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Time and Space of Homesickness: Nâzım Hikmet's Homesickness as a Chronotope*

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Abstract

Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Chronotope is a useful method to analyse the functions of temporal and spatial settings of a narrative. The fact that it is mostly applied to studies of prose should not mean that it is not suitable for the analysis of poetry, especially but not necessarily narrative ones. In that sense, the poetry of the Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet, as it is rich with elements of narratology, is examined in this article in light of the theory of chronotope. More specifically, his homesickness in his poetry is brought into light regarding the temporal and spatial aspects of and around it. It has been understood from this analysis that Hikmet's homesickness for his homeland is mostly settings of blurry, fleeting, and both metaphorically and physically far-away images and that it is interwoven with his love and longing for his partners and his son.

Keywords:
homesickness,
chronotope,
chronotope of homesickness,
Nâzım Hikmet

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Sıla Özleminin Zamanı ve Mekânı: Bir Kronotop Olarak Nâzım Hikmet'in Sıla Özlemi*

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Özet

Mihail Bahtin'in Kronotop Teorisi, anlatılardaki zaman mekan unsurlarının işlevlerini incelemede kullanılan yararlı bir yöntemdir. Bu teorinin çoğunlukla düz yazı eserlerinin incelenmesinde kullanılması şiir incelemelerine, özellikle de anlatımcı şiirlerin incelenmesine uygun olmadığı anlamına gelmemelidir. Bu sebeple bu makalede, Türk şair Nâzım Hikmet'in şiirleri, anlatıbilim unsurları bakımından zengin olduğundan, kronotop teorisi ışığında incelenmiştir. Özellikle de şiirlerindeki memleket hasreti, bu duygu üzerinde ve etrafında kurulan zaman mekan unsurları açısından araştırılmıştır. Bu inceleme sonucunda Nâzım Hikmet'in memleket hasretinin çoğunlukla bulanık, belli belirsiz ve hem mecazi hem de fiziki anlamda uzakta betimlenen sahnelerden oluştuğu ve eşleri ile oğlu için duyduğu sevgi ve hasret ile yoğrulduğu anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:
memleket hasreti,
kronotop,
memleket hasreti kronotopu,
Nâzım Hikmet

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Introduction

Home is, not necessarily but usually, a place to which relocated people feel themselves attached. It is a place where they feel they belong to and for which they long. This longing for a home, namely homesickness, can be seen arguably most strongly at exiled people. In this sense, rather than being the house that one inhabits, home becomes a place of origin, referring to the country or 'homeland' to which one belongs, but, in most cases, cannot return. It is in this condition of not being able to return to home that the homesickness of the person remains not remedied. A way of easing this homesickness can be then to write about and of it, an act which the exiled Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet did.

Nâzım Hikmet Ran (1902-1963) is celebrated for his immense contribution to Turkish and world literature. Spending many years in prison because of his political views, he finally fled to Soviet Union ever not to return and to spend his last twelve years in exile. This, in turn, resulted in a wide corpus of poems reflecting on his home and homesickness. Although the time and space of homesickness can traditionally be defined as a home left in the past, a closer examination might prove both other possibilities of definitions and various shapes it can take. A possible way of examining homesickness can therefore be via looking at it in light of the Theory of Chronotope by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). Bakhtin's chronotope theory is mostly known for its contribution to narratology and especially the study of prose narrative. The temporal and spatial aspects of a narrative can be studied to expose their function in the storyline. As works of prose such as novels are full of temporal and spatial indicators, employment of the chronotope theory can yield very fruitful analyses regarding the temporal and spatial elements. However, it should not mean that it would not suffice to analyse poetry as "[i]n the centrifugal environment of non-narrative poetry, chronotopes flicker and flow in a series of hints, glimpses, dissolves, defining consciousness, world and values via evanescence rather than stability" (Ladin 2010: 133). The existence of the genre of narrative poetry proves the possibility of eligibility of chronotope theory to analyse temporal and spatial indicators of a story within a poetry. Considering that Hikmet's poetry is not non-narrative, on the contrary, is full of with almost all the elements of narration such as characters, places, events and much more, it should not be difficult to detect those 'hints' which point to the chronotope of homesickness. This article, therefore, discusses the feeling of homesickness as a chronotope by outlining Hikmet's homesickness in terms of its spatial and temporal indicators found in his poems.

