a threat to the integrity of the self and is often used to understand socially deemed threatening entities, individuals, or

subjects. By aiming to eradicate the abject, both the individual and society attempt to suppress it, mostly resorting to extreme violence. That is why abject is crucial in forming subjectivity and identity. The other concept, the semiotic, refers to language's prelinguistic, bodily, and affective aspects. Sounds, rhythms, and bodily gestures characterize it. It represents the realm of drives, emotions, and unconscious processes.

After establishing the theoretical framework, the next chapter shifts its focus to the prevalent themes in Söğüt's novels, which are also pertinent issues in contemporary Turkey. These themes include violence, vulnerability and homelessness, madness, and immoral relationships, which cannot be totally focused on without a gendered and sexuality-related perspective. Söğüt frequently intertwines themes of gender and sexuality, offering insights into the complexities of gendered identities and the challenges posed by hegemonic masculinity. These discussions often revolve around characters most impacted by such norms, providing a deeper understanding of their essence and lived experience.

Violence emerges as a prevalent theme, carrying structural, hegemonic, and political implications. It is generally directed at marginalized groups, such as women and queer identities, whose mere existence is deemed threatening. Therefore, violence serves as a tool for control and suppression. By depicting these harrowing events graphically and unapologetically, Söğüt exposes the grim truths often seen in newspapers, everyday life, or televised news: women are predominantly killed by their intimate partners, their bodies left shattered; girls are raped and murdered, while queer individuals face marginalization and violent assaults from random perpetrators. Söğüt's narratives function as abject in that they disturb the sense of coherence and unity in readers, presenting a distorted world with unjustly distributed power. They challenge readers to confront their own biases and privileges, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of power and oppression. Although such confrontation might be shocking and unsettling, it serves as a catalyst for revolt, resistance and defiance against power-holders and ideologies behind them. These graphic portrayals subvert the dominant narratives and power structures, showcasing the dysfunctions within them.

Yadigar, while drowning in the river, instead of being saved, is raped multiple times and left to death by a neighboring boy in *Kırmızı Zaman* (2022a). Beş Sevim Huriye Hanım becomes subject to constant physical violence by her husband just because she cannot bear a baby boy in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023). Elif's father casually gets drunk and beats both her and her mother every night also in the same novel. Maria/Olga is wrongly assumed to be a pimp simply because she shares an apartment with a transgender person. Subsequently, she is brutally beaten and left for dead in *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (2022c). She is also exploited as a commodity, enduring constant humiliation in a master-slave relationship with Madam Arthur Bey. (2022c). Numerous leftist people are tortured in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2022b). Women are killed, and their body parts are shattered in several parts of the cities. Girls are raped by their fathers and considered evil, resulting in their murder as a perceived act of purification act in the same novel.

Söğüt empowers her abject characters by giving them agency within her narratives. Through shifting narrative voices, readers are provided a safe distance to empathize with these characters and their stories. By bringing them out from the societal fringes, Söğüt asserts their existence and urges readers to embrace them fully. In presenting their stories, Söğüt presents the multi-layered nature of violence, as explored in the subchapters. Violence, depicted in her novels, encompasses not only individual acts but also political agendas, hegemonic structures, religious doctrines, and cultural values. She achieves this by weaving together similar narratives from different periods, revealing the cyclical nature of oppression and violence.

The cycle of oppression reinforces the idea that systematic injustices are deeply rooted in social structures. For example, Melih and Semih persist in their pattern of killing women even after committing the first murder of their sister, carrying out subsequent murders in the same methodical manner in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (Söğüt, 2022b).

Moreover, the cycle of oppression is perpetuated through institutionalized forms of discrimination. The power-holding authorities in Söğüt's novels are either directly or indirectly involved in perpetuating violence, endorsing violence through law and discourse. The wounded woman and numerous other survivors of violence in Şahbaz's

stories highlight the paramilitary organizations backed by ideological and political forces in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (Söğüt, 2022b).

While categorizing violence into three distinct categories in the thematic discussion chapter may risk diverting attention from its multifaceted nature, it nonetheless offers a valuable framework for recognizing its institutionalized nature across various mechanisms used to oppress and discriminate against individuals deemed abject by society and authority. This holistic approach underscores her political stance on the issue.

Similarly, while less frequently explored, the theme of homelessness and vulnerability is portrayed to compound the challenges faced by women, rendering them invisible as they embody fundamental threats to the unity of self. Not only do individuals overlook them, but institutions and governments also tend to disregard their plight, as seen in the case of Efsun Abla and her friends, who wander unnoticed through the city in the novel *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (2022d). Their existence is rarely addressed, even in literature. Therefore, this subchapter served as a nexus for exploring the intersection of gender and vulnerability. It laid the groundwork for readers to confront and understand how these characters experience exclusion in the Turkish context. Söğüt depicts the presence of vulnerable characters in a way that forces us to embrace our primary narcissistic fear - the threat against the unity of the body. This encounter highlights the fragility of the self, epitomized by the loss of physical security and the deprivation of a basic necessity: shelter. Efsun Abla cuts off her own legs to prevent her lover from selling her to other men. This brutal act and the resulting amputation symbolize her liberation from what Devran, her lover, represents: the patriarchal hegemony that objectifies the female body. Söğüt's use of the abject is both empowering and condemning. While reclaiming the abject by portraying the characters and their unsettling experiences, she also condemns the societal structures that lead to their marginalization and exclusion.

Madness is another prevalent theme in Söğüt's novels, often intertwined with women's experiences. Through her narratives, readers understand the various factors that drive these women to madness, leading to their abjection. The wounded woman seeks refuge in madness after being heavily tortured in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2022b).

Dysfunctioning family structures and member drive their children crazy in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023). She boldly explores the inherent connection between women's madness and patriarchy. Madness, intricately woven throughout Söğüt's narratives, vividly illuminates the paths to the abjection of these characters, continuing to unsettle readers with its disturbing nature.

Although relegating women to madness and the semiotic realm is not empowering or considered a "revolutionary act" (Felman, 1975, p. 2), it is imperative that they are not silenced and they are given opportunities to speak up. Söğüt's novels provide such an opportunity because literature undoubtedly enables the presentation of madness to disrupt and challenge the realm of the symbolic through semiotic ruptures. As a result, in Söğüt's narratives, "madness gains materiality in narrative through narratological tools and strategies" (Sarı, 2016, p. 64). Additionally, it acts as a subversive tool, urging readers to recognize the existence of these marginalized mad characters, understand the underlying causes of their marginalization, and embrace them rather than abjecting them.

Regarding the theme of immoral relationships, society often rejects immoral relationships, with the government similarly overlooking them, which results in crimes against individuals in such relationships going largely unpunished. Sex workers, particularly women, face inhumane working conditions, sometimes coerced into the profession by their intimate partners. In desperate attempts to escape this fate, characters like Efsun Abla resort to drastic measures, such as cutting her legs in *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (2022d). Others, such as Gülsüm, resort to violence against their oppressors, as seen when she stabbed her partner in seven places in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023).

The way Söğüt presents these characters is not judgmental. She presents readers with these themes and characters, prompting them to embrace the abject. The theoretical focus on these abject characters has furnished essential insight into the multifaceted aspects of subjectivities with an interdisciplinary approach, centering upon linguistic, psychological, and social layers of subjectivities. This discussion summarizes that subjectivities are formed in creating a threatening other, the abject, that challenges the unity and cohesion of the self. Likewise, communities perform on othering certain

groups of people that function as a threat to the norms and values that help specific groups maintain power.

It is clear that Söğüt specifically employs these threatening others as her characters that are often pushed to the margins of society. The way she depicts these characters allows readers to comprehend the injustices and marginalities of these characters, evoking a sense of social awareness and critique of unjust power relations. Her narratives do not add to their marginalization; instead, she acclaims them, enabling them to speak for themselves through everyday obstacles and treatments. Empowering the long-silenced characters to speak up functions as a reminder that these often-ignored characters have been subjected to multilayered forms of violence. These characters are generally women and queer individuals who do not conform to the societal values. Regardless of the conformity to these values, these women and queer people are subjected to consistent violence, oppressed, and discriminated against by patriarchal norms and values.

The unsettling nature of violence presented in Söğüt's novels exposes unjust power relations and underscores how certain forms of violence can go unnoticed and unpunished. This discussion concludes that a Kristevan approach to the thematic study of Söğüt's novels allows a more profound comprehension of specific individuals' marginality and evokes a sense of social awareness. It criticizes power-holding agencies and asks for a societal transformation.

The structural discussion explores the distinctive narrative structures found in Söğüt's novels, aligning them with the semiotic concept proposed by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's approach enables a deeper look into how such unusual occurrences can disrupt established structures. Promoting dynamism through semiotic disruptions of several narrative functions, such as intertextuality, metafiction, ambiguity, and repetition, readers gain a more efficient consideration of the presented issues.

Intertextuality emphasizes the interconnectedness and enriches the reading experience. It involves intertwining different signifying systems rather than direct references to other texts. Hence, within this framework, any departure from or interruption of conventional storytelling is viewed as intertextuality: such as the wounded woman's reactions to Şahbaz's malevolent narratives in *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2022b),

each patient recounting their story from their unique perspective, which diverges from the hospital records in *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023), and the dictionary segments preceding each section, emphasizing the thematic focus of that particular part in *Kırmızı Zaman* (2022a).

