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***Hamlet* in Contemporary Turkey: Towards Postcolonial Feminist Rewrites?**

The dictionary definition of adaptation is “to make suitable” which implies an intercultural or intergeneric transfer. In Linda Hutcheon’s (8) words, “The adapted text is an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work in a process of creation and reception”, which involves both “difference” and “repetition” (114). According to Geoffrey Wagner (20-21), adaptation can be examined in three categories, namely “transposition, commentary and analogue”. Drawing on the above mentioned arguments, it can be suggested that the process of adaptation requires an intentional dialogue with another text as well as new interpretive contributions. In this respect adaptation aims at making the adapted text, which is both similar and dissimilar to the interests of the target reader or the audience, thoroughly suitable to the newly introduced context. Adaptation inevitably becomes a chaotic process for readers and audiences, and can be considered as “hybrid” in the postcolonial sense that Homi K. Bhabha (2) uses in *The Location of Culture* as “the one and the Other both” while at the same time “neither the One nor the Other”. The purpose of this study is to examine the transformation of readings of *Hamlet* given the context of contemporary Turkey. This study draws on Homi K. Bhabha’s (5) concept of “cultural hybridity” which reflects on the cultural anxieties in Turkey, always at the crossroads of an important cultural encounter between the Western and the Eastern cultural identities.

The history of adaptation in Turkish literary history dates back to the mid nineteenth century, to a specific period called Tanzimat (1839-1876), during the reign of the Ottoman sultans Mahmut II and Abdülmecit I. Tanzimat, the English word connotation of which is reorganization, is usually received as a period of Westernization in the Turkish history, followed by the first constitutional period. Tracing the Turkish literary background, one can argue that from the Tanzimat Period onwards, adapting a Western source text to the Turkish audience has become a problematic issue, manipulated by the ongoing political debate of Westernization versus Easternization. Following Ahmet Vefik

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Paşa's adaptations of Molière, Shakespearean plays, especially tragedies, started to be adapted to Turkish stage in mid 1800s. Turkish literary scholar İnci Engünün (251) traces the reason why Shakespeare was introduced to the Ottoman Empire two centuries later than it was in Europe to the dominance of İslamic tradition on national literature. It is noteworthy that the Turkish audience's encounter with Shakespearean tragedies corresponds to the Westernization discourses during the Ottoman Empire.

Sources suggest that Turkish audience's initial recognition of Shakespeare was in 1867, as *MacBeth* was staged by the Naum Theatre Company in Armanian, followed by their further performances in İstanbul and İzmir. The next Shakespearean play to be staged in Ottoman theatre was another tragedy, *Othello*, which was performed by the Greek originated actor Soutsas and his company. It is recorded that a noteworthy number of French translations of Shakespeare including *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III* were published in İstanbul in 1874. The first Turkish translation of a Shakespearean play, the source text of which was the French writer Ducis's adaptation, unfortunately included no references to Shakespeare. It was first published in 1876 and staged many years as a play by Ducis. Hasan Sırrı's translation of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1884 is thus noteworthy as the first Turkish translation of a Shakespearean play as a play by Shakespeare. *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* were staged many times by different theatre companies during the Ottomans.

It is quite remarkable that during the Tanzimat, Shakespearean tragedies were more welcomed on Turkish stage while there is little trace of performance concerning Shakespearean comedies and history plays with the exception of *The Merchant of Venice*. This tendency may be related to the shortcomings of translating humour as well as the ignorance of the English historical context. However, Turkish audience's reviving interest in tragedies should be considered as another influential factor.

Among Shakespearean tragedies, *Hamlet* has a remarkable place in Turkish theatre history as the most frequently staged Western play, and thus has become a symbol of Western canon for the Turkish readers and audience. The first full stage adaptation of *Hamlet* was in 1911 and sources record that there were previous performances by small theatre groups of then Ottoman Armenians and Greeks. It is important to note that despite the theories which call a stage performance of a play not necessarily an adaptation since drama is a performative genre already, most of the Turkish stage performances are called "adaptations" in this study, drawing on their inevitable intercultural transfer.