Nâzım Hikmet and His Homesickness

As already stated, Nâzım Hikmet spent many years in jail and consequently his last twelve

years in exile. Coming from a cosmopolitan family, he grew up in a rich environment and found the opportunity to engage himself with art, literature, and politics. His first poem "Feryad-ı Vatan" (Hikmet 2008: 1873), written only at the age of eleven, reflected the political unrest within his homeland, as well as the international scene at that time, foreshadowing World War I. He kept writing poems and gradually, he began to appear in various literary journals and magazines.

When he was nineteen years old, he went to Anatolia with a friend Vâ-Nû and two other aspiring poets to join the Turkish War of Independence, mostly referred to as *Milli Mücadele* in Turkish. Through friends and colleagues in Anatolia, they were introduced to Marxism and consequently decided to embark on a journey for Moscow to enrol at the newly founded Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). Upon Lenin's death and a call from the Communist Party of Turkey, Hikmet returned at the end of 1924 to a newly founded country, the Republic of Turkey. However, he was not content with the situation he found Turkey in, therefore, he started to write poems and articles for a journal called *Aydınlık,* often criticising the situation. However, following political unrest, *Aydınlık was* banned, and the people associated with it were arrested. Hikmet was also tried and sentenced, but he fled to the Soviet Union and escaped from getting arrested. Upon a law granting amnesty in 1928, he wanted to return to Turkey, but when he crossed the border, he was arrested. He gained his freedom with the help of countless articles written by many of his friends and intellectuals. In this period, he was being arrested and sentenced to jail now and again, getting out every time with the help of intellectuals or via benefitting from an amnesty law. However, he was arrested again in 1938, and this resulted in being the longest period he spent in prison. After being released finally in 1951, he had to leave Turkey, not being able to return ever again. Having been separated from his first wife, Piraye, during these years which partially led to their literal separation, Hikmet was separated again from his second wife, Münevver Andaç, and their child, Memet, along with his homeland.

Although he had to leave Turkey due to the reasons explained briefly above, he loved his country deeply before and during his exile years. It is evident that he suffered from homesickness due to his love for his country, which can be understood by examining not only his exile years but also the years before. He came to understand what it means to be away from the land before being a literal exile, given that he was imprisoned and went to live and study abroad even before being an exile. Therefore, his exile years, as well as his homesickness, can be better understood and defined if the years before are also studied. His love for his country is salient, for example, in the poem written at the prison of Istanbul in 1939:

I love my country:

I've swung on its plane trees,

I've slept in its prisons.

Nothing lifts my spirits like its songs and tobacco. (Hikmet 2002: 82)

He is fond of his country through and through, not only of its positive aspects but also of its shortcomings, as he finishes the poem in such fashion:

and then my people,

ready to embrace

with the wide-eyed joy of children

anything modern, beautiful, and good—

my honest, hard-working, brave people,

half full, half hungry,

half slaves... (Hikmet 2002: 83)

Thus, it is evident that his homesickness stems from his love for his country and the fact that he experienced being kept away from his land, although not in a literal 'exiled' sense. His homesickness resulting from his exile might then be a reflection or a continuation of his homesickness resulting from his years in prison. The poems he wrote during his exile are evidence of this. And, as argued above, looking at these later poems in light of theory of chronotope might yield substantial proof of his homesickness. For that matter, for example, the poem titled "The Mailman" from 1954 contains those hints. The first lines of the poem in which he declares "I've been a poet / which is a kind of mailman" (Hikmet 2002: 160) read as follows:

Whether at dawn or in the middle of the night,

I've carried people news

—of other people, the world, and my country,

of trees, the birds and the beasts—

in the bag of my heart. (Hikmet 2002: 160)

