ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

POLITICS OF IDEOLOGIES: POPULAR CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL TRANSITION IN *THE SEPTEMBERS OF SHIRAZ* AND *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN*

Jayasree Mukherjee Lahiri
The English and Foreign Languages University (Erstwhile)
jayasreemukherjee8@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper studies the impact of political transitions on the private life of citizens, through the lens of literature. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the secular, republican nation-state of Turkey (1923) are cases in point studied with reference to two representative novels from the respective countries: Dalia Sofer's The Septembers of Shiraz (2007), and The Other Side of the Mountain (2000) by the eminent Turkish writer, Erendiz Atasü. The paper concludes that irrespective of the essential difference in the ideologies motivating the political transitions in question, situations in both the countries turned out to be equally oppressive for the citizens at a personal level. The motivating ideologies being collectivist in essence, subordinate the real interests of the people to the imagined interests of the abstraction, called the "State", making popular welfare a secondary issue in national politics.

In the twentieth century, political reformative movements in the Islamic countries have primarily occurred with reference to a baffling issue: the viability of a rule of religion (Islam) as an effective political order. The efficacy of the Islamic regulations as principles of administration has been brought into question by such alarming factors as the obsolescence of some of the religious prescriptions which fail to address the emerging needs of the changing times and situations and offer little room for political arbitration; the oppressive theocratic governments restricting the scope for pluralism and drastically curtailing civil rights in some of the Islamic Republics; and the repeated occurrence of sectarian conflicts in different parts of the Islamic world at various points of time. The sense of inadequacy with a theocratic political order has been further corroborated by the increasing success of secularism as a political principle, exemplified through the system of democracy in the West.

However, the adoption of a Western political ideal entails the larger project of emulating the underlying principles governing the civil societies in the West. The project necessitates serious compromises with indigenous (which, in case of Islamic nations, is largely rooted in the religion) traditions and, hence, comes with the threatening baggage of establishing the hegemony of Western culture in many a sphere of civil life. The tricky choice, therefore, lies between the binaries of cheering for a homocentric, populist political rule and preserving the cultural integrity of the people.

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

The choice involves another consequential danger. Islam is not merely a system of spiritual beliefs, it is a lifestyle. The injunctions documented in the *Qur'ān*, the holy text containing the divine revelations received by Prophet Mohammad, the messenger of God (*Allāh*), encompasses almost every aspect of human life—personal, conjugal, familial, social, cultural, economic and political. In addition to it, there remains the *Hadīth*, a body of imperatives derived from the teachings of the Prophet; and the *fiqh*—the Islamic system of jurisprudence. They together make Islam a self-contained world order which its affiliates are supposed to abide by. Hence, implementing a secular political rule would jeopardize the verities of Islam, not only as a system of faith, but also as a code of living. It would destabilize the cultural foundations of the Muslims at a generic level.

It is in response to this dilemma that the Islamic nations, the world over, have been consistently juggling with various possible models of administration through an admixture of religious conservatism and liberal democratic principles in different permutations and combinations to determine the ideal system. Today, the wide variety of ruling systems prevalent in the Islamic countries across the world, exhibit this experimentation, ranging from theocracies (like Iran) to secular democracies (like Azerbaijan and Turkey).

Iran and Turkey are two countries that have taken a decisive, but diametrically opposite stand on this issue. Divesting itself of the legacies of a centuries-old dynastic rule (the Ottoman Empire, 1299-1923), Turkey emerged as a secular, republican nation-state in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Shah (1881-1938) (better known as the *Atatürk*, meaning "Father of Turks"). The move was guided by the Kemalist agenda to transmute a Sultanate into a modern nation-state that would "live as an advanced and civilized nation in the midst of contemporary civilization" (Ahmad 53).

In sharp contrast to Turkey, her neighbor, Iran became the first nation to opt for a theocratic (Islamic) regime led by an Ayatollah (Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, 1902-1989). The Revolution of 1979 was motivated by the emergent need to salvage the national politics, culture and economy from the growing influences of Western imperialism promoted by the pro-Western Pahlavi regime (1925-79)[1]. Hence, Turkey's transformation from a Sultanate to a republican nation-state and the Revolution establishing Iran as an Islamic Republic are instances of political transformations effected by the two ideological extremes in politics in the Islamic world today--secular democracy and theocracy, respectively. The two nations have experienced political upheaval of comparable magnitude but contrastive consequences in due course of the twentieth century. The radical change in political values resulted in equally drastic changes in the nature as well as the intensity of state regulations exercised on the citizens in both the countries. The differences in the nature of the outcome were only due to the essential difference in the political ideologies inciting the revolutions.

This paper attempts to study the two political phenomena with reference to their repercussions on the ordinary humanity through the lens of literary texts. Literature being creative in nature, allows room for subjective treatment, thereby providing a humane understanding of the phenomena. The animating touch of fiction further aids the reader's imagination and facilitates better comprehensibility and empathy on the part of the reader.

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

The Other Side of the Mountain (Turkish: Dağin Öteki Yüzü 1996; Trans. Elizabeth Maslen 2000), the Turkey's most prestigious award-winning (Orhan Kemal Novel Prize) novel by the acclaimed writer, Erendiz Atasü (1947-present) and *The Septembers of Shiraz* (2007) by Dalia Sofer (1972-present) are two semi-autobiographical novels which serve as representative texts from Turkey and Iran respectively. Their temporal backdrop, thematic relevance and, most importantly, their autobiographical aspects (outlined in the authors' personal notes to the readers) make them fitting subjects for studying the popular consequences of the Turkish transition into a nation-state and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 respectively.

