

Dehumanization in Burhan Sönmez's Labyrinth: A Psychopolitical Study

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Abstract

This research attempts to analyze Burhan Sönmez's Labyrinth based on Byung-Chul Han's psychopolitical theory, in which Han critiques the neoliberal tools of dehumanization. Through Labyrinth, Sönmez explores the consequences of living in a neoliberal world where the friendly smart power reduces the characters to mere objects to increase its productivity. The paper also explains how Boratin's amnesia reflects the erasure of collective identity and history. Sönmez has chosen Turkey as the novel's main setting and highlights capitalist's dehumanizing effects within its specific context. Overall, this paper analyzes the forms of dehumanization in the modern era and how power works silently. It also examines how identities, histories, and memories are being erased to control the minds of the characters and make them act in accordance with the desires of those in power.

Keyword: Dehumanization, Psychopolitics, Labyrinth, Neoliberalism, Memory

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Introduction

Burhan Sönmez's *Labyrinth*, which published in 2018, presents Boratin, a musician who has lost his memory after a suicide attempt on Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge. *Labyrinth* is not only a story of memory loss but also a powerful reflection on how power robs individuals of their humanity and their sense of self. To examine how capitalism causes psychological fragmentation and collapsed identities, the researcher applies Han's psychopolitical theory. Han's main ideas are surrounded by power and how it controls the psyche of the people to direct and predict their actions. Individuals are responsible for bearing their own burden of failures and successes in the name of individual competition and freedom. Nowadays, everyone has become an entrepreneur of their own life, often exploiting themselves without awareness of their own exploitation. By examining Boratin's exploration of his identity, past, and selfhood, this paper aims to show how the contemporary capitalist system robs individuals of their humanity.

The Problem and the Questions of the Study

Power is not merely exercised through physical manipulation but through psychological means as well. In today's world, politics is more than political ideologies and parties; it shapes everyday life without our conscious recognition. Today, individuals are oppressed and dehumanized without an obvious oppressor.

The difficulty in recognizing these psychological effects lies in the nature of power, which blinds individuals in subtle and seemingly friendly ways.

Based on the problem of the study, this research seeks to answer the following questions: 1- How does the novel portray the theme of dehumanization in *Labyrinth* through the psychological exploration of the protagonist?

2- How does a capitalist neoliberal system lead the characters to lose their identity and dignity? 3- How does Sönmez show the reality of today's neoliberal Middle Eastern society by making Turkey the only context of the novel?

4- How does Boratin's amnesia and experiences dehumanization represent a broader issue of dehumanization in the entire modern world?

5- How does Boratin's loss of identity contribute to the erasure of collective humanity?

The Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for several reasons; it focuses on how Middle Eastern societies deprive people of their humanity and fragment their identities by choosing Turkey as the main setting. It demonstrates how the structures of dehumanization have evolved into more serious and dangerous forms. Most importantly, it portrays how Burhan Sönmez, a Kurdish writer, contributes to a body of contemporary literature that explores complex psychological states caused by political oppression and the modern life.

Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach to answer the research questions and achieve its aim. In order to analyze dehumanization in *Labyrinth*, this paper critically examines the main text and the theory which is the framework of the analysis. Its main source is Burhan Sönmez's *Labyrinth*. Its

secondary sources include Byung-Chul Han's works about psychopolitics and dehumanization and other scholarly articles.

Literature Review:

This study attempts to analyze Burhan Sönmez's *Labyrinth* based on Byung-Chul Han's theory of psychopolitics. It aims to demonstrate how neoliberal power self-governs and controls the character's psyche, ultimately dehumanizing them. Additionally, it aims to examine how silent power, which is more powerful than violent power, stimulates the emotions and desires of the characters. The researcher has identified prior studies that address *Labyrinth* but pursue different aims.

Currently, two academic papers have been published on Burhan Sönmez's *Labyrinth* in the Turkish language. The first paper is written by Esra Başak Aydıralp entitled "Burhan Sönmez'in Labirent Adlı Eserinin Bir Yapısöküm Okuması: Çağdaş Bir Metnin Sınıf-İçi Uyarlaması." In this paper, the researcher reads *Labyrinth* according to Jacques Derrida's approach of "Writing and Difference" and "Of Grammatology". The aim of the study is to analyze *Labyrinth* in terms of hierarchical contradictions to show the role of the oppositions in the construction of identity, such as forgetting/remembering, social memory/individual memory, nobody/everybody, life/death, and past/future. Moreover, it aims at deconstructing the text and prepares didactic course content in the context of literature education (Aydıralp, 2019).

