

Zeynep Tüfekçiođlu

Nation and Identity in Turkish Crime Fiction

Reading Ahmet Ümit's Novels as a Medium
of Ideological Negotiation



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Acknowledgments

“I’m astounded whenever I finish something. Astounded and distressed. My perfectionist instinct should inhibit me from finishing; it should inhibit me from even beginning,” writes Fernando Pessoa in his text 152 in *The Book of Disquiet*; and then he continues: “I begin because I don’t have the strength to think; I finish because I don’t have the courage to quit. This book is my cowardice” (2003: 136). I am sure anyone who has written a doctoral dissertation would empathize with Pessoa. And what is perhaps even more challenging than finishing a dissertation is then having to re-work it, after the defense, in order to turn it into a book. It is a challenge not only because one knows by heart almost every sentence on every page, and so it is inevitably boring to work on the text again, but also because this is a point at which one is brought face-to-face with one’s novice self. It is a point in the process of writing where it is impossible to stop, yet impossible to start over in search of something better or new.

For a fair amount of time I was detained in this purgatory stage of the final round of writing. One part of me wanted to revise the bulk of the text; another part told me to be loyal to the original, since a voice in my head kept asking, “what is a book for its author if not a way to remember a particular point in one’s life, a particular self in time and space?” In the end, I decided to publish my dissertation with only slight revisions, those suggested by my supervisors, mainly because I think of it as a medium of personal memory – which also reminds me of my cowardice. The sentences here remind me of the small campus of the American University in Almaty where I decided to focus on the masculinities; they remind me of the cold public library on snowy days in Kiev, where I first thought of the concept of post-secularism in relation to Ümit’s fiction; and of a few sunny days in Essen when I was revising my thoughts on Ottomania. In some sentences I can scent the lavenders of Çeşme or the *Glühwein* in Marburg. And in each chapter there is the joy of reuniting with Gökçe, and the pain of having to say goodbye yet again.

This book has taken years to finish... I started working on it initially as my PhD dissertation at the Justus Liebig University, Gießen, at the most difficult stage of my life, just a few months after the unexpected passing of my younger brother. While grief and yearning have surely delayed and obstructed the writing process, that very process also became one of the primary means to help pull me through, by reminding me of the magic of life not only through the novels and stories that kept me company, but mostly through the solidarity and friendship I have shared with so many people.

Among them, first of all, I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mark Kirchner for being so responsive ever since our first email exchange, and for his endless support, patience, and understanding over many years. Likewise, Ansgar Nünning, my second supervisor, has always provided wholehearted support and inspiration when I needed it the most. My time at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at the Justus Liebig University was immeasurably valuable, and I am grateful for the fellowship I was offered.

Over the years I have benefited greatly from the feedback of friends and colleagues who are engaged in their own intellectual endeavors. It was Levent Soysal who prompted my academic journey to Germany; I am forever indebted to him. I would also like to thank Selim Kuru, Egemen Özbek, Meltem Gürle, Sevgül Sönmez, and Cansu Özge Özmen, who read various chapters and provided invaluable suggestions. My first academic publications, which reflect the initial stages of this work, have been published in volumes edited by Seval Şahin, Börte Sagaster, and Béatrice Hendrich. I thank them for their encouragement and recognition of my early work.

Since my first years in Gießen, Béatrice has become one of my best friends as well as my mentor. I am grateful for her insightful suggestions on my work at every stage. It was Béatrice, five years ago, who informed me about the opening at the University of Duisburg-Essen, which led to me finding my academic home in Germany. I finished this manuscript here at the Institute of Turkish Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, surrounded by many scholars working on Turkey in many diverse disciplines. It has been a privilege to learn from them and be inspired by their ideas. Among them, Kader Konuk is a true role model, his diligent, cheerful, and intelligent demeanor encouraging me every day to become a better scholar. I also thank all of my colleagues at the Institute for their support, especially Sevgi Çıkrıkçı, with whom I shared late-night writing sessions in the Summer of 2018, and to Davut Yeşilmen, my officemate and partner in crime.

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Meral and Kaya Tüfekçioğlu, my parents, deserve pages of acknowledgments for their endless love and encouragement. Instead, here I can only express how much I love them, and how much I appreciate everything they have done for me. Their kisses and hugs, jokes and stories, prayers and praise, give me happiness and peace of mind again and again.

My husband Gökçe Yanaşmayan took me out from darkness and gave me the strength to start over shortly after the loss of my brother. Gökçe deserves my gratitude for another reason, too. He has respected my decision to have a long-distance marriage and accepted being far from me and our son so that I could continue my academic path in Germany. I know

this is one of the most difficult sacrifices one could ask for, and I hope our lives will be long enough to compensate for every single minute we have missed together.

Our son Can Yanařmayan came into our lives at a time when Gökçe and I were young ‘nomads’. And as our lives have progressed through numerous countries and even more cities, Can has proved that ‘home’ can be anywhere in the world. I am grateful for this cheerful child, who sings me songs every day and never fails to ask if my book has finally been finished. I am proud to tell him that it has.

In addition to all the hands which have been holding mine over the years of this journey, there is the invisible hand of a boy. This thesis is dedicated to that boy, who will never have to grow up.

To the loving memory of Murat Tüfekçiođlu.

Note on Editions, Spelling, and Transcriptions

All the novels quoted in this book have several different editions, and page numbers may vary accordingly. Each translated quotation is given in Turkish in the footnotes so that anyone who wishes to refer to the original may do so. All excerpts from *Patasana* in Chapter 3 are from the first edition of its English translation by Amy Spangler (2011). All page numbers for the passages quoted from the other three novels are from the following editions: *Sis ve Gece* 41st edition (2014), *Kar Kokusu* 24th edition (2012), *Kukla* 17th edition (2010). The excerpts from the three novels in Chapter 4 are taken from *Beyoğlu Rapsodisi* 58th edition (2015); *Kavim* 38th edition (2015); and the first edition of the English translation of *Bab-ı Esrar, The Dervish Gate* by Elke Dixon (2011). The quotations in Chapter 5 are from the 3rd edition of the English translation of *İstanbul Hatırası, A Memento for Istanbul* by Rakesh Jobanputra (2017) and the 9th edition of *Sultanı Öldürmek* (2016). All translations of the novels which are not available in English are by Ayşe Pınar Köprücü-Rauth and myself. *Sultanı Öldürmek* was not available in English translation (appearing as *To Kill a Sultan*) until after this book was in final preparation for print, so translations are our own.