The novels provide an "insider's perspective" of the condition of life lived during times when the severity of political regulations begins to jeopardize the civil rights of the citizens and limit the scope of individual discretion. Under such circumstances, politics transgresses its stipulated jurisdiction of public domain and comes to have a decisive influence on some of the innocuous day-to-day activities of the civilians. It is then that the terms "political" and "personal" cease to have different meanings for the civilians who are allowed to function only as political entities. It is this all-encompassing avatar of national politics that these narratives seek to delineate, taking the cue from the authors' first-hand experiences. First, they help the reader to compare and comprehend the ramifications of political movements propelled by religious fervor on the one hand, and secular interests on the other; second, they substantiate the conclusive role played by ideologies in the upshot of a radical political makeover.

Though temporally speaking, the Turkish Struggle of Independence preceded the Revolution in Iran, I would like to take up the Iranian case first. This is because the exacerbating influence of religious zeal in a mass mobilization can hardly be overemphasized. History bears evidence (in forms of the crusades and the *jihād*s) to the inherent propensity of religion to whip up communal disharmony by dividing people along the lines of faith and commanding passionate participation in the combat in the name of God. Moreover, Islam has been repeatedly accused of begetting fundamentalist practices, thanks to the terroristic activities carried out by the Muslim extremist groups across the world. Hence, it is not difficult to imagine the possible consequences when a system of faith (Islam) is adopted as the principle of public administration in a country.

So first, let's try to gauge the kind of social order perpetuated by the post-Revolutionary theocratic rule in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) through Sofer's narrative. *The Septembers of Shiraz*, a novel largely inspired by the author's childhood memories, is circumscribed within the frame of a single tempestuous year in the history of Iran—September 1981-September 1982. In this novel, which brought the prestigious PEN/ Robert W. Bingham Prize to its debutant author, Dalia Sofer conjures up a panorama of the social reality in post-Revolutionary Iran through a collage of snapshots of a wide array of characters, especially the political prisoners. With the ascension of the clerics to power in 1979, agency shifted to the conservatives, earlier ostracized by the pro-Western Pahlavi regime (1925-79). The empowered revolutionaries initiated a project of weeding out the pets of the ex-regime, "the perpetrators of cupidity and wantonness", in the name of restoring the

moral integrity of an Islamic nation, and silencing all dissenting voices as a means to consolidate a rule of clerical absolutism in Iran (Azimi 365). The project was a part of the larger plan of raising a devout Shi'i nation which, in the long run, would join hands with the rest of the Islamic nations and declare a world-wide *jihād* (an armed fight in the name of religion) against the imperialism of the West.[2] The novel explicates how religion, invigorated with political power, is capable of becoming a tool of torture in the hands of a theocratic regime.

Isaac Amin (a character largely inspired by the plight of Sofer's father)—a flourishing Jewish gem merchant under the Pahlavi regime—is taken hostage by Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*) on charge of being a Zionist spy[3]. The prison, where Isaac is convicted, harbors people representing the different ideological factions in the society, such as, the communists: young Ramin [whose parents are killed for being *Tudeh* (communist)] is accused of throwing red paint on a mullah and gets shot eventually; and Mehdi, who suffers the same fate as Ramin, after being in captivity for eight months. Then, there are the ex-regime loyalists: the ex-court pianist, Vartan Sofoyan, who meets with a similar destiny as Ramin and Mehdi; Hamid—a low-ranking general from the Shah's army; and Reza—one of the Revolutionaries and an active participant in the Hostage Crisis[4], but now jailed by his comrades for assisting his father, a minister of the Shah, in fleeing Iran. Besides, there are people with dubious allegations like old Muhammad and his three daughters held up in the women's block—one, on charge of being a communist, the second, an adulteress, and the third, for being the sister of the first two convicts. The range of charges as well as the socio-political backgrounds of the convicts exemplifies what Amin Saikal observes in "Islam: Resistance and Reassertion":

> . . . resurgent Islam is directed not only against outside imperialisms and ideologies, but also against elite groups within Moslem countries who are viewed as having sacrificed the eternal verities of Islam in exchange for the luxuries of a westernized existence. These elites are viewed as practical surrogates for the ideologies of liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism with which resurgent Islam is in conflict at a conceptual level. (194)

The variety of allegations leveled against the convicts suggests that a Fascist project of social cleansing was operative in Khomeinist Iran. The Khomeini government had set itself the task of eradicating the beneficiaries of the ex-regime (like Isaac and his brother-in-law, Keyvan), the "infidels" (like Javad, a wine smuggler and Isaac's brother, and Ali Reza Rasti, a Professor of Philosophy, whose file is discovered by Shirin from the basement of her friend, Leila's house) and anyone who is *deemed* not to be a "devout" Muslim or an active champion of the mullah regime. The establishment of a theocratic order implies bestowing religion with the legality of political regulations which, in its turn, acquires an aura of unassailability thanks to the religious coloring. Hence, once the mullahs were hailed as the legal heads of the state, they were officially authorized to utilize religion as the pretext for legitimizing their oppressive policies in the garb of promoting "pan-Islamism" and establishing the divinely ordained "rule of Islam".

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

Also, with Islam becoming the principle in power, it becomes the dominant ideology--the principle *of* power. It divides the national population into the hegemonic categories of the "Norm(al)" and the "Other", the latter being the anomalous fraction to be eliminated for the attainment of homogeneity and national integration. In Iran, it took the form of a rigorous program of gratuitous captivity, unrelenting torture, flogging and indefinite detainment in unspeakable living conditions, the only alternative to execution or firing. Hence, the only way to escape being convicted was to cease to be the "Other" and enlist oneself in the good books of the dominant group. It is thus that Isaac finds his way out of the prison. He prudently quotes from the *Qur'ān*, the verses attesting to the immateriality of wealth, and promises to donate the savings of his lifetime to the cause of the Revolution. In prison, which harbors the "moral convicts" of the theocratic state, the *Qur'ān* is the only text allowed to be read for the spiritual ablution of those gone "astray" and praying is mandatory for all Muslims. For rebels like Ramin and Muhammad, death is the only destiny. There was, thus, a passive but relentless religious conversion program operating in the jails of post-Revolutionary Iran. So a rule of religion (Islam) that was preached to be the only antidote to Western imperialism and the singular means to revive the indigenous culture before the Revolution[5], was now serving as a means to torture a section of the people in the name of generating a nation of devout Shi'is.

