



# BROKEN MASCULINITIES

SOLITUDE, ALIENATION, AND  
FRUSTRATION IN TURKISH LITERATURE  
AFTER 1970

*Çimen Günay-Erkol*

 **CEU PRESS**

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*to my mom and dad*



*History is what hurts*

FREDRIC JAMESON

*The truth of art lies in its power  
to break the monopoly of established  
reality to define what is real*

HERBERT MARCUSE



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## *Preface*

This book is an attempt to understand gender from the perspective of masculinities with Turkey's military periods as the backdrop. I am especially interested in the coup of 1971, which traumatized the climactic 1968 spirit in Turkey. I focus on novels published during and after the military intervention of 12 March 1971, which punished 1968 radicalism grievously and put the brakes on the rise of socialism in Turkey. Such an attempt allows one to reflect on some of the broader cultural and literary questions pertinent to Turkey, as well as the obscure history of the military coups, which has not been widely explored. It is hard to find books in English that address Turkey's 1968 as most of them refer to movements from Latin America or China for comparison. Turkey's political mobilization in 1968 took a serious toll and was threatening for the state. This was a close parallel with Europe in terms of timing, as the events in Istanbul followed those in Paris within a matter of weeks. Four weeks after the Sorbonne occupation on 13 May 1968, students occupied Istanbul Technical University on 17 June 1968. Students, workers, and political activists united in demonstrations, and after the barricades came down, marched with improvised weapons against police brutality and made a noteworthy call for change. There is a political urgency to question Turkey's 1968 if the current authoritarian political climate in Turkey is to be confronted.

I intend this book to serve as a reminder for the deeper roots of authoritarianism, which keeps haunting Turkey especially after the suppression of the Gezi Park movement in the summer of 2013. Despite the demilitarization of the political sphere in the last ten years, it is hard to say that Turkey's political culture has been profoundly transformed. Disputes on demilitarization reached a dramatic climax in 2012 with the trial of army officers in civil court, who were accused of underpinning civilian governmental control in 2003, including former top commanders, such as İlker Başbuğ, Turkey's military chief of the period, and several other officers and journal-

ists, as part of the controversial Ergenekon plot. A retired general plus sixteen others were sentenced to life in prison on 5 August 2013. Several officers were also detained in 2012 for their roles in the 28 February 1997 coup, when the military forced out a coalition government. The 1980 military overthrow, which was the last and bloodiest of Turkey's coups, was under fire as well. In 2013, Kenan Evren, the seventh president of Turkey (1983–1989) and the leader of the traumatic 12 September 1980 coup, stood trial, together with the top commander of the Air Force, Tahsin Şahinkaya, when the two were the only surviving leaders of the coup.

As of 2014, İlker Başbuğ and commanders who had received life sentences within the scope of the Ergenekon trial were released from jail after 26 months, when top court ruled in March 7 that the court trying them had failed to publish a detailed verdict on the case and therefore violated their rights. Kenan Evren, who in a speech in 1984 asked, “should we feed them in prison for years instead of hanging them?” (*asmayalım da besleyelim mi?*) in defense of the executions of political activists after the army takeover, received life sentence in June 18 along with Tahsin Şahinkaya. Evren died on 9 May 2015 and Şahinkaya on 11 July 2015 while the sentence was on appeal. While some see the appeal to justice as a challenging move, there are also others who see the Ergenekon trials as theater built on fabricated evidence and exaggerations, and designed to suppress current political opposition rather than a cleansing of Turkey's deep state. They consider the life sentences of two old, long-retired generals hardly more than symbolic in a country where the governing bodies still function under the 1982 constitution imposed by the military after the coup and many of the anti-democratic aspects of the 1980s are still being felt.

It is necessary to develop a better understanding of the authoritarianism and brutality that made militaristic masculinity a critical paradigm, since Turkey keeps struggling with democratization in 2014 despite the transformation of the military control of politics. It is necessary to make people confront their “militarized/authoritarian” selves in their civilian lives. The quest to look back at the 1970s can help us identify the ways in which power shifted between some political actors, and systematically marginalized or silenced certain others. Turkey's 1968 is very important in this sense, as liber-

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ation was demanded under a paternal sort of care by self-appointed leaders, where student activism, political parties, and unions organized the energy of the revolt in various hierarchies. Considering that central figures of the right-wing student movements of the 1970s are currently in high political positions in Turkey, one can hardly say that what happened forty-five years ago is now the distant past.