Throughout this book I have retained the Turkish spelling of private names and book titles, e.g., “Erdoğan” and yet have not made any changes if such names are spelled in English in the references. Likewise, I have preferred hyphenation for the term “post-secular(ism)” and yet do not use this if a reference sets it unhyphenated. Hence, the variation observed throughout the book does not indicate inconsistency, but rather the choices of different authors.

In the bibliography, the Turkish alphabetic order is followed.

Introduction

Ahmet Ümit is a phenomenon of contemporary popular culture in Turkey. For about two decades he has been seen as *the* author of Turkish crime fiction. While best known for his crime novels, Ümit has also published numerous collections of short stories, along with poems, folk tales, and an epic. He is not only one of the most prolific authors of contemporary Turkish literature, but also among “the best-selling and top-earning authors” (cf. Erguvan 2016: 339) in the country.¹ The first editions of his two recent novels *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* (*Farewell My Beautiful Homeland*, 2015) and *Kırlangıç Çığlığı* (*The Swallow’s Cry*, 2018) had record print runs of 250,000 and 300,000 copies respectively, and still the first edition of *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* was sold out within a week. Meanwhile, his previous works continue to be re-published, with some running into sixty editions, and his works have been adapted into graphic novels, radio plays, films, TV series, and an opera.² Ümit regularly appears on TV as a guest in cultural programs and has hosted a few himself.³ For years, he has been visible in innumerable public events across Turkey. Especially in his book signing events, his readers wait in line for hours to get his autograph. What is more, Ahmet Ümit is a keen user of social media. His official Instagram account, named after his renowned detective character Başkomiser Nevzat, is visited by thousands each day. In short, Ahmet Ümit is not just a popular author in contemporary Turkey, but also a prominent public figure.

At the same time, he is also experiencing rising international acclaim. His novels have been translated into over twenty languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Chinese, Russian, German and English. Recently described as “one of the most translated Turkish authors” (Erguvan 2016: 331), in 2014 the Turkish Exporters Assembly announced that he was also “the best-selling Turkish author abroad.” Since his novels became available in more

1 Annual data on authors’ earnings, publications, and sales of their works are collected by the business magazine *Forbes*.

2 *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* has been turned into a graphic novel with illustrations by Bartu Bölükbaşı; and three short stories featuring Başkomiser Nevzat were also published as graphic novels in 2005, 2007 and 2011, illustrated by İsmail Gülgeç, under the titles *Çiçekçinin Ölümü* (*The Death of the Florist*), *Tapınak Fahişeleri* (*Prostitutes of the Temple*), and *Davulcu Davut’u Kim Öldürdü?* (*Who Killed the Drummer Davut?*). NTV radio featured four of his works in the form of radio theatre: *Şeytan Ayrıntıda Gizlidir* (*The Devil is Hidden in the Details*, 2002), *Agatha’nın Anahtarı* (*Agatha’s Key*, 1999), *İstanbul Hatırası* (*A Memento for Istanbul*, 2010), and *Kavim* (*The Man Who Spoke the Language of Jesus*). His novella *Bir Sis Böler Geceyi* (*A Voice Divides the Night*, 1994) was made into a film by Ercan Arsever in 2012, released in English with the title *The Path of the Faithful*. The film adaptation of his first novel *Sis ve Gece* (*The Fog and the Night*, 1996) by Turgut Yasalar was released in 2007. The scripts of the TV series *Şeytan Ayrıntıda Gizlidir*, released in 2004, and *Karanlıkta Koşanlar*, released in 2001, are based on Ümit’s short stories and featured his famous detective Başkomiser Nevzat. In 2017, his epic tale *Ninatta’nın Bileziği* (*Ninatta’s Bracelet*, 2006) was made into an opera and staged by Süreyya Opera in Kadıköy, Istanbul.

3 Together with Mario Levi and İskender Pala, two popular contemporary Turkish authors, Ahmet Ümit was the host of the TV show *Önce Söz Vardı* and he also hosted the documentary *Yaşadığın Şehir*.

languages, Ümit has been increasingly attending book signings and readings in other countries, especially in Germany, where the translation of his *İstanbul Hatırası* (*A Memento for Istanbul*, 2010) was published by btb Verlag in 2017 under the title *Die Gärten von Istanbul*. It can thus confidently be claimed that Ahmet Ümit is one of the Turkish authors who have “contributed to Turkey’s vibrant literary scene and legacy within world literature” (Nolte, n.d.).

Considering the dynamics of today’s book market, Ümit’s national and international renown cannot be attributed solely to him. His previous publishing house Everest and his literary agency Kalem Ajans have played a crucial role in the national and international marketing and dissemination of Ümit’s fiction.⁴ Inextricable from these two, the reading public’s strong association of the name of Ahmet Ümit with the genre of crime fiction also plays a major role in his success, especially in Turkey. As shown by numerous articles in the recent edited collection *Crime Fiction as World Literature* (cf. Nilsson/Damrosch/D’haen 2017), the commercial success of national crime novels cannot be considered in isolation from the worldwide popularity of the genre itself (cf. Hedberg 2017; Berglund 2017; Bassnett 2017). In “Detective Fiction in Translation: Shifting Patterns of Reception” Susan Bassnett convincingly shows that the global book trade, translations, and the publishing industry “shape what readers choose to read,” concluding that “the national and the international are inextricably linked” (Bassnet 2017: 149). This is indeed the case in contemporary Turkey, where the international reputation, reception, and circulation of the genre, especially since the 2000s, have formed readers’ tastes and preferences. In Turkey, as in many countries, translations of best-selling crime novels by internationally acclaimed authors such as Dan Brown, Patricia Highsmith, Ian Rankin, Stieg Larsson, and Henning Mankell are available to Turkish readers. A manifestation of the current interest in the genre is prevalent in the fact that an increasing number of Turkish readers want to read crime fiction, and not merely in translation. Thanks to the intense marketing strategies of his publishing house and literary agency, Ümit’s novels are without a doubt the most widely available ones that respond to this increasing interest.⁵

From the Periphery to the Center?: Contemporary Crime Fiction in Turkey

Inside *and* outside Turkey, Ahmet Ümit is now considered as the foremost author of Turkish crime novels. Thus, in a 2013 article in the UK newspaper the *Independent*, Ümit was defined as “Turkey’s answer to Stieg Larsson” (Independent 2013). This comparison is not only indicative of the intricate link between the national and international in the reception of crime fiction, but also hints at the content of Ümit’s writing: since his early novels, the first one having appeared in 1996, Ahmet Ümit has been carefully following and adopting the global

4 In June 2019, after the completion of this thesis, Ahmet Ümit changed his publishing house from Everest to Yapı Kredi Yayınları.