Afflictions, however, were not restricted to the convicts. The tremors of trauma that they sent across the fabric of the society affected its every strand. The unwarranted house raids, which began as preludes to the arrests, became a pretext for harassment, vandalism and robbery. A brief extract from the description of the raid at Isaac's house elucidates this point:

> When he [a Revolutionary Guard] is done with Isaac's side of the closet he turns to hers [Isaac's wife's], adding her dresses and sweaters to the pile on the floor. He smiles when he gets to her underwear, retrieving the pieces one by one and holding them in the air just for a moment before throwing them to the floor. He picks up a box of sanitary pads, peeks inside it. . . . Then, noticing a pair of onyx cufflinks in an open box on Isaac's nightstand. . . . [Later says] "Nice . . . very nice . . ." He takes the cufflinks and drops them in his pocket. "It's evidence," he says. (132-33)

With a similar attitude of impudence that comes from being a Revolutionary Guard of the ruling regime, Morteza, a former employee at Isaac's office and the son of Habibeh, the maid at the Amins', breaks into Isaac's office in his absence and in association with the rest of the employees, strips it of all its assets in broad daylight.

Such open threats to life and property deprived millions of Amins of their sense of security, peace of mind and freedom of speech and movement. People ceased to even try to anticipate when and what might attract the attention of the Revolutionary Guards and qualify them for an arrest. Thus, when the curio dealer, Shahriar Beheshti, opines that the schools should have continued to teach the *Shahnameh* to inculcate a sense of patriotic pride in the minds of the young generations, Isaac's wife, Farnaz whispers, "Be careful", "You never know who's listening". Shahriar replies despondently, "But I am so tired, Amin-khanoum. Sometimes I just want to scream" (217).

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

The threat of destruction that hangs like a huge cloud of horror over the cities permeates into human relationships. Huddled up in the cell, as Isaac tries to catalogue his lost treasures, he realizes:

> In the two years since the uprisings he has lost much—four employees who fled, his dear friend Kourosh . . . and things less concrete, like his desire to touch his wife, his interest in his daughter's grades, or the memory of places he once meant to visit. (10)

Besides, the television, "with its wretched footage of his country coming undone street by street" (5) becomes another gateway for the tensions pertaining to the public domain to creep into the private arena. On the other hand, Isaac's sister and brother-in-law, Shahla and Keyvan, keeps discussing the option to flee to Switzerland to Keyvan's parents, but Shahla is reluctant to part with their hard-earned wealth and honor in Iran. The couple is compelled to escape when Shahla encounters an acid attack on her way home from the hairdresser's, apparently for keeping her headscarf slack.

The relation between Farnaz and her maidservant, Habibeh and that between Isaac's daughter, Shirin and her friend, Leila unveils another dimension of the problem: the clash between the ruling squad and the beleaguered half of the population is not simply one of faith and philosophy. Rather, the issues are the upshots of a larger project of retaliation that has its roots in economics—the inequitable distribution of wealth—and the malpractices of the ex-regime. The tables having turned post-1979, agency shifts to the conservatives who now take it out on all those who "lived well under the Shah". The perspective becomes evident in the words of Morteza, son of Habibeh:

> This isn't about one man. It is about a collection of men—men who turned their backs to injustice, men who profited from a corrupt government, men who built themselves villas and traveled whenever they pleased to places the likes of me have never even heard of. God has answered the prayers of the weak. (163)

The vial of contempt that Morteza pours into the ears of his mother brings Habibeh to confront Farnaz: "I don't think what we have is friendship. I believe it's tolerance, and habit. Like animals in a forest, we have learned to live with one another" (79). On his release, Isaac finds his beach house by the Caspian Sea given away by the Government to a revolutionary. When questioned, comes the prompt reply from the occupant, "I serve the revolution, and I didn't have a decent house. You serve only yourself, and you have two houses. It makes perfect sense that, like you, I should have a comfortable house", followed by the threat, "Now if you are not happy, all of us . . . can hop in my Jeep and pay a visit to the Revolutionary Guards" (307). When the balance of power tilts in favor of a section of population in a nation/society, it provides every member of the section an upper hand over every "Other". Authority is the incentive power awards to its wielders.

A boast of victory, similar to that of Morteza and the occupant of Isaac's beach house, is also echoed in the words of Leila's father—the man who previously worked in a morgue and is now a Revolutionary Guard. Leila, friend of Isaac's daughter Shirin, reports her father to have said, "I went from being at the bottom of the garbage chute to being at the top. . . .

Finally *I* decide who goes down" (181). Mohsen, one of the primary interrogators in the prison, also happens to be one of the victims of the SAVAK's (the central security agency of Mohammad Reza Shah) brutal torture. He, who had served a long term in the same prison and lost his right index finger to torture, now brings his little son to scamper around the prison as a trophy of survival of himself and his faith. Therefore, it might be said that what followed as a corollary to the religious revival in Iran is a rise of the "proletariat" of the Pahlavi Era.

