

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'
NOVEL *BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS***

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to discuss the concept of identity formation in relation to Louis de Bernières' novel *Birds Without Wings*. Primarily, this study presents the development of identity theories which investigate the social construction of identity with its impact on self, society and social structures. The postmodern novel *Birds Without Wings* depicts the stringent issue of identity construction in a period of global crises, when any identity markers are easily removed, changed and, therefore, destabilized as a result of the play of power. The characters of de Bernières' novel confront the agonizing truth of the fluid and changeable markers of identity revealing that any "certitudes" are easily deconstructed and re-constructed anew as a result of identity politics which deprives one of a stable sense of selfhood.

Keywords: constructed identity, social identity, ingroup, outgroup, fluidity

**LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'İN *KANATSIZ KUŞLAR* ROMANINDA SOSYAL
KİMLİK OLUŞUMU**

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Louis de Bernières'in *Kanatsız Kuşlar* romanındaki kimlik oluşumu kavramını tartışmaktır. Öncelikle, bu çalışma, kimliğin sosyal yapısını benlik, toplum ve sosyal yapılar üzerindeki etkisiyle araştıran kimlik teorilerinin gelişimini sunmaktadır. Postmodern bir roman olan *Kanatsız Kuşlar*, herhangi bir kimlik belirleyicinin kolayca çıkarıldığı, değiştirildiği ve dolayısıyla iktidarın bir sonucu olarak kararsızlaştırıldığı bir küresel kriz döneminde zorlu kimlik inşası meselesini tasvir eder. De Bernières'in romanının karakterleri, akıcı ve değişken kimlik belirleyicilerinin acı veren gerçeğiyle yüz yüze gelir; bu, "kesinliklerin", istikrarlı bir özerklik duygusundan mahrum bırakan kimlik politikalarının bir sonucu

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olarak kolayca yeniden yapılandırılabilir ve yeniden inşa edilebilir olduğunu ortaya çıkarır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: inşa edilen kimlik, sosyal kimlik, grup içi, grup dışı, akışkanlık

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of “identity” has attracted as much interest as to become a heavily theorized concept, which is debated in multiple academic disciplines. Early assertions on identity were made by philosophers, and among the most fruitful contributions in this respect is made by Hegel in his famous work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Relying on the paradigm of strife between “lord and bondsman”, Hegel argues that the identity is mostly *intersubjective* rather than being subjective, and it is not individually but socially located. Hegel also puts forward the idea that human consciousness is prevented from being independent from external factors, such as the social world. Moreover, since the consciousness fails to acknowledge an autonomous or free self, it requires an embracing of or submission to an “other”. This perspective implies the emergence of the self to take place through the participation in social life.

Hegelian social perspective relocated the earlier accounts on identity and paved the way for more recent views, according to which the self is determined mainly by someone’s inclusion in, or identification with a certain collectivity. The second half of the twentieth century reveals an extension of sociological accounts on identity, where the self is discussed primarily within the frame of collective identities. The terminology and concepts were enriched and varied by such terms as “membership”, “in-group/out-group identity”, “collective identity”, “social location”, “social-categorization”, “social-identification”, and so on.

Theories on Identity as an Outcome of The Social

Stets and Burke's study *Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory* (2000) makes a clear review of the theories on social identity. Some of the explanations provided in this study are direct quotations from related works: “A social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group,” Hogg and Abrams (1988), (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 2).

In *Discourse and Identity* (2006), Benwell and Stokoe divide identity studies into two main categories, the first being “identity as a product of the self” and the second being “identity as a product of the social”. As the title suggests, identity is seen as a product in this

or that way, either a product of the self or of the social. The study stands out with its integrative method, prompting concepts related to the self, to social and to their combination together as well as taken separately. Prior to the detailed representation of the development of Social Identity Theory Tajfel (1982) and Turner (1986), Benwell and Stokoe state that the shift from the individual to the social and then to “collective identities” became more clear in the second half of the twentieth century. As they claim,

