

Elif Şafak's *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*
as an "International" Novel

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The Saint of Incipient Insanities is Elif Şafak's first novel written in English. It is also the first novel in English written by a contemporary Turkish writer.¹ Şafak (or Shafak) has joined the growing group of international writers who write in English although it is not their mother tongue, and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* has been shelved in bookstores among other examples of "the rapid, extensive and many-sided internationalization of literatures at the end of the twentieth century" (Dhardwadker 59). The aim of this article is to explore how Şafak's novel tackles the grip of nation on writers, especially on those from formerly colonized and/or so-called developing countries of the world, by focusing on the novel's publication processes and the writer's use of English in the novel.

In his article Vinay Dhardwadker draws attention to a paradox: nationalism, he holds, is "an essential ingredient in the contemporary internationalization of literatures" (63). He suggests this paradoxical situation is the result of the efforts made by ex-colonized new nations to define their "cultural identities" through literature (produced both by writers writing in their native tongue and by those writing in English):

They have established local and national councils of the arts; provided state funding for writers and literary institutions in the form of fellowships and grants; subsidized educational systems, libraries, publishers, and literary media; instituted national and international conferences, book fairs, and literary awards; and funded programmes for lectures, readings, and tours at home and abroad. (62)

Looking at Şafak's case, however, we can enlarge the paradoxical role of nation Dhardwadker describes in the sphere of international literatures.

The novel's publication process as well as the responses it has received in Turkey and in the United States are indicative of the prominence of national and nationalist discourses in both of these spheres even if the novel belongs to the category of international fiction. In relation to the recent translation of Chinese-American and Chinese diaspora literatures in Mainland China, the Hong Kong-based literary critic K.C. Lo holds that "the Chinese translations of Chinese American novels are . . . prone to stressing more their cultural and ethnic identification than their artistic achievement or creativity" (Qtd. in Dirlík 223). Lo's critique can be applied to the translation of *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* into a Turkish version, which is entitled *Araf*. *Araf* was published in Turkey in April 2004, while *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* was not published in the United States until October 2004. The Turkish translation of Şafak's novel had already been widely read in Turkey when the American public began to read the original novel six months later. What is remarkable in this case is that *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* was not translated into Turkish because of its artistic achievement or creativity, manifested in the responses it received from English-language readers. Such an interesting reversal in the order of publication of the original and translation can be explained only by the fact that Şafak is a writer of Turkish descent with a large group of readers in Turkey. The same explanation could be made even if the publication dates of the two books had been almost the same. Şafak's novel's publication processes not only illustrate nation's paradoxical hold on "international" literatures but also the process itself maintains "the myth of national unity" (Lo 223) between the writer and her/his "home" country as well as between the writer's work and the "national" literature. Translations into the national language of a writer's home country are remarkable sites, I believe, to see the role nation prominently plays in the sphere of "international" literatures.

Responses of Turkish readers to Şafak's novel in English can be grouped into two large categories: on the one hand, she was severely criticized by those who view her writing in English as being co-opted by cultural imperialism; and, on the other, she was highly praised and appreciated by those who consider her "success" (being published in the United States) a success for her country.² The common denominator between these res-