5 A case in point is the co-organization of Everest and Kalem Ajans in 2015. For the launch of Ümit’s *Elveda Güzel Vatanım*, they gathered Ümit’s global publishers and translators in Istanbul. For details, see: publishingperspectives.com/2015/12/celebration-turkish-author-ahmed-umit, retrieved September 20, 2020.

trends in the genre.⁶ At the same time, he has been contributing to these trends himself through his own particular methods of constructing the nation. Accordingly, his works yield fruitful comparisons, highlighting several congruencies with crime novels from other national literatures. In a similar manner to Stieg Larsson's "ruthless demolition of the image of the Swedish social democratic ideal" (Forshaw 2012: 14), in his early work, Ahmet Ümit puts forward a social and political critique of his country. For instance, in his *Sis ve Gece* (The Fog and the Night, 1996), *Kar Kokusu* (The Scent of Snow, 1998), and *Kukla* (The Marionette, 2002), he touches upon the deep scars in recent Turkish history: he brings the focus to bear upon the clashes between the extreme rightist groups and the radicalized socialist left, the military coup of 1980 and its aftermath, and corrupt governments and the "deep state."⁷ His novels may as well be compared with the noir fiction of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Paco Ignacio Taibo II.⁸ Especially Ümit's later works, those published after the year 2000, allude to the works of these authors. Through the investigation of various crimes, Ümit's renowned detective Başkomiser Nevzat "scrutinize[s] the ambiguous nature of truth and justice" in his country and "reveal[s] the marginalized victims of neoliberal state policies" (Nichols 2011: 30) in ways similar to Montalbán's Pepe Carvalho and Taibo's Héctor Belascoarán Shayne. For instance, his *Sultanı Öldürmek* (To Kill a Sultan, 2012) overtly conveys Ümit's dissatisfaction with the urban renewal and the neoliberal transformation of Istanbul in contemporary Turkey, recalling the respective portrayals of Montalbán's Barcelona and Taibo's Mexico City.

The points of comparison of Ümit's novels with other fictional works from across the globe can easily be multiplied. We may note, for instance, how Ümit responds to the national and global religious resurgence. Three of his novels, namely *Beyoğlu Rapsodisi* (Beyoğlu Rhapsody, 2003), *Kavim* (The Man Who Spoke the Language of Jesus, 2006) and *Bab-ı Esrar* (The Dervish Gate, 2008) manifest an evident engagement with religious topics, religiosity, as well as Sufism. These novels may be conceived as exemplary of "post-secular fiction" in general (cf. McClure 2007) and "post-secular crime fiction" in particular (cf. Hansen 2014; 2011). If we consider the treatment of religion and spirituality in these novels, "a post-secular alternative taking shape in the space between traditional and religious discourses" (McClure 2007: 12) becomes evident. Although the studies of John A. McClure and Kim Toft Hansen, who have respectively proposed the aforementioned terms, are concerned with American and Scandinavian fiction, one can easily point at commonalities

6 For an elaborate discussion of contemporary trends in crime fiction, see the collection edited by Malcah Effron, *The Millennial Detective: Essays on Trends in Crime Fiction, Film and Television, 1990–2010*.

7 Mehtap Söyler, the author of *The Turkish Deep State: State Consolidation, Civil-Military Relations, and Democracy*, defines this notion as follows: "Deep state is associated with authoritarian, criminal and corrupt segments of the state that function in a democratic regime by exploiting and reproducing its deficiencies. At the same time, the deep state derives legitimacy from that political regime in exerting a coup threat, instigating military interventions, and committing organized crime and extrajudicial killings within the boundaries of the formal security apparatus. Perpetrators are held responsible for massive human rights violations ranging from massacres and assassinations to extrajudicial executions and disappearances" (2015: 1). In the following chapters, the deep state and the aforementioned issues will be tackled in more detail since they are closely linked with the aims of this thesis.

8 For an excellent analysis of the works of these two authors, see William J. Nichols's *Transatlantic Mysteries: Crime, Culture, and Capital in the "Noir Novels" of Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán* (2011).

with Ümit's novels, written in a predominantly Muslim country. Thus, the claim can be made that within the global context of (world) literature, Ümit's novels share concerns and characteristics with many literary narratives which are part of "the globalized mediascape of contemporary popular culture" (Nilsson/Damrosch/D'haen 2017: 2). This brief comparative look into his fiction reveals that while closely following the global developments of genre, Ahmet Ümit does not shy away from experimenting, appropriating, and at times subverting the conventions of crime fiction for his own purposes.

While the form and content of Ümit's novels overtly reflect innovation, partially inspired by global tendencies in the genre of crime fiction, they are also nourished from the Turkish literary tradition. In several interviews, Ümit himself declares that he is influenced by authors such as Yaşar Kemal, Oğuz Atay and Yusuf Atılgan. By singling out these canonical authors as his literary influences, Ümit makes an implicit claim about his novels, and indeed about the genre in general, namely that they should not be conceived as lowbrow fiction.

In fact, Ahmet Ümit has been defending crime fiction in Turkey for many years, his battle cry being "*iyi polisiye iyi edebiyattır!*" (Good crime fiction is good literature). If we consider the denigrated position of this genre in Turkish literature in the 1990s when Ümit started writing, we can understand why today, as the most acclaimed author of the genre, Ümit makes a mission of its advocacy. Without a doubt, Ahmet Ümit has contributed to the genre's changing perception and reception in Turkey in the last decades. In other words, within the contemporary Turkish context, Ahmet Ümit has played a significant role in moving crime fiction from its earlier periphery position to its current one of popularity.

As in many parts of the world, today in Turkey, following Ahmet Ümit's lead, many authors have started writing crime novels. The Turkish Crime Writers' Association was founded in 2017.⁹ Numerous works of the youngest generation of crime writers are now being translated into other languages, and some have been awarded international literary prizes.¹⁰ Since 2015, an annual festival of crime fiction, Kara Hafta (Noir Week), is organized in Istanbul, gathering national and international authors of crime writing together. Moreover, there are a few literary journals on crime fiction, while others have dedicated special issues to the genre.¹¹ In sum, these trends are indicative of crime fiction, once mostly written under pseudonyms and considered lowbrow writing for many years, having now become a significant part of contemporary Turkish popular culture.