Contrary to the 1960 and 1980 coups, the military did not assume direct power in 1971, but urged for a government of technocrats from outside the parliament and exercised its influence behind the scenes. However, together with the police force, the military pursued a brutal campaign and made arbitrary arrests. The number of casualties in the ten-year period between 1970 and 1980, resulting from unidentified assassinations, street fights, and crimes by state agents (i.e., the police and military) is assumed to be greater than 5,000. Violence escalated as the ideological conflict between the left and the right got further complicated with increased religious fundamentalism and Kurdish separatism. Many of the painful memories of these specific periods of Turkish history are still waiting to be confronted.

This book focuses on the testimonial post-coup novels, which were named after the intervention as the “March 12 novels,” as they feature events from that period in their narrations. My aim is to organize the historical and literary discussion of these testimonies around important themes from masculinity studies, such as hegemony and performativity. These are issues that previous commentators of the March 12 novels deliberately stopped short of confronting. Masculinity is a new research area in Turkey, especially within literary criticism. In the last few years, as feminist scholars took greater steps to deal with gender in the broader sense of the term, masculinity became the explicit focus of research projects in diverse fields, such as sociology and history. The real dawn of such research lies in literature, as the artistic dimension allows a more nuanced discussion of attitudes and institutions of masculinity (such as the military) by writers of different generations and political orientations. Literary production of the military periods provides an excellent example of how fiction makes it possible to narrate otherwise intimidating stories of traumatic events.

Almost all of the critics and writers mentioned here were participants of the events of 1968 and were transformed by them. The

seizure of power by the military in 1980 pushed masses of people into violent struggles in a more militarized and oppressive manner than the March 12 intervention in 1971, and imposed a fierce social alienation and de-politicization on post-coup Turkish society. The 1971 coup inspired numerous works not only in the nine-year period between the two military interventions of 1971 and 1980, but also in the post-1980s. There are young writers who produced second-hand accounts of the March 12 events in the 1980s, and the artistic merit of their work cannot be denied. The criterion that has governed my choice of novels, however, is the attempt to avoid interference with the echoes of the last coup and the different social dynamics of the literary atmosphere of the neo-liberal post-1980s.

The controversies related to gender and sexuality in the March 12 fiction, which surface in a polarized discourse shaped by the fierce conflict between the left and the right in Turkey, have the whole history of Turkish modernization as the primary part of their enigma. Written in the thick of political battles, March 12 novels look at a profound crisis of power not only in the political domain but also in the personal domain, which requires a critical look at Turkey's modernization. Whether satiric or realistic, March 12 novels elaborate the ways masculinities and femininities settled in the traumatized power hierarchy of the period, questioning modernist utopias and authoritarian pressures. They portray how prescribed ideals became sources of anxiety for individuals. Gender is one of the principal hermeneutical manifolds to understand the dynamics of the period, not only because both of the political discourses (revolutionary-left and ultra-nationalist-right) were caught in the ruses of patriarchy, but also because the boasting of the military produced subjects that were traumatized in their gendered identities.

The main focus of this book is on novels published between 1971 and 1980, which contain firsthand eyewitness accounts. Selected works represent the diversity of March 12 fiction as extensively as possible. Works of writers who belong to the revolutionary left are included as well as those of the radical right. On the whole, I chose books that are particularly representative of the chaotic atmosphere of the March 12 coup. The analyses of the novels are arranged in chronological order to deal better with their specific position at the historical moment that marks the development of March 12 fiction.

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Chapter 1 contains a critical reading of three popular March 12 novels published immediately after the military intervention: *Büyük Gözaltı* (Extreme Surveillance, 1972), *İsa'nın Güncesi* (The Diary of Jesus, 1974), and *Yaralımsın* (You Are Wounded, 1974). Chapter 2 focuses on the works of female writers, who in their novels broadened the discussions about the period by critically dealing with male subject positions, and this includes *Şafak* (The Dawn, 1974), *Sancı* (Stitch, 1975), *Yarın Yarın* (Tomorrow Tomorrow, 1976) and *Zor* (Hard, 1977). Finally, Chapter 3 explores two novels published in 1979 at the outset of the third and the most devastating military intervention of 12 September 1980: *Gençliğim Eyvah* (Alas! My Youth, 1979) and *Bir Düğün Gecesi* (A Wedding Night, 1979).