All of these novels serve as rebellions against the author's dominant and authoritative position, empowering readers to take on more responsibility and contemplate these semiotic disruptions within a broader cultural and political framework. Such a classification facilitates an exploration of how texts interact with each other in cultural contexts, disrupting dominant narratives. It suggests that the meaning-making process involves the semiotic modality of the language, too.

Besides, the frequent allusions to fables and the fable-like quality of Söğüt's novels alleviate the weight of distressing events. Additionally, they contextualize these unsettling events within cultural, political, and historical frameworks, allowing readers to comprehend them within the broader context. Consequently, cultural, historical, and political viewpoints and principles are closely related to shaping these occurrences, thereby prompting scrutiny.

Repetition serves as a semiotic disturbance within Söğüt's narratives. Through these narrative elements, Söğüt pushes against the boundaries of language, tapping into the energies and impulses concealed within the semiotic realm, which threaten the dominance of the symbolic realm and seek expression. By disrupting rational language, repetition challenges the social and cultural codes it represents, prompting questioning and reevaluation.

As the final narrative element, ambiguity presents plural interpretations, requiring reader engagement and mitigating the impact of distressing events. It also highlights the fluidity and subjectivity of truth. Consequently, readers become more involved in assigning meaning and challenging the nature of events from various viewpoints while taking a safe distance. These narrative techniques contribute to the dynamic nature of Söğüt's storytelling.

In her novels, Söğüt consistently focuses on marginalized characters and their gender and sexuality experiences. Her stories can be unsettling but are essential for

understanding the challenges faced by women and queer individuals. She offers a window into these characters' unsettling experiences through her writing. However, her narratives transcend mere portrayal of marginalized characters; they delve into the core of agency and resistance against oppressive norms and discriminatory regulations. They defy established authority, with characters refusing passive conformity to social expectations. Consequently, her narratives serve as revolutionary expressions, embodying revolt through diverse forms of resistance, dissent, and subversion aimed at dominant power structures, ideologies, and norms.

Söğüt's approach to storytelling can be broken down into two key aspects: themes and narrative techniques. She delves into thought-provoking themes that challenge societal norms, underscoring the struggles of marginalized identities. Additionally, her narrative style carries a sense of protest, unsettles readers and their sense of coherence and unity. Through these provocative confrontations with the marginalized and their experiences of harrowing events, she disrupts prevailing power dynamics, reclaiming agency, autonomy, and self-determination in the midst of marginalization.

Kristeva underscores that revolt encompasses a constant questioning and a disruption of the status quo (Kristeva, 2017). Revolt, instead of an outright rejection of the established order or embracing new norms and values, often leads individuals into disillusionment or into a new form of totalitarianism (Kristeva, 2017). However, at its core, revolt necessitates ongoing questioning, critical reflection, and the willingness to challenge existing paradigms (Kristeva, 2017). Söğüt’s narratives provide the ground for challenging the meta-narratives, be it religion or culture, through her constant exposure to violent themes and distorted worlds. They imply transgression against law and authority.

While some characters find empowerment in their marginalization, such as through sex work, Söğüt encourages readers critically to reflect on these unsettling themes. She presents these experiences as potentially empowering and deserving of scrutiny and critique. Ultimately, her work invites readers to engage with the complexities of marginalized identities, fostering a constant questioning of the power relations and identities. Söğüt, through her narrative, emphasizes the unbanishable nature of the abject and subversive functions of the semiotic modality. Her unsettling themes and

unconventional narrative elements bring the abject into view and reveal suppressed elements stuck in the semiotic modality, claiming their existence.

This research offers valuable contributions to the literature for several reasons. First, it thoroughly examines all of Söğüt's novels and discusses recurring themes and narrative elements. This study comprehensively explores Söğüt's literary style by including her entire body of work.

Additionally, the application of Kristevan theories to Söğüt's narratives highlights narratives' function as a deconstructive power. Kristeva's theories provide insights into the formulation of individual and collective identities. This encourages readers to deconstruct the binaries between self and the other. Such deconstruction and subversion present the arbitrariness of identities as well as the oppressive and discriminatory forces of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Therefore, Söğüt's narratives function as tools for revolt and resistance. Applying Kristeva's semiotic concept underscores the role of the preverbal in literary texts. It also enriches literary discussion, revealing the underlying processes through which meaning is produced and interpreted. The existence of semiotic ruptures functions as revolts and resistance against what the Symbolic represents, namely the norms and regulations.

Kristeva's theories draw on insights from literary theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, and linguistics. Integrating perspectives from multiple disciplines offers a holistic comprehension of Söğüt's works, revealing the complex relationships between language, identity, power dynamics, and gender. Moreover, the dual emphasis on structural and thematic aspects of Söğüt's novels enhances the depth of discussion, providing readers with a profound comprehension of the intricately woven protest nature embedded in both themes and structures.

Along with its strengths, this research also has its limitations. The primary limitations and difficulties I have encountered throughout this research can be classified into several main headlines. Initially, the exploration of Julia Kristeva's theories, particularly the abject and the semiotic, presented a challenge due to the inherent nature of their complexity. Including psychological, philosophical, and linguistic elements required a profound interdisciplinary understanding. In order to overcome these difficulties, a multilayered approach was undertaken. First, a thorough

examination of primary and secondary sources was conducted to break down the theories into manageable components. In this way, this approach refrained from the risk of overemphasizing theory on a broader level. Regular consultation with my thesis supervisor was also pivotal, offering remarkable guidance.

Additionally, the thesis-writing process served as a comprehension tool through repetitive revisions and self-assessments, refining the articulation of these complex concepts. These strategic approaches helped navigate the theoretical complexity challenges, ensuring a nuanced and well-rooted incorporation of Kristeva's theories into the framework of this research.

Another challenging aspect was the interdisciplinary nature of the research, combining literature, feminist theory, and Kristevan reading, whose integration without too much divergence required a meticulous selection of sets of ideas and a sustained focus on thematic coherence. This research aimed to interconnect diverse perspectives by clearly outlining the theoretical framework and methodological consistency, successfully bridging disciplinary boundaries.

Apart from the theoretical perspectives, the study posed difficulties in dealing with sensitive themes such as violence and marginalization, which required ethical handling. The primary focus was on maintaining a critical perspective that avoids causing offense, ensuring that the marginalization and disruption brought by these characters to the narratives are celebrated rather than overlooked. To navigate this challenge, inclusive language and commitment to emphasizing the voice of marginalized characters were strategically incorporated into the analysis process. This strategy confirmed that this research dealt with sensitive themes focused on affirming the agency of the marginalized characters rather than relegating them to the position of mere victims.

In addition to the strengths and limitations outlined in this study, there is potential for further research to be conducted on a level that investigates readers' responses to how they understand and interpret the themes and engage with the characters in Söğüt's novels. Such a study can contribute to analyzing the novels' impact on diverse audiences. This type of research can offer remarkable insights into the overarching goal of examining literature as a dynamic area that functions as a powerful tool to

create social awareness and transformation. Furthermore, to investigate the process of subversion of established norms and regulations, creating a resistance against them, the incorporation of Söğüt's novels into the literature curriculum can also be explored. This avenue can contribute to exploring students' engagement and the effectiveness of literature in critical thinking and resistance.

In conclusion, this research has meticulously explored subversive elements in Mine Söğüt's novels through the Kristevan lens. Doing this thematically and structurally, the in-depth discussion provides the deconstructive power embedded in Söğüt's narratives, which enables embracing the abject characters. This research contributes significantly to the literature, showcasing the dynamism of literature and its function of subversion and resistance. It also recognizes the limitations and difficulties, encouraging further research and exploring Söğüt's narratives' power in fostering resistance and constant questioning against patriarchy and heteronormativity.

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APPENDICES

A. SUMMARIES OF THE NOVELS

1. *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (The Five Sevim Apartment)

Her debut novel, *Beş Sevim Apartmanı*, initially released in 2003, delves into the life of a psychiatrist named Doctor Samimi (Doctor Sincere). In the narrative, he gathers five mentally ill patients from different places to his "Five Sevim Apartment". Doctor Samimi stays on the basement floor, and these patients reside on each floor of the five-floored building. The readers are guided through each patient's personal story, exploring their subjective experiences and the underlying truths. Simultaneously, the apartment's history and Doctor Samimi's tale are revealed. As is characteristic of Söğüt's writing, the side stories are imbued with similar thematic elements as the main plot.

Doctor Samimi lost his father when he was too young, and his mother left him with his very affluent aunt, moving to the USA, where she remarried and had two daughters. It is interwoven in the story that Doctor Samimi's appearance, with his short height, red hair, and freckled face, makes him feel like an outcast among his friends. This feeling is further intensified by the emotional impact of his mother's abandonment and lack of compassion. He believes he is deemed with genies and fairies; therefore, he plans to fight against their impacts on his body. After the death of his aunt, leaving a big inheritance, Doctor Samimi buys an old abandoned building where he places five mentally ill people who believe they are also deemed with genies and fairies.