ponses is that they both participate in (though they are not limited to) some major nationalist discourses in Turkey, “left-wing’ Kemalist nationalism” and “pro-Western/liberal nationalism,” respectively (Bora 436).³ Tanil Bora holds that both of these languages derive from the official nationalism, which is “the root-language of Turkish nationalism” (436). “Left-wing’ Kemalist nationalism” has gone through three stages: In the 1960s and 1970s, it was leaning towards the left, which was marked by “anti-imperialism and the stand for independence” (439). In the 1990s, this emphasis was replaced by “secularism” as a reaction to the rise of the Islamist movement (438–39). And at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was marked again by anti-imperialism and national independence as a result of globalization’s “challenge [to] the nation-state” (434). Thus, in its critique of globalization, neo-Kemalist nationalist discourse participates in a larger, worldwide reading of global re-structuring of the world as Americanization.⁴ A Turkish writer’s use of the language of the Empire instead of the national language was considered a political betrayal as well as cultural assimilation. This attitude was reinforced by the traditional role assigned to Turkish and Turkish literature in the formation of a “national community” especially in the early years of the republic, but, which still has a strong hold on the Turkish public.⁵ “Liberal nationalism,” Bora states, “defines national identity in terms of its fervour and ability to attain the level of the ‘developed’ or wealthy countries of the world: the West” (440). Thus, as opposed to “Kemalist nationalism,” liberal nationalism celebrates “Turkish capitalism’s progress in interfusing with the global economy” (441) and “takes pride in seeing in İstanbul ‘brands that are cousin to those one can see in Paris, in Washington, in Tokyo” (442). While for Kemalist left-wing nationalists (as well as for the radical left) McDonald’s restaurants all around Turkey, for instance, can be a symbol of Turkey’s colonization by the United States, for liberal nationalists the same stores can signify a national achievement on the road to development. Bora holds that “the most influential advocate of this discourse is the media, which is intertwined with big capital” (441). Before *Araf* was published, it was heavily promoted both by written and visual media in Turkey. The promotion of the novel was founded on the fact that it was originally written in

English and that it would be published in the United States (Türkeş). Such a promotion campaign both pre-supposes and recreates the idea that for a Turkish writer to write in English and publish in the United States, by itself is a success and therefore a source of national pride, which should be appreciated by purchasing the novel.

The mainstream reviewers in the United States have generally praised Şafak's novel.⁶ They all have emphasized that *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* is her first novel in English and commented on her use of English. One of these reviews is especially significant since it illustrates as well as recreates the myth of national unity between a writer and her/his "home" country even if Şafak's publishing company promoted her as "a wonderful new voice in international fiction."⁷ A reviewer from *Economist* compares Elif Şafak with Orhan Pamuk, another prominent Turkish writer (and the last Nobel prize winner in literature) whose novels were translated into English. The reviewer considers Pamuk "the leading contemporary interpreter of Turkish society to the Western world" and recommends that "readers looking for a less intense taste of Turkey can turn to *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*" (74). The reviewer compares Pamuk with Şafak because they are both Turkish writers whose books have been published in the United States. The reviewer's response to both writers illustrates the assumption that a writer of another nationality is first and foremost an interpreter or a representative of that other national culture. To this American, the foreign writer is expected to be an authority in relation to that foreign culture, and thereby, manifest her/his breadth of cultural knowledge in her/his works.⁸ According to Arif Dirlik, this "burden of translation" (216) or of representation imposed upon the foreign as well as the ethnic writer in the United States (both by publishing companies and readers) "justifies the qualification of the author to speak for something called Chinese [or Turkish], but also the containment of what s/he has to say in an ordinary 'Chineseness' [or Turkishness], where it is no longer clear whether ethnic [as well as national] identification is a cultural privilege or a cultural prison-house" (219). Şafak's national identity then, even if she herself problematizes it, is not so easily disregarded by some readers in the United States. On the contrary, it plays a prominent role in shap-

ing their expectations and evaluations of her work. International works of literature, therefore, can simply prolong (rather than lead to questioning) the reification and abstraction of national as well as cultural differences. In relation to reading preferences of “the international readership,” Bruce King notes that, “plays, poetry, and fiction that require familiarity with a national culture, history, or society are less likely to travel well” (16). King’s remark seems to contradict the point I have raised about the role of representation assigned to the “international” writer; yet, it does not. On the contrary, the notion of “familiarity” that King mentions brings us closer to Dirlík’s point about “cultural prison house.” In relation to Orientalism, Edward Said holds that “at most, the ‘real’ orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it” (22). Said’s critique of Orientalist writing can be applied to the international reading and writing public not only because internationalization of literatures can produce Orientalism but also because it throws light on the kind of familiarity expected from the international writer. Does the writer, in other words, sell well in the international market if s/he is familiar with the “real” or with the myth about that “real”? And, if the writer is not interested in the myth at all, does this mean that s/he *is* interested in representing “her/his” “real” national culture? Will a writer publishing in a “foreign” language and in a “foreign” country always be inevitably haunted by her/his original national identity? All these questions I have raised are for the purpose of complicating the spheres of “international market,” “international readership,” and “international literatures” by foregrounding the significant role that national identities or belongings play in all of them. Their existence does not guarantee that the notion of nation as the origin/home of a writer or a literature will be challenged.