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I enjoyed the challenge of researching and writing this book very much. However, from time to time, I found myself haunted by the dark memories presented by the victims and witnesses of the military coup. There were times when things did not go well, and I wanted to quit writing altogether. I am greatly indebted to Ernst van Alphen who helped me stay tuned, contributed to my ability to grasp trauma in its reality and reproduction, and helped me to make my observations into literary analysis. Without him, I would have quit my studies altogether, and my manuscript would never have left my drawer.

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## *Introduction*

A common expression in Turkish that communicates the power of a hardship, a struggle, a burden on an individual is “having the milk one had drunk from his mother pumped out through his nostrils” (anasından emdiği süt burnundan gelmek). The significance of this saying—besides the savage image of torture it implies with the image of a fluid being forced through the nostrils—is its metaphorical suggestion of the long-term storage of the mother’s breast milk in an individual’s adult body. By means of such an imagery, this expression points out the special link between the past and the present, despite the gap that separates the two. It hints that people carry their pasts in them, and also suggests that when under repression, one encounters elements of his past. History as “breast milk” as a metaphor fittingly describes how battles that evoked cultural and political conflicts in Turkey’s past still reverberate in Turkey’s present. Military coups, for example, are such specters.

Turkey experienced three successful (1960, 1971, and 1980) and two abortive military coups (1962 and 1963) in the twenty-year span from 1960 to 1980.<sup>1</sup> The 1960 coup was a direct intervention against the Menderes government, which lost the people’s support due to the mid-1950s economic crisis as well as its suppressive policies regarding the freedom of press and student demonstrations. Most intellectuals welcomed the intervention because a new constitution—with a wide range of civil liberties and social rights—was introduced following the military coup.

1 The history of military coups in Turkey provides a dramatic history of the development of capitalism in the country. İsmet Akça fruitfully discusses how all military coups helped the construction of an authoritarian state form, and how the 1980 military intervention especially gave rise to the establishment of neoliberal capitalism in Turkey. İsmet Akça, “Hegemonic Projects in post-1980 Turkey and the Changing Forms of Authoritarianism,” in *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*, ed. İsmet Akça, Ahmet Bekmen and Barış Alp Özden (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2014).

Liberal attitudes of the new constitution toward organized political activity caused several different political groups such as Islamists, Turkists and socialists to accumulate around political clubs. The 1971 intervention was different, since military did not assume direct power but urged for a technocratic government while exercising its power behind the scenes.<sup>2</sup> Although armed forces acted indirectly in politics, their response to protesters in the streets was direct. Turkey became a site of torment under the military regime from 1971 to 1973, overwhelmingly for the leftists.

The 1980 coup was a direct intervention to politics. It is considered as one of the CIA assisted overthrows worldwide.<sup>3</sup> In addition to financial instability and social unrest, Kurdish separatism and Islamic extremism complicated the political scene of the 1980s. Several people were sentenced to the death penalty and were executed. The military outlawed all political parties and passed numerous laws drastically affecting the socio-economic and political structures. The number of casualties from the two military coups has been estimated around 5,000. Between 1975 and 1980, an estimated 5,000 people were killed with three times as many wounded.<sup>4</sup> There is a dramatic increase in the number of victims within the two-year period of 1977–1979: from 230 in 1977 to between 1200 and 1500 in 1979.<sup>5</sup> Another estimate has the number of victims as 231 in 1977 and 832 in 1978.<sup>6</sup> In 1981, after the coup, authorities accused the anticommunist movement and its paramilitary cadres of 694 murders between

- 2 The majority on the left saw a revolutionary potential in the armed forces for a socialist regime and a left-wing junta (later known as the Madanoğlu Junta) deciphered on 9 March 1971, on the intended date of intervention by the military. Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism* (Leiden: I.B Tauris, 2011).
- 3 Daniele Ganser notes the U.S. support for the coup via counter-guerilla forces (Turkish gladio) as part of the counter-insurgency politics of the United States. Daniele Ganser, “Terrorism in Western Europe: An Approach to NATO’s Secret Stay-Behind Armies,” *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 2005 Winter/Spring: 69–95.
- 4 Ergun Özbudun. *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 35.
- 5 Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 276.
- 6 Kenneth Mackenzie, *Turkey Under the Generals* (London: Institute for the Studies of Conflict, 1981), 8.

the years 1974–1980.<sup>7</sup> Before the return to democracy in 1983, judges granted 500 of 6,000 requests for death sentences, forty-nine of which were executed.<sup>8</sup>