Before exploring the five individuals' narratives, the author provides the readers with the backstory of the apartment's name. The Five Sevim Apartment derived its name from an older woman, Miss Five Sevim Huriye, who had five cats, all named Sevim, residing in her home.

Additionally, she also fed numerous cats in the garden. Every day, she would tuck her five cats under her clothing and visit her neighbors, recounting the tragic tale of how she lost her daughters. Since the early days of their marriage, the husband expressed a strong desire for five baby boys, as he admired his beloved commander with five sons. However, with each attempt, they are only given baby girls, which leaves him not only disappointed but also raged with anger and hostility towards the babies and the wife: "When I gave birth to my second child, the man became extremely angry, he beat me, and he cursed at the baby. The poor thing didn't live long; he passed away two months later" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 36). All five daughters pass away, and their deaths are suggested to be a consequence of neglectful care. Söğüt portrays these deaths as distressing and harrowing, causing the readers and Miss Five Sevim Huriye to confront the death as an abject element.

After her husband abandons her, Miss Five Sevim Huriye finds solace in sharing her story with her neighbors and nurturing the cats inside, all named Sevim after her dead daughters, and outside her house.

The story initiates with the tale of a resident, Oğuz, living on the first floor of the apartment. This man strongly believes he is a dwarf. He has an intense fear that if he were to grow taller, his mother would also try to kill him "because, when his mother was still pregnant with him, she had stabbed and killed her husband in their two-person bed with a single pillow, covered in white percale, while he was sleeping, yes, while he was sleeping" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 55). Söğüt depicts murder without refraining from graphic details, and these details become more unsettling as the story progresses. Oğuz's mother's history with her partner unravels. They eloped without the consent of the girl's family, but the man had deceived her with the promise of marriage. They were only living together through a religious marriage. After a few months, he also started selling the woman to other men due to poverty.

The mother gives birth to Oğuz but has no affection for him. Oğuz, feeling unloved and rejected, develops a fear of being killed by his own mother. Consequently, he resists growing up in his mind. When his mother scolds him, urging him to work, he has "grown up" (Söğüt, 2023, p. 9). He resolves to kill her to avoid being killed because he assumes his mother has been waiting for him to grow up. In a grim twist,

Oğuz commits matricide just as his mother had murdered her husband. The story of the resident living on the second floor of the apartment narrates the life of a girl growing up into a survivor of sexually abused relationships, delving into harrowing details.

The second resident, Yeşim, has a pilot father who is often away from home and a mother occupied with her job as a pharmacist, causing them to overlook their daughter's experiences. Due to her parents' neglect, Yeşim feels unwanted and constantly fears losing them, which manifests in her dreams. Shortly after reaching puberty, she begins to engage in intimate relationships with men and steals emergency contraceptive pills from her mother's pharmacy, leading to an overdose and an abortion.

Upon discovering these events, Yeşim's mother collapses, and her father, unaware of the specifics, rushes to the hospital. Tragically, as the actual background of the story is revealed, the father passes away, and the mother's mental state deteriorates. Meanwhile, Yeşim is placed under her grandmother's care. Her grandmother discovers her continuous affairs with the men around her and the resulting abortions. Hence, she is taken to a religious figure, “hodja,” to heal; nevertheless, she is subjected to constant rape by the hodja.

The third resident is Yusuf, from a wealthy family. Yusuf is prone to exercise violence over his friends and himself, and he manipulatively misdirects his family about the events. Learning about all this, the family decides to put him on treatment; however, the treatment does not work. Yusuf ends up murdering his own mother with his father’s shiny and expensive shoes. On the fourth floor of the apartment resides a woman named Elif, who is abandoned by her family and left in a mental hospital. As the story unfolds, readers discover that Elif's past is filled with challenges. Her father has always wanted a son instead of a daughter, so he makes Elif act like a boy during the night. This experience leads Elif to have a sexual identity crisis, struggling with how to dress and behave. At age eight, her father dies tragically after drinking excessively and falling, hitting his head on the pavement stones.

The last resident on the fifth floor is Melike, born into a gypsy family with unknown fathers due to her mother and grandmother's relationships with multiple men. Longing

for a father figure, Melike invites a stranger, who appears at the door asking for her mother, into her house, hoping he might be the father she yearns for. However, the stranger ends up raping her, leaving her traumatized. Melike is left questioning why this happened, and in her dreams, the answer directly blames her mother and grandmother for the situation. Filled with anger and confusion, she decides to take revenge and kills both of them.

At the end of the novel, Doctor Samimi realizes that the building's occupants must be freed from their burdens and decides to kill everyone, including himself, by setting the building on fire. The story concludes with discovering only his deceased body in the basement.

2. *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time)

Mine Söğüt's second work, titled *Kırmızı Zaman* (The Red Time), was published in 2006. The book introduces four characters whose relationships are gradually revealed through time and provided details. Söğüt's novel intricately revolves around the Cemetery of the Forsaken and the Executioners, where the main characters search for meaning or find themselves connected to the cemetery.

One day, a fisherman called Zaman Dayı (Uncle Time) unexpectedly emerges on the shores of the Golden Horn, appearing in a vivid red boat. As the story progresses, the enigma surrounding Uncle Time gradually unfolds, revealing his true identity as an escaped prisoner. In the prison, Uncle Time stumbles upon a peculiar stone that appears to be shifting. He moves the stone aside and discovers a hidden maze beyond it. Despite enduring numerous injuries, bruises, and shedding blood, he perseveres through the maze for several days until he finally finds an exit. Emerging from the walls encircling the Golden Horn, his arrival goes unnoticed by most, except for a descendant of an executioner, Halat (Rope), recognizable by the thick ropes surrounding his neck.

The readers are drawn into the background of his story, which includes a dark past involving a tragic incident causing his imprisonment. He was imprisoned for the brutal murder of a lost girl, where he gruesomely split her body in half with an ax. However, the truth behind his actions is far more complex. Zaman Dayı is an orphan, considered

a saintly figure in a remote village. He possesses an extraordinary connection with nature, whispering to birds and conversing with animals. During one of these encounters, he mistakes the bloodied girl for a mermaid, as she pleads with Zaman Dayı to protect her secret identity as a mermaid from her parent's knowledge. In reality, the girl is a victim of multiple rapes inflicted by a neighboring boy. After noticing the blood, the boy assumes she is dead and leaves her. She implores Zaman Dayı to prevent her parents from witnessing her in such a condition. Zaman Dayı decides to split the body in half with an ax.

The story of Zaman Dayı does not conclude at this point. He continues to wander through the maze persistently until he eventually comes across a cemetery. To his realization, this cemetery is none other than the Cemetery of the Forsaken and the Executioners.

In the surroundings of the Golden Horn, there resides Halat (Rope), a madman who lives nearby the Golden Horn and sustains himself solely on a diet of raw fish. Halat is the only person aware of the mysterious appearance of Zaman Dayı, and he assists him in tending to his wounds and cleaning away the traces of blood.

Similarly, Zaman Dayı becomes aware of Halat’s narrative through a statement made by Halat, where Halat apologizes to "the dead, the murdered." As the narrative unfolds, readers become acquainted with Halat's own story, which reveals a lineage of executioners, with both his father and grandfather being the notorious executioners of their own time. When Halat is a little child, he inadvertently witnesses his father execute a convict. He struggles to erase the traces of that traumatic experience, which becomes so overwhelming for him that he descends into madness. The event's intensity profoundly affects Halat, leading to his mental instability and adherence to the ropes.

Another significant character in the novel is Hüsran (Disappointment), a young girl who is the long-awaited child of a couple haunted by the loss of several children due to the adverse effects of the dampness in their home. Fearing for Hüsran's possible death, as she suffers from severe allergies, they confine her within the house, forbidding her from venturing outside. Within the confines of her home, Hüsran immerses herself in the stories found in the books her father collects from garbage piles. In one of these books, she encounters a tale about mazes, piquing her curiosity.

She begins to explore the four walls of their house, one of which is connected to the ancient forts encircling the Golden Horn. To her surprise, she finds an opening akin to the labyrinthine passages from the stories. She wonders if there might be a hidden opening similar to the labyrinthine passages described in the story. After an extended period, her persistence to find a way to a secret world pays off as the path leads to a maze resembling the descriptions in the tales she has read.

Equipped with a lamp brought by her father, she bravely navigates the dimly lit paths, following them relentlessly. Eventually, Hüsran discovers her way to the mysterious Cemetery of the Forsaken and the Executioners.

Botan, the other central character in the story, is a young man obsessed with locating his father's remains or body parts. His father had abandoned Botan and his mother, only to be later murdered by his lover, which they learn through a newspaper article three years after his father's disappearance. The lover of Botan's father confesses to poisoning him and disintegrating his dead body. Each part of his father's remains is thrown away in various locations throughout Istanbul. Determined to find closure, Botan visits the Emergency Service daily, hoping to encounter his father's deceased body. Although his long waits at the hospital turn out to be useless, one day, he unexpectedly comes across the dead body of his father's lover, with whom he got acquainted through the news in the newspaper. This time, Botan patiently awaits the arrival of the deceased's relatives. When no one arrives to claim the relation and the deceased body, the decision is made to bury the body in the Cemetery of the Forsaken.