Between 1911 and 1960, in the late Ottoman and early republican period, *Hamlet* was staged numerous times in İstanbul and Anatolia and, parallel to the Westernization trend, most of the adaptations were loyal to the original play. The period between 1960 to 1970 was considered to be very productive in Turkish

theatre and there were many attempts to build a modern national theatre. The Turkish translator and critic Talat Halman notes that in 1960, *Hamlet* was performed in İstanbul one hundred and sixty-four times, which was a world record beaten later by Richard Burton's Broadway performance (qtd. in Raw 139). Turkish adaptations of Shakespeare were more transformative from 1960 onwards, which may be related to the period's experimental mood in theatre. It should be pointed out that 1960 is an important time in the history of Turkey since the first military takeover took place in 1960 (Act of the 27th of May). The new legislation offered more freedom and thus contributed to new experimental methods in art. One of the most noteworthy stage adaptations of *Hamlet* flourished in this period. As Muhsin Ertugrul, a prominent Turkish dramatist, initiated a female *Hamlet* stage project between 1962 and 1965, the celebrated actress Ayla Algan played Hamlet. Their stage productions revisited the first female *Hamlet* performance by Siyanüş during the Ottoman Empire, which was then a very revolutionary idea as it offered a counter-Elizabethan perspective by making a woman play the role of a man, especially that of a Shakespearean protagonist. It is noteworthy that some scenes of the 1961 stage production are reminiscent of the 1921 silent film version of *Hamlet* directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall, in which the Danish actress Asta Nielsen plays Hamlet as a woman who disguises herself as a man. Although in both adaptations Hamlet remains a male character played in a female body, the idea of introducing a female Hamlet might still be considered challenging for those times. Siyanüş and Algan's performances of Hamlet on Turkish stage can be noted as a significant contribution to the perceptions of *Hamlet* in Turkey as an ever revolutionary plot.

Female Hamlet was revisited in Turkish Cinema—Yeşilçam—too, in 1976 by the director Metin Erksan as *İntikam Meleği: Kadın Hamlet* (The Angel of Vengeance: Female Hamlet). A Turkish celebrity, Fatma Girik, played Hamlet in Erksan's production, which failed to reach an international audience. The major criticism was directed at Erksan's intention to retell the story of *Hamlet* in a contemporary Turkish context and promising a "Kadın Hamlet" at the same time, leaving them both underdeveloped. However, it may be suggested that most of the critics underestimated the significance of *Kadın Hamlet*, which was very revolutionary for 1976, not only because it subverted the male Hamlet image by offering a female character played by an actress, but also because it was one of the early examples of postmodern parody in Turkish cinema. This strategy of the adapter is very explicit in giving all characters but Hamlet contemporary Turkish names. To exemplify, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become Rezzan and Gül (two contemporary Turkish female names), dormitory friends of the female Hamlet who is called by the original name, Hamlet, which is neither contemporary, nor female, nor Turkish. Similarly Gertrude becomes Gönül and Ophelia becomes Orhan, two contemporary Turkish female and male

names respectively which are frequently used in Yeşilçam. The exaggerated performances of the celebrated Turkish actors and actresses which evoke in the audience a sense of metatextuality also contributes to the notion of postmodern parody. Considering the celebration of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* in 1977 among the early postmodern readings of the play, one can note that the 1976 production *Kadın Hamlet* is a noteworthy film for its time.

Kadın Hamlet also offers a challenge to the earlier misogynistic receptions of the play. Deborah Cartmell (28) argues that the 1944 film version by Laurence Olivier reflects "the phallogocentric views of the play" which she exemplifies with references to Gertrude's "passionate kiss" to Hamlet in the film. In the 1976 film version, the Oedipal bondage between Hamlet and Gertrude was inevitably challenged by offering a female Hamlet, who hates her mother as much as she hates her uncle. A Freudian reading would further suggest that the female Hamlet is a "rival" to her mother and a real "admirer" of her dead father by reversing the earlier "Oedipal" readings of *Hamlet* with the Jungian term "Electra" (Bettelheim 20-25). In this respect the film revisits the Oedipal complex from the female perspective, making a call for a psychoanalytical feminist reading.

The film is worth mentioning especially because the idea of offering a *Female Hamlet* on screen inevitably announces a reversal of the patriarchal context in *Hamlet*. While the film represents the female Hamlet as a subject, the male version of Ophelia (Orhan) can be considered even more "oppressed" than Shakespeare's Ophelia, thoroughly as an object. Drawing on Cartmell's (32) further suggestion that "the male-centred readings of the play are increasingly challenged in 1980s" as she focuses on Ophelia being theoretically foregrounded, this 1976 film version may be considered among the pioneers by offering a feminist context which decolonizes the women in the play. *Kadın Hamlet* asserts this suggestion by thoroughly omitting the famous quote "Frailty, thy name is woman" and thus announcing its deconstruction of the patriarchal perspective in the source play. Based on Elaine Showalter's suggestion in *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (137-139) that women's literature can be considered in three phases, the feminine,¹ the feminist,² and the female,³ *Kadın Hamlet* can be considered to belong to the feminist stage as it still protests against the male protagonist of Shakespearean tragedy. However, it obviously differs from the 1960s stage production, which is at the feminine phase, by challenging the "internalized

¹ "Women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature".