Nevertheless, I do not think we can arrive at the conclusion that nation’s formative power in reading, writing, or publishing cancels out, or renders meaningless, a writer’s struggle to connect with an international public and to seek a connection with others that transcends nationalities. In an interview conducted by Myriam J.A. Chancy, Şafak talks in detail about the influence of “migrations, ruptures, and displacements” (56) on her life and writing. In relation to her experiences as “the only

Turkish child” in an international school in Spain, Şafak states that “it is there that I learned about the hierarchy of nationalities, about an unwritten hierarchy even children knew about and perhaps were more cruel in expressing. Being Dutch or English, for instance, was most prestigious. An Indian girl and I in the class were in the lowest ranks” (57). Since her childhood, therefore, being associated with a particular nationality has always been a problem for her. This is not only because this association entails as well as results from a desire to assert one’s authority over another person, but also because it leads to a nationalist reaction on the part of the othered. “I have also observed how foreigners cling to their religious or national identities as a reaction to this process of ‘otherization.’ In a way, the more they are ‘othered’ because of their national background, the more they glue themselves to it. It is this tendency to live with and within flocks that worries me,” she states (57). For her, then, connections established between people solely on the basis of national identities are as problematic and exclusive as otherization itself.

Referring to the early years of the Turkish republic, Şafak says that “the fabrication of a purely Turkish language was of crucial importance for the fabrication of a homogenous national identity. Making language more monolithic was part of the project of making the nation more homogenous” (59). The official language of the Ottoman Empire was Ottoman Turkish, which was “a conglomeration of Turkish, Arabic and Persian with some Italian, Greek, Armenian, and other European elements, and was written using Arabic characters” (Aytürk 1). The language revolution in Turkey was initiated in the 1920s. First, the alphabet was romanized in 1928, and in 1932 the Turkish Language Institute (Türk Dil Kurumu) was founded: “The task of the institute was, among other things, to ‘purify’ the language by ridding it of its non-Turkish components and to coin new, ‘authentic’ words to replace them” (Aytürk 1). Çolak states that the language policy of the Republic evolved around two basic principles: secularism and nationalism:

It [language policy] is linked to secularism because from the beginning language policy has included attempts to purify Turkish by purging it of Arabic and Persian words which are re-

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garded comprising religious meaning and understanding
With regard to the latter aim, the official language policy intends to create a unified national language to help form a homogenous national community. (67)

Şafak is concerned about the contemporary traces of this linkage between language and secularism as well as language and nationalism. She says, “in Turkey, for almost every single object we have two different words—one modern, one old and traditional. Depending on which camp you are in, you use this or that word. . . . [W]hen you are a writer, no need to say, this becomes a huge issue. In Turkey, my fiction has been, from time to time, targeted by some rigidly Kemalist intellectuals who have accused me of betraying the nationalist project because I do like ‘old’ words” (59). This “rigidly Kemalist” nationalist group has attacked her not only because she wrote a novel in English but also because she has used “old” words in her writings. In both cases, she has been blamed for betraying the nationalist project by being co-opted by (American) Imperialism in the first case and by the Islamist movement in Turkey in the second case.

Şafak’s use of a foreign language to write a novel, therefore, cannot be discussed thoroughly without bearing in mind her problematic relationship with monolithic approaches to language in Turkey. In an interview with Fadime Özkan, Şafak states that “I have not made a choice between English and Turkish. It is unthinkable that I will give up Turkish. It is possible to be multi-lingual instead of choosing between either this or that both in life and in literature” (np). Her writing in English is linked to her desire to escape the tendency of “living within flocks.” In other words, in Şafak’s case, writing a novel in a language other than Turkey’s national language is another way of challenging her national identity and a means of connecting with a larger group of people transnationally.⁹ Yet, the question worth raising here is whether or not English is simply one of the foreign languages of the world for its non-native users. If she wrote a novel in another foreign language, would she again be criticized so severely for being assimilated into “American culture”? I do not think so. Most of the anxiety in voices critical of *The Saint of Incipient*

Insanities stems from her use of English. In contemporary Turkey, there is a fierce struggle over the presence of English, in that, just as in the case of McDonald's, for some, it is a symbol of the American annexation of Turkey whereas for some others using English signifies "development," "progress," and integration into the global world.¹⁰ By writing her novel in English, Şafak has inevitably become a part of these discussions.