The novel delves into the ancestry of Halat's grandfather, the son of a Romani man and a Jewish woman. It begins with his birth and explores his journey as he becomes an executioner. The catalyst for this choice occurs when he accidentally discovers an entrance to a maze and follows its path, leading him to the cemetery where the executioners bury the convicts they have killed. Söğüt's depiction of this scene is graphic, with the executioners holding bloody sacks containing dismembered body parts of the convicts to be buried. Instead of experiencing fear, Leon, Halat's grandfather, is captivated and develops an admiration for these executioners, ultimately deciding to become one of them.

A common thread leads each character to the Cemetery in the novel's concluding chapters. Hüsran, a frequent visitor, finds solace within its grounds, composing poignant poems for each individual resting there. Halat's emotions surge as he stands by his father's grave, tears flowing freely in a heartfelt tribute. Zaman Dayı, grappling with his past actions, seeks redemption through fervent prayers at the cemetery, hoping to find the girl he once divided between two paths. Botan, forging an unexpected bond, befriends the caretaker of the cemetery, tirelessly scouring the area for a connection to his father's final resting place.

3. *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (Şahbaz's Extraordinary Year 1979)

Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979 (Şahbaz's Extraordinary Year, 1979) is the third novel by Mine Söğüt, initially published in 2007, and it consists of two parts. The first part includes twelve separate months, each of which features Şahbaz narrating "extraordinary" stories to a woman who "was about to die when Şahbaz found her" (Söğüt, 2022b, p. 20). Before starting the first part, Söğüt presents a story in which Hacer is killed by her twin brother, Mustafa, while she is dancing naked. The second part serves as an almanac of news reports that Söğüt collected from various newspapers throughout the entire year of 1979.

The stories narrated by Şahbaz to the tormented woman he rescued from imminent death within the confines of the "Üç Kapılı Han" (The Three-Door Inn) include tales that delve into Turkey's collective trauma, where each violent death has a profound impact on both the collective and personal identity of the characters.

While the novel touches upon tragic deaths and acts of violence through its subplots, the central focus revolves around three siblings: Melih and Semih, twins, and Emine, their half-sister, who later changes her name to Mehtap. Melih emerges as the malevolent force behind all the wicked deeds. As the story unravels, readers discover that during their childhood, Melih and Semih were coerced into killing their older sister, who was believed to be immoral. Following this tragic event, Semih loses his memory, while Melih continues to commit these murderous acts. Furthermore, Melih cunningly shifts the blame onto his brother Semih, who remains unaware of the events due to his amnesia. Mehtap (formerly Emine), their half-sister, unexpectedly encounters both brothers, unaware of their familial relations, just as Melih is about to

kill Semih. Initially, she engages in a sexual encounter with Melih, but he fails to ejaculate. Subsequently, Mehtap sleeps with Semih, resulting in her becoming pregnant with twins. Mehtap decides to abandon her daughter and keeps the boy, although she never develops genuine affection for him and constantly regrets her decision. It is stated that Melih planned to kill Mehtap after seeing a picture in her room, which readers learn is a picture of her father and mother, which allows Melih to be aware of their kinship. As part of his habitual behavior (murdering his sister and many women), Melih also plans to kill Mehtap. However, Semih intervenes, revealing that Mehtap is carrying his child, although Semih knows the truth, which prevents Melih from executing his plan. In the later stages of the first part, Melih manages to take Burak to his house and custody of the child whom Melih has in combat camps. Tragically, Melih succeeds in killing his half-sister Emine, who is Burak's mother.

In the basement of the Three-Door Inn, Şahbaz takes care of a wounded woman, offering her nourishment in the form of a specific fruit each month, which he grows in his garden. Despite her inability to speak due to her wounds and bruises, she manages to respond to the stories Şahbaz shares with her. Her body remains covered in unhealed wounds, pus, and blood from the tortures. Şahbaz's narratives revolve around the evil prevailing outside - a vicious world where the city is engulfed in terror, people dump dead bodies in dumpsters, and terrifying scenes of dismembered heads are discovered in cinema halls.

4. *Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey* (Madam Mr. Arthur and Everything in Her/His Life)

Madam Arthur Bey ve Hayatındaki Her Şey (Madam Mr. Arthur and Everything in Her/His Life) is Söğüt's fourth novel, which was initially published in 2010. Olcayto, a young novelist facing a creative struggle, tries constructing a narrative based on photographs he acquired from a second-hand bookseller. These pictures become the foundation for his transgender character, Madam Mr. Arthur, who is the center of dark and malevolent events in Turkey. The events take place non-linearly; however, all the characters are intermingled with each other in a way. Madam Mr. Arthur's evil persona takes center stage, arranging all malevolent acts and occurrences in the narrative. The character's romantic partner, Keşşaf Hanuman, is also her/his accomplice in these evil

acts, a photographer capable of capturing Madam Mr. Arthur's vivid imagination on film. Despite the novel's fable-like nature, the novel's setting appears to reference the 1990s era through the novel's details, such as the fall of iron countries and events in Turkey, rendering the events a touch of the genuine.

The novel has a nested structure, containing a story within a story, which makes it difficult to express the complexity of events. As Olcayto begins writing, he is mysteriously summoned to the gloomy Dark Mansion (Kara Yalı) by the mysterious figure of Madam Mr. Arthur. The character demands that Olcayto write and create a new life for her/him since s/he claims to have forgotten her/his past. S/he also provides a bag of photographs as a clue to her/his previous experiences. After returning to his hotel room, where he stays, Olcayto feels exhausted and decides to take a deep and relaxing sleep. Upon waking up, he is filled with curiosity. He decides to examine the photographs he obtained, with the wish of delving deeper into the life of Madam Mr. Arthur, the central transgender character of his upcoming book. However, his expectations of finding ordinary details like friends, families, and dinners are shattered once he comes across horrifying images.

In the photographs, a name catches Olcayto's attention: Keşşaf Hanuman. He searches the phone book for any information related to this person and discovers only one individual with the same surname: Şehnaz Hanuman. Intrigued, Olcayto arranges a meeting with her, hoping to gain more insights into Madam Mr. Arthur and Keşşaf Hanuman.

During their meeting, Şehnaz reveals that she has never met her father, although he has always provided financial support. Olcayto and Şehnaz meet in a patisserie and then visit Keşşaf Hanuman’s grave in the cemetery, during which she learns that her father's lover was a shemale. She invites Olcayto to her house, intending to initiate a sexual encounter, but when Olcayto does not come up, she ends up sleeping with a shemale she encounters on the street named Deniz. Later, it is revealed that Deniz had left his village under unconventional circumstances, being taken away "on the lap of a truck driver in the middle of the night" (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 121).

Deniz's path crosses with Olga's when they meet unexpectedly at a hairdresser's where Olga works after she runs away from her country. Olga, a fugitive from the Iron

Curtain countries, mistakenly believes Deniz to be her long-lost daughter-son. Overwhelmed with emotion, Olga tries to communicate with Deniz, experiencing excitement she had not felt in a very long time, even “when she mistakenly thought she was in love with a soldier who had raped her” (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 122). Their intimacy leads them to share the same house despite not being related. After a while, Deniz's brothers raid the house, assuming Olga to be a pimp involved in selling their brother. In the process, they brutally beat her to death, unaware of her true intentions and mistaken identity, and they dump her from the trunk of their car in front of the Dark Mansion in the middle of the night. Noticing a moving thing in the middle of the street, Madam Mr. Arthur runs to the street and takes her to the room under the stairs in the Dark Mansion, where they have lived together for years. He starts calling Olga “Maria.” Escaping from the Iron Curtain countries, Olga encounters various forms of violence described explicitly in the novel.

Later in the novel, there is a knock on the door of Olcayto's hotel room. When he opens it, he recognizes Nagehan, a sex worker across the street whom Olcayto has been observing from his window. However, due to the non-linear progression of the novel, this encounter with Nagehan is not the first time readers come across her.

In the novel's opening scenes, Nagehan is depicted conversing with a fortune teller in the hotel lobby where she both resides and works. The fortuneteller claims to have wings emerging from apparent scars on her back. Although the fortuneteller believes these scars give rise to wings, the receptionist reveals that “her son stabbed her in the back upon confronting her mother engaging in sexual activity with a client” (Söğüt, 2022c, p.13).

From the meeting with Nagehan, Olcayto learns about a person who might know about Madam Mr. Arthur and Keşşaf Hanuman. This person is called Kedileş (Cat Carcass) who got this name since “He murdered cats. He disintegrated and cooked them over the fires in the remote corners” (Söğüt, 2022c, p.138).

As the narrative continues, Kedileş avoids directly answering Olcayto's inquiries, advising him to keep his distance from Madam Mr. Arthur and Keşşaf Hanuman. Kedileş feels unease at Olcayto’s appearance and questions his secret past with them. That unease and fear he feels upon this is similar to “when his wife, whom he would

beat mercilessly whenever he felt like it, suddenly started coughing one day and lay in feverish agony for a week before dying" (Söğüt, 2022c, p. 131). As the story progresses, it is revealed that Kedileş is the one who has carried out Madam Mr. Arthur's dark deeds, and the three of them have been accomplices in committing various evil acts together. These dark deeds have had a sense of politically driven ones.