Despite the genre's remarkable development in Turkey, especially since the turn of the millennium, the academic study of crime writing is still, for the most part, in absence. Scholars of Turkish literature have neglected the genre, focusing instead on the works of

9 There are about forty authors (and scholars) of crime fiction listed as members of the Turkish Crime Writers' Association. It can be easily claimed that in post-2000 literature, an increasing number of young authors write crime fiction. Some of the notable contemporary authors of Turkish crime fiction can be listed as follows: Armağan Tunaboğlu, Alper Canıgüz, Çağan Dikenelli, Verda Pars, Algan Sezgintüredi and Derviş Şentekin.

10 For instance, the novels of Emrah Serbes and Alper Canıgüz have been translated into German and published by Binooki. In 2018, for his series of crime novels, which feature a five-year-old detective Alper Kamu, Alper Canıgüz received the Litprom prize in the category of "Weltempfänger," which is awarded to international authors in order to promote their works in German-speaking countries.

11 *221B Dergi* and *Detektif Dergi* are two literary journals on crime fiction. In 2014, the renowned *Notos Journal* devoted its 46th issue to crime fiction and Ahmet Ümit was the guest editor of this special issue.

‘canonical’ or ‘elite’ writers. Crime fiction has, therefore, become one of the literary genres to have been pushed into the margins within Turkish literary studies due to the predominant interest in supposedly highbrow literature.¹² This is why in one of the rare academic conferences on crime fiction, held in 2012 at the Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul, at a time when there was already vivid public interest in it, crime fiction was marked as ‘the step-child of Turkish literature’.

Hence, it can be argued that even though contemporary Turkish crime fiction has caught up with *and* is part of the “international sphere of world literature” (Nilsson/Damrosch/D’haen 2017: 2), its scholarly inquiry in Turkey is far from reflecting the global academic interest in this genre.¹³ As a consequence, in spite of his indisputable fame in Turkey and rapidly increasing international recognition, notwithstanding a few exceptions, Ümit’s fiction has not yet been the subject of any comprehensive study.¹⁴

12 Along with crime fiction, popular historical novels, science fiction, fantasy and contemporary Islamic literature are exemplary genres and milieux, which are neglected by scholars of contemporary Turkish literature.

13 Due to the increasing number of volumes and manuscripts, articles, and symposiums devoted to the genre in various academic cultures, it is impossible to give here an all-inclusive list which would highlight the global academic interest in crime fiction. Among the (very) long list of recent studies on the genre, including those published by renowned publishing houses such Routledge and Palgrave Macmillan as well as university presses such as Cambridge and Oxford, the following selection only partially illustrates the wide ranging recent studies in crime fiction written in the English language: *Crime Fiction as World Literature* by Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, and Theo D’haen (eds., 2017), Peter Swirski’s *American Crime Fiction: A Cultural History of Nobrow Literature as Art* (2016), Steven Peacock’s *Swedish Crime Fiction* (2014), Peter Messent’s *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (2013), John Scaggs’s *Crime Fiction* (2005), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman (2003) and Gill Plain’s *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001). Additionally, there have been a number of studies that (claim to) explore international crime fiction. See, for instance, Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley (eds.) *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions* (2012), Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn (eds.) *Investigating Identities; Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction* (2009), Christine Matzke (ed.) *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective* (2006), Marc Singer, Nels Pearson (eds.) *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (2009), Jean Anderson, Miranda Carolina, Barbara Pezzotti (eds.) *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations* (2012). Besides these volumes, a majority of monographs in English focus on Anglo-American crime fiction or crime novels from continental Europe, most notably France, Spain, Italy, and Scandinavia. See, for instance, Claire Gorrara’s *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War* (2012), Shelley Godsland’s *Killing Carmens: Women’s Crime Fiction from Spain* (2007), Barbara Pezzotti’s *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction* (2014), Faye Stewart’s *German Feminist Queer Crime Fiction* (2014). Among many other studies, those that focus on the Middle East and Mediterranean crime fiction are particularly worth mentioning in this study. See, for instance, Börte Sagaster, Martin Strohmeier and Stephan Guth (eds.) *Crime Fiction in and around the Eastern Mediterranean* (2016) and Jonathan Smolin’s *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime and Politics in Popular Culture* (2013). The only book-length study on Turkish crime fiction published in the English language is David Mason’s *Investigating Turkey: Detective Fiction and Turkish Nationalism* (2017); and in Turkey, the only book-length studies on the genre are Onur Bilge Kula’s *Yazınsal Yapıt ve Ahmet Ümit Nasıl Okunabilir?* (2016), Erol Üyepazarıcı’s *Korkmayınız Mister Sherlock Holmes* (2008), Seval Şahin’s *Kültürel Sermaye Kibar Hırsız ve Şehir* (2012) as well as her *Cinai Meseleler Osmanlı-Türk Polisiye Edebiyatında Biçim ve İdeoloji (1884–1928)* (2017); and a recent completion of articles presented in the first symposium on Turkish crime fiction *Edebiyatın İzinde: Polisiye Edebiyat*, edited by Seval Şahin, Banu Öztürk and Didem Ardalı-Büyükarman (2013).

14 Onur Bilge Kula’s manuscript, *Yazınsal Yapıt ve Ahmet Ümit Nasıl Okunabilir?* (2016) is the most

Aims, Main Research Questions, and Methods

The idea for this thesis is rooted in the aspiration to fill the conspicuous gap in the study of contemporary Turkish crime fiction. As the discussions below reveal, owing to Ahmet Ümit's dominance in this genre and the prevailing academic neglect regarding his fiction, the particular focus is on Ahmet Ümit's crime novels.

Throughout my thesis I work with “an open definition of crime fiction” (Nilsson/Damrosch/D'haen 2017: 5): the novels under analysis are considered as crime novels because in each of them there is a detective, whether professional or amateur, and the plot revolves around an investigation of one or multiple crimes. A mood of suspense and curiosity is evident, and an investigation predominantly drives each narrative. “Through the detective's investigation” (ibid.), in all of Ümit's novels considered in this thesis, “power structures, institutions, police procedures, and civil codes are portrayed, as are human behaviour and psychology” (ibid.). Aside from these reasons, this dissertation considers Ahmet Ümit's novels as works of crime fiction, because that is how they are marketed and perceived, nationally and internationally.

As the following chapters will establish, the open definition of crime fiction allows me to recognize the genre's hybridization. Being aware that contemporary crime fiction is “complex and comprises a spectrum of stories that can be grouped in numerous sub-genres or categories” (ibid.), I also read Ahmet Ümit's fiction as generic hybrids.

To this end, the following (open) definition of the crime fiction genre is adopted:

The globalized and hybridized genre of crime fiction, dealing with universal questions about life and death, crime and punishment, conflicting values and moral systems, is known for portraying the darker sides of society and formulating a social critique upon its own native context (Nilsson/ Damrosch/D'haen 2017: 4).