Another factor that should not be ignored in relation to Şafak's novel and English is that her use of English has played a significant role in the publication of her novel in the United States. Again in an interview, she accepts the role of the language in her response to the question whether her book would still be published in the United States if she had not written it in English. "They [publishing companies] were interested in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* rather than my previous novels because these books were in Turkish and were not yet translated into English. This is a huge industry in the United States. Only two and a half percent of all literature books (published in the U.S.) are translations," she states (Zaman np). This brings to mind, not specifically in relation to Şafak, the relationship between rapidly-increasing use of English in "international" literatures and the publishing industry. In other words, to what extent the use of English is also a market-generated choice demands consideration.

As I previously pointed out, reaching out to a transnational public is one of Şafak's primary motivations to write her novel in English. To her, in other words, English is a means of transnational connection. Now, bearing also in mind all the other dynamics of writing in English, I will move on to her use of English in the novel. In his article, "Thick Translation," Kwame Anthony Appiah addresses primarily the academicians in the United States. He writes:

[I]n the easy atmosphere of relativism—in the world of 'that's just your opinion' that pervades the high schools that produce our students—one thing that can get entirely lost is the rich differences of human life in culture. One thing that needs to be challenged by our teaching is the confusion of relativism and tolerance . . . there is a role here for literary teaching . . .

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in challenging this easy tolerance, which amounts not to a celebration of human variousness but to a refusal to attend how various other people really are or were. A thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others. Until we face up to difference, we cannot see what price tolerance is demanding of us. (427)

I have quoted this passage not because Şafak, too, is in the American academy, but rather because I think Appiah’s “we” includes anyone who is involved in making translations from other languages into English in the United States.¹¹ Şafak wrote her novel in English; yet, she, too, has made translations from Turkish, Arabic, and Spanish throughout her novel since the novel includes characters from Turkey, Morocco and Spain. In light of Appiah’s remarks about the necessity for “challenging . . . easy tolerance” for the “other,” the question I ask is whether Şafak has such a (political) concern or not. Does she, in other words, problematize “the world of ‘that’s just your opinion’” in her translations? I am interested in this question also because of Dharwadker’s remark that “the reading public in English-using countries . . . does not always react happily to the process of internationalization. In England and the United States especially, many common readers and book-buyers have responded to the unfamiliar contents and styles of the internationalized literatures with prejudice, incomprehension, or hostility” (64). Thus, we can say that the “international literature” is indeed one of the sites to problematize and challenge the expectation of “the familiar” in the English-using reader. In other words, English used by the “other” can be a manifestation of what kind of a transnational connection the “other” seeks—an “easy” or a “challenging” and thereby “genuine” connection? “She [Şafak] presents a masterful command of language, which she uses cleverly, humorously, and engagingly,” comments Michael Spinella, a reviewer from *Booklist* (209). Marly Rusoff, however, in her reviews of the novel both in *Publishers Weekly* and in *Kirkus Reviews* criticizes

Şafak's use of English. "Her linguistic acrobatics distract rather than enlighten," (56) she states in the former and holds that "Şafak's use of language veers from masterful to awkwardly convoluted" (773) in the latter. Rusoff's comments may give a clue about the answer to the questions I have raised; at the same time, they may suggest a prejudiced reading of any non-native use of English. As I previously stated, I will look at Şafak's translations and non-translations in the novel and try to see how she approaches English as a means of transnational connection.