Madam Mr. Arthur, driven by jealousy, kills his lover Keşşaf Hanuman and Ruhat, fearing that Keşşaf might develop stronger feelings for Ruhan. In a complex and twisted turn of events, Keşşaf and Ruhat engage in a sexual encounter with Nagehan simultaneously, leading to her becoming pregnant with two children. These children are later identified as Olcayto and Şehnaz, the former belonging to Ruhat and the latter to Keşşaf. Söğüt skillfully intertwines these seemingly disparate narratives, gradually revealing connections and deepening the complex tapestry of characters and events throughout the novel.

In the novel's conclusion, Maria wakes up one morning to discover Madam Mr. Arthur dead in his bed, unaware of who the killer might be. Olcayto appears there in the Dark Mansion, as well. Maria's story unravels: Long ago, she slept with Madam Mr. Arthur and got pregnant with a girl whom Madam Mr. Arthur took away from him. This girl is Nagehan, Şehnaz's and Olcayto's mother. In the end, unexpectedly, Olcayto appears in the bed, donning Madam Mr. Arthur's clothes as if he has taken his place, and they both feel they are stuck in that mansion, unable to go out.

5. *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (The God of Others)

Söğüt's latest novel, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (The God of Others), published in 2022, revolves around four individuals and a baby who, despite their diverse backgrounds, find themselves brought together in a coffeehouse that they feel expelled to leave soon due to its imminent demolition. The story begins by introducing the character of Şair Musa (Musa the Poet), who inexplicably decides to leave his wife and child. While wandering the streets, he comes across and falls in love with Efsun Abla (Sister Efsun), a disabled woman who supports herself by begging.

As the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that Sister Efsun intentionally amputated her legs to prevent her young lover, Devran, from selling her into prostitution. Unfortunately, her extreme act does not reach the intended conclusion, and Devran abandons her: “She cut her legs herself. A few years ago. Because of Devran. For Devran. Despite Devran. Devran, a man, who does not love her much” (Söğüt, 2022d, p. 14). Another character named Adnan Abi (Brother Adnan) is introduced to the readers. Adnan suffers from amnesia and has no recollection of his past or personal identity.

Hülya is described as the fourth character, a drug-addicted sex worker who resides in the attic above the coffeehouse. Occasionally, she visits the coffeehouse to have a cup of tea. Musa, Efsun, and Adnan, the other three characters, live together in the deteriorating coffeehouse. Their living situation changes when they discover a baby's cry from the garbage dumps near the stairs after making love near the city walls. They rescue the baby from the garbage and name her "Matruşka."

From that moment onwards, their focus shifts to caring for and protecting the baby. They register Matruşka under Hülya's name at the population registry office, as she is the only potential mother figure among the group. Meanwhile, before the baby's arrival, Musa violently kills Devran, Efsun's former lover, who abandoned her after she became disabled.

In the subsequent stages of the novel, it becomes apparent that Hülya hesitates to discuss her relationship with violence. However, there is a pivotal moment where she opens up about it, which serves as both the first and the last time she shares this information. Readers and the other characters learn that Hülya witnessed her father brutally murdering her mother in her presence.

Söğüt handles this revelation without excessive dramatization, providing a glimpse into the circumstances surrounding the murder. The novel delves into the disturbing reality that Hülya's father had a habitual pattern of physically abusing her mother, inflicting bruises and causing her to bleed. Tragically, it was not only her mother who suffered from his violence, as Hülya was also subjected to his beatings. These harrowing acts got more violent when Hülya was just ten years old and “when his father stabbed her mother to death in twenty-one different parts of her body” (Söğüt,

2022d, p. 76). Following the loss of both her parents, Hülya begins to live on the streets.

The novel revolves around the characters' struggle to survive, especially for the baby, after leaving the building that served as their shared home. They make a living through begging, stealing, and sex work. As the story nears its conclusion, they stumble upon an abandoned and dilapidated house where they seek shelter for the night. However, upon waking up, they discover that Matruşka, the baby they had cared for, is missing. Musa, filled with concern and urgency, goes out in a hurry, searching for the baby, desperate to find her.

In the final chapter, Musa awakens in his familiar, conventional life with a family and a job. He drinks coffee and smokes on the balcony before heading off to work. While at the subway station, he notices a woman in a wheelchair begging for support.

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

GİRİŞ

Bu çalışma, Mine Söğüt'ün romanlarını Julia Kristeva'nın teorik çerçevesinde inceleyerek, kadın ve queer kimliklerin çok yönlü portrelerini tematik ve yapısal olarak ele almayı amaçlıyor. Böylelikle hedeflediği Söğüt'ün anlatılarının, okuyuculara sunduğu tema ve yapıyla dönüştürücü etkiye sahip olabilme etkisini araştırmaktır.

Bu giriş bölümü, tezin çerçevesine bir giriş bilgisi sağlarken Türk edebiyatının dönem içindeki Dünya edebiyatı ile dönüşümü çerçevesinde, özellikle kadın karakterlerin temsiliyeti bağlamında ele alıp erken dönem ikiliklerinden çoklu kimliklere kadar olan süreci tartışıyor. Böylelikle tez, Mine Söğüt'ün çağdaş Türk edebiyatı ve akademideki önemine odaklanıyor, onun edebi katkılarını, gazetecilik çabalarını ve eserlerinin siyasi sonuçlarını vurguluyor.

Genel olarak Söğüt'ün anlatıları, toplum normlarına, ataerkilliğe ve devletin egemenliğine uyum sağlamayan ve dolayısıyla toplum dışına itilmiş karakterlere odaklanıyor ve okuyucuya onların bakış açısıyla deneyimleme olanağı sunuyor. Söğüt, bu karakterlerin hikayelerini kullanarak toplumsal normları, ataerkilliği ve devletin geniş sosyo-politik alanı içindeki güç yapılarını eleştirmeyi amaçlıyor. Bu çalışma ise, tüm bu eleştiri sürecinde, onun eserlerinde yaygın olan temaları- korku, şiddet ve geleneksel olmayan ilişki ve yaşam tarzları- tartışıyor ve bunların nasıl yazınının imzasını oluşturduğunu gösteriyor.

Söğüt'ün eserleri hakkında pek çok akademik çalışma mevcut; bu çalışmalar folklor, kadınlık ve delilik, metinler arası bağlantılar, feminizm ve marjinalleştirilmiş karakterler gibi pek çok konuya odaklanıyorlar. Ancak bu tez diğerlerinden, Kristeva'nın bakış açısını kullanarak farklılaşıyor ve özellikle iğrenç (abject) ve semiyotik (semiotic) konseptlerine odaklanıyor. Bu farklılaşma sayesinde metinlerin

dinamik yapısı ve dönüştürücü özellikleri vurgulanıyor ve bu kavramların Söğüt'ün romanlarında marjinal karakterleri devrimci bir şekilde nasıl tasvir edebileceğini araştırmak ve bu karakterler üzerinden toplumsal adaletsizliklere dikkat çekmek ve sosyal değişimi savunmak mümkün kılınıyor.

Tez, beş bölümden ve bir ekten oluşuyor. İlk bölüm metodoloji olarak ele aldığı feminist edebiyat eleştirisi içinde Fransız feminist edebi eleştirisine genel bir özet ile başlıyor ve teorik çerçevede faydalandığı Julia Kristeva'nın dilin semiyotik ve sembolik işlevleri ile iğrenme (abjection) kavramlarına odaklanıyor. Sonraki iki bölüm boyunca, Söğüt'ün eserlerini Kristeva'nın gözlüğünden tema ve yapısal açıdan inceleyerek devam ediyor. Bu çalışma tematik analiz kısmında, Söğüt'ün eserlerinde şiddet ve şiddetin formlarına; engellilik ve evsizlik temalarına, deli kadın karakterlerine ve toplumda tabu olarak konumlandırılan ilişki türleri performe eden karakterlere odaklanıyor. Diğer bölümde ise, Söğüt'ün kullandığı geleneksel olmayan anlatı biçimlerine odaklanırken, geleneksel dil normlarını sorgulayan Söğüt'ün anlam iletmek için dil-dışı unsurlara vurgu yaptığını vurguluyor.

Sonuç olarak bu tez, Kristeva'nın bakış açısının Söğüt'ün eserlerinin ele alınmasında eleştirel bir anlayış sağladığını ve okuyucuları toplumdaki rahatsız edici temalarla ve güç dinamikleriyle yüzleşmeye teşvik ettiğini vurgulayarak sona eriyor. Söğüt'ün hikayelerinin toplumsal farkındalık yarattığını ve baskıcı normları eleştirdiğini, okuyucuları kurumsal değerleri sorgulamaya çağırdığını savunuyor.

TEORİK VE KURAMSAL ÇERÇEVE

Bu bölümde Mine Söğüt'ün romanlarını analiz ederken metodoloji olarak kullanılan feminist edebiyat eleştirisi üstüne bir özet sunup Fransız feminist edebi eleştirisinin getirdiği farklılıklara odaklanılıyor. Bu odak ile Fransız feminist eleştirisinin kökenleri, gelişimi ve Julia Kristeva'nın teorileri üzerinde duruluyor.

Feminist edebi eleştiri, kadınların edebi metinlerdeki temsillerini, cinsiyet kalıplarını ve kadın deneyimini mercek altına alarak toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliklerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlar. Bu bağlamda, Virginia Woolf gibi öncü yazarların eserlerine değinilerek feminist eleştiri tarihî bir perspektifle incelenir.