However, in spite of the ideological divide that lay at the root of the social tensions in post-Revolutionary Iran, the novel suggests that eventually, the scales did fall from the eyes of at least a few of those who believed the theocratic regime to be the panacea for all problems. The characters who could look through the trying circumstances and diagnose the real issues include, amongst others, Mehdi, who echoes the disenchantment of millions of his comrades who were swayed by the patriotic exuberance of being the agents of the much-desired change in the course of the Iranian political history, but could hardly anticipate the malpractices of a clerical government:

> There was a feeling that something was happening, and that we were the ones who were making it happen. We wanted to put an end to the monarchy. We thought we were cheering for democracy… In the end, we unleashed a monster.
>
> (123-24)

Leila initially basked in the glory of her father's spirited patriotism and moral integrity (who made her believe that the prisoners were sinners), only to eventually realize the hypocrisy of the whole affair when she finds her father drinking—an act he has had always condemned as immoral and sinful (against the Islamic law). Leila's sense of disillusionment is shared by Habibeh. Though momentarily blinded by her son's cant of injustice and exploitation, Habibeh discerns the duplicitous motives of her son and his associates when he gets his cousin (sister) arrested on charge of being a communist. She, therefore, concludes with prophetic wisdom: "This revolution is destroying families" (325). The novel ends in conformity with Sofer's childhood experience. Being robbed of almost all of their property and following the examples of millions of Iranian families of the time, the Amins flee Iran with the help of smugglers.

The fact which, therefore, emerges from the discussion of Sofer's narrative is that the change of regime in 1979 in Iran hardly brought about any amendment in the equation between the state and the body politic. The situation has been aptly described by Laith Kubba, "regimes change while authoritarianism remains". In support of his claim, Kubba opines, "The Shah was no democrat, but the revolution against him reproduced authoritarianism in a new and deadly mixture of religious dogma and street power" (39). It is only the oppressor and the oppressed who exchanged places while tyranny continued to reign supreme in Iran before and after the Revolution.

Nevertheless, the differences which the ushering of a theocratic political order made to the civil life in post-Revolutionary Iran can hardly be understated. With the proclamation

of religious regulations as the principles of state policy, piety became the parameter of legal judgment in the IRI. The state's adoption of piety as the fundamental principle of civil and political society equated it with the otherwise unrelated concept of virtue. It imposed a specific way of life on the civilians regardless of their personal beliefs and preferences, thereby foreclosing the scope for pluralism and religious non-conformism in post-Revolutionary Iran.

While religious authoritarianism can be seen to have performed its expected separatist function in Iran, political transitions effected without the invocation of religion can also turn out to be no less telling for the citizens of a nation. The fact that a radical change in the mode of administration, involving an enthusiastic project of refurbishing the civil society after the Western model, is capable of begetting equally trying circumstances at the grassroots level is exemplified in Erendiz Atasü's *The Other Side of the Mountain*. Atasü has woven the novel out of the contents of the letters exchanged between her parents during the 1930s and 40s which she accidentally discovered after her mother's death. The text is thus imbued with the essence of lived realities of a phenomenal period in the history of the Republic of Turkey—the time when, disposing off the antiquated systems of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, Turkey emerged as a sovereign republican nation-state and was struggling with the teething problems of a change in the form of government and the administrative challenges faced by a nascent nation-state.

The foundation of the young nation was vulnerable due to the plaguing adversities resulting from a series of war suffered towards the late Ottoman Era, including World War I and the Turkish War of Independence (May 19, 1919 – July 24, 1923) that had irreversibly altered the geographical as well as the demographical constitution of the country. Moreover, the new Republic's frenzy to rub her shoulders with the Super Powers through securing membership of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the EU (European Union) ended up entangling Turkey in their power play. The Republic of Turkey, therefore, had to wage a struggle for survival at two levels: first, developing a national infrastructure befitting a sovereign nation-state; and second, preserving national sovereignty from the clutches of the Super Powers. This made Turkey's foreign policy a tricky affair. Turkey, as a new-born state, was in need of the benefaction of the Super Powers to better establish herself, and simultaneously had to be on guards against getting trapped into their ensuing intra-group rivalry, which would jeopardize the foundations of a budding nation. The government of Turkey was, thus, required to be in complete control of situations at the domestic as well as the international front. A novel situated against the backdrop of such a historical conjuncture depicts the kinds of demands which the State made on its citizens in order to facilitate her interests.

Here, it is the Hayreddins who occupy the centre stage. The Hayreddin family is an archetypal example of the refugees evicted from Salonika after the Greek annexation of Macedonia and Thrace during the Balkan War[6]. The Macedonian Hayreddins are made to migrate to Anatolia as per the Turko-Greek Population Exchange Agreement[7] (1923) following the Turkish War of Independence. Vicdan, the protagonist and the character modeled after Atasü's mother, Hadiye, serves as a multi-faceted lens in the hands of the

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

author to project the varied dimensions of the form of citizenship enforced by the Kemalist regime—a member in the Kemalist "army of enlightenment"; a "New Republican Woman"; a staunch Kemalist; a mindful citizen; and a member of the state-commissioned teaching team at the Village Institutes. Hailing from a family which, in spite of losing much to the Balkan War including their home and the father, zestfully supports the nationalists, Vicdan struggles to assume the collected composure, strength of character, poise and dignity demanded of the "New Woman" of Republican Turkey. The traumatic days of her childhood, suffused with fear of patrolling Greek soldiers and their shocking treatment at the hands of the nationalists—especially, the sight of a Greek soldier executed by the nationalists: "a hanged man with his swollen, purplish feet, his protruding tongue" (45)—conveyed to her the horrors of the irrational, virulent enmity fomented by the War. But being raised by an iron-willed mother, Fitnat Hanim, she is forbidden to express her anguish, a gesture which Fitnat considers to be a matter of "sin" and "shame" when the country's sovereignty is at peril. Thus, Vicdan is taught to prioritize her political identity of a cognizant citizen of the state quite early in life.