In the novel, Ömer, Abed, and Piyu are all international graduate students who share a house in Boston. Ömer is from Turkey, Abed is from Morocco, and Piyu is from Spain. For all of them, English is a foreign language and they all have problems with the necessity of leading their lives using a foreign rather than their native language. Of Ömer and Abed's efforts to communicate in English despite the missing words in their vocabularies, the narrator comments: "Just like patients still feeling their amputated limbs long after the surgery, people who have been entirely and brusquely cut from their native tongue, and have henceforth learned to survive in a foreign language, somehow continue sensing the disjointed words of their distant past, and try to construct sentences with words they no longer possess" (Şafak 11). Speaking in one's native language, on the other hand, means "stepp[ing] in the tranquil valleys, orderly parishes of that vast and yet familiar land called Mother-tongue" (13). They have problems not only with vocabulary but also with grammar:

'Although they unashamedly call Turkish coffee a 'Greek coffee' over there, still the chances of a Greek to prefer Turkish coffee to any other coffee are greater than the chances for . . . of someone from . . . another nation . . . nationality to . . . to . . . to prefer . . . Turkish coffee . . . ugh!'

Ömer let out a moan as he acknowledged in dismay that the level of his English would never allow him to shepherd all these words he had been carelessly scattering around.

'See what I mean?' he wailed. (16)

They even design a language-game so that they can improve their English. Addressing both Abed and Piyu, Ömer suggests:

‘Well, since our problem is common we can help each other.’
Ömer rose up from his chair, his face flushing in a manic flame, and seized the brick-thick English-English Dictionary on the bookcase behind, lifting it above his head as boastful as a champion lifting his prize. . . . Shifting turns, each time one would ask a word, and the other two would respectively try to find the antonym and the synonym, using exemplary sentences. With the help of a scoreboard, they could make the game quite competitive. (111–12)

Although they enrich their vocabulary by learning words even such as “flocinaucinihilipilification” or “sesquipedalianism” as a result of this game (112), English still remains a “foreign” language for them. Ömer, for example, is haunted by his native language, which shapes the way he uses English. While speaking with Abed, Ömer translates a Turkish idiom into English:

‘I’ll tell you how spider-minded you are!’
‘What what what?’
‘That’s the Turkish expression for people like you. When somebody is long-behind-the-times, conservative, old-style, traditionalist . . . we call him spider-minded.’
‘But why?’
‘*Why?* There is no why!’
. . .
‘I mean it’s like saying ‘Your brain is as small as a spider’? Or is it more the cobweb than the spider itself? Like saying ‘Your brain is so dusty for being unused for ages.’ But even then, I tell you, it doesn’t make sense unless you say *cobweb-minded* instead of *spider-minded*.’ (13)

Ömer’s translation, “spider-minded,” is a *mot-à-mot* translation, in that he does not try to make it more accessible in English. This is, therefore, one of the rare moments in the text where, in Gayatri Spivak’s words,

translation “surrenders to the [original] text” (400). What she means by “surrendering” is caring for “the rhetoricity of the original,” (398) or, in other words, it means “most of the time, being literal” (406). Spivak recommends that “a feminist translator” (397) make “literal” translation especially from “a non-European woman’s text” (398) because, she holds, this is “one of the ways to get around the confines of one’s identity” (397) and thereby translate respectfully “the other’s” voice (407). I am referring to Spivak’s call for the feminist translator here because her point ties in to Appiah’s argument about the necessity for a genuine respect for the other (language). Such moments in the text when the “unfamiliar” voice of the other is heard are unfortunately very rare. Furthermore, as it happens in the passage above, “the unfamiliar” does not remain so very long—Ömer tries to explain what he means by “spider-minded” and also Abed makes it more accessible for the English-using reader by re-translating it as “cobweb-minded.” A similar dialogue takes place again later on in the novel, but this time between Ömer and Gail, who is Ömer’s American wife:

‘I’m hungry,’ she exclaimed. ‘What about you?’

‘As hungry as wolves!’ came the answer.