Fransız feminist eleştiri, özellikle 1968'deki sosyo-politik değişimlerin etkisiyle şekillenmiştir. Jacques Derrida ve psikanaliz gibi düşünürlerin fikirleri, bu akımın temelini oluşturur. Bu eleştiri, kadın eşitliği yerine farklılığı vurgular ve ikili karşıtlıkları dekonstrüksiyonla çözmeyi hedefler. Özellikle Fransız feminist eleştirinin odaklandığı önemli figürler arasında Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray ve Julia Kristeva bulunur.

Julia Kristeva'nın teorileri, bu çalışmanın merkezinde yer alır. Kristeva'nın "semiyotik (*semiotic*)" ve "iğrenç (*abject*)" kavramları, Söğüt'ün romanlarındaki temaların ve yapısal unsurların analizinde kullanılır. Bu teoriler, marjinalleşmiş kadın ve queer karakterlerin deneyimlerini anlamak için dilin ve sembollerin gücünü vurgular.

Söğüt'ün romanlarında sıkça karşılaşılan rahatsız edici temalar, Kristeva'nın iğrenç kavramı üzerinden incelenir. Kadın karakterlerin fiziksel, cinsel ve kurumsal şiddetle karşılaşması, marjinalleşme ve dışlanmaya nasıl katkıda bulunur, bu konular detaylıca ele alınır. Ayrıca, romanlarda yer alan savunmasız ve akıl hastası karakterlerin temsili incelenerek, bu kavramların nasıl oluşturulduğu ve sürdürüldüğü anlaşılmaya çalışılır. Kristeva'nın iğrenç kavramının bu temalar üzerinden uygulanmasıyla, toplumsal ve kültürel analizlere yeni bir boyut eklenir.

Ayrıca, Kristeva'nın semiyotik kavramı, Söğüt'ün romanlarının yapısını anlamak için kullanılır. Romanlardaki yapısal analizler; metinlerarasılık, tekrarlar ve gerçek ile hayal arasındaki belirsizlikler olarak sınıflandırılan semiyotik bozulmalar aracılığıyla incelenir. Bu analizler, Fransız feminist eleştirisinin disiplinler arası doğasını vurgular ve dil ile psikanaliz teorilerinin nasıl kullanılabileceğini gösterir.

Bu çalışma, Söğüt'ün romanlarını Fransız feminist eleştiri açısından ele alarak, dilin, sembollerin ve psikanaliz teorilerinin metinlerin altında yatan derinlikleri ve karakterlerin deneyimlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini anlamayı hedefler. Feminist edebi eleştiri perspektifinden bakıldığında, bu analiz, marjinalleşmiş kimliklerin temsillerini ve toplumsal yapıların bu kimlikleri nasıl etkilediğini keşfetmek için önemli bir araç olabilir.

Julia Kristeva’nın, dilin anlam oluşturmada sürecinde dilin semiyotik ve sembolik moduna değinir. Kristeva’ya göre, semiyotik olan, dilin sözel ve doğrusal olmayan,

ritmik olan, bedensel ritimler, duygular ve dürtülerle ilişkilendirilen yönlerini ifade eder. Bu, daha ilkel, bilinç öncesi iletişim seviyesidir. Diğer taraftan sembolik, yapılandırılmış, düzenlenmiş dil ile ilgilidir ve dilbilgisinin, kuralların ve toplumsal normların içinde gerçekleşen iletişim şeklidir.

Kristeva, anlamlandırma süreci için dilin bu iki moduna da ihtiyaç olduğundan bahseder. Bu anlamlandırma süreçleri her ne kadar rasyonel ve normatif olan ile ilişkilendirilse bile, semiyotik kesintilere süregelen bir şekilde maruz kalır ve bu durum kaçınılmazdır.

Ayrıca Kristeva, dilin iki işlevi olan semiyotik ve sembolik kavramlarını sunarken, her iki dil işlevinin birbirine bağımlı olduğunu ve herhangi bir anlamın sadece semiyotik ya da sadece sembolik olamayacağını vurgular. Bu dinamik etkileşim ve bağımlılık, anlamın sadece kurallardan kaynaklanmadığını, duygusal süreçleri, sessizlikleri, kahkahaları ve bedensel ifadeleri de içerdiğini gösterir.

Bu durum, Kristeva'ya göre, edebi pratiklerin, çoklu ve çoğul anlamların uygulanmasına olanak tanımasını ve normları ve kurulmuş düzenleri aşan anlam çeşitliliklerine izin verdiğini vurgular. Çünkü semiyotik kesintiler sembolik düzeni altüst eden, onu sorgulayan ve devrimci eylemleri teşvik eden bir potansiyele sahiptir. Tüm bunlar da dilin toplumsal yapıları analiz etmek için önemli bir araç olarak işlev görebileceği anlamına gelir. Doğal olarak, dilin bu şekilde işleyişi, sembolik düzenin dışına çıkarak hegemonya ve baskı sistemlerini bozabilir.

Bu bilgilere ek olarak, Kristeva'nın dil üzerine görüşleri, bilinçaltı ve özne oluşumu arasındaki ilişkinin de derinlemesine anlaşılmasını gerektirir. Çünkü semiyotik kavramıyla ilgili olarak, Kristeva, enerji ve dürtüler konusunda Freudcu psikoanalitik düşüncelere atıfta bulunur ve Lacan'ın dilin bilinçdışı ile olan ilişkisi üzerine olan yorumlarından beslenir. Dilin sembolik ve semiyotik arasında yapılan ayrımı Lacan'ın imgesel ve sembolik kavramlarıyla ilişkilendirilir.

Sonuç olarak, sembolik ve semiyotik arasındaki ayrım, öznenin birlikte yaşayan yaratıcı ve yıkıcı güçlerine yol açar. Bu anlamda, semiyotik, toplumsal ve normatif olana tehdit oluşturduğu için daima baskı altına alınır ve kontrol edilir; ancak tam

anlamıyla kontrol hiçbir zaman mümkün değildir. Semiyotik kesintiler aracılığıyla düzen ve kural olan yıkılır ve alternatif gerçekliği ortaya sunar.

Tezde işlenen bir diğer Kristeva kavramı ise *iğrenç (abject)*tir. Kristeva, bu kavramı *Korkunun Güçleri* adlı eserinde işler ve ona göre *abject/iğrenç* karşı derin ve saldırgan bir isyan olarak nitelendirilebilir. Bu kavram, dış veya iç kaynaklı algılanan bir tehdide karşı tepki olarak ortaya çıkar. İğrenç kavramı bireyin kişisel kimlik oluşumunda oldukça önemli bir role sahiptir. Kristeva, bu kavram ile *sembolik (symbolic)* düzenin öncesindeki bir aşamayı vurgular ve *iğrenmenin (abjection)* kişisel sınırların ve anlam oluşumunun belirlenmesinde kritik bir rol oynadığını savunur. Bu kavram, insan deneyimindeki belirsizliği vurgulayarak, tanımlanması zor unsurların birleştiği bir alanı ifade eder.

Dolayısıyla *iğrenç*, insan deneyimindeki karmaşıklığı ve belirsizliği vurgulayan bir kavramdır. *İğrenme* ise kişisel sınırların belirlenmesinde, ötekinin varlığını inşaa etmede, tutarlı ve bütünlüklü bir öze tehdit sunan herhangi bir varlığın belirlenmesinde kritik rol oynar. *İğrenç* olan ile karşılaşmak, bireyin sınırlarını bulandırır, kimliğini ve benliğini sorgulamasını sağlar ve kendi ile öteki arasında oluşturduğu çizgiyi yeniden şekillendirmesini sağlar.

Kristeva'ya göre, *iğrenç* ile karşılaşmada, edebiyat, önemli bir rol oynar. Özellikle modern yazarlar, sınırları bulanıklaştıran ve bireyin kimliğini, toplumsal yapıları sorgulayan unsurları işleyerek *iğrenme* kavramını derinlemesine incelerler. Dostoyevski, Lautréamont, Proust gibi yazarlar, bu unsurları keşfederek tabuları ve bastırılmış duyguları ifade etmek için edebiyatı kullanır.

MİNE SÖĞÜT'ÜN ROMANLARINDA RAHATSIZ EDİCİ TEMALAR ARACILIĞIYLA İĞRENCİ (ABJECT) ONAYLAMAK

Mine Söğüt metinlerinde, özellikle ölüm, şiddet, karanlık ve çaresizlik gibi temalara odaklanarak, toplumun kenarında yaşayan ve marjinalleşmiş bireylerin deneyimlerini anlatmaya odaklanır. Onun eserlerinde *iğrenç* olarak kabul edilen konuları ve karakterleri işlerken, okuyuculara bu unsurlarla yüzleşme ve kabul etme fırsatı sunar. Ayrıca, Söğüt'ün karakterleri geleneksel olarak "iyi" ve "kötü" arasındaki ayrımlardan uzak, daha karmaşık ve gerçekçi bir şekilde yansıtması da vurgulanmaktadır.