In the second half of the twentieth century, sociological accounts of identity were characterized by a concern with collective identities. Group labels such as adolescent, black, working-class were taken to be indisputable identity formations, often serving as social variables against which forms of social behaviour or linguistic usage could be measured (...) Indeed, a commitment to one or more of these 'labels' is invariably the most common response to the question 'Who am I?' It is only recently that the homogeneity implicit in this version of identity has been challenged and they are acknowledged to intersect. Howard (2000) refers to these as 'theories of intersectionality'. (Howard, 2006, p. 24)

Despite the fact that these intersections seem to complicate the concept of group identity, the notion of identity continues to be theorized and viewed as “unified”, “essential” and “pre-discursive”. (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 25)

Relevant to the purpose of this study is the presentation of the key theory of group identity, known as the “social identity theory”, which has been advanced by Tajfel in 1982. In contrast to personal identity, social identity is determined by individual identification with a collectivity, a process which is primarily established by "a reflexive knowledge of group membership, and secondly by an emotional attachment to this belonging” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 25). Tajfel points out that identification is a social and cognitive process which develops within the frame of a membership and that the sense of “belonging” is initiated on the social level and sustained or kept on the cognitive one.

Social Identity Theory scrutinizes thoroughly such phenomena as “ingroup” and “outgroup” which can be simply explained through the process of “difference”. This difference can be seen as a result of the activities one is engaged in. In simple words, it can be taken as a division of groups; the group which the individual belongs to is the ingroup, whereas the other group is seen as the “outside”. Social Identity Theory, refers to this identification with a collectivity or social category in terms of social movements, by creating a common culture among the participants of a group. The maintenance of a positive label for a social identity is frequently achieved through the appreciative comparisons between ingroups and outgroups, comparisons which would lead to a boost of self-esteem for the members of an

ingroup, whereas the comparisons to the outgroups leading most often to strong stereotyping and prejudice.

When the concept of identity is considered within the frame of social structure as an umbrella term, one should examine it under the influence of such determinants as national, ethnic, class, cultural, linguistic, and religious factors. They are some of the basic elements of what is named "social structure". These factors can represent the fundamental elements which establish social groups or categories.

Following this idea, C. Taylor claims that "[one] cannot be a self on one's own" (1989, p. 36). There is no more the belief in the idea of a self-sufficient individual which once upon a time was overestimated as being unique, fixed, unified, internal, rational, ideal and improving as an enlightened self, instead it is thought to have failed to survive as a unified being in the post-world war period. Therefore, identity not only fails to be seen as a single structure on its own, but as a total lack of an act of power, mostly an artificial construction of acting out roles through the interaction within social categories Membership Categorization Analysis, Sacks, (1972), which emerges as an outcome of suppression, oppression through exclusion or inclusion of the other. One can succeed or fail to become a self as a result of these interwoven elements that formulate social structures. Consequently, someone's identity depends mostly on and inevitably feeds from those social, outside factors.

The poststructuralist approach to identity brings the role of language and discourse and stresses out the issue of "construction". Kroskrity, for example, defines identity as the "linguistic construction" of group membership in one or more social groups or categories (1999, p.111). As he claims,

Identities may be linguistically constructed both through the use of the particular languages and linguistic forms (e.g., Standard English, Arizona Tewa) associated with specific national, ethnic or other identities and through the use of the communicative practices (e.g., greeting formulae, maintenance of mutual gaze, regulation of participation) that are indexed, through members' normative use, to their group. (Kroskrity, 1999, p.111)

Moreover, language tool is the element of constructing and reshaping our identities and it is only through social interaction that the self is constituted. Therefore, it can be said that identities are in a constant and continuous mode of making. As Stuart Hall explains in his famous study *Who Needs 'Identity'?*, "It is a process never completed -- always in process" (2000, p.16). Contrary to the widespread idea of a unified, same, naturally and internally constituted, seamless identity, Hall asserts that identities are constructed through difference.

As he states, “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference (...) it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks” (Hall, 2000, p.17). Hall, in the same study, quoted Laclau, who claims that “the constitution of a social identity is an act of power” (1990, p. 33). The purpose of this quote is to emphasize that the constitution of identity is “constructed within the play of power”, which is based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles (Hall, 2000, p.18). The claimed unities of identity structures are in fact constructions which emerge as a result of exchange in the play of power and exclusion. While two oppositions are put against each other, the one who excludes or differentiates any side serves in fact the construction and the conceptualization of the other side as well.

***Birds Without Wings's* Eskibahçe as a Space for Identity Constructions**

Louis de Bernières' novel *Birds Without Wings* (2004) is set on the eve of World War I in a small town, called Eskibahçe, in present-day Turkey, at that time being a part of the Ottoman Empire. Eskibahçe provides a community of Ottoman citizens living in harmony despite their ethnic, religious, economic, social and individual differences. The town is mostly depicted in a vibrant, charming and heavenly atmosphere that sparkles as the embodiment of a mixture of variety of characters as Christians, Muslims, Armenians, Jews, the poor and the rich, the sane and the insane, the literate and the illiterate, living side by side in acceptance and harmony. Their differences are directly reflected in the narrative technique employed in the novel, as well as in the ways in which the identities of the characters are constructed.

Romantic nostalgia for a lost world is delivered in the opening part of the novel, since the world of Eskibahçe suggests a universe of microcosmic harmony and love, which will be destroyed as a result of war. The brutal shift from the tradition of religious and ethnic tolerance to extreme nationalism and religious persecution interrupts the unforgettable and timeless dream of the initial cosmopolitan space. Louis de Bernières, however, does not completely idealize Eskibahçe, because in the village there are still some comfortable and low prejudices between the members of this community, but they always come to an understanding that they are a part of a whole, that allows the creation of what Schwartz calls a “grey area”, which shows that they belong to an insular community (2008, p.4), where such distinctions without labeling each other as black and white are possible. These characters can all be seen as representatives of identities from the perspective of discursive and ideological structure within this “grey area” which creates a possible fluidity.

The upcoming war pulls the trigger of the wind of change and forces the town with its citizens into a turmoil, a new way of living, that brings about the construction of new borders which allows the rise of an artificially imposed trend of nationalism that pushes the citizens of the town from their fluid identities into limited ones. The term “constructed certitude” is introduced by Beck (1992) in *Discourse and Identity* where he asserts that if there is a sense of lack of personal security in a society, traditional certitudes are tried to be compensated by “constructed certitude” by affiliations to identities such as nationalism, gender, or religion. It is an attempt to sustain a clear and unified identity, a wholeness, necessary in order to survive. This is so true when one considers the situation in the Ottoman Empire and the nature of its population in the period of World War I.

A look at the novel from the identity perspective enables the view of a complete fusion of the two lenses which construct, shape and reshape the characters – discourse and identity – concepts which co-exist in the language of *Birds Without Wings*, both as the producer and the product elements of the text in general. The idea mentioned here suggests that nothing is inherently significant or meaningful, unless it is comprehended in the set of relationships, the structure or the discourse, which one is a part of. In this view, all human social behavior from eating to fashion, from working to getting married, from fighting for something to dying for the sake of something or moving from one place to another, which is probably the most significant forced human action in the novel, represents a part of the process of making “signs” and inferring meanings about our relationships with the world. The short passage from the “Exodus” in *Birds Without Wings* sets such a clear scene of this making of meaning, within and outside this discursive realm of language, as it produces a shocking image of the characters grabbed and drowned into that realm of self-determining structure of interrelationships and artificial construction of identities:

'Where is Greece?'

'Over the sea. It's not far. Don't worry, you will be looked after by the Greeks and the Franks. They will find you new homes as good as your old ones. '

'Are the Greeks Ottomans like us?'

'No, from now on you are Greeks, not Ottomans. And we are not Ottomans any more, either, we are Turks.' The sergeant held out his hands and shrugged. 'And tomorrow, who knows? We might be something else, and you might be Negros, and rabbits will become cats.' (De Bernières, 2004, p. 527)

As it follows from this fragment, the asserted unity of identity structures fails to correspond to the communal realities, proving instead to be constructions which result from the interplay of power and exclusion. In the novel, Iskander the Potter reveals an example of exclusion through differentiation that allows the rise of awareness that any social categorization or identification process is a mere construction:

We knew that our Christians were sometimes called Greeks, although we often called them dogs or infidels, but in a manner that was a formality, or said with a smile, just as were their deprecatory terms for us. They would call us 'Turks' in order to insult us, at the time when we called ourselves 'Ottomans' or 'Osmanlis'. Later on it turned out that we really are 'Turks' and we became proud of it, as one does of new boots that are uncomfortable at first, but then settle into the feet and look exceedingly smart. (De Bernières, 2004, p.4)

Iskander's words are relevant to the idea of "settling into" an identity, a role, a social category within a social structural process. There is an individual and social exposure to a constant change, shifting modes of identification that provide the individuals' ability to fit into a social, national class or category. This is the fundamental premise that Membership Categorization Analysis works with. Dennis Day, from the University of Southern Denmark, makes the following remarks in the study of Membership Categorization Analysis:

In particular it focuses on the recognizability of people as certain sorts of people or, more specifically, people as certain sorts of members of society, and how this recognizability is a resource for members in their dealings with each other. And as one of the primary ways in which we 'deal' with each other is through language, MCA is often brought to bear on the analysis of how people use language in situations of everyday life. (Day, 2010, p.1)

The word "recognizability" needs to receive a special attention here. It emphasizes the urge and desire to be accepted as a member of a social group or category. The idea of belonging to and identification with a group or category is an assurance of one's existence and safety. It is also important to emphasize the fact that being an insider or an outsider always defines one from the perspective of the other. Iskander's words in the same prologue can be seen as a proof of this: "I miss the Christians. Without them our life has less variety, and we are forgetting how to look at others and see ourselves" (De Bernières, 2004, p.5). It is clear that an individual or social self can only exist in relation to the other. The identification, the belonging and the desire to be recognized are only possible through the opposition of the other. Greeks know that they are Greeks because they are not Turks, and vice versa. Christians are called Christians as they know they are not Muslims. This is how individual

identity also becomes subject to the more general social identity construction process, by basing itself on oppositions, differences and otherness.

The preoccupation with the social identity emerges in parallel with the awareness of national and ethnic identities at the break of the war in the Ottoman Empire, depicted vividly in the novel by the new challenges which the people of Eskibahçe must confront. They learn about the existence of countries, nations and religions which earlier they never heard about. An outside interference into national, racial, religious and ethnic issues causes major dilemmas and chaos in the previously unified town. The inhabitants of the town, as a result of growing instability and uncertainty, lose control and become the violators of various principles and values that they earlier accepted and respected.

This could be the example of Levon the Armenian, who is brutally attacked by a Christian local, Constantinos. This event could suggest an outburst of suppressed feeling of hostility and grudge, which people might bear against Levon only because he is from a different ethnic and religious group. The triviality of the excuse that seemingly caused the start of the fight – a slight jolt – puts forward the idea that there should not necessarily be an ‘acceptable’ reason for such violence. The existence of the other is the leading motive for such a brutal act. The unveiling of hidden feelings and thoughts are depicted in the novel as an outburst in the following section:

'Haydi! Haydi! Haydi!' he shouted, pushing the Armenian in the sternum, and forcing him backwards. 'Filthy shit! What do you think you are doing? Pig!'

Levon's initial reaction was one of astonishment, and his mouth fell open. He said something inarticulate, and Constantinos merely thrust at him in the chest again. 'Pig! Filthy Armenian! Traitor pig.' (De Bernières, 2004, p.159)

The reaction of Constantinos turns into a public beat, which is accompanied by the laughing and mocking crowd, whose interest is aroused immediately. Acting like “an intoxicated chorus”, the crowd continues in a state of complete frenzy, shouting “Kick him, kick him!”, without even a smallest reason for such a display of violence (De Bernières, 2004, p.161). This situation serves as the embodiment of mob psychology acting, since it derives its power primarily from the steamroller of the social and ethnic majority against the minority.

This scene resembles much the act of public exposure to violence, committed against Tamara when she is accused of adultery by her husband. In Tamara’s case, the national or ethnic reasons are replaced by the religious ones. With Rustem Bey’s announcement of his wife as an adulterous to the villagers, there is a radical change in Tamara Hanim’s social

position. The respected wife of the Ağa suddenly becomes a prostitute, whose life can only continue in the brothel of the town. The young, beautiful and esteemed woman of this community turns rapidly into the condemned, the marginal or the outsider, who is easily threatened by the insiders, but at the same time, ironically, exhibits the vulnerability of the mob.

Leyla Hanım's case, the woman which is called in the novel "The Circassian Mistress", renders a problematic national and religious identity issue, since she is constantly overvalued by the utopian ambition of Rustem Bey to have a perfect wife, a situation which eventually results in failure and loss of any sense of identity. Leyla, whose true name is Ioanna, uses the constructed Circassian and Muslim identity markers as her protective shields in the social structure of the town, although she permanently longs for her real Greek Christian self. It is especially the Greek language that she identifies herself with, and one of the reasons she seeks the company of the two Greek girls from the village, Philothei and Droussula, is to be able to speak Greek to them, but who, to the woman's complete surprise, know no word in this language. On the day of exodus, she unhesitatingly decides to get back to her real self by socially imposing her religious and national identity markers. Although she lives a comfortable and peaceful life with Rustem Bey and she knows that she could live in the same way until the end of her life, she chooses to turn back to her Greek Christian self and her mother tongue which has always been Greek:

Leyla Hanım caught up with the Christians on the evening of the second day. She was filthy, hungry and exhausted, but in good spirits, and when she entered the encampment she made a special point of walking confidently and holding her head high. She had anticipated a hostile reception, and was not surprised when she received one. After their initial surprise, the Christians and especially the women, soon began to mutter against her. 'What is she doing here? We don't want Rustem Bey's Circassian whore. Why should we walk with a slut like that?'... Father Kristoforos approached her. 'Leyla Hanım, why are you here? You have no place among us. What makes you think you can come to Greece? None of us here wants you with us.' Leyla Hanım did not even look up at him. 'Eimaipio Ellinida, apooloussas,' she said tartly. 'Genithikastin Ithaki kaiesis den isasteparamia ageliapo bastardi Tourki.'... Father Kristoforos was taken aback by this unexpected reply that he barely understood. Sitting near the flames, Daskalos Leonidas had been momentarily awakened from his mute dejection by hearing his own tongue. 'I'll translate for you' he said. 'Leyla Hanım said, "I am more Greek than any of you. I was born in Ithaca, and you are nothing but a pack of mongrel Turks."... 'From now on, said Leyla Hanım, reverting to Turkish, 'my name is Ioanna, and you will speak to me with respect. (De Bernières, 2004, p. 548-9)

The reaction of the immigrating Greek Christians of the town towards Leyla is also striking. They see her as an outsider and humiliate her, since she is the Circassian mistress of Rustem Bey. There is a social sense of inferiority and immorality in her status by being primarily a mistress, then a Muslim and a Circassian, but at the moment when she divulges her true identity, as a Greek Christian who speaks Greek much better than most of them, the attitude of the crowd changes completely. While she is seen as an out-group member from religious, national and linguistic perspectives, she turns out to be one of them, an in-group member and she is accepted without being questioned anymore. The above mentioned passage from the novel depicts hilariously almost the magic scene of Leyla's transformation into Ioanna, suggesting, in a way, the flexibility and instability of any identity markers. It also proves what Hall claims that "identities are never unified (...) but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (2000, p. 17).

Even the degree of literacy of the characters is related to the social and religious category to which they belong. In the relationship between Karatavuk and Mehmetçik, the differentiation in education they receive at school is visible. While Mehmetçik, as a Greek Christian, is taught to read and write in Greek by his dedicated teacher Leonidas, Karatavuk's school education is limited to memorizing parts from the Koran. He is not taught reading or writing of the Koran alphabet, since it is not the everyday language they speak. A paradoxical language situation arises from this duality: although the members of Greek society are taught to read and write in Greek language, they still speak Turkish language, just like the rest of the people in the town. Therefore, the literate minority creates a new language, artificially constructed, which is made of Turkish words that are written with Greek letters.

Karatavuk, who possesses an intuitive and inquisitive nature, foresees the importance of literacy and its relationship to power. Besides reading and writing, he wants his friend to teach him math's, adding-up, taking-away and so on. He relates social and economic power to literacy and expresses his ideas in such words:

'I want reading and writing,' said Karatavuk firmly. 'You Christians are always richer than us, and my father says it is all because of reading and writing and adding up and taking away and that's why you are so good at deceiving us, and he says that we Muslims only learn what we need to get us into paradise, but you Christians get all the advantages on earth because you learn about all the other things as well. I want those other things too.' (DeBernières, 2004, p. 91)

As a result of his request, he is not refused by his friend and he eventually accomplishes his desire by becoming the letter writer of the village in the future. He succeeds to attain the power through knowledge, literacy, the pen and the paper, and, therefore, a certain degree of authority in his community.

Leonidas, the teacher of the Greeks, stands out as the most radical ethno-nationalist identity representative. He dedicates his life totally to his life-long ambition – the Great Idea – which means the re-creation of the Great Greece. He enthusiastically shares his desire, saying that “Greece was the light of the world! At one time you couldn’t be called civilized if you didn’t speak Greek. Why do you think the Turks call us Romans? Because eventually even the Romans spoke Greek! We are the greatest race in the world (...) Our time must come again” (De Bernières, 2004, p. 259).

However, with the unexpected interference of the world events, he is forced to wake up from his nostalgic dream. Both the “idea” and the “character” are deconstructed to face the bitter reality of the fluid, changing world which produces fluid and fragmented identities. His awareness of identity emerges as a construction of ethno-nationalist ideology, prompted by political motivations. His years-long education, endless studies that cost him sleepless nights are decreased to nothing but a vague memory, long forgotten with “oil and wakefulness he wasted” (De Bernières, 2004, p. 262). The word “wasted” here is used to designate Leonidas' life by Georgio P. Theodorou, a close friend and colleague of Leonidas' father, who wants to emphasize the enormous waste of effort spent by someone caught in “the play of specific modalities of power” by “specific enunciative practices” (Hall, 2000, p. 17).

Georgio P. Theodorou is a very interesting person, who introduces himself as a merchant and a philanthropist. He is a very important character due to the representation of his sensible mind, as a supporter of conciliation and harmony when confronted with the social ordeal. As a rich tradesman, money and finding out ways of earning money represent the priorities in his life. His lifestyle, based on the consumption of goods, prevents somehow the genuine development of the self, leading to a kind of “commodification of the self” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 22). He values money, as a capitalist of the time, while making a sarcastic criticism of the ongoing social trauma caused by the emerging nationalism that disturbs the balances in a multi-national society: “Nothing, my friends, is as innocent as the pursuit of cash, the avaricious but honest exchange of goods and labour. I am a capitalist, and no good capitalist can afford to be a dunderpate. I have made money out of every commodity, and even out of thin air” (De Bernières, 2004, p. 507).

However, although he might be an example of a commodified identity, Georgio P. Theodorou is not a ruthless individual, indifferent to the changes in his society. As he says, "I had such a wonderful life that I was even inspired by my serene mood to commit unwise acts of philanthropy, such as erecting the little pump house at Eskibahçe, and not collecting debts from my friends"(De Bernières, 2004, p. 506). His commodified self "offers up a paradoxical space for the agency of the subject, facilitating both creative potential and self-defining possibilities via consumption"(Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p. 22). In his quest for benefit, he is creative enough to think about the modernization project for Eskibahçe, likethebuilding of the pump house, which should turn out profitable both for this community and himself. Therefore, anything that damages the balance between the two sides is criticized and condemned by him. He reveals that he is a "twenty-four carat Asia Minor Greek". The adjective he uses while referring to himself connotes to gold even when he talks about his ethnic roots, nationality. Being an Asia Minor Greek literally puts his identity in an in-between position. He feels neither Greek nor Turkish; neither Christian nor Muslim, a situation which is somehow benefic for him, as the opposite way damages the opportunities which he captures. He continues to confess that regardless of his identity as a Turk, a Greek, a Jew, an Armenian, or Levantine, as long as there is something for the mutual benefit, it is not a problem for him. "I make no distinctions of race and religion as long as there is some loveable cash in it or a good night out at Rosa's" (De Bernières, 2004, p. 507). This state of ambivalence stimulates his creative potential and exploits all possibilities.

Theodorou refrains himself from identifying with a social, national, religious group or category. In other words, he refuses to identify himself with any "constructed certitude" Beck, (1992), since the world they live in is one in which everything is elusive. This makes him more humane than other less materialistic people of the town, being even capable of philanthropy. Ironically, although he is "in-between", and never takes sides with any nationalistic or ideological groupings, he cannot escape the rage of the majority. As he makes his farewell while sinking, he makes his last confession:

I can't convey to you the relief, the sheer pleasure, of abandoning the impossible struggle, the moment when one realizes that it is less horrifying to die than to continue to struggle for life (...) Georgio P. Theodorou, merchant and philanthropist, wishes you all a watery farewell, but I don't know where my hand is, and more than likely you are not even there, whoever you are or aren't. Farewell Smyrna, farewell Rosa's, farewell my friends, farewell Lloyd George and Venizelos, and all the other fuckwits, farewell my worldly goods, farewell even to

myself. I just wish I didn't have to die with that stupid song about the fez going round and round in my head.(De Bernières, 2004, p.506, 516)

Even in the state prior to death, Theodoros is adamant about the futility of any social identity markers. The confrontation with death reveals the sameness of experience to all human beings, regardless of group name they are a part of. Stripped of any identity labels, one naked truth is revealed: a minority is always vulnerable to a majority that might easily make an exercise of power and subdue someone to its will.

The same idea of futility of death from nationalist or religious reasons is transmitted in the novel through Philothei, the beautiful Christian girl, in love with the Muslim Ibrahim the Goatherd. The last moments of Philothei's life deliver the tension of her confrontation with her true self as she dwells between her individual and social desires. On the day of exodus, when the Greek Christians are preparing to depart from the town, she desperately and uncontrollably runs to the graves to find her lover Ibrahim in order to give him the news of the expulsion. Her identity is under scrutiny when she is forced to confront her social, religious and national roots, since they create an imprisoning border which leads to her inner split. She loses completely the traditional certitudes that she earlier experienced, living instead an overwhelming sense of personal insecurity and fragmentation, as she is forced to leave the town with her family, whereas her individual self is concerned only with love and being loved back by Ibrahim.

The novelist aptly makes the reader aware of possible alternative scenarios to Philothe's death. If she would not have been urged to make such a choice in haste, she wouldn't have died. If she would not have been forced to depart from Eskibahçe due to her nationality and religion, she would have married Ibrahim, who is also diminished to the status of nobody as a victim of the same new world and new Eskibahçe. Iskander the Potter narrates a similar idea in his epilogue:

I say this not because her death was an accident, but because there would have been no accident it were not for the great world. It was the great world that went to war with us and attempted to divide us up and because of this decision Philothei ran to find Ibrahim and suffered the accident that killed her. (De Bernières, 2004, p.600)

The most striking case of social construction of identity is delivered in the novel by the presence of the historical personality Mustafa Kemal, who raises the idea of nationality, nation state and religion as predominant characteristics on the social restructuring process of the Ottoman society, of which Eskibahçe is only a small unit.

As a military man, Mustafa Kemal has the dream of creating a homeland, a nation state for the Turks, where all will experience a unified sense of identity and ideology. Eskibahçe, the small village which functions as a microcosm representing the greater Ottoman world, is made up of mixed ethnics, religions and cultures, and comes under the growing pressure from the globally developing trend of radical nationalism. Mustafa Kemal defines ethnicity upon religious markers, a situation which creates a tumultuous context of confusion, leading to shifting national boundaries and ethnic identities. Moreover, Louis de Bernières approaches the situation of the leader for the new system with care, as he presents:

Mustafa Kemal begins to conceive the notion of a Turkish state within secure borders, with the accretions of empire permanently removed. Amid all the cries of Greece for the Greeks (Jews and Turks out), and Bulgaria for the Bulgarians, (Jews and Turks out) it is hardly surprising that sooner or later someone will begin to say 'Turkey for the Turks'. One day Mustafa Kemal will say, 'Happy is the man who calls himself a Turk' and this will be carved into hillsides all over Anatolia. (De Bernières, 2004, p.199)

The novelist tries to deliver the utopian dream of the new leader, Mustafa Kemal, who seeks wholeness and security for the newly rising nation in a time when the world is confronted with a global crisis. Therefore, responding to a loss of traditional certitudes, there will begin a process of “constructed certitudes”, which would rely on the imposition of a new language, a new culture, a new identity. “Happy is the man who calls himself a Turk” represents, in fact, the culmination of this process. The world of Eskibahçe reveals the fluidity of the changing cultural belongingness, since people feel the urge to get adapted to it in order to feel secure, and what is mostly important, to feel as a part of a wholeness. As Schwartz discusses in *It might be all one language: Narrative Paradox in Birds Without Wings*, “the balances in world powers move to delineate national boundaries more strictly, taking notice of ethnic and religious differences that seemed less consequential before, the tenuous balance that existed begins to falter” (Schwartz, 2008, p.6).

De Bernières stresses out the artificiality of the process of “nation-building and boundary-drawing” (Shwartz, 2008, p. 6). In Chapter 22 of the novel (De Bernières, 2004, p. 517), the novelist reveals how the identities are constructed within a discourse, which is the product of certain discursive formations and practices, resulting mostly from some modalities of power:

History begins again. Mustafa Kemal commences the construction of an entirely new country. He abolishes the sultanate, and then the caliphate. He sets up a secular constitution. He changes the alphabet from Arabic to Roman, thereby inadvertently ensuring that almost no

future historians will really be able to understand the disordered archives left over from Ottoman times...

Mustafa Kemal also signs up to the Treaty of Lausanne, one of whose provisions is that almost all Turkish Christians, regardless of which language they speak, will be removed to Greece. All Greek Muslims, whether of Greek or Turkish religion and regardless of which language they speak, will be removed from Greece and sent to Turkey. The criteria are explicitly religious rather than ethnic, and in the interests of preventing future strife it looks like a good idea, until one takes into account the innocent people concerned. (De Bernières, 2004, p. 519)

With the rise of national identities in the world which resulted from the new social and political modalities of power, Atatürk is set as a leading figure who gives directions to it in his own social and historical context. Both his success story and his identity depict some troublesome moments of ambivalence, as he is elevated, respected and valued, but also, to some extent, he is shown paradoxically controversial, due to the representation of his identity. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is called in the novel "the proud young Macedonian" (De Bernières, 2004, p. 86), can be considered a constructed social, political and discursive product, deriving from multiple identities, but he is the one who dedicates his life to the establishment of an independent "Turkish" state.

Conclusion

Louis de Bernières' novel *Birds Without Wings* criticizes the constitution of a social identity as resulting from an act of power, stressing out the fluidity of the constructed social boundaries and the randomness within the play of power, when one individual can become a Turk, a Greek, or a Circassian; whether one will identify with Leyla or Ioanna; Mustafa as an ordinary young Balkan Turk carrying the big heritage of his ethnic roots on his shoulders, a member of the army who dreams about a secure state of his own, or Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as a state and opinion leader, to whom Turkey as a present Republic owes most of its existence with its victories, accomplishments and drawbacks.

The representation of the characters in the novel reveals the fluid, changeable and hypocritical nature of artificially constructed social selves that serve as indices to categorize people into in- and out-groups. The self is constantly destabilized as a result of constructing and deconstructing social structures and systems from small to large scales, on macro and micro levels. Louis de Bernières' novel aims to raise the awareness of the reader to the painful fact that what we considered adamant regarding one's identity, is in fact a mere construction, which results from the interplay of inclusion or exclusion, always in relation to the Other,

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mostly in relation to what it lacks. Moreover, the novel stimulates the awareness of the oppressive dimension of identity and tries to pose a serious challenge to “temporary attachments” which result from the identity politics that prevent the achievement of a coherent and stable selfhood.

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