Since the poem unfolds and introduces a scene beginning from the first line, first glimpse of a chronotope is presented with "at dawn or in the middle of the night". Providing a sense of space and time, this phrase functions as an opening of what is yet to be filled with other phrases'

contributions to the whole picture. With the present perfect tense of "I've carried", the temporality is enriched as it suggests an event that has begun in the past and continues to the present time. These first two lines are cyclical by nature as one dawn comes after another each day, every night has a 'middle', and present perfect tense used here refers to an action that is repeated, which gives the impression that the poet is essentially there, and arguably stuck. The following lines furnish the spatiality and define this 'there', especially the words "the world" and "my country" add a definitive sense of place. Of course, "my country" is of great importance here since it once again carries and reflects the poet's love and concern for his country as it is exclusively mentioned and not included in the comprehensive word "world". These three places, which are organically strung together in an idyllic way, are what he carries "in the bag of [his] heart". That very phrase, "in the bag of my heart" adds to the spatiality, completing the picture for this excerpt. Thus, the action of carrying is realised through the large and expansive idyllic chronotope of his country, the locus of his homesickness. A few lines down more elements that contribute to the chronotope is provided:

Here, I'm driving a dogsled

over ice,

canned goods and mail packets

glint in the Arctic twilight:

I'm crossing the Bering Strait.

Or here, under the shadow of heavy clouds on the steppe,

I'm handing out mail to the soldiers and drinking kefir. (Hikmet 2002: 160)

Thus far, the temporal and spatial sense of the poem was limited to faint, general suggestions, however, as the poem zooms in a scene, that blurred image gets clear and the fragments of this cyclical time-space are presented. The "dogsled / over ice" implies the winter season, thus suggests a temporal indicator and it provides a spatial indicator with "ice", that is furnished with "Arctic twilight" and is finally completed with "Bering Strait" as a rather precise location is presented. The glinting "canned goods and mail packets" is interesting for it bears both aspects of the chronotope: the fact that canned goods and mail packets glint in the Arctic twilight hints that they are in the Northern Pole, covering the spatial aspect and they attest to events that have taken place in order to can the food and to package, or already before that, to prepare the mail, indicating the temporal aspect. Thus, they expand time to include befores and afters, causes and effects (Ladin 2010: 142), as it is the case with "ice" since it also implies a process of freezing. In the other imaginary situation, "steppe" is mentioned, which again adds to the spatial aspect of the chronotope. "Heavy

clouds", on the other hand, points to the temporal aspect as the reader is reminded of clouds passing by, or a possible rain to come. The "mail" that is being handed out also contributes to the temporal sense similar to that of canned goods and mail packets, as "the soldiers" as well, since the soldiers suggest transiency, being people who has come to serve in the army and will probably be going back home or retire. On another note, soldiers might imply Hikmet's reminiscence of home and homesickness as they are highly associated and affiliated with the nation. Which seems to be the case as he mentions his country a few lines below:

> But it's a difficult art in my Turkey.
>
> In that beautiful country
>
> a mailman bears all manner of pain in telegrams
>
> and line on line grief in letters. (Hikmet 2002: 161)

Although he has been a poet, "which is a kind of mailman", and has delivered posts to places some of which are abovementioned, he finds it difficult of a job to do in Turkey. It is also interesting that while he has "carried news of [...] the birds and the beasts", he considers mails of a Turkish mailman painful and grievous. This is, of course, to be explained with the pain and the grief he feels because of his homesickness. As the poems ends, this becomes apparent:

> One envelope
>
> writes:
>
> "Memet,
>
> Nazim Hikmet's son,
>
> Turkey".
>
> Back in Moscow I'll deliver the letters
>
> to their addresses one by one.
>
> Only Memet's letter I can't deliver
>
> or even send. Nazim's son,
>
> Highwaymen block the roads—
>
> your letter can't get through. (Hikmet 2002: 161)

In his beloved country lives his son, and he is separated from both of them: his country and his son. Just as the letter he wishes to send to his son cannot be delivered, or even sent; it cannot get through, he himself cannot go to Turkey. The imaginary situations as well as the very fact that they

are imaginary, thus, infeasible, both spatially and temporally far-away, which is created and enriched by the chronotopical aspects of this poem, explain the poet's homesickness as his return to home is just as imaginary and infeasible as these situations in the poem. It is also through these micro-chronotopes of scenes that the larger, idyllic chronotope of homesickness is portrayed.