Vicdan's service to the nation begins on getting selected as a member in Kemal Shah's "army of enlightenment". She (like her real-life counterpart, Atasü's mother, Hadiye, who went to the University of Oxford in 1929 on state-funding) is one of the meritorious students to win the national scholarship in 1929 to take graduate lessons in English literature at the prestigious University of Cambridge and import the distilled essence of the European ethos to the nation which is set to regenerate its man-power resource drastically reduced by the succession of battles recently waged. Her education is, therefore, more of a political obligation than a personal aspiration.

Being the representatives of a nation that has achieved sovereignty only after steering clear of the manipulative strategies of the Super Powers, including England, Vicdan and her companion, Nefise Celal, are required to measure their steps, not as individuals, but as envoys of "the only country that dared to say 'No!'" to imperialism during World War I. "Did you ever fall in love or consider marrying an Englishman?" "No, never", comes the reply from Vicdan Hayreddin when interviewed by a British daily in 1935. The reason being, "I was in love with my country" (54). This aspect of the Kemalist citizenship has been confirmed by Jenny B. White: "Love and passion in the early Republic were to be subordinated to love of nation" (154). Thus, love, in line with education, became a politicized institution in early Republican Turkey.

Nefise, on the other hand, manifests an alternative reaction to the citizenship obligations imposed by the Kemalist regime. In fact, she is one of the first characters in the narrative to feel the way political obligations persistently haunt the citizens with an overbearing sense of duty. Unlike Vicdan, Nefise being never used to repression, feels an irresistible desire for Ted Campbell, an English Lieutenant. But soon, she is brought back to her senses by Vicdan, "How on earth can you, *a citizen of the Turkish Republic*, think of marrying an officer of the British Empire?" (emphasis added) (59). Nationality, or better still, international relations, thus, becomes the protocol for inter-personal relationships, including love, in a situation as that in the Kemalist Republic. In circumstances such as this, nationality

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

comes to color one's individual identity as citizenship supersedes selfhood. So Vicdan reminds a love-struck Nefise of their contract to return to their country and teach for twelve years to repay the national scholarship.

Through Vicdan and Nefise, Atasü further sketches the haunting sense of "homelessness" that tormented the band of refugees generated by the Balkan War and the Turkish War of Independence. Living thousands of miles away from home, in England, as homesickness overtakes Vicdan, she wonders:

> 'Where is home?'. . . . Alaşehir, the small Anatolian town that betrayed her father? Or is home the interminable dormitories of the boarding-schools? Or her mother's household, number 8, Sakizağaci Road? Or the beloved seaside town (Salonika) she lost when she was only two years old? (57)

On the other hand, Nefise's mind oscillates between "the shabby market" of the small town in Central Anatolia where she used to sell lemons as a child after her father's death, "the dilapidated wooden house with a leaking roof", or in much broader terms, South-Eastern Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, İzmir, the Black Sea coast, Istanbul and Ankara. Her mind, like Vicdan's, keeps assessing the relative sense of (in)security evoked by each of these names. Their recurrent feeling of homelessness, when probed into, reveals the fact that "home"—a domain of safety and security—has become a transcendental concept for the Hayreddins and the likes of them. Being the citizens of a state whose boundaries get repeatedly reconfigured through intermittent warfare, "home" becomes an eternally deluding mirage for Vicdan and Nefise.

The "politics" of home, or broadly speaking, regional identity continues long after families like the Hayreddins settle down in Anatolia. The fact that discrimination on the basis of regional origin continued to exist in Turkey even after about fifty years following the Balkan War is exemplified through Burhan. Vicdan's second younger brother, Burhan, mentions "İzmir" as his place of birth in his birth certificate, instead of Salonika, the Macedonian town, to evade the regional bias against the "overseas" Turks and establish himself as a lawyer. The "sea", it seems, continued to function as an insurmountable barrier, ghettoizing the segment of population which crossed it decades ago.

In Vicdan's husband Raik, the character modeled after Atasü's father Faik, the reader gets a peek into the conditions of life endured by three different categories of citizens in early Republican Turkey—the millions of refugees generated by the Czarist invasion of Trabzon; the participating soldiers in the World War II; and the state-appointed inspectors of the mass literacy project. During the Czarist invasion, Raik, a child of ten, had to flee his hometown with his family, in a boat. Raik, a victim of the continual combat that ripped Turkey during the early twentieth century, lost two of his brothers to the Great War[8]. His memories of the brothers who froze to death during the Caucasian invasion continue to haunt his psyche in the form of nightmares. With the outbreak of World War II, Raik gets conscripted to Gallipoli and Vicdan is left to wrestle with her anxieties and solitude in the forlorn Sihhiye quarter of Ankara. Her anguish becomes apparent in one of the letters she writes to Raik in 1941: "Sleep is out of the question for me until you return. Every night I go to bed with the anguish of, 'What if we enter the war tomorrow?'" (24).