In this thesis, these functions within Ümit's novels will be explored in detail, with a particular focus on their intricate relationship with the ideologies prevalent in Turkey, both today and in the recent past.

One of the main aims of this study is then to highlight the functions of Ahmet Ümit's novels. Conceptualizing them as “cultural ways of worldmaking” (cf. Nünning/Nünning/Neumann 2010) and also as a medium of ideological negotiations, I argue that an analysis of Ümit's fiction provides us with critical ways of understanding Turkey and Turkishness. As best-selling literary narratives, which for over two decades have been portraying the darker sides of Turkish society and formulating a social critique of Turkey, Ümit's novels are treated in this thesis “as primary historical and ideological documents; the vehicles, not reflections, of social change” (Bender 1987: 1; qtd. in Nünning 2012: 165). Their best-selling status thus interests me because, as widely circulated, read, and discussed narratives in Turkey, they

comprehensive work on Ahmet Ümit's fiction published so far. In his study, Kula provides an extended analysis of Ümit's 2015 novel, *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* and he only superficially provides analyses of the author's other works. Additionally, based on the data of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) thesis center, by September 2018, there have been a total of nine master theses on Ümit's novels, submitted to various universities in Turkey. According to YÖK thesis center, by 2020 the number of theses which deal with Ümit's fiction in various Turkish universities has risen to eighteen.

have a performative power as well as a worldmaking function. As cultural ways of worldmaking, Ümit's novels not only "thematise and represent events, stories and cultural issues, but they can also actively construct identities, communities, hierarchies of values and norms" (ibid.: 169). The making of identities and communities in Ümit's fiction, as well as the shaping of values and norms, is inextricably linked to his novels' engagement with history and the formation of an alternative cultural memory. Hence, I argue that Ümit's literary narratives, along with numerous others, do not simply mirror or reflect Turkey, but indeed construct it.

In order to discuss the functions that Ümit's novels fulfil as cultural ways of worldmaking, I rely on the concept of ideology, and I propose to designate his novels as a medium of ideological negotiations. Through reference to certain ideologies, I elaborate on how Ahmet Ümit constructs national identity and history and how he provides an alternative cultural memory.

The discussions of the functions of Ümit's novels is connected to another aim of this study. In calling attention to the functions of the author's work, I aim to underline that these novels are exemplars of resistance literature: in performing ideological negotiations, Ümit's novels serve as a site of cultural resistance. The aims of my study then include an investigation of *how* ideological negotiations are generated, and a discussion of *why* they are manifest in Ümit's novels.

Cultural narratology, which is the method of this study, allows me to explore both the *hows* and the *whys*, since it is based on a "context-sensitive and cultural approach to narratives" (Nünning 2004: 356). As defined by Ansgar Nünning, one of the pioneering narratologists to develop cultural narratology, it "explores the ways in which the formal properties of novels reflect and influence the unspoken mental assumptions and cultural issues of a given period" (Nünning 2009: 62). Thus, by adopting cultural narratology, this thesis provides an answer to *how* questions, as it explores the formal properties of Ümit's novels. More precisely, it looks into certain narrative techniques and literary tropes through which ideologies are negotiated. At the same time, it sheds light on *why* questions by relating these techniques to the mental assumptions and cultural issues prevalent in contemporary Turkey. It thus reveals that certain narrative and literary techniques serve to contest, challenge, subvert *or* affirm, and disseminate various ideologies, and that they play a role in generating Ümit's particular ways of worldmaking as cultural resistance.

Cultural narratology is not only suitable for the main goals of this dissertation, but also fits my broader and more indirect objectives. By focusing on Ümit's crime novels, I want to show "the value of not dividing literature into watertight categories of high and low art and culture" (Nilsson/Damrosch/D'haen 2017: 4). While I do not fully disregard such categories, I agree with Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, and Theo D'haen that "the most ambitious crime novels occupy a space in between both categories or even participate in both" (ibid.). It is my contention that within the Turkish literary field, Ümit's novels may be considered as such works.

Cultural narratology serves to unveil a number of features that Ümit's novels share with Turkish literary narratives which are conceived as elite literature or manifestations of high culture. Since cultural narratology provides a possibility of bringing together narratological analyses of Ümit's novels with a consideration of the socio-cultural context of which they are a part, it allows me to study his fiction not based on *a priori* aesthetic criteria or evaluative

judgments, but instead on its transgressive and subversive functions in its construction of Turkey.

One of the larger aims of this study is to point at commonalities among numerous Turkish authors' ways of cultural worldmaking, with a particular focus on their construction of Turkey and Turkishness. Predominantly analyzing Ahmet Ümit's crime novels, in the next chapters I will often make rather unorthodox comparisons. I will, for instance, compare Ahmet Ümit's novels with those of Orhan Pamuk, Yusuf Atılgan, and Oğuz Atay. I will, moreover, liken Ümit's authorship to the early novelists of Turkish literature. These comparisons hint at an alternative literary genealogical link between canonical and popular works of Turkish literature, based on the common function of generating cultural resistance by relying on similar techniques.

The final (and most wide-ranging) goal of this study is to provide a novel view on the study of Turkish literature. Providing close readings of best-selling contemporary narratives which have not yet been subject to a comprehensive scholarly inquiry indeed partially fulfills this aim. The analyses in this thesis are intended to contribute to further discussions revolving around popular literature in Turkey, and my method also plays a role in achieving this aim, since it is the first study of Turkish literature, which adopts the framework of cultural narratology. I believe that introducing a new method into Turkish cultural and literary analysis opens a door for new interpretations.