So the Turks got *hungry as wolves*, Gail wondered. She did not tell him, of course, that Americans got as hungry *as a bear*, *as a pig*, or perhaps *as a wolf* but did not usually get as hungry *as wolves*. The devil is in the details, they say. Perhaps true, perhaps not. But the proof of foreignness is certainly there. Gail wouldn’t correct anything as she listened to him dabble in English. (213)

In this passage, too, Ömer’s literary translation of a Turkish idiom is rendered familiar by Gail, a native speaker of English. This time, however, it is only the reader, not Ömer, who is informed about more “American” ways of translating the idiom. Moreover, Gail’s internal response to Ömer’s “dabbl[ing] in English” is quite reminiscent of the kind of caring attitude Spivak suggests. She respects his “foreignness” manifested through his translation. Except for these two passages, there are no such examples of literary translations in Ömer’s speeches. His

speeches with his mother and with his ex-girlfriend, Defne, on the phone are all represented in everyday, “familiar” English. During Ömer and Gail’s visit to Ömer’s family in İstanbul by the end of the novel, no one speaks in Turkish (331–32). Yet, a vendor’s speech on the ferryboat Ömer and Gail take is translated into English and it is rendered “unfamiliar”: “Ladies and gentlemen! A fleeting attention is all I demand from you. And in return, I provide you with everything you need in life, except for a lover, perhaps!” (334). This time, it is the narrator, who makes a “literal translation;” however, this short passage remains as the sole example of an overt attempt on the part of the writer to “unfamiliarize” English. So, we may arrive at the conclusion that Ömer’s “literal translations” from Turkish to English are mainly for the purpose of showing the difficulties he experiences while using a foreign language rather than foregrounding his foreignness. Except in the case of the vendor, Şafak does not carry Gail’s attitude to Ömer’s use of language to the point where she can, through her use of English, foreground the existence of a “foreign” voice. Furthermore, there are very few non-translated Turkish words and expressions in the novel. Ömer comes across a childhood friend in Boston, who calls out to him in Turkish: “Ömer! Abi naber ya, n’apıyorsun burda?” which is translated into English in a footnote as “Ömer! What ya doin’ here, brother?” (82). Their conversation is not represented—the narrator only mentions what the speech is about. Abed uses the word, “dostum,” while speaking with Ömer; the word appears five times throughout the novel. In the first instance, the translation of the word, “my friend,” is given in a footnote (7). In other instances, the writer does not provide the translation (130, 231, 246, 275). Again Abed uses another word he learns from Ömer, which is “Rakı:” “a strong spirit made from grape and anise” (14). Another drink, “sahlep,” also appears in the narrator’s description of the vendors in İstanbul in front of Sultanahmet Mosque—it means “a hot drink made of milk, sugar and cinnamon” (204). Since both *rakı* and *sahlep* do not have English equivalents, they remain as they are and are explained instead.

In contrast to Turkish, Spanish is much more frequently used throughout the novel. Piyu and his Mexican-American girlfriend, Alegre, insert

Spanish words and expressions into their speeches in English. But it is especially during Alegre's meetings with her *las tias* (aunts) when we hear a lot of Spanish utterances. When *las tias* speak, they mostly speak in Spanish (136, 157–60, 216–18, 310). In some instances, the English translations of some Spanish words and expressions are not provided (216–8, 342, 349). Furthermore, in contrast to detailed explanations of *raki* and *sablep* in footnotes, “*buñu elos de viento, chambergos, cica-das, yemitas, capirotidas, flan de coco,*” (218) for example, remain unexplained. These differences between the treatments of two “foreign” languages in the novel undoubtedly stem from the fact that Spanish is the most commonly-used foreign as well as second language in the United States (in addition to being a native language for many). Therefore, the American reading public must be quite familiar with all these non-translated Spanish words and expressions. In *Araf*, by contrast, there is no non-translated Spanish—Spanish words are all given in their Turkish translations within the text. Spanish is not common in Turkey as a foreign language. Thus, in both cases, the notion of the reader’s “familiarity” with the language used in the text has obviously informed the writing as well as the translation process.