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

Once the combat at Gallipoli gets over, Raik is sent off on tours across the country as a school inspector by the Ministry of Education. Through his letters to Vicdan, Atasü attempts to provide a glimpse of the deplorable conditions of living which the state-employed teachers were fated to endure. In January 1945, Raik writes from Konya:

> Vicdan, the room I share here with three colleagues . . . is claustrophobic; . . . the ceiling leaks badly. The weather is exceedingly cold. We are trying to keep warm beside the dilapidated brazier, the smell of which gives us all headaches. We are all longing for our homes and families. . . . However, we hide our burdens of weariness in our hearts and do not utter words of complaint to each other, doing our best to carry out the duty the state has commissioned us to perform. (264)

A further obligation imposed on the youths of the new Republic is compulsory service in the national army (a state mandate since 1927, Gürbey 376) to safeguard Turkey's territorial integrity in the face of ensuing international political disruption. The possible consequences of such a directive at a personal level are portrayed in Reha, the eldest son of Fitnat. The horrific experiences at the front rend the nerves of Reha—a born romantic with a lovelorn, tender heart—once he gets drafted into the military. On being posted in Dersim, all he can brood over is his separation from his lady love, Yildiz. However, his reverie gets soured by the memories of "the purplish, crimson flesh of the murdered soldiers . . . frozen hands, arms, legs and penises" (102) that he witnesses at a checkpoint raided by the rebels. Much like Raik, Reha is the other soldier who is continually tormented by the haunting memories of war.

In "Islam, Nation-State, and the Military: A Discussion of Secularism in Turkey", Sinem Gürbey says, in spite of the Kemalist separation of religion from politics, the professional morale of the Turkish army was laid in the religious concept of martyrdom. Ahmet Hamdi Akseki's book, *Askere din Kitabi* (The Book on Religion for the Soldier) written as the moral guide for the Turkish soldiers valorizes fighting for the nation as *jihād* and martyrdom as a service to God (*Allāh*) and accords the martyrs a status only next to the Prophet (Gürbey 377). The martyrs are also promised an afterlife in heaven. The secular state, thus, attempted to elicit the dedicated service of its army in the name of religion Martyrdom hangs as the Holy Grail before young Lieutenants like Cumhur Özgecan, the son from Fitnat Hanim's second marriage and the First Lieutenant of the Korean War (1950-1953), inspiring them to willfully march down to the valley of death.

Vicdan's mother, Fitnat Hanim—the character inspired by Atasü's grandmother, Elmas Hanim--is the representative of two dominant citizen-types in Republican Turkey: a republican mother and a war-widow. In Fitnat, the reader perceives the model "Republican mother" promoted by the *Atatürk*[9]. Being the classical nationalist mother, Fitnat plays the prime muse of patriotism to her children, admits her sons into the military academy and takes pride in her daughter's selection in the Kemalist "army of enlightenment". Fitnat names her new-born from her second marriage, "Cumhur" (meaning "the Republic" in Turkish) as an accolade to the new Republic. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, nations in which the

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

"identities and ways of life (of the citizens) gradually grow compatible with the demands of the nation-state and support its growth" are cases "[w]here the nation-state is ideologically successful" (267). Characters like Fitnat, thus, testify to the success of the Kemalist political ideology.

Fitnat is an archetypal war-widow in a nation trapped in a sequence of intermittent warfare. She represents the section of war-widows who, in spite of having lost everything to the wars, still dare to place the political cause above the personal and continue to render unremitting services to the motherland. Testing times toughen a frail, angst-ridden Fitnat into an iron-willed, intrepid Kemalist who risks her home, husband and, finally, the children to the cause of the country. Fitnat is the woman who shields her three children in the face of the Greek invasion and expulsion from Salonika, bars the doors to the Greek palikar against arresting her husband, moves to her brothers' place in Istanbul with the fatherless children and dons a black scarf as a mark of mourning throughout the term of occupation. A true nationalist at heart, Fitnat refuses to savor the dissolute opulence at her brothers' mansion at a time when her nation has been recurrently subjected to the acid tests of the Balkan War, World War I, the War of Independence, and decides to remarry the first suitor who asks for her hand and move out.

However, in Fitnat one also perceives the sequel to such sacrifices—the frustrated hopes and the associated sense of disillusionment with the government. The government forgets to pay Fitnat's due compensation for the loss of her property in Salonika as per the Turko-Greek Population Exchange Agreement. Fitnat is left to reminisce her prosperous past and lament her lonesome present steeped in poverty and despair in her derelict house at Sakizağaci Road—the only property that Fitnat was granted as compensation by the government.

In his article, "War and the Nation-State", Michael Howard says that a nation-state entwines its citizens in an irrevocable contract of committed self-sacrifice—a feature exemplified by almost each of the characters in the novel. The strategy which Howard identifies as one of the basic prerequisites for the survival of a nation-state is said to be weaved into the very idea of a "nation". Howard says,

> . . . an evil prince could be disowned; allegiance could be renounced or limited. But how could this be done with a Nation that was simply an extension of oneself, the embodiment of the General Will? (102)

This attitude which David Luban calls, the "Romance of the Nation-State", impresses the citizens with the idea that national sovereignty endows the people with their "most important entitlement: a state that expresses their traditions, history and unity" (392) and hence, embodies the core essence of their racial identity. "Nation" is, therefore, accorded the status of an entity worthy of any and every form of sacrifice.

The novel, thus, chronicles the ordeals of a populace undergoing the arduous process of evolution from subjects to citizens, whose foremost duty is to participate in the process of fortifying the newly-laid foundation of the state. The situation exhibits a paradoxical relation between the body politic and the State to which the citizens serve both as a resource to accomplish her aspirations and also as mere currency units which the State is authorized to

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

spend, save and exchange in international power transactions. As for the citizens, their nationality gets the better of individual identity, as their duty towards the motherland precludes deliberation—a condition effectively substantiated in Atasü's narrative with an eye to its consequences.

In conclusion, it may be said that set against the backdrops of precarious political conditions, the novels have turn out to be especially informative about the conditions of civil life sustained during some of the peak phases of political maelstrom, not just in the history of the nations in question but that of the world. Such volatile political ambiances are seen to be accompanied by a necessary tightening of state regulations when the State comes to enforce her duty of popular control with enhanced rigor. While political protocols limit the scope for arbitration, the tension bred by national and/or international conflicts makes its pulse felt behind the closed doors. In providing a faithful picture of such states of affairs, the texts reassure the relevance of literature as a subjective sociological document—a trend that is increasingly gaining prominence in contemporary academics.