What this thesis provides is then *my own interpretation* of Ümit's novels in relation to *my own awareness* of their socio-historical context. Thus, a few self-reflexive remarks are necessary. Let me begin by quoting a passage from *Challenging Canada* by Gabriele Helms, "one of the first narratologists to provide a conceptual and methodological outline of a cultural narratology and to actually test its usefulness" (Nünning 2012: 166). In her introductory chapter to *Challenging Canada*, as a German working on Canadian fiction in Canada, Helms asserts the following:

In the process of working on and reworking this book, I have been reminded many times [...] that reading and analyzing literature are subjective undertakings. My own readings are influenced by various shifting configurations within which I am situated in Canada – configurations determined by citizenship, language, age, race, class and so on. At times, "a deceptive insider," at other times "a deceptive outsider" to borrow Trinh T. Minh-ha's terms (1991, 74), I have watched myself shift back and forth between positions available to me, less concerned with determining once and for all where I exactly belong than with exploring everything I can be – on different occasions and in different places. As Smaro Kamburelli (2000, 22) observes in her musings on the hybridity of the diasporic critic, the "objective is ... to produce a space where her hybridity is articulated in a manner that does not cancel out any of its particularities." For me, this space is less an in-betweenness than the simultaneity of all possible insider/outsider positions. While I am wary of taking self-positioning as a guarantee of authenticity [...], it remains crucial in self-reflexive analyses that focus on narrative techniques and that recognize the importance of readers' decisions and their cultural contexts. (2003:16–17)

In writing this thesis, I have referred many times to *Challenging Canada*, not only to comprehend Helms' propositions on cultural narratology, but also because I have come to

realize that her remarks in the above passage neatly reflect my own concerns and thoughts. As someone coming from Turkey and working on its contemporary literature from outside, within a quite different academic culture, I often consider myself as a privileged diasporic critic who can benefit from “the simultaneity of all possible insider/outsider positions” to which Helms refers.

Over the years working on this thesis, I have witnessed the significant transformations in Turkey from afar. In the following pages, I discuss these transformations while I point at the changes in dominant ideologies, the consequent regime change, and Turkey’s drift into a more authoritarian and repressive politics. I am aware that what I am presenting in the next chapters is inextricable from my own “shifting configurations.” It can be said that this thesis, very much like Helms’ *Challenging Canada*, is the work of “a deceptive insider” and “a deceptive outsider.” The sources I rely on and cite in order to present the Turkish context are the results of a process of selection which is influenced by my personal and educational background, as well as my own position as a doctoral student in Germany who is lucky to be able to present a critical and uncensored interpretation of the transformations in Turkey without the threat of repression. I am also aware that certain historical events and the recent transformations in Turkey, of which I am critical, could have been considered in other ways. Thus, I cannot claim objectivity in what I have written, particularly in so far as it concerns ideologies and political matters. I can, however, claim transparency.

I owe said transparency in this thesis largely to the employment of cultural narratology, the selection of which is also inextricably linked to my position in Germany. Although in my previous studies in Turkey, I had not been trained in narratology, over the years the theoretical and methodological approach of my PhD has developed under the influence of German narrative theory. The combination of structuralist analysis and interpretative contextualization that I aim at in this study is therefore a result of my convergence towards cultural studies and narratology within the German academic context. As the next chapter puts forward, in addition to a narratological approach, in this thesis I also work with anthropological and semiotic definitions of culture in order to include popular literature into the study of Turkish literature. Thus, although this thesis is concerned with contemporary Turkish literature, its methods as well as its theoretical premises originate from another national research culture, namely German *Kulturwissenschaften*, and narrative theory in particular.¹⁵

Moreover, in order to pave the way for my “context-sensitive *interpretations* of narratives” (Nünning 2009: 56), I rely primarily on four scholars who have been thinking and writing about Turkey not only from within but also from outside. The discussions in this

15 For more on the German tradition of narrative theory (*Erzähltheorie*) see, for instance, David Darby’s controversial article “Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology” (2001) as well as Monika Fludernik’s response to Darby “History of Narratology: A Rejoinder” (2003); and Tom Kindt, Hans-Harald Müller (eds.) *What Is Narratology?: Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory* (2003). For the recent significant changes and developments in narrative theory, see Greta Olson (ed.) *Current Trends in Narratology* (2011); Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (eds.) *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Research* (2009). For differences between German *Kulturwissenschaften* and British and American Cultural Studies, see Ansgar Nünning’s “Towards Transnational Approaches to the Study of Culture: From Cultural Studies and *Kulturwissenschaften* to a Transnational Study of Culture” (2014).

thesis on particular ideologies as well as on Turkish history and literature owe much to these four scholars. The renowned political scientist and cultural critic Tanıl Bora's volume *Cereyanlar: Türkiye'de Siyasi İdeolojiler* has helped me to make sense of intricate connections among the seemingly opposing ideologies in Turkey, and to trace the historical roots of the dominant ones in the present day. Likewise, historian Kerem Öktem's *Angry Nation: Turkey since 1980*, anthropologist Jenny White's *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, and the literary and cultural critic Erdağ Gökner's *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel*, together with their articles, have contributed to the historical contextualization which is pursued in this study. Gökner's ideas on the politics of the Turkish novel, based on his critical analysis of the Turkish canon, and particularly of Orhan Pamuk's fiction, have also contributed to my analyses of Ümit's novels in Chapters 3 and 4, because he is the first and, so far, the only scholar of Turkish literature to engage with concepts such as *homo secularis* and post-secularism, which are crucial in discussing ideological dispositions in the Turkish novel. Thus, throughout this thesis I often refer to Gökner, but since he is primarily concerned with canonical novels – written before the significant post-millennium transformations – in each chapter I supplement his ideas with considerations of popular narratives published within the more recent cultural and historical context.

In my attempt to investigate popular Turkish crime fiction as a medium of ideological negotiation, based on the cultural-narratological readings of Ahmet Ümit's novels, this thesis is “travelling between academic and national cultures and cultures of research” (Neumann/Nünning 2012: 11) of Germany, Turkey, and beyond. For this reason, it may be considered an interdisciplinary and a transnational study of culture, despite its focus on Turkish culture and literature.¹⁶ What I aim at in this thesis is not a mere re-application of a method and theoretical approaches to the study of (Turkish) culture that have their roots elsewhere, but a self-reflexive and a deliberate re-(al)location of methods and theories of culture. I believe that this particular reading practice can produce critical analyses which promise to overcome certain limitations prevalent in the study of Turkish literature, and which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Overview of the Chapters

In addition to this introduction, the thesis consists of five main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter presents the theoretical and methodological frame; the second puts forward a contextualized and historized approach to Ahmet Ümit's fiction; and the subsequent three chapters present analyses of nine of his novels.

The nine novels included in this study are Ahmet Ümit's crime novels published between 1996 and 2012. The selection of primary sources excludes other works by the author for the following reasons: Firstly, since this thesis is primarily concerned with the genre of crime

16 As discussed above, owing to the contemporary book trade, any contemporary study of crime fiction is, to a certain degree, inevitably transnational. Even if the main focus of a study may be a national one, considering the ever-increasing globalization of the genre, the discussions would be inextricably linked to the trends and dynamics, crossing national boundaries.

fiction, particularly the novel form, it does not look into the author's short stories, folk tales, poems or his epic. Instead, its inquiry starts with the author's first crime novel *Sis ve Gece*, which came out in 1996, and ends with his ninth novel *Sultanı Öldürmek*, published in 2012. All nine novels were published before the Gezi Protests which took place in 2013. As the next chapters reveal, I argue that Gezi is a milestone not only in recent Turkish history, but also in Ümit's fiction, because it put an end to his *ambivalent* politics of resistance which is manifest both in his fictional and non-fictional narratives. Since then, Ümit has been much more overtly critical of the current government and certain ideologies that dominate present-day discourses and politics.