Another “foreign language” used in the novel is Arabic. Abed, who is from Morocco, uses (in only two instances) the words *sebbakiyas* and *sabr*. Both words are explained immediately: *sebbakiyas* means “Ramadan cookies” and *sabr* means “submissive patience” (143). Zahra, Abed’s mother who visits him in Boston, uses mostly Arabic in her speeches; yet, the conversations of Abed and Zahra are all in “familiar” English. Zahra frequently utters proverbs in Arabic and their translations are given in footnotes (184, 187, 202). Going back to my question about the use of English in the novel, we can now say that Şafak attempts to problematize the readerly expectation of easy accessibility; yet, her attempts remain limited. The aim of making the other (language) sound familiar and thereby easily understandable overcomes her efforts to draw attention to “foreignness.” Therefore, I do not think we can argue that Şafak acts throughout with an aim to problematize English as a means of transnational connection. We should not ignore the writer’s endeavour, however, to foreground the “foreignness” of English for its non-native

users such as Ömer, Abed, and Piyu. English, in other words, does not remain (an) invisible (norm) among “other” languages. It is an “other” language for its non-native users just as Turkish and Arabic are for most American readers.

The Saint of Incipient Insanities is both a celebration and a critique of a search for connection especially beyond national identities. Our uncritical attachment to the “flocks” we were born into is questioned and the possibilities as well as significance of seeking ways of connection with others are emphasized. Yet, I have tried to show that the novel cannot totally escape the grip of “nation;” on the contrary, it reproduces the idea of national unity between a writer, her/his work and “her/his” country especially given its publication history in Turkey and in the United States. Furthermore, we cannot say that the writer thoroughly problematizes and thereby politicizes her use of English. This would have benefited her readers in both the United States and Turkey. She could have challenged the “easy tolerance” of the English-using reading public for the “other,” and complicated the ideological struggle in Turkey over English.

Notes

- 1 Halide Edip Adivar’s *The Clown and His Daughter* (1935) is the first novel in English written by a Turkish writer. The book was translated into Turkish by Adivar herself as *Sinekli Bakkal*. The novel is one of the most widely-read canonical books in Turkey. She was not followed by any other writer until today. Şafak is the second Turkish writer who has written a novel in English.
- 2 Very few critics, such as A. Ömer Türkeş, have preferred to focus on the narrative text itself without indulging in either of these discussions. See “Araftaki Yalnızlar” by Türkeş in *Radikal-Online*. 24 April 2004. <<http://www.radikal.com.tr>>
- 3 Bora holds that Turkish nationalism [is] not . . . a homogeneous discourse, but . . . a series of discourses and a vast lexis” (436). He distinguishes between four major nationalist languages: “the official/Atatürk nationalism,” “left-wing’ Kemalist nationalism,” “pro-Western/liberal nationalism,” and the “racist-ethnicist Turkish nationalism” (436). All these languages co-exist in contemporary Turkey.
- 4 See Barber, Benjamin, and Büken.
- 5 See Çolak.
- 6 See “Problems of Identity,” Spinella, and St. John.

- 7 See the front jacket information on *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*.
- 8 It is not only the foreign writer who is pre-supposedly a representative of his/her national culture; the same assumption holds true in the case of the ethnic writer. King-kok Cheung states that, “like most artists of color, authors of Asian ancestry in the United States face a host of assumptions and expectations. Because their number is still relatively small, those who draw inspiration from their experiences as members of a minority are often seen as speaking for their ethnic groups” (qtd. in Dirlík 216).
- 9 Very ironically, however, precisely because she wrote her novel in English, she has been applauded in (liberal) nationalist discourse in Turkey.
- 10 In her article, Gülriş Büken states that, “ensnared by the allure of a remote-controlled lifestyle, Turkish youth are effectively turned into couch potatoes. The amounts to America enacting cultural imperialism via mass media, winning the hearts and minds of Turkish youths. Dressed in blue jeans and Caterpillar brand sport shoes, Turkish youths are indistinguishable from their American counterparts—both in their appearance and, to a large extent, in their collective mentality. In addition to changes in physical appearance, words and expressions such as ‘prestige,’ ‘image,’ ‘cool!’ ‘take care,’ ‘what’s up?’ and ‘what’s in it for me?’ have seeped into common usage among Turkish youth, who are fully aware of the social and economic currency language implies” (248).
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