² Involved women's writing that protested against male standards and values, and advocated women's rights and values, including a demand for autonomy.

³ "Women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature".

female assumptions” (Showalter 137) and alternatively enjoying the representation of Hamlet as a female character, rather than a female body arbitrarily performing the male Hamlet.

Another significant point is that *Kadın Hamlet* may be considered as a transition from the “transpositions” to “analogies” in Wagner’s words. As Julie Sanders notes (26), such free adaptations, also called “appropriations”, “frequently affect a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain”. Given the Turkish context, *Kadın Hamlet* implies a new phase in adaptations, namely the Easternization of the adapting context instead of Westernization of the Turkish context. The Turkish critic, Gülşen Sayın (18), offers a noteworthy analysis of *Kadın Hamlet* drawing on the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman’s theories on the stages of cultural transfer and considers the film as an “appropriation”, exemplifying such intercultural transfer as well as “a melting pot of the melodramatic conventions dominating the Turkish cinema of the period and the National Cinema movement which is still alive in Erksan’s films”. Sayın’s following notes on Erksan, who has a background in adapting several Western canonical texts into Turkish screen, supports the claim that Erksan consciously chose to offer an alternative to the mainstream representations of the play on screen.

Yet it should be argued that for any adapter, defining the Turkish cultural identity is very difficult owing to the cultural reflections of being East European and West Asian at the same time. While one signifies being a Westerner, the other signifies being an Easterner which according to Edward Said (1-3) indicates the encounter of “the Occident and the Orient”, in turn that of the “self and the Other”. In the postcolonial sense that Homi K. Bhabha suggests, “cultural hybridity” is a possible term to account for the ambivalent reflections of the cultural identity in Turkey. Borrowing Homi K. Bhabha’s (41) following words, which he uses to explain any ambivalent cultural encounter, the cultural identity in Turkey would be “neither the one nor the other but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both”, the cultural identity of Turkey implies being the subject and object at the same time. If Bhabha’s argument is related to the specific context of a Turkish audience’s encounter with the Shakespearean text that signifies the Eurocentric canon, it is possible to read it as an encounter with the Other. To exemplify, one can recall the references to the Cyprus battle in which Othello fought against the Ottomans. In this respect the cultural identity of Turkey is stereotyped and commodified, which in turn problematizes the Turkish reader/audience’s reception of the play.

On the other hand, Turkish literature has its own national canon which has similarly stereotyped its own indigenous cultures or Eastern neighbours. The 1930s Anatolian performances of *Othello* as “Arabın İntikamı”, the English translation of which is “the Revenge of the Arab”, exemplifies the stereotypical distancing of the Arab as the Other of the Turkish. The title of the play implies

the Turkish prejudiced readings of the Arab as a stereotype. To exemplify the cultural context, one can refer to the Turkish phrase “Arap saçı” (Arabic hair) which refers to kinky hair and is used to signify complicated issues. Rewriting the title *Othello* as “Arabın İntikamı” similarly attributes to Othello the role of an object in the text where the agent is Iago. An interesting detail to note would be that, unlike in its European or American counterparts, the Turkish representations of Iago have usually been not darker than blonde. This unconscious choice possibly reflects “double consciousness” in Du Bois’s sense which indicates “looking at oneself through the eyes of the other” (2). In other words, the Turkish adaptation of *Othello* is aware of its being the Other of Shakespearean play *Othello* while, on the one hand, it Other’izes Othello, the Arabic Moor, in its Turkish context on the other. Given the context of *Kadın Hamlet*, one can argue the presence of a similar Turkish context where Shostakovich’s *Hamlet* and a classical Turkish song “Makber” encounter in order to provide a background for the female Hamlet’s mood. Erksan’s juxtaposition of the Western text with Eastern cultural elements is also observable in his choice of calling Claudius Kasım, a name which inevitably brings into the text a remembrance of a Middle Eastern folk tale, *Ali Baba ve Kirk Haramiler* (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*). Kasım is Ali Baba’s evil brother who betrays his own brother for the sake of money and thus he is very reminiscent of Claudius, who kills his brother for the sake of the throne. Another noteworthy juxtaposition takes place as Erksan replaces “The Murder of Gonzago” with a spontaneous form of a play in Turkish folk literature. Such juxtaposition of Western and Eastern contexts implies a conscious challenge to the Shakespearean text, probably addressing it as the canonized Other. The film’s deconstructive strategy is also explicit in the following translation of the famous soliloquy, “To be, or not to be, that is the question” as “Var olmak veya yok olmak, işte bütün sorun burada” meaning “To exist or to disappear, there dwells the whole problem,” and this translation subverts the major question of the play by announcing it as a problem. Similarly not to exist is translated not as its exact Turkish definition “Var olmamak” but as “yok olmak” (to disappear), implying another subversion. The above notes reinforce Linda Hutcheon’s (93) observation that “Adaptations of Shakespeare, in particular, may be intended as tributes or as a way to supplant canonical cultural authority”.