Bu kısımda *iğrenme* kavramı aracılığıyla toplumsal dışlanmayı inceleyerek, bu konseptlerin toplumsal ve siyasi kimlikler üzerindeki etkilerini açıklanır. Söğüt'ün eserleri, marjinalleştirilmiş bireylerin hikayelerini anlatarak, toplumun dışlanmış kesimlerine dikkat çeker ve okuyucuların bu konularda farkındalık kazanmasını sağlar.

Söğüt'ün metinlerinin, okuyucuların katılımcı bir şekilde okumalarına izin verdiği ve kendi anlam dünyalarını oluşturduğu vurgulanır. Bu şekilde, okuyucular metinleri çeşitli açılardan yorumlayarak, kendi bakış açılarıyla metni anlama ve değerlendirme şansı bulurlar.

Son olarak, bu bölüm Türkiye'deki belirli toplumsal dinamikleri ele alırken, kadınlar ve queer gibi ötekileştirilmiş grupların yaşadığı zorlukları inceler. Bu analiz, toplumdaki cinsiyet, cinsellik ve etnik kimliklerin etkileşimini ve bu grupların marjinalleştirilmesini derinlemesine ele alır. Bölümde genel olarak abject olanın varlığının kabulü ve onun konumunu sorgulama üzerine analiz yapılır.

Bu analizde kadınların toplumda karşılaştığı şiddet türleri ve bunun Söğüt romanlarında işlenmesine odaklanılır. Şiddet türlerinin vurgulanmasındaki amaç, katmanlı ve çok yönlü olarak uygulanan şiddetin Söğüt'ün bahsi geçen beş romanında derinlikli işlendiği üzerinedir. Söğüt'ün anlatılarında, özellikle kadın bedenlerine yönelik fiziksel ve cinsel şiddetin sonuçları vurgulanıyor ve bu şiddetin güç ilişkileriyle nasıl ilişkilendirildiği inceleniyor. Örneğin, Söğüt'ün ilk romanı *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2023) karakterlerin geçmişlerindeki şiddet olaylarına odaklanıyor ve bu olaylar, okuyucuları rahatsız edici abject doğasını ele almaya yönlendiriyor.

Söğüt'ün anlatılarında, toplumsal normların ve bireylerin kimliklerinin nasıl sorgulandığı ve dönüştürüldüğü vurgulanıyor. Özellikle, şiddetin sadece bireylerin yaşadığı bir durum olmadığı, aynı zamanda toplumsal ve yapısal bir boyutu olduğu üzerinde duruluyor. Kadınların şiddete daha açık olduğu ve bedenlerinin kontrolünü kaybettiği vurgulanırken, bu durumun kültürel ve toplumsal baskılarla nasıl şekillendiği ele alınıyor.

Söğüt'ün anlatılarındaki şiddet örnekleri, toplumdaki belli normları ve bu normların yarattığı baskıları ortaya koyuyor. Özellikle, kadın bedenlerinin geleneksel güzellik

standartlarına uyma baskısının altını çiziyor ve bu durumun yarattığı travmaları ve izleri okuyucuların gözleri önüne seriyor. Sonuç olarak, Söğüt'ün anlatıları toplumdaki şiddetin farklı yönlerini gözler önüne sererken, bu şiddetin abject doğasını ve güç ilişkilerini sorgulamaya ve eleştirmeye yönelik bir bakış açısı sunuyor.

Bu bölümdeki diğer bir başlık olan engellilik ve *iğrenç* kavramı arasındaki ilişki üzerine. Bu alt bölümde engelli veya dezavantajlı olma kavramının genellikle zayıflıkla ilişkilendirildiği ve bu tür anlatılarda engelli bireylerin değerinin azaltıldığı vurgulanıyor. Bu durum, toplumda engelli bireyleri, kirli veya sağlıksız olarak gösteren ve genellikle dışlayıcı bir yaklaşım sergileyen abject kategorilerine dahil ediyor.

Örneğin, Söğüt'ün en son kitabı, *Başkalarının Tanrısı* (2023), ana temasını, kalıcı bir yuvası olmayan bireylerin üzerine kuruyor. Bu bireyler, dilencilik, hırsızlık ve seks işçiliği gibi yollarla geçimlerini sağlamaktadırlar. Kitap, özellikle dezavantajlı kişilere yönelik şiddete karşı yasal korumanın eksikliğini eleştiren bir nitelik taşıyor. Roman, şehirde amaçsızca dolaşan ve diğer insanlar ile resmî kurumlar tarafından görmezden gelinen evsiz karakterlere odaklanıyor. Örneğin, karakterlerden biri olan Efsun Abla, genç sevgilisi Devran tarafından fuhuşa satılmasını engellemek için kendi bacaklarını bilinçli olarak kesmiştir. Ancak bu radikal hareketi istediği sonucu getirmez ve Devran onu terk eder. Bu durum, yaşamın kırılganlığını ve savunmasızlığını işaret ederken, abject bir biçimde tehdit ve rahatsızlık hissi yaratır. Engelli bir karakterin varlığı, engelsiz bireylerde bir tehdit duygusu uyandırarak, kendi kimliklerine yönelik bir yara açar.

Söğüt'ün bu anlatısı, sadece fiziksel şiddeti değil, aynı zamanda toplum içindeki engelli bireylerin dışlanmasını eleştiren bir nitelik taşır. Engelliliğin bu şekilde tasvir edilmesi, toplumsal dışlanmayı ve bunun arkasındaki etkenleri aydınlatırken, okuyucuların dezavantajlı kişilerin yaşadığı izolasyonu ve dışlanmayı da anlamalarını teşvik eder.

Diğer bir alt bölüm deli kadınlık ve abject arasındaki ilişki üzerine odaklanıyor. Söğüt karakterlerinin deliliğini aktarırken onların yaşadığı travmatik deneyimlere vurgu yaparak ve bu deneyimler ile kadınlık arasında bir ilişki kurarak delilik üzerine daha derinlikli düşünmeyi ve süreci anlamlandırmayı teşvik ediyor. Özellikle ilk romanı

olan *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (2003) her bir bireyin hikayesini hem kendi ağzından hem de kurumsal ağızdan okuyucuya aktarıyor. Karakterlerin yaşadığı akıl hastalığına sebep olan etkenlerin toplumsal boyutlarına odaklanan Söğüt, akıl hastalığının kadın ve çocuklar üzerindeki toplumsal ve cinsiyetçi baskılarla nasıl şekillendirildiğini gözler önüne seriyor.

Söğüt'ün bu anlatısı aracılığıyla okuyucu, egemen kültürün baskılarına direnerek marjinal durumdaki kişilerin hikayelerine bir de onların gözüyle bakmayı deniyor ve toplumsal olarak dışarıda tutulmalarının oluşturduğu yaralanmayı daha iyi analiz edebiliyor.

Kitapta hikayeleri anlatılan bu farklı karakterlerin akıl hastalığına sürüklenme süreçleri genellikle aile içi şiddet, cinsiyete dayalı ayrım ve şiddet gibi olumsuz etkilerle bağlantılı. Söğüt'ün tüm bu insanlık hallerini gerekçeleriyle birlikte sunması ise, baskın güç sahibi grupların bakış açısından öte, marjinalleştirilen ve güçsüz bırakılan bireylerin bakış açısını sunuyor. Sonuç olarak bu tarz bir anlatı da baskıcı ideolojileri ortadan kaldırmak için farklı sesleri duymanın önemini okuyucuya vurgulamış oluyor.

Söğüt, akıl hastalığının bulunduğu bu karakterle okuyucuları yüzleştirerek aslında abject ile yüzleşmeye olanak sağlıyor. Bu yüzleşme, insanın içsel durumu üzerine ışık tutmak için bir araç olarak kullanılıyor. Genel olarak Söğüt, eserlerinde, abject ile mücadele etmek yerine onu açığa çıkararak toplumsal normları ve önyargıları sorgulamayı sağlıyor. Bu sorgulama da baskıcı önyargıları eleştirerek dönüştürmeyi de beraberinde getiriyor.

Abject bölümünde incelenen bir diğer alt başlık ise normatif olanın dışında ilişkiler sergileyen kişilerin Söğüt romanlarında oldukça yaygın bir yer alması üzerine, toplumun kabul etmeyi pek yeğlemediği bu ilişkilere odaklanıyor. Söğüt'ün eserlerinde, cinsel ilişkiler de dahil olmak üzere, sıra dışı insan ilişkileri sıklıkla abject unsurlar olarak tasvir ediliyor. Örneğin, *Kırmızı Zaman* (2022a) adlı ikinci romanında, Leon karakteri, içinde yaşadığı toplumun uygun bulmadığı bir evlilik dışı ilişki sonucunda doğmuş ve bu nedenle çevresi ve ailesi tarafından utanç kaynağı olarak kabul edilmiştir. Toplum, bu türden ahlaki normları ihlal eden unsurları reddetme veya yok etme eğilimindedir çünkü toplumun düzenine tehdit oluştururlar.

Ancak Söğüt, bu durumları okuyucuya aktarırken, aslında abject olanın ahlaki normlar ve toplumsal beklentilere bağlı olarak göreceli olduğunu da vurgular. Kültürel normlar ve tabular, toplumsal güç dinamiklerine göre yapılanır ve toplumun tehdit olarak algıladığı bu unsurları belirler. Bu durum da abject unsurların göreceliliğini ortaya koyar.