Furthermore, this is not the only time he identifies himself with items that are meant for Memet but cannot reach him. In the poem "In the Snowy Night Woods" from 1956, those items become the toys addressed to his son:

> The old calendar says
>
> Spring came in today.
>
> The toys I sent my Memet
>
> Were all returned to me.
>
> His pickup sits brooding, hurt
>
> Its spring never got wound up,
>
> And Memet never got to sail
>
> His white boat in the tub. (Hikmet 2002: 176)

With just two words, namely "old calendar", temporal senses are presented: "old" indicates the passing of the time and "calendar" in itself refers to time itself. "Spring" renders it more definitive and precise, and the fact that toys had been sent and were returned adds to the temporal aspect. Finally, the toys are now sitting, which completes the string of events. It is striking but not surprising that the toys are described in a moody manner, "brooding, hurt", most probably indicating the poet's feelings that result from his homesickness. Hikmet travelled a lot, especially during his exile years, despite his heart condition. However, some cities were of great importance for him, furnishing his poems with spatial indicators of the chronotope. Istanbul was the most beloved and is probably the most recurring one in his exile poems:

> I left my budding rose
>
> In my city of seven hills. (Hikmet 2002: 176)

or:

> There are no guests, no one.

Poor Istanbul out the window. (Hikmet 2002: 178)

Another salient example of his love and longing for Istanbul is found in the poem titled Faust's House (Hikmet 2002: 181-82):

Below the towers, under the arcades,

I wander through Prague late

at night.

The sky is an alembic distilling gold in the dark—

an alchemist's still over a deep-blue flame.

I walk down the hill toward Charles Square:

on the corner, next to the clinic there,

is Doctor Faust's house set back in a garden.

As the poet describes Prague, he makes use of more specific temporal and spatial indicators compared to other examples. "Below the towers, under the arcades" and "through Prague" refer to the spatial setting and render the place almost precisely while "late / at night" and "dark" signal the temporal setting. The opening scene and therefore the spatial and temporal setting become clearer when the poet describes Faust's house and the way leading to it. As the poem continues the reader gains insight into the function of this setting:

I knock on the door.

The doctor isn't home.

As we all know,

on a night like this

about two hundred years ago,

the Devil took him

through a hole in the ceiling.

I knock on the door.

In this house I, too, will hand Satan a deed—

I, too, signed the deed with my blood.

I don't want gold from him

or knowledge or youth.

I've had it with exile,

I give up!

If I could have just one hour in Istanbul...

The use of present tense here serves to emphasise the act, making the temporal setting repetitious. The poet wishes to "have just one hour in Istanbul", and this repetitiveness renders his wish more precise and straightforward. Same repetitiveness continues as the poem does:

I knock and knock on the door.

But the door doesn't open.

Why?

Am I asking the impossible, Mephistopheles?

Or isn't my tattered soul

worth buying?

The scene closes with another repetitive act, which is knocking on the door:

In Prague the moon is rising lemon-yellow.

I stand outside Doctor Faust's house

at midnight, knocking on the closed door.

The poem begins and ends with the image of Prague and Faust's house, which are the only precise setting of the poem, which is rendered as an endless loop with the repetitiveness of the usage of present tense and the act of knocking on the door. Across this setting stands Istanbul alone as a vague concept, representing the poet's longing. The "closed door" also serves as a metaphor of his longing, representing his inability to return to his homeland, or more specifically to Istanbul. The setting of "at midnight" before this metaphor signifies the darkness, emphasising this inability.