Another significant subversion takes place through the intergeneric transfer process the Shakespearean play encounters in becoming a film. As film adaptation theories suggest, filming a play is more difficult than filming a novel (Zapplin 150-170) since a play is written for a stage performance but not necessarily for a screen adaptation. This may be the major reason why there is very little attempt to film Shakespeare in Yeşilçam. Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe (25) consider film adaptation as “a cultural process” by pointing out that it is not simply “translating an artwork” in between two mediums.

Screening a Western canonical writer as Shakespeare thus requires a complicated intercultural translation besides an intergeneric or even intersemiotic transfer for a Turkish director, who already struggles at the intercultural stage because he/she can hardly make a consistent choice to define the target group in relation to Shakespeare.

According to Savaş Arslan (171), a Turkish cinema critic, “in Turkey, Shakespeare’s works, and *Hamlet* in particular, have long been participants in a republican discourse, which invariably sides with secularism and modernization against religious and conservative movements”. His suggestion thoroughly accounts for the Westernization Period from Tanzimat to 1960s, when the adaptive strategies were made to reinforce the reflections and perceptions of Turkey as a part of the Western culture.

However, recent adaptations of *Hamlet* in Turkey differ from the previous ones in spirit by offering an alternative *Hamlet*, as an Eastern play, which implies that readings of *Hamlet* in Turkey have been transformed. To exemplify, one can consider a very successful stage adaptation of *Hamlet* in 2011, as *Hamlet (in Kurdish)*. The Kurdish *Hamlet*, staged by Diyarbakır Tiyatrosu in Kurdish with Turkish subtitles, juxtaposes the Shakespearean play with Anatolian and Middle Eastern folkloric elements, featuring Gertrude in a scarf and Claudius with his nargile (water pipe), accompanied by Kurdish songs. The long dance scene of Kurdish *Hamlet* transfers Hamlet’s tragic gaiety into the target context very effectively. Echoing the most quoted line in the play “To be or not to be” in the sense of Kurdish experience in Turkey initially as “Hebun an Nebun” (to be or not to be) and consequently as “Ya herrü ya merrü” (Even if for the worst, let it be), *Hamlet (in Kurdish)* calls for recognition of Kurdish culture and its own presence within the Western literary canon, signifying both Turkey and the rest of Europe. The play also reflects an observable challenge to Shakespearean text as a Western text, which can be further traced to the canonical presence of the Western text in contrast to its eastern Other. In other words, an Eastern Shakespeare is introduced to the audience as an alternative to both Shakespearean text and its previous adaptations in Turkey. In an interview the director, Celil Toksöz, states that his inspiration in directing a Kurdish *Hamlet* was a reaction to a Turkish critic who had earlier suggested that the Kurdish language was not poetic and it was not possible to stage a Shakespearean play in Kurdish. These words interestingly echo the context of the celebrated playwright Harold Pinter’s less studied play, *Mountain Language*, which offers a critique of prejudices directed at the Kurdish culture.

Celil Toksöz notes that *Hamlet* is a universal play which also very well fits in the Kurdish cultural context, implying the Kurdish tradition of marrying a sister-in-law and a type of kinship-oriented revenge called “kan davası” which are similar to the themes employed in Shakespeare’s play. His words reinforce the previous argument that there is both similarity and difference relating the

source text to its adaptation. Furthermore, the above lines manifest that similarly to *Kadın Hamlet*, some strategic choices were made in the adaptation process of the Kurdish *Hamlet*.