The second research on *Labyrinth* is written by Meliha Tatlı and is entitled "Burhan Sönmez'in Labirent Romanında Bellek Yitimi Ve Unutma." In this work, the researcher explains amnesia and forgetting in the novel and shows how amnesia creates a universe of absences and causes suffering for the protagonist, Boratın. Furthermore, the study makes a connection between social memory and nostalgia, establishing that the uncertainty of the past has liberated

Boratin, allowing him to escape from the past struggles that led him to commit suicide (Tatli, 2023).

In conclusion, it is essential to highlight that this research distinguishes itself from the previously mentioned studies. It examines the dehumanizing effects of power on individuals through the lens of Byung-Chul Han's psychopolitical theory, which explains how neoliberalism has affected and poisoned every aspects of life. The work *Labyrinth* has not been previously analyzed using psychopolitical theory. There are only two studies exist; one addresses amnesia and memory, and the other analyzing the novel based on Derrida's approach of grammatology. Arguably, the researcher also recommends that future writers consider analyzing *Labyrinth* through other contemporary theories, due to the limited research available.

Byung-Chul Han's Psychopolitical Theory:

Psychopolitics refers to the methods and tactics employed by the power holders to control and manipulate the population. It's the intersection between politics and psychology, which shows how power is used to influence and control emotions and desires. This section is going to explain Byung-Chul Han's psychopolitical theory and explore his significant ideas.

The first interest in the study of psychology in the political field began in France in the early 1870s. Adolf Bastian, in his book *Man in History* (1860), introduced the term 'political psychology' for the first time. In Italy, between 1902 and 1903, political thinkers such as Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, contributed to the term 'political psychology' when discussing the relationship between the rulers and then ruled, as well as social classes. Furthermore, in the early years of the 20th century, Oxford and Cambridge universities in the United Kingdom incorporated psychology into political studies. Eventually, when the

study of psychology with politics succeeded in Europe, American scholars started to adapt the idea; Harold Lass pioneered in introducing the term.

Michel Foucault was the pioneer in revolutionizing the understanding of the concept of power. Later theories are rooted in Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and technologies of the self. In 2013, Byung-Chul Han introduced psychopolitics in his book *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*.

Han's focus is on how the individuals are being emptied out through a voluntarily act of self-exposure rather than oppressive means through explaining how freedom has been exploited in the modern era. Technically, freedom is the opposite of coercion, but in the neoliberal world, freedom itself generates coercion, an instrument of capitalism, to control and manipulate individuals. Today, everyone is the entrepreneur of their own life constantly forced to improve and optimize themselves. The individual subject considers itself free, but "in so far as it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an absolute slave" (Han, 2017, p. 2). With the abolishing allo-exploitation, everyone is now a master and a slave at once. Human beings are now isolated entrepreneurs who practice auto-exploitation voluntarily.

In his book, *The Burnout Society*, Han discusses the psychological disorders of the modern world, as he argues, "neurological illnesses such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), borderline personality disorder (BPD), and burnout syndrome." (Han, 2012, p. 1) These are modern issues that are not caused by repression but from the access of positivity and freedom and are not infections but infractions. The neurological illnesses are caused by many reasons, such as the expulsion of the other 'foreign'. Harm does not come from negativity or the other but also from positivity and an excess of sameness. Just as Baudrillard argues that "he who lives by the same shall die by

the same” (Han, 2012, p. 4). Dealing with these infractions is very difficult, as they are ghostly enemies infiltrating every part of the world.

By differentiating between ‘I-tiredness’ and ‘We-tiredness’, Han tells us what kind of a world we are living in. He refers to Peter Handke’s “Essay on Tiredness” as he calls it “divisive tiredness”: private tiredness, not ours, but mine over here and yours over there.” (Han, 2012, p. 31). ‘I-tiredness’ destroys what is common and shared within communities. Modern individuals confront their own tiredness in isolation; they have no listeners for their stories of fatigue.

Another characteristic of neoliberal society is algophobia, an extreme fear of pain. In contemporary times, all painful situations are avoided, even viewing love as something to be wary of. This algophobia controls political spheres, leading societies into a state of permanent anesthesia. Today, the palliative society, pain is denied a language, as it is seen as a sign of weakness that should be hidden. Han cites Ernst Jünger’s famous quote when he argues, “tell me your relation to pain, and I will tell you who you are.” (Han, 2020, p. 1) For Jünger, people live in a “zone of sensitivity,” where ideas of pain and struggles are erased from the collective consciousness. Today, Pain is seen as a result of personal failure and individuals are responsible for it; nobody puts blame on society. Han also mentions how the art of coping with suffering through the healing hands and storytelling has been abandoned.

Overall, Han’s psychopolitical theory is a critique of the capitalist neoliberal regime that has controlled the psyche of individuals and predicted their actions. Silent power, more insidious than overt political power, dehumanizes individuals and turns them against each other in the name of free competition to increase productivity and profit.

Dehumanization in the Neoliberal Era:

Dehumanization, the process of depriving someone of his or her human qualities, has existed in various forms throughout history. In the past, the forms of dehumanization were obvious; people were dehumanized based on their skin color or their economic status. In modern times, the forms of dehumanization are invisible and quiet but more serious and dangerous.

Contrary to Marx's assertion that workers are dehumanized and regarded as mere machines under the hands of an obvious oppressor. The modern entrepreneurs dehumanize and exploit themselves voluntarily with no visible oppressor. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has shifted into inner struggle against oneself. Individual workers are hyperactive and constantly working to increase productivity and benefit smart fat capitalism.

Today, individuals are increasingly measured and quantified as objects. There are “countless self-management workshops, motivational retreats and seminars on personality or mental training” (Han, 2017, p. 29) to turn human beings into ‘positive machines’. In chapter six of *The Burnout Society*, which is entitled ‘Healing as Killing’, Han explains how the word ‘healing’ is about therapeutically eliminating every weakness, which is a neoliberal form of exploitation. This relentless demand for improvement leads to mental collapse and produces a burnout society. In the contemporary era, self-optimization follows a systematic process and is measured.

According to Han, the age of listening to each other is gone. Today, attention is almost nonexistent. This is due to the expulsion of the other. Behaviors like work, alcohol and drug use, and addiction to electronic devices are separating people from each other. The era of distraction is the era of narcissism, which is self-worshipping. The narcissist individual views relationships as vehicles for self-affirmation and self-improvement.

Furthermore, Han explains how ‘shock’ was one of the disciplinary techniques to turn individuals into a ‘clean slate’. The Canadian author, Naomi Klein (1970), believes that electric shocks lead to the creation of a new personality, as “the psyche is subjected to a violent ‘de-branding’ and ‘re-branding’”. It was to be newly formatted and rewritten, as it were.” (Han, 2017, p. 33) Instead of the violent psychiatric techniques, the neoliberal regime deploys electric shocks differently. Smart power “works with positive stimuli” (Han, 2017, p. 36); it seduces the soul and stimulates emotions. In fact, emotions are very important to power holders, as they are short-lived and easy to control.

Neoliberal capitalism values productivity over human beings. The system sacrifices human beings and their dignity to keep the economy healthy. Han, in his book *The Disappearance of Rituals*, says that “values today...serve as things for individual consumption. Once considered universal goods in themselves, values such as justice, humanity, or sustainability are now exploited for profit.” (Han, 2020, p. 5) He also argues that “the neoliberal regime deploys emotions as sources in order to bring about heightened productivity and achievement” (Han, 2017, p. 45). Power holders reduce human beings to mere consumers, using their emotions as a source to increase productivity. The programs they put into the world are designed in a way that stimulates individuals’ desires to consume the goods they produce, encouraging individuals to voluntarily expose themselves performing as positive robots.

Dehumanization has many dangerous effects on modern individuals; the most alarming one is self-harm, which has become a widespread phenomenon among today’s youth. Injuring and cutting one’s arm has become an addiction. The self-harmers often suffer from deep psychological problems and are tortured by the feelings of low self-esteem and shame which are caused by the contemporary capitalist system.

Human beings have been dehumanized throughout history by using different forms and techniques. As mentioned above, the modern era's dehumanization has the most dangerous effects on individuals, as it works silently and strongly. The reason for its strength is that it cannot be defeated easily because the true oppressor remains largely invisible. Individuals are dehumanized through optimistic tools, freedom, motivational courses, and their desires and emotions, not through imprisonment or punishment.

Dehumanization in *Labyrinth*:

Labyrinth was written by Burhan Sönmez, a Kurdish novelist from Turkey, in 2018. The narrative revolves around Boratin, a 28-year-old musician, who has attempted suicide by jumping off Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul. Boratin loses his identity, history, and memory after waking up in the hospital. Sönmez critiques the modern tools of neoliberalism that are used to deprive individuals of their humanity through Boratin's amnesia. This paper seeks to reveal how *Labyrinth* portrays dehumanization and psychological control by the capitalist system in the contemporary neoliberal world.

Labyrinth does not dramatize dehumanization but captures it in a quiet way. Boratin does not experience torture or imprisonment, but rather he is subjected to a hidden power in a society that has fragmented his sense of self. Both Han and Foucault argue how power is everywhere, even in the blood vessels of human bodies. Throughout the novel, Boratin is not controlled by a power that deals with death or threats, but a power that functions through the investment of his life. In fact, before the suicide attempt, Boratin's roles were shaped by the social values of the time, as his life appeared to be fulfilled with happiness. He was socially active, a musician, and handsome as well. It seems that his suicide attempt is due to the violence of positivity and his internal pressure for more success. Thus, Boratin experiences dehumanization that is extended beyond

physical to internal. Boratin's internal 'I-tiredness' caused him to commit suicide. In the neoliberal world, individuals see themselves as entrepreneurs, constantly striving to improve.

Boratin's friend, Effendi, has also tried to commit suicide, as he argues, "Boratin, you don't remember us coming to this passage about a year ago and standing in front of this billboard and you grabbing me by the wrist like this when I told you I wanted to commit suicide, do you? Boratin looks sheepish. It's the first time it has occurred to him that others too might want to die." (Sönmez, 2019, p. 77) This shows how self-harm has become a widespread phenomenon among today's individuals. Sönmez's mention of other characters' suicide attempts indicates how suicide is never mentioned as political but as an individual and isolated incident. In the novel, Boratin never blames the system but rather himself. His friend's hidden attempt at suicide shows how pain is privatized. Nobody except Boratin knows about Effendi's secret. He doesn't mention it with other friends but rather laughs with them and performs his best version. Effendi mentions how other people commit suicide as he argues that Boratin was "always lucky," and his "good luck came to the rescue again. Dozens of people jump off the Bosphorus Bridge every year." (Sönmez, 2019, p. 77) This quote shows how modernity has created a society of the undead, which is mentioned by Han, where individuals are technically alive but dead inside.

Apparently, Boratin is too alive to die and too dead to live. Boratin's friend, who appears happy, yet attempted suicide, shows the paradox in the modern world. Few minutes after Effendi tells Boratin that "death used to find me everywhere. On the balcony it used to say, jump. On windy days it would summon me to the sea. Whenever I went into the kitchen it would show me the knife. At night it would wake me up with the smell of the medicines in the cabinet," (Sönmez, 2019, p. 78) he laughs out loud for a very simple reason that is not even

funny: “Are we going to buy those cigarettes? he asks. Effendi pauses. He holds his breath. He hesitates for a moment, then bursts out laughing. His voice echoes in the passage.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 78) then they both return to their table and start “raising their glasses in response to the glasses raised to toast their return, they sip their drinks,” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 79) as if nothing has happened. Effendi doesn’t even tell Bek what they have talked about when he asks him “what have you two been up to? Boratin told me a great story, he says. Did he? Yes. A young man gets lost in the woods.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 79) this quote shows how Effendi lies to Bek to hide his sorrow and his desire to commit suicide. Individuals are not themselves in the performance society; rather, they act as positive machines. They are being dehumanized through their internally driven desires to voluntarily perform and perfect themselves. Neoliberalism strips individuals of their human qualities. Anger, sorrow, and even happiness are private matters; nobody shows how miserable they are by not refusing the norms.

In *Labyrinth*, freedom appears to be paradoxical; Boratin is free from his past, memory, and even neoliberal obligations, yet feels trapped in the world. Neoliberalism deceives individuals into believing that they are free and have full control over themselves. Boratin’s release after the suicide attempt can be terrifying, not liberating. Just as he argues that “I can’t place myself anywhere in the world I have seen once, the remainder of which I attempt to piece together with what little information I have in my head. If someone told me I was in a dream I’d believe them.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 14) He is free from his terrifying memory but still hollow inside. He doesn’t know what to do with his life after the loss of himself entirely. In fact, liberation has turned into an internal pressure. As Han argues how “freedom itself is bringing forth compulsion and constraint.” (Han, 2017, p. 1) Additionally, individuals are responsible for what they do and

what to choose. This freedom demands their constant self-improvement and self-optimization, which leads to burnout.

Moreover, Boratin attempted to get free but fell into the same dehumanizing system again. As Sönmez mentions that “the medicines prove ineffective, turning into a bottomless, restless, pitch-covered pit of torment. This night isn’t clear like other nights. If Boratin surrenders to the thought he has been striving to banish for hours and takes a few more sleeping pills and painkillers, he will be embarking on another suicide.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 68) This quote represents how silent violence, which is disguised in the form of medicine, takes away their pain and optimize them. Exploited freedom leads to invisible violence, in which individuals go through the feeling of guilt and pressure to success. They don’t feel or realize the hidden violence which has spread around the world and affects all of humanity. Boratin feels oppressed without an obvious oppressor, because “although the achievement-subject dreams itself free, in reality it is a slave. In so far it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an absolute slave.” (Han, 2017, p. 2) Besides, Boratin’s suicide attempt symbolizes that he has already been defeated by the neoliberal norms. He blames himself for the suicide as well and looks for answers.

Boratin also experiences dehumanization as he considers himself as an object, not a human being with a clear past and memory. In chapter two, he describes himself as “an animal and a machine” that “have come together in the same body” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 10). This quote indicates how hollow the era of neoliberalism is, in which individuals feel like objects not human beings.

Furthermore, Boratin no longer recognizes himself in the mirror; he calls himself a stranger several times in the novel. He feels disconnected from his face, body, and thoughts. This estrangement is not simply a symptom of amnesia but the manifestation of human erasure. In chapter one, Boratin looks at the mirror

and greets himself and says, “hello stranger” (Sönmez, p. 4). Even in chapter eleven, he tells Effendi that he is asking about a person he doesn’t even know, and that Effendi knows him better than himself: “I regard even my own face in the mirror as a stranger. I’m like a blank sheet of paper. I have no inside and no outside.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 15) It symbolizes the collapse of subjectivity, not only memory loss. He becomes alienated from himself, and he is no longer a complete individual. This is a clear example of dehumanization and the erasure of personal wholeness.

Boratin, the protagonist, feels estranged not only from others but from himself as well. The alienation that appears today is not only from others but from the same; Boratin was tired of focusing on himself alone. This form of alienation takes place during self-realization and optimization. Boratin once claims how lonely he feels as he asserts, “I go to sleep late and when, one morning, I wake up in the hospital again, having lost my memory, I realize I am caught up in the world’s eternal cycle. Empty. Alone.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 10) He also expresses how confused he feels as he argues, “my east and west are hazy, as are my south and north. No matter where I step, I feel as though I am about to tumble into a void.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 14) Neoliberal society isolates individuals by turning them into entrepreneurs of the self, constantly improving themselves. This, in fact, is a paradox. The more Boratin attempts to find his position in the world, the more he feels isolated.

In addition, Boratin feels alienated from his previous choices and decisions. As he says:

“He looks around him, trying to ascertain whether he has ever woken up here before. The room is spacious. The walls are a plain ivory color, but the maple veneer of the wardrobe opposite him is too light. A darker shade would have looked better. Who chose that wardrobe,

was it me? Boratin questions his own taste. When they brought him here last night he had hoped that this unfamiliar house might trigger some memories in the light of day.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 4)

This statement indicates how Boratin’s ideas, desires, and needs are deeply shaped by power holders through media, digital technology, institutions, societal norms, and every single entity around him. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that “they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds-which is to say, they produce producers.” (Kaposy & Szeman, 2011, p. 148) Thus, Boratin’s doubts show that his tastes are not his but the capitalists’ needs.

Boratin experiences a profound loss of his social connections both prior to and following his suicide attempt. This erasure of the other, which equals the enclosure in itself, creates the feeling of emptiness. Despite Istanbul’s busy environment, the death of the other is obvious in the novel. Boratin does not feel attached to his friends and ex-lovers. He hasn’t even seen his sister and his nephew for a long time as he states, “I haven’t been to see my sister and my fatherless nephew for all these years,” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 38) and “I can’t imagine my sister’s face. I haven’t got a photo of her.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 127) Boratin prefers to stay home for days without even going out and avoids interactions with people. Expulsion of others mirrors the dehumanization of relationships as though the others are not human beings and are easy to let go. In fact, Boratin tries to reconnect with his sister and friends, but the connection seems shallow, and he cannot escape solitude.

Boratin’s conversations with his friends are just performative and robotic, as if he is living a normal life while he isn’t. He suppresses his own emotions for the sake of visibility. In chapter eleven, when Boratin is hanging out with his friends in Theodora’s Tavern on pedestrian street, he tries “to match his friends’

names to their faces and save them in his memory, and, on the other, to keep track of Bek's conversation" (Sönmez, 2019, p. 74) just like a robot. His conversations with his friends feel hollow, robotic, and performative. He acts like a machine who tries to engage in human interaction.

Boratin's act of self-harm is caused by many reasons; one of the main ones is a cry for love and attention. Today, there are rarely any touches. We seem to miss the healing hands of the other. Boratin misses his sister, and the comfort comes from her as he states, "I don't feel like there's anything missing. My ex-girlfriend isn't something that's lacking in my life. The only person from my past I want to reach out to is my sister." (Sönmez, 2019, p. 143) Even her voice gives Boratin a kind of peace which he cannot feel with others as he asserts, "my sister is more reassuring than the doctor. Her words aren't convoluted. She puts me at ease without burdening me with anything, without wearing down my mind." (Sönmez, 2019, p. 132) He hasn't seen her in years; this is how a modern man cuts relations and is a narcissistic person. In the novel, it's obvious that no amount of medicine can reduce his pain. Boratin's rib still hurts, and he needs the healing touch from the other to be stable again. As Han mentions how "a stable self only emerges in confrontation with others. An excessive narcissistic relation to self, by contrast, produces a feeling of emptiness. The ego drowns in the self." (Han, 2021, p. 44)

Another reason is the absence of negativity. Feelings such as grief, despair, and anger are silenced. Today's optimization and performance culture turns human beings into machines to increase productivity. Their only task is to work and perform, not to grieve and waste time. Thus, they face depression and end up hurting themselves. Before his suicide attempt, Boratin hadn't shown that he was in despair; if his friends were aware, this wouldn't have happened to him. But he was busy performing and working. Another reason to cut oneself, which

may also be another reason for his attempt, is to feel like a human being again. Han argues: “I bleed therefore I am” (Han, 2021, p. 44).

Today’s algophobia has tolerated pain as it tries to suppress suffering immediately. Medicalization and pharmacology destroy all cultural codifications of dealing with pain such as the healing hands of a mother. Therefore, pain has lost its meaning. In the novel, Boratin’s pain is treated with medicine. In several chapters, Sönmez has mentioned that Boratin is taking medicine to fall asleep, as he writes, “I take my medicine at night and wake up the next morning with fresh hope, but at the end of the day I find myself back in the same place” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 45). This quotation shows how the modern man is sensitive to pain and tries to avoid it at any cost. In fact, it is the political system that tries to keep individuals in a state of anesthesia and optimism. The system is trying to turn Boratin into a happy subject who is devoid of feelings. In contemporary times, all painful situations are avoided, with even love is regarded as something dangerous that should be avoided. Boratin refused to see his ex-girlfriend, Suzan, as he is afraid of facing her and talking to her. As he tells Bek that he is not going to meet his ex-girlfriend, as he “always end up in a dark tunnel.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 141) Boratin is afraid of getting lost and confused when facing his past. He cannot stand the pain which comes with it and wants to stay in a safe zone.

The doctor’s superficial insurance indicates that the system works to keep Boratin within the system obsessed with positivity and appearance. Instead of dealing with his suffering, the neoliberal regime offers motivational slogans and medicine; Sönmez shows this states through Boratin’s question as he asks, “tell me Doctor, do you dispense this much hope to all your patients along with their medication?” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 5) The doctor is motivating him to make him re-enter the performance and achievement society. This is deeply dehumanizing to see someone for their looks without referring to their emotional and psychological

well-being. The doctor is telling him that he is handsome and that everyone wants to have his appearance as she tells him that “those good looks alone are enough to live for.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 46) He must be grateful and be happy for his looks rather than thinking about the loss of his past. Generally, as Han mentions, the modern man is put into motivational courses to turn them into positive machines and increase productivity.

In a transparent society, people are obsessed with visibility and appearance. Individuals are reduced to consumable objects. In *Labyrinth*, women are sexually objectified. They are judged based on their appearance rather than emotions or intellect. In Theodora’s Tavern, when Boratin and his friends are gathered and are having conversations, Bek tells Boratin that “beauty is more alluring than