Military tutelage and political repression continued into the 1990s. Another intervention into politics in Turkey by the military came on 28 February 1997 with a memorandum that precipitated the resignation of the prime minister on the grounds of rising religious extremism in the country.<sup>9</sup> The process was later labeled a “post-modern coup.” Another memorandum followed on 27 April 2007, labeled the “midnight memorandum” or “e-memo,” prepared by the chief of general staff and a group of other commanders, published on the webpage of the armed forces. Amid the political crisis over the election of the country’s president, there was a parliamentary deadlock on whether the presidential nominee’s spouse should wear an Islamic headscarf or not. The memorandum stated that the military was following the debate over secularism in the presidential election with “concern” and would “openly display its position and attitude when it becomes necessary.”

Military coups traumatized Turkey’s walk toward democracy. Each had massive impact on people’s engagement with politics and trust in the parliamentary system. Among the four interventions, the 1971 coup stands unique in its attack of the 1968 spirit in Turkey and its vocal anti-Americanism.<sup>10</sup> The year 1968 in Turkey was an outcry for change but it lacked a program of consensus. Massive protests in 1968 attacked not only the ills of capitalism but also the administration’s inadequacy in answering requests for freedom in universities and elsewhere. Official history, government policies against Kurdish citizens, pressure on Alevi minorities, and authoritarian policies were

7 Albert J. Jongman and Alex Peter Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 674.

8 Kerem Öktem, *Angry Nation: Turkey Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 59.

9 Ümit Cizre and Menderes Çınar, “Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, 2/3, (2003): 309–32.

10 In his “68: İkinci Eleme” (68: The Second Elimination), Tanıl Bora explains how the premature anti-authoritarian intentions of the 1968 movement distinguishes it from the leftist movements of the 1970s. Tanıl Bora, “68: İkinci Eleme,” *Birikim* 109 (1998): 28–36.

questioned. Students were the catalyzing agents of the street struggles and demonstrations, which were answered with police brutality.<sup>11</sup> A sometimes-vulgar Marxism led most of the movements, eclipsing the attempt to break the hold of the oligarchy and establish a libertarian democracy. The student-worker alliance, backed up with strikes and massive protests, initiated a conservative counter-current, and a civil-war atmosphere existed, as paramilitary anticommunist groups organized themselves into the guardians of the state against the disorder that threatened it. Streets became the venue of violent clashes: armed leftist- and right-wing students clashed in the streets causing injuries and deaths. As the military intervened, thousands of people found themselves in courts controlled by the military and then imprisoned, facing mistreatment and torture, paying for their demands.

The 1971 coup is also unique in terms of the literary corpus it inspired. Intellectuals mostly supported the 1960 coup, and therefore it did not provoke much reactionary literature. The 1981 coup initiated reactionary and documentary writings, but the yield is diverse in form and content, and hence lacks the continuity of a literary current. There is, however, a rich body of literature that concentrates on the memories of the 1971 coup, which is named “March 12th literature.” Different genres such as the novel, poetry, and short story can be observed within this trend.<sup>12</sup> However, the most popular genre was novel. In the nine-year period between the two successive military interventions of 1971 and 1980, several novels followed one

11 There are significant similarities between what happened in Turkey and the events of May 1968 in Paris. Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman see the insurrection in France as part of a worldwide revolutionary movement and refer to similar experiences in Latin America, China, Indochina, Japan and Mexico, but they omit Turkey. Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

12 Famous poet Can Yücel was sentenced to fifteen years because of his translations from Che Guevara and Mao Zedong by the military court in 1971. He was released with the announcement of general amnesty in 1974 and published *Bir Siyasinin Şiirleri* (Poems of a political prisoner). Several such prison writings exist but are not widely explored by literary critics. Some short stories on March 12 were collected in a book published in 2008, *Yiğit İken Ölenlere: 12 Mart Öyküleri Antolojisi* [To Whom died brave: Anthology of stories on March 12] (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 2008).

another in publication including books by Çetin Altan, Erdal Öz, Melih Cevdet Anday, Sevgi Soysal, Pınar Kür, Selim İleri, Oktay Rıfat, Taruk Dursun Kakinç, Demirtaş Ceyhun, Samim Kocagöz, Sevinç Çokum, Emine Işınsu, Füzuzan (Yerdelen), Demir Özlü, Adalet Ağaoğlu, and Tarık Buğra, whose positions ranged from ordinary observers of the political atmosphere to politicians and activists.