Based on the above arguments, it may be suggested that the cultural identity in Turkey problematizes the process of adaptation, owing not only to Turkey's geographical positioning between Europe and Asia, but also to its "permanent transcien[ce]" (Albee 177) between Westernization and Easternization discourses. Public surveys on the European Union show that nearly half of the citizens define themselves as Westerners while the other half define themselves as Easterners. Given this complex cultural situation, the adapter can hardly address both splits of cultural identity in Turkey at once and he/she is further challenged while defining his/her target audience as either "mostly similar" or "mostly dissimilar" to the parameters of the adapted text. Especially in adapting Shakespeare, who has become a symbol of the Western Canon and thus a reflection of the adapter's Western self, the adapter yearns for a faithful revisit. Yet being outside the canon himself, the adapter in Turkey also tends to challenge the authority of his/her canonized Other. The adapter's inevitable choice between remembering or rewriting Shakespeare would also indicate remembering or rewriting both Turkey's Western self and its Western Other respectively as Turkey as a European country and Europe as the Other of Turkey. As this study reflects on the problematic adaptation process to the target culture in Turkey, it inevitably questions the possibility of any "Turkish" adaptations of Shakespeare, drawing on Bhabha's consideration of "hybrid" cultures as being neither the one nor the Other while at the same time both the one and the Other.

The process of adaptation usually implies an indirect challenge to the canonical presence of the source text, which may be observed in recent Turkish adaptations of Shakespeare. According to Linda Hutcheon, "transcultural adaptations" usually transform the existing racial and gender parameters (147) and even further, "indigenize" the text to "exert power over what they adapt" (150). Drawing on Hutcheon's argument, the recent trend in Turkish adaptations of Shakespeare may be traced to a quest to "indigenize" Shakespearean texts by locating them at the heart of an Eastern context, their "cultural Other".

In a broader perspective, drawing on the argument of a Brazilian theatre critic Augusto Boal (38-47), the classical system of theatre, which inevitably implies "oppression", is being challenged as in the case of any postcolonial feminist rewrite. To Boal, classical theatre operates through an oppressive system which dates back to Aristotle. While "hamartia" or "individual ethos" is being suppressed, "social ethos" is being reinforced. As the audience watches the play and catharsis operates, through empathy and "dianoia", he/she experiences both "purification" and "purgation". Finally "social ethos" or norm is praised by the tragic ending (Boal 38-47). This system is observable in Shakespearean

Hamlet as Hamlet fails to act being caught on a philosophical layer, which in turn might be taken as his hamartia. As in most tragedies, his hamartia brings him misfortune and eventually leads to his fall. Postcolonial feminist adaptations reverse the mainstream readings of the text and block the possibility of “catharsis” by distancing the audience from the protagonist through the process of adaptation. In both cases of *Kadın Hamlet* and *Kurdish Hamlet* there is a strong intention to offer “a revised point of view from the original, [...] voicing the silenced and marginalized” (Sanders 19). In other words, the idea of offering postcolonial and feminist adaptations of *Hamlet* inevitably challenges the oppressive markers in Shakespearean text. The choice of representing *Hamlet* in a postcolonial feminist context in Turkey goes parallel to the theoretical developments after 1960s in which translation studies suggests more target-specific applications offering the concept of “intercultural translations” and the foundation of adaptation studies, specifically in 1970s. To put it forth in Andre Lefevere’s words (8), the target text “manipulates” the source text in a way “to fit in with” the ongoing “ideological and poetological currents” in the target culture.

It may be concluded that most of the Turkish adaptations of Shakespeare from 1860s to 1960s reflect the Westernization trend in late Ottomans and early and mid Turkish Republicans, being “transpositions” (Wagner 20-21) indicating fidelity to the source text. A thoroughly opposite trend is introduced after 1960s as adaptations of the period are “analogues” (Wagner 20-21) or “appropriations” (Sanders 26) and Shakespearean tragedies became “indigenized” by the target cultural context of Turkey which moved onto a postcolonial feminist wave. In other words, either to represent or re-present *Hamlet* in Turkey, which was a matter of “to be or not to be [a Westerner]” until 1960s, is recently being transformed into a matter of asserting “frailty thy name is [oppression]”.

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