His love and longing for Istanbul manifest itself even in his poems from prison, as accepted as a form of homesickness apart from as a result of exile:

And every night, doctor,

when the prisoners are asleep and the infirmary is deserted,

my heart stops at a run- down old house

in Istanbul. (Hikmet 2002: 136)

Thus, it is safe to say that Istanbul is a recurring micro-chronotope that adds to and completes the chronotope of homesickness. Another recurring image which can be the micro-chronotope of love, is his love and longing for his partners, both before and during his exile.

> Whether he is yearning for Piraye in prison or Münevver in exile, he also yearns for his city and country. And even when he is happy with Vera in Moscow, his happiness is inseparable from his homesickness, which is, in turn, inseparable from his vision of Turkey and the future he envisioned for his people. (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225)

This is, for example, to be seen in the poem he wrote in prison in Istanbul addressing Piraye: "I thought of the world, my country, and you." (Hikmet 2002: 180). In Çankırı, his waiting for her seems to embody his waiting for his release in the poem "Letters from Chankiri Prison":

> Four o'clock,
>
> no you.
>
> Five o'clock,
>
> nothing.
>
> Six, seven,
>
> tomorrow,
>
> the day after,
>
> and maybe—
>
> who knows... (Hikmet 2002: 185)

By listing of the time and days, an image of passing, but most importantly, never-ending time is created, which is furnished with "maybe / who knows", completing the image of a lingering and unknown future. As the poem continues, his love for his country and its people becomes his longing for Piraye, and his longing becomes his yearning for being outside again:

> 3
>
> Wednesday today—
>
> you know,
>
> Chankiri's market day.
>
> Its eggs and bulgur,

its gilded purple eggplants,

will even reach us,

passing through our iron door in reed baskets...

Yesterday

I watched them come down from the villages

tired,

with sorrow under their brows.

They passed by—the men on donkeys,

the women on bare feet.

You probably know some of them.

And the last two Wednesdays they probably missed

the red-scarfed, "not-uppity"

lady from Istanbul... (Hikmet 2002: 108-109)

This third part of the poem begins already with a day, Wednesday, which opens the scene ready to be furnished. With the "Chankiri's market day", the reader indeed gains a more solid insight into where and when of the scene, which is equipped with colourful images of eggs, bulgur, and eggplants. Arguably the most striking and important spatial and temporal indicators are provided in the next two lines: the fact that these foods will reach them points to a time that is to come, and "iron door" refers to the entrance of the prison, pinpointing the exact location. The two lines "Yesterday / I watched them come down from the villages" provides another layer of the spatial and temporal elements as they expand the scene to another past time. The description of the people supplies more information on this expanded time, but especially "tired" contributes to another past time since it points to an event, most probably working, that made the people tired. With the "last two Wednesdays", the line of the expanded scene is drawn further back, spanning at least two weeks. And lastly, the "lady from Istanbul" who is being missed indicates both a temporal and a spatial, and also both a literal and a metaphorical distance, which is, as argued, linked with Hikmet's homesickness and the homesickness chronotope. In the series of poems addressed to Piraye titled "9-10 Pm. Poems", his two loves, namely Istanbul and Piraye, thus, the two micro-chronotopes become one:

Dark news comes from my far-off city

of honest, hard-working, poor people—

the real Istanbul,

which is your home, my love,

and which I carry in the bag on my back

wherever I'm exiled, to whatever prison,

the city I hold in my heart like the loss of child,

like your image in my eyes... (Hikmet 2002: 108)

These words exemplify what has already been explained: he loves and longs for the "far-off" city in which his love inhabits, from both of which he is exiled. What fully demonstrates how he associates his love for his country with his love for his partner, and therefore his longings for both, is the poem titled "You're":

You're my bondage and my freedom,

my flesh burning like a naked summer night,

you are my country.

Hazel eyes marbled green,

you're awesome, beautiful, and brave,

you're my desire always just out of reach. (Hikmet 2002: 138)

His longing for being able to be outside with Piraye turns into his yearning for his country in which Münnevver and their son Memet reside, from all of which he is literally exiled. He associates his partner with his country again in the poem he wrote in exile titled "You":

You are a field,

I am the tractor.