However, the fact which emerges from reading the novels against the respective socio-political milieus of the IRI and the Republic of Turkey is that there exists a generic semblance lurking under apparent peculiarities. While civil life appears to be equally distressed by political mayhem in both the countries, the difference in the kinds of adversities faced owes itself to the nature of state control exercised on the citizens. Then again, the adopted policies of the states were largely guided by the kinds of goal the states set to themselves. Thus, the state-commissioned persecution of a section of population in Iran was the direct outcome of the proclamation of Islamic regulations as the principle of governance, which, in turn, was the means to generate a devout Shi'i nation which is to lead the world-wide *jihād* against the imperialist West. The move foreclosed the scope for pluralism on the one hand and unleashed a centrifugal force in the fabric of the Iranian society on the other, pitting the fellow Iranians against each other on the basis of individually professed ideologies. In contrast, driven by its obsession to emerge as a modern nation-state, comparable in merit to the Super Powers, Kemalist Turkey commanded an unfailing devotion to the cause of the nation-state. The nation-state was accorded the status of the "Absolute" at whose service, all sacrifices were due.

But in spite of the essential contrast in the states' intent behind popular control, when looked at from a civilian's perspective, the intensity of political authority exercised on an individual equaled in their enormity in both the countries in question. If more patient attention is paid to the policies adopted by the states—the Khomeini regime's aim of generating a pan-Islamic Shi'i nation and the Kemalist craze to secure a membership in the EU and the NATO—it becomes evident that they were both guided by an imagined international face which the regimes aimed to impart to their respective states. While for the Khomeinists, it was an Islamic Republic, for the ardent nationalists of Kemalist Turkey, it was a "modern nation-state" emulating the European model. State policies and, consequently, civil life in both the IRI and the Republic of Turkey have been largely appropriated to the accomplishment of these imagined identities.

What needs to be noted in this discussion is, therefore, the ontological inversion

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

perceptible in the polity's equation with the State. The international face of the states conceived by the regimes in power went a long way in determining their principles and policies of administration. The fixation to craft a specific global image of the nation overrode the basic tenets of popular welfare. It resulted in prioritizing the project of realizing an abstract state-image over the fundamental purpose of ensuring the "greatest good to the greatest number"[10]. In other words, the state, a bespoke means of facilitating popular welfare was championed over its end, the people. Public life and services were, thus, time and again directed to the achievement of the supposed larger "aims" of the State. The famous French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain calls this practice "political perversion". In his essay, "The People and the State", he writes:

> . . . the State is but an agency entitled to use power and coercion, and made up of experts and specialists in public order and welfare, an instrument in the service of man. *Putting man at the service of that instrument is political perversion*. . . . man is by no means for the State. The State is for man. (173) (Emphasis added)

Maritain says that it is in such cases that the State conforms to its "absolutist notion". He describes it as a situation in which "the symbol has been made a reality, has been hypostasized" and which consequently "absorbs in itself the body politic from which it emanates" (176).

As an extension of Maritain's theory of political perversion, it may be said that the root cause of such tendencies, i.e., prioritizing the presumed "interests" of the State over those of the body politic, is the very nature of collectivist ideologies which subordinate the interests of an individual to that of a collective entity, such as a state or a community. It is the assumption that the interests of the collective are of greater worth than that of an individual that encourages the negligence of popular causes at the grassroots level. When such imagined "interests of the collective" is set as the end of a socio-political revolution (which is almost always the case), the politically backed collectivist ideal moulds every single life to serve itself. It is then that the domain of privacy is pulled into the jurisdiction of political regulation as the citizens are denied their right to freedom of will. In the cases of both Iran and Turkey, we have seen, it is the respective motivating ideologies which have determined the effects of the political transitions for the masses. Also, the *kind* of duress suffered by the ordinary humanity has been decided by the *nature* of the ideology in action. It might, therefore, be stated as a closing remark to this paper, that the collectivist ideology which fuel a revolution, decides the final outcome of a political makeover in terms of its kind and intensity.

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

Notes

1. For a detailed history of Iran under the Pahlavi rule, refer to Keddie.

2. One of the larger aims of the Iranian Revolution was to "export" the Revolution and, thereby, achieve a "union of (all) Muslim peoples… political, economic and cultural unity of the Muslim world" (Paul 191). The project was believed to be the only and the most effective antidote to the imperialist practices of the West against the Third World nations, especially the Islamic ones.

3. The status of the "non-Muslim" minorities, especially the Jews and the Baha'is, deteriorated with the onset of an Islamic theocracy. While the former were suspected of having contact with Israel [declared as the "agent of imperialism in this region" and a "small Satan" by the Islamic regime (Paul 191)] and, hence, looked upon as agents of a foreign power, the latter were considered apostates from Islam (Keddie 48).

4. The Hostage Crisis of November 4, 1979 was a tactic of Khomeini to get rid of the Bazargan government which endeavored to improve political and economic relations with the United States. When Americans persuaded President Carter to allow entry to the Shah for his treatment (cancer) from Mexico, the "Students following the line of the Imam" (SFLI) attacked and seized the American embassy in Tehran, taking the officials hostage and destroying the documents. Khomeini's support for the SFLI only exacerbated the situation. He utilized the incident as a pretext to weaken the moderates, the anti-Khomeini *ulema* and, thereby, get the new constitution passed (Keddie 248-249).