Yazarın eserleri, toplumun kabul ettiği normlara meydan okuyan ilişkileri detaylı bir şekilde ele alırken, aynı zamanda abject unsurların sorgulanmasının ve toplumun geniş bir bakış açısına sahip olmasının önemini de vurgular. Bu ilişkilerin, toplumun geleneksel görüşlerini zorlamasına rağmen, farklı ve çeşitli yaşam formlarını kucaklamanın ve çeşitliliği genişletmenin önemini ortaya koyar.

SEMİYOTİK VE SEMBOLİK ARASINDAKİ ETKİLEŞİM: MİNE SÖĞÜT ROMANLARINDA GELENEKSEL OLMAYAN ANLATIM UNSURLARI

Bu bölüm, Söğüt'ün metinlerindeki sembolik ve semiyotik anlamlar arasındaki etkileşimi ele alıyor. İlk ve ikinci alt bölüm, Söğüt'ün romanlarındaki semiyotik unsurları inceliyor ve geleneksel anlatı yapılarına göre semiyotik kesintileri vurguluyor. Semiyotik ve sembolik arasındaki etkileşimin, mevcut güç dinamiklerini sorgulayıp bireysel ve toplumsal düzeyde bastırılmış ve bilinçaltı olanlara ses verme yeteneği olabilir mi, bunu analiz ediyor.

Son bölüm ise, Söğüt'ün anlatılarındaki belirsizlikleri inceleyerek, bu belirsizliklerin, kurulmuş normları sorgulama ve direniş kaynağı oluşturabileceğini analiz ediyor.

İlk olarak analiz edilen semiyotik kesinti Söğüt'ün metinlerindeki "metinler arasılık" barındıran unsurlar üzerinedir. Söğüt eserindeki bu unsurlar, metnin metinler arasındaki etkileşim ve uygulamalara odaklandığını belirtir. Tipik metinlerarasılık tanımları metinler arasındaki etkileşimlere odaklanırken, Kristeva'nın bakış açısına göre metinlerarasılık daha çok iki veya daha fazla anlam sistemini birbirine geçmesiyle oluşur (Lechte, 2012). Dolayısıyla, Sögüt'ün anlatılarını incelerken kültürel ve metinsel referanslara odaklanılıyor.

Örneğin, Söğüt'ün romanları sıkça fabl unsurları içerir; bu yaklaşım, anlatı akışını izleyici için daha tolere edilebilir hale getirmeyi amaçlar. Bu fabl benzeri unsurlar, mitolojik öğeleri içerir ve anlatının altında yatan anlamları ve eleştirileri gösterir.

Ayrıca Söğüt, eserlerinde aile içindeki baskıcı dinamikleri sorgular ve kadınların erkek çocuk doğuramamaları nedeniyle maruz kaldığı baskıları eleştirir. Metinlerinde aile içi psikolojik mücadelelerin, aile üyeleri arasındaki sevgi eksikliğinden kaynaklandığını vurgular.

Diğer bir alt başlık olan tekrar unsurları da Söğüt'ün sıklıkla başvurduğu bir edebi yöntemdir. Belirli unsurların tekrarı aracılığıyla o olaylara daha da yoğunlaşmamızı sağlar.

Söğüt'ün geleneksel dil kullanımından kaçınması sembolik düzenin temsil ettiği yasalar, kurallar ve düzenlemelere başkaldırmayı ima eder. Benzer şekilde, bu araçlar bastırılmış bilinçaltı arzuları, dilekleri ve korkuları yüzeye çıkarır. Bu nedenle, bu araçları analiz etmek, bir metnin dinamiklerini anlamanın ve belirtilen olayın arkasındaki psikolojik ve toplumsal dinamikleri çözmenin kritik önem taşır.

Söğüt sıkça kelime bozulması, tamamlanmamış cümleler ve kelimeleri içerir; ek olarak, tekrarlı ifadeler, onun anlatılarında standart edebi araçlardır ve belirli olayı daha derin ve yoğun bir şekilde vurgular.

Bir diğer alt başlık altında incelenen, gerçek ve hayal arasındaki belirsizliğin Söğüt'ün eserlerinde sıkça işlenmesi yazarın okuyucuyu daha aktif bir role doğru yönlendirme talebi üstünedir. Söğüt'ün bilinçli olarak bıraktığı belirsiz sonuç, gerçeklik ve kurgu arasında okuyucuları havada bırakır. Bu niyetli yaklaşım, okuyucuların romanlarındaki olaylardan rahat bir şekilde ayrı tutmalarına olanak tanır. Sonuç olarak, bu strateji, ele alınan konular üzerine daha güvenli bir düşünme sürecini teşvik eder. Ayrıca, olayların gerçekliği konusundaki kasıtlı belirsizlik, okuyucuları ele alınan konular ve temalar hakkında derin düşüncelere sevk eder.

Belirsizlik, semiyotik alan bozulduğunda ortaya çıkar, baskı altına alınmış unsurların yüzeye çıkmasını sağlar. Belirsizlik ve kesinlik birbirine dolanmıştır; ne biri diğerinden üstün tutulur. Örneğin, *Şahbaz'ın Harikulade Yılı 1979* (2022b) adlı eserinde belirsizlik, Salih ve Melih karakterlerinde de ortaya çıkar. Başlangıçta Salih, ilişki kurduğu her kadının yok olmasından sorumlu olarak tasvir edilir. Ancak hikaye ilerledikçe, bu iddia reddedilir ve sonunda şiddetli eylemleri gerçekleştiren kişinin Melih olduğu ortaya çıkar, hatta yarı-kardeşi Emine'ye karşı bile şiddet uygular. Daha

sonra ortaya çıkan olaylar, Salih ve Melih'in çocukluklarında başka bir kız kardeşlerini öldürmeye karıştıklarını gösteriyor. Bu olay, onları gölgeliyor ve bellek kaybına neden oluyor ve kötü niyetli özelliklerin gelişmesine yol açıyor. Bu bilgiyle birlikte kadın cinayetlerini Salih'in mi Melih'in mi gerçekleştirdiği kesin olarak bilinmemektedir. Sonuç olarak, Söğüt, bu bağlamda belirsizliği kullanarak okuyucuların bireylerin yetiştirildiği kültürel ortamlardan kaynaklanan kötü eylemlerin etkisini düşünmelerini sağlamayı amaçlar.

SONUÇ

Bu çalışma, Mine Söğüt'ün romanlarının temasal ve yapısal olarak, Kristeva'nın abject ve semiyotik kavramlarını uygulayarak dönüştürücü ve direnç kazandırıcı işlevlerini keşfetmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Söğüt'ün yazılarının protesto niteliğinin, romanlarının temaları ve yapıları üzerinden gözlemlenebildiği ve toplumda marjinalleşmiş kadınlar ve queer kimliklerin karşılaştığı çeşitli şiddet ve adaletsizlikleri ortaya sunan sosyal ve feminist temalar kullandığı sonucuna varılabilir. Abject ve semiyotik teorilerine odaklanan bir Kristeva analizi, güç hiyerarşileri tarafından yapılandırılan toplumsal cinsiyetin daha derinlemesine bir analizini sağlar. Bu nedenle, Söğüt'ün anlatılarını adil olmayan güç ilişkilerinin nasıl yapılandırıldığını temsil eder, bunu okuyucuya sunar. Okuyucuya bunu sunarak sosyal farkındalığı tetikler. Ve haksız güç ilişkilerine eleştirel bir bakış sağlar.

Anlatıları, toplumun dışına itilmiş bireylerin marjinalleşmelerine katkıda bulunmaz; aksine, onların karşılaştıkları günlük engeller ve maruz kaldıkları muameleler aracılığıyla kendi seslerini duyurmalarını sağlar. Uzun süredir suskun kalmış karakterlerin konuşmasına izin vermek, genellikle göz ardı edilen bu karakterlerin çok katmanlı şiddet biçimlerine maruz kaldığını hatırlatır. Bu karakterler genellikle, toplumsal değerlere uymayan kadınlar ve queer bireylerdir. Bu değerlere uygun olsalar da bu kadınlar ve queer bireyler, patriarkal norm ve değerler tarafından sürekli şiddete maruz kalır, baskılanır ve ayrımcılığa uğrarlar.

Söğüt'ün romanlarında sunulan marjinal karakterler ve şiddetin rahatsız edici doğası, haksız güç ilişkilerinin sergilenmesinin yanı sıra, belirli şiddet biçimlerinin fark

edilmemesi ve cezalandırılmamasının da bir göstergesidir. Tematik ve yapısal olarak gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine analiz, Söğüt'ün anlatılarına gömülü olan dekonstrüktif gücü gösteriyor. Bu araştırma, edebiyatın dinamizmini ve toplumsal farkındalık ile dönüşüm işlevini göstererek, literatüre önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunuyor. Aynı zamanda sınırlamaları ve zorlukları tanıyarak, daha fazla araştırmayı teşvik ediyor ve edebiyatın toplumsal değişimi teşvik etme gücünü keşfetmeyi amaçlıyor.

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TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (**İngilizce** / English): A Kristevan Reading of Mine Söğüt's Novels

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