Thus, although Ahmet Ümit has so far published four novels since *Sultanı Öldürmek*, I have purposefully excluded close readings of these, because, being published after the Gezi Protests, his two novels *Beyoğlu'nun En Güzel Abisi* (*When Pera Trees Whisper*, 2013) and *Elveda Güzel Vatanım* (*Farewell, My Beautiful Homeland*, 2015) are the cultural products of a period in Turkish history which, because of its immediacy and complexity, would be recalcitrant to the coherent discussion required by this thesis. Moreover, the complexity of the more recent cultural context, due to the rapidity of significant events and the palpable instability in the country, would hinder a comprehensive discussion of the ideological implications of these novels. Ümit's latest novel *Kırlangıç Çığlığı* (*The Swallow's Cry*, 2018) is also excluded because it came out during the final stages of work for this thesis.¹⁷ In Chapter 2, I offer brief discussions of these three novels, but do not venture upon a close reading informed by the methodological framework of cultural narratology. In spite of this absence, however, this thesis provides the most comprehensive analysis of Ahmet Ümit's crime novels currently available. To this end, I adopt the following structure:

Chapters 1 and 2 lay the foundation for the analyses of Ümit's nine novels. In three sections, Chapter 1 sets out the theoretical and methodological grounds on which this dissertation is built and elucidates key conceptual and terminological matters. The first section introduces the main theoretical approaches of this study, and it discusses them in relation to literary criticism in Turkey. In doing so, it explicates why the theoretical parameters of this study are compatible with both its primary concerns and its wider objectives. The second section examines cultural narratology in more detail, and it further explains why it promises to be instrumental in overcoming certain problems that are prevalent in Turkish literary criticism. The third section is concerned with key concepts. The definitions of ideology, Turkishness, cultural memory, and cultural resistance, crucial to this thesis, are presented. Instead of merely providing conceptual definitions, this section additionally elaborates on these concepts in relation to the cultural context of contemporary Turkey. Thus, it will introduce particular ideologies present in Turkey such as Kemalism, Turkish nationalism, and secularism, and begin to situate them in relation to Ümit's fiction in order to underline the major arguments of this thesis and to provide contextual information.

Chapter 2 provides an account of the concrete socio-historical context in which, for over two decades, Ümit's fiction has operated as a medium of ideological negotiations. It does so, firstly, by considering Ahmet Ümit's place within the Turkish literary and cultural field. As such, section 2.1 refers to Ümit's biography in order to show his transition from a young

17 Please note that in 2019, after the submission of this thesis, Ahmet Ümit's latest novel *Aşkımız Eski Bir Roman* was published by Yapı Kredi Yayınları.

novice author to one of the most popular novelists in contemporary Turkey. Additionally, this section presents an overview of his fictional narratives, published up until the Gezi Protests, so that it underlines the significance of crime fiction both in generating Ümit's popularity and partially disguising the cultural resistance that is embedded in these novels. The second section focuses especially on Ümit's "non-fictional or real world narratives" (cf. Nünning 2012: 157) in order to reveal that his politics are shaped not only by his fictional narratives, but also by his "narrative acts of self-making" (cf. Bruner 2002:65; qtd. in Nünning 2012: 165), i.e., his ways of constructing his public persona. By elaborating the ways in which the Gezi Protests have been a milestone both for Turkey and also for Ümit, the final section of chapter 2 describes the changes in Ümit's narratives as they are manifest in the aftermath of the Gezi Protests. Hence, this third section also includes a discussion of the three novels whose analyses are missing in this study.

Chapters 3 to 5 present my reading of Ümit's nine novels. The division of chapters is based on a chronological ordering which serves to reveal the changes in Ümit's fiction, both in form and content, over the twenty-two years between the publication of his first novel and his ninth, and also to show that the changes in his fiction may be aligned with the transformations in the country. To this end, despite several common characteristics which all nine novels exhibit, I have categorized them under three groups, represented in chapters 3 to 5, respectively.

Chapter 3 looks into the author's four novels which I designate as Ümit's early works and political thrillers, namely *Sis ve Gece* (The Fog and The Night, 1996), *Kar Kokusu* (The Scent of Snow, 1998), *Patasana* (Patasana, 2000) and *Kukla* (The Marionette, 2002). Written between 1996 and 2002, I argue that these works are particularly concerned with the discontents of the Kemalist regime, and, even if ambivalently, they aim at dismantling certain values and norms and contesting Kemalist historiography. The ideological negotiations manifest in these novels are thus predominantly related to Kemalism, which was the "hegemonic state ideology up until the 2000s" (Öktem 2011: 54). This chapter looks into Ümit's narrative ways of challenging Kemalism and other ideologies, which are undeniably linked to the tensions in Turkey's recent past such as Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. The analyses of these four novels show how Ümit combines the social realist mode, prevalent in the leftist novels of this period, with the genre traits of crime fiction, to construct an alternative version of the recent past, particularly the period of the 1980 military coup and its aftermath. Further, the analyses reveal how "the dark core of Turkish nationalism" is challenged through the particular construction of the male characters (ibid.: 24). In this chapter, I propose the interpretation of numerous male characters and the way they are constructed in Ümit's novels as contemporary and popular manifestations of *homo secularis*. A concept proposed by Erdağ Gökner, *homo secularis* designates numerous characters in the Turkish canon that symbolize the discontent of discursive confinements of certain ideologies such as secularism, Kemalism and Turkish nationalism (cf. 2013). This chapter argues that through the memories, interior monologues, and life stories of *homo secularis*, in these four novels, and in ways similar to the canonical authors, Ümit generates cultural resistance against the prevalent ideologies of the Kemalist state. In doing so, mostly implicitly but sometimes also explicitly, Ümit contests a number of national values and norms, especially those related to the sacred idea of the military. Moreover, this chapter discusses how he

challenges a number of national taboos by reminding his reader of the atrocities against ethnic and religious minorities.

Chapter 4 investigates another set of Ümit's work, which I describe as his novels of transition. This set includes *Beyoğlu Rapsodisi* (Beyoglu Rhapsody, 2003), *Kavim* (The Man Who Spoke the Language of Jesus, 2006) and *Bab-ı Esrar* (*The Dervish Gate*, 2008). Written between 2003 and 2008, these novels are part of a period in Turkish history in which what was then considered “the moderate wing of the Islamists,” the Justice and Development Party (AKP), “captured political power with a landslide electoral victory in 2002” (Bakiner 2014:1857). In addition to the 1980 military coup and state violence, in these novels Ümit engages with new issues which are linked with prevalent public discussions, particularly on the role of secularism and religion in defining Turkish identity. The three novels, which are the foci of this chapter, differ from the previous four due to the fact that they manifest Ümit's engagement with and participation in such discussions through his fiction. All three novels thematize religious faith and religiosity, as the murders and the associated investigations are either linked to the religious identities of the victims, or religious texts serve as red herrings. What is more, through the multiplicity of perspectives, religious identities in Turkey are brought into focus. These include, for instance, Arab Christians, Süryanis, agnostics, and Satanists. Additionally, Sufism appears as a literary trope in *Bab-ı Esrar*, as the novel reconstructs the life stories of the two renowned Sufis Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. In this chapter, I firstly present the changing dynamics in Turkey after the landslide victory of the AKP, and I interpret the initial years of the AKP government, during which these novels were written, in a positive manner. I make use of the notion of post-secularism not only to identify the new (and rather short-lived) cultural climate in Turkey, but also to characterize these three novels. Accordingly, the main ideologies this chapter examines are secularism, post-secularism, and political Islam. In my reading of these novels as being exemplary of post-secular (crime) fiction, I show how they challenge both the rigid confines of Kemalist secularism and Sunni Islam orthodoxy in defining national identity.

In Chapter 5, two novels are taken into examination: *İstanbul Hatırası* (*A Memento for Istanbul*, 2010) and *Sultanı Öldürmek* (*To Kill a Sultan*, 2012). These novels, denominated in this thesis as Ahmet Ümit's Istanbul novels, were published respectively in 2010 and 2012, after the post-secular cultural climate had come to an end, and as Turkey was moving towards “an authoritarian regime” (cf. Öktem 2016; Başer/Öztürk 2017). Both best-selling novels are analyzed in relation to their context, in which the making of “the New Turkey” and “the new Turks” was generated through “a radical reinterpretation of all aspects of the established culture and politics” (Geç, “The Sacred and Its Discontents”). The main argument in this chapter is that by means of a literal recuperation of the ancient past through the history of Istanbul in *İstanbul Hatırası*, and by constructing an alternative Ottoman history in *Sultanı Öldürmek* while calling into question official historiography's claim to objectivity and truth, these two novels provide a dual resistance to dominant ideologies in both regimes. In other words, these works contest the official historical narratives prevalent both in the Kemalist and AKP regimes. In these novels, Ümit makes use of the literary trope of Istanbul cosmopolitanism and the cultural phenomenon of Ottomania in order to concurrently contest a number of ideologies. This chapter builds on the discussion of ideologies in the previous two chapters to show how his fiction provides an additional critique of the three dominant ideologies of this later period, namely Muslim nationalism, neo-Ottomanism and

neoliberalism, through the presentation of the history of the Ottoman Empire and the city of Istanbul.

Altogether, the five chapters in this study present a cultural history of Turkey. Chapters 3 to 5 lay out the characteristics of Ümit's fiction in chronological order, focusing on the narrative and literary techniques, i.e., literary tropes and modes of writing, which generate cultural resistance. These three chapters reveal that in all his novels, the author relies on multi-perspective narration, constellation of characters, unreliable narration, analepsis, and interior monologue to contest, subvert and/or affirm and disseminate numerous ideologies. The chapters also display that, gradually, the social realist mode loses its dominance in Ümit's novels, which start to feature postmodern techniques. Furthermore, they show that in ways similar to many authors in Turkish literature, Ümit makes use of literary tropes such as Sufism and Istanbul cosmopolitanism, and his novels feature various cultural phenomena such as Ottomania, for example, to voice a critique against the dominant discourses of Turkish history, national identity, and cultural memory.

The conclusion brings together the main discussions of each chapter as it sums up the main findings of each analytical chapter. As the conclusion highlights the main arguments of this thesis, it attempts to determine whether its aims have been fulfilled. In the light of the questions developed in this section, the study concludes by suggesting points of departure for further research.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical and Methodological Premises

1.1 Interconnections Between the Theoretical and Methodological Approaches and Aims of this Study

The theoretical basis of this thesis is provided by anthropological and semiotic theories and definitions of culture (cf. Geertz 1973; Nünning 2012a; Posner 2004, 2008) as well as a narrativist approach to its study (cf. Bal 1999; Herman 1999; Nünning 2000, 2009; Nünning/Nünning/Neuman 2010).¹ I argue that integrating the anthropological and semiotic conceptions of Turkish culture with a narrativist approach to its scholarship provides a possibility of overcoming certain constraints of Turkish literary and cultural criticism. As this chapter presents the theoretical and methodological grounds of this study in detail, it reveals that the rationale behind the selection of this particular framework is not only compatible with this thesis' aims and methods, but also that it may be instrumental in developing a new look into popular literary narratives in contemporary Turkey.

An Integrated Concept of Culture

This work perceives cultures holistically “as systems of signs which have three dynamically interrelated dimensions, viz. a material dimension, a social dimension, and a mental dimension” (Nünning 2012a: 162). The material dimension of culture comprises elements such as language, literary texts, and historical sources, as well as other narratives including film and photography; the social dimension comprises institutions, political organizations, social hierarchies and roles. The mental dimension embodies mentalities, systems of values and norms, taboos, and concepts of identity (cf. Nünning 2012b: 265). An anthropological and semiotic concept of culture conceives these three dimensions not as “isolated phenomena, but interdependent and complementary elements within the study of culture” (ibid.). Consequently, culture is understood as “the entire complex of discursive formations, ideas, values and meanings created by humans and materialized in symbolic systems” (Nünning 2014: 33). In adopting this broad conceptualization of culture, this study aims to look into the connections among the three dimensions of Turkish culture as they are expressed in and through Ümit's narratives.

More precisely, this thesis will repeatedly point out such connections in order to investigate *how* Ümit's novels function as a medium of ideological negotiation and *why* they can be read as resistance literature. Ümit's popular literary narratives, which belong to the material dimension of contemporary Turkish culture, are thus explored in their relation to the

¹ For elaborate discussions on the various definitions of culture in relation to the study of cultures and narratives, see Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning (eds.) *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture* (2012).