5. Martin 126.

6. The Balkan War (1912-13) was initiated by the Balkan states under Ottoman rule—Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria—with the aim of eradicating Ottoman authority from the European continent. The War, which won the prestigious erstwhile Ottoman capital of Edirne back to the Turks, however, incurred irrecoverable loss of territory, human and financial resources for the Turks. Amongst the lost treasures were countries like Macedonia, Thrace and Albania—the crowning glories of the Ottoman Empire which contributed the highest share of Ottoman elites, including the *Atatürk*, the great national hero who was a native of Salonika. There was a deluge of Muslim refugees—the expulsed inhabitants of the European Ottoman territories—in Istanbul. The immigrants were pushed into a life of deprivation, crammed in the squatter settlements and infested with typhus and cholera. (Zurcher 107-111)

7. The Treaty of Lausanne signed on July 24, 1923 (marking the end of the Turkish War of Independence) occasioned for the Turko-Greek Population Exchange in which about 1.5 million orthodox Greeks from Anatolia were exchanged against 400,000 Muslim Turks hitherto residing in Greece. According to Jennifer Jackson Preece, "[t]he transfers themselves

ISSN 2277-3967 Vol. III Issue III, July 2014

were accomplished quite quickly" and in an "orderly and humane fashion", but "the monetary compensation (guaranteed) later proved unworkable" (824).

8. After an interregnum of only a year following the Balkan War, Ottoman Turkey was tricked into joining the Great War (1914-15) in favor of Germany with which it had entered into a secret agreement of alliance, in case of her combat with the Central forces. The Russian mobilization against Austria and Germany on the day immediately preceding the agreement enmeshed Turkey in the warfare overnight. What made matters worse for the Ottomans was the unexpected involvement of France and Britain. Despite being aware of the unpreparedness of the Ottoman army for the war, the operational plan drawn up by the German Chief of the Ottoman General Staff, Bronsart von Schellendorf, recommended attacks on the Suez Canal and Russian Transcaucasia. While the first attack made on the Caucasus front by the Russians was counteracted by the Ottoman army led by Enver Pasha, the offensive initiated at the end of December, 1914 was dealt with effectively by the Russians. Only 12,000 out of 90,000 Ottoman troops could survive the fight at Sarikamiş, while the rest died of biting cold and exhaustion while crossing the Caucasian range in the dead of winter (Zürcher 119).

9. In line with love and education, motherhood became a politicized institution in early Republican Turkey. The pivotal role of the Turkish women as "mothers of the nation" was incessantly emphasized in every speech of the *Atatürk*. In one of the speeches delivered in 1923, the year of foundation of the Republic, the *Atatürk* said:

> History shows the great virtues shown by our mothers and grandmothers. One of these has been to raise sons of whom the race can be proud. . . . I will not cease to repeat it, woman's most important duty, apart from her social responsibilities, is to be a good mother. As one progresses in time, as civilization advances with giant steps, it is imperative that mothers be enabled to raise their children according to the needs of the century. (Jayawardena 278)

10. The quoted phrase refers to Jeremy Bentham's famous concept of political ethics which forms one of the core observations of his "Utilitarian" philosophy:

> It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right or wrong. [From *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (printed in 1780; first published in 1789; and corrected by the author in 1823)].

Works Cited:

Primary Sources:

Atasü, Erendiz. *The Other Side of the Mountain*. Trans. Elizabeth Maslen. London: Milet Publishing Limited, 2000. Print.

Sofer, Dalia. *The Septembers of Shiraz*. New York: Ecco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Ahmad, Feroz. *The Making of Modern Turkey*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Azimi, Fakhreddin. *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008. Print.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. "Ethnicity versus Nationalism". *Journal of Peace Research.* 28.3 (1991): 263-278. Web. *JSTOR.* 1 Mar. 2011.

Gürbey, Sinem. "Islam, Nation-State, and the Military: A Discussion of Secularism in Turkey". *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 29.3 (2009): 371-380. Web. *Project Muse.* 10 July 2011.

Howard, Michael. "War and the Nation-State". *Daedalus*. 108.4 (1979): 101-110. Web. *JSTOR.* 18 Feb. 2011.

Jayawardena, Kumari. "The Movement for Women's Emancipation". *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement: Middle–East Asia.* Vol.1. Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2002. 261-291. Print.

Keddie, Nikki R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of the Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Print.

Kubba, Laith. "Islamist Parties and Democracy: Institutions Make the Difference". *Journal of Democracy*. 19.3 (2008): 37-42. Web. 3 Nov. 2013.

Luban, David. "The Romance of the Nation-State". *Philosophy and Public Affairs.* 9.4 (1980): 392-397. Web. *JSTOR.* 18 Feb. 2011.

Maritain, Jacques. "The People and the State". *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture.* 11.2 (2008): 163-187. Web. *Project Muse.* 20 Feb. 2011.

Martin, Vanessa, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003. Print.

Paul, Ludwig. ""Iranian Nation" and Iranian-Islamic Revolutionary Ideology". *Die Welt des Islams.* 39.2 (1999): 183-217. Web. *JSTOR.* 1 Mar. 2011.

Preece, Jennifer Jackson. "Ethnic Cleansing as an Instrument of Nation-State Creation: Changing State Practices and Evolving Legal Norms". *Human Rights Quarterly*. 20.4 (1998): 817-842. Web. *JSTOR.* 18 Feb. 2011.

Saikal, Amin. "Islam: Resistance and Reassertion". *The World Today.* 43.11 (1987): 191-194. Web. *JSTOR.* 1 Mar. 2011.

White, Jenny B. "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman". *NSWA Journal*. 15.3 (2003): 145-159. Web. *Project Muse.* 10 July 2011.

Zürcher, Erik J. *Turkey: A Modern History*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2003. Print.