Famous director Yılmaz Güney was also among the March 12 writers. Güney wrote three novels, *Salpa* (Salpa), *Sanık* (Suspect), and *Hücrem* (My Cell), in 1971–1973, which were published in 1975. In these novels, we find an attempt to make history via literature, which provides the readers less with stylistic experimentations and more with an autobiographical and journalistic realism, and “stories that history has forgotten,” as Azade Seyhan subtly summarizes.<sup>13</sup> Literature, Seyhan states, complements “our understanding of the past” and gives us a chance to review some personal and intimate details of important historical events.<sup>14</sup> When talking about March 12 novels, “to complement” can be replaced with “to challenge” as the fictional reconstruction of the grand narratives of history offers new ways of thinking of the events, and invites readers to imagine what is unimaginable within the “scientific approach” of history writing.

In the post-1980s, memories of the 1971 and 1980 military coups inspired several renowned novelists of contemporary Turkish literature such as Oya Baydar, Latife Tekin, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Mehmet Eroğlu, Ahmet Altan and Bilge Karasu to start important debates. In the literature of the post-1980s, there were writers with limited public appeal who contributed to the surge of “September 12 literature” from prison.<sup>15</sup> The 1980 coup was an important turning point in Turkish letters, which inspired book-length studies and eclipsed the critical study of the 1971 experience. The toll of September 12 was the heaviest: in total, fifty people were executed, 500,000 were

13 Azade Seyhan, “Introduction: Novel Moves,” in *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context* (New York: MLA, 2008), 1–22.

14 *Ibid.*, 5.

15 Başak Deniz Özdoğan mentions writers such as A. Kadir Konuk and Hüseyin Şimşek as important figures of prison literature. “Experience of September 12 coup d’état in Turkish Novels of the 1980s.” Unpublished master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2008.

arrested, and hundreds died in prison. In the late 1990s, Turkey witnessed a boom in the publishing of memoirs, testimonials, and fiction that focused on the 1980 coup. The 1971 intervention and the military rule of 1971 to 1973 made limited appearance in the post-1980s as defining themes in biographical or autobiographical form. Testimonials of 1971 emerged quite late, after a considerable amount of time had passed over the dreadful events of the 1980s. Testimonies and biographies of people who witnessed this period are still limited in number.<sup>16</sup>

In his *Testimony After Catastrophe*, which concentrates on the testimonies of atrocity, torture, the Holocaust, and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans during the 1990s, Stevan Weine indicates that fictionalized testimonials do an important job, since they carry out a more nuanced discussion of the traumatic events and their consequences on individuals.<sup>17</sup> March 12 novels shed light on such personal moments not seen by “(official) history” and carry out a vivid discussion of a dark period, when there was little effort to shed light on it. In the 1970s, when there was not a rich body of testimonial-historical writings of the period, the fictional perspective provided by these novels, for better or worse, accommodated the only discussion of the escalating political violence and the March 12 regime that purport-

16 An early account of Turkey’s 1968 is written by Harun Karadeniz, student leader from Istanbul Technical University, who published his memoirs *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik* (Troubled Years and Youth) in 1974. Karadeniz died in 1975. The majority of memoirs came during and after the 1990s. Some examples are: *Ziverbey Köşkü* (Ziverbey Mansion, 1987) by İlhan Selçuk; *Bir MİT Mensubunun Anıları* (Memoirs of an Intelligence agent, 1991) by Mehmet Eymür; *12 Mart’tan 12 Eylül’e Mamak* (Mamak from March 12 to September 12, 1998) by Oral Çalışlar; *Bir Annenin 68 Anıları* (Memoirs of a mother from 1968, 2000) by Muazzez Aktolga; *Gülleyle’ya Anılar* (Memories to Gülleyle, 2002) by Azra Erhat; *İhtilal, İhtiras ve İdeal, 68 Kuşağı Hakkında* (Revolution, passion, and ideal: About the 68 generation, 2008) by Erol Kılınç; *Sokak Güzeldir: 68’de Ne Oldu?* (Streets are beautiful: What happened in 68?, 2009) by Nadire Mater. Ertuğrul Kürkçü, member of THKP-C (People’s Liberation Party-Front of Turkey) and the only survivor of the Kızıldere massacre, published his first book *İsyanın İzinde* (En Route of revolt, DipNot Yayınları), a history of revolts in Turkey starting from Anatolian heretics and covering the revolutionary movement of the 1970s in 2013.

17 Stevan Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe: Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).