[...]

You're a mountain village

in Anatolia,

you're my city,

most beautiful and most unhappy.

You're a cry for help—I mean, you're my country;

the footsteps running toward you are mine. (Hikmet 2002: 155)

Just as he identifies himself with the toys or packages that are meant for Memet but cannot reach him, and implicitly Turkey, he identifies his partners with his country, both of which he cannot, again, reach. When he thinks of his partners, here especially Münevver, he thinks of his country:

Under the chestnut I just thought of you

and you alone—I mean Memet,

just you and Memet, I mean my country... (Hikmet 2002: 190)

Finally, his last partner, Vera, also seems out of reach, which can be explained with the age gap between the two or the fact that Vera was married when they met:

Then she called out from Poland, but I couldn't answer,

I couldn't ask, "Where are you, my rose, where are you?"

"Come," she said, but I couldn't reach her,

the train was going like it would never stop,

I was choking with grief.

[...]

Then suddenly I knew I'd been on that train for years

—I'm still amazed at how or why I knew it—

and always singing the same great song of hope,

I'm forever leaving the cities and women I love,

and carrying my losses like wounds opening inside me,

I'm getting closer, closer to somewhere. (Hikmet 2002: 235)

All in all, through all these experiences; after being away or being kept away from his country as a student, as a prisoner, and finally as an exile, after being away from his partners and his child, he came to know all sorts of separations:

some people know all about plants some about fish

I know separation

some people know the names of the stars by heart

I recite absences (Hikmet 2002: 259)

Conclusion

The temporal and spatial indicators of a story function not just as a setting but also a way of telling the story. The theory of chronotope by Bakthin is a fruitful method to analyse those temporal and spatial indicators. Although it is mostly applied to studies of narrative, chronotope might be beneficial to examine poetry, especially but not necessarily narrative ones. And although the source of the homesickness that an exiled person feels might seem to be obvious, being the home and homeland he/she left behind, looking at this feeling in the writing of the exile can make it easier to place and understand it. And by making use of the theory of chronotope, the functions of the temporal and spatial settings of homesickness can be brought into the light.

For this reason, this article has examined the homesickness in the poems of Turkish poet, Nâzım Hikmet in light of theory of chronotope. This analysis has shown that Hikmet's homesickness for his homeland is mostly settings of blurry, fleeting, and both metaphorically and physically far-away images. His homesickness is interwoven with his love and longing for his partners and his son. He identifies himself with the toys, letters, and, in general, goods addressed to his son, which cannot be reached and delivered to him, and identifies his homeland, his home city, and, in general, his home with his partners; thus, his homesickness with his separation from them. Hikmet almost always carried two loves at his heart: "[t]here is never one of anything, but always two women, two loves, two cities, two countries, two commitments—they make him a 'whole person'" (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225). He loved Münnevver when he was with Piraye, he fell in love with Vera when he was in exile away from Turkey and from Münnevver. He loved and yearned for Turkey while residing in the Soviet Union. He always longed for Istanbul, although he was fond of Moscow. "These splittings (or doublings) that collect [Hikmet]'s emotional history in the poems" (Konuk Blasing 2013: 225) present, as argued, a chronotope of homesickness, which is enriched with the micro-chronotopes. The micro-chronotopes within a poem as well as the salient micro-chronotopes such as love chronotope and Istanbul chronotope found in numerous poems provide a rich number of elements that are linked to the macro-chronotope of homesickness by painting a picture of both literally and metaphorically distant, sometimes fleeting, but always never-ending settings of separation. A lingering image of events and places, an awaiting of some goods or letters or visits, vivid images of Turkish people and Istanbul, and, arguably most remarkably, his partners add up to his homesickness. Hikmet's love for his country reflects his longing for it, and his love and longing for the women in his life merge with and fuse in this longing for his country,

thus, his homesickness. All these images of fleeting settings as well as identifications provide the chronotope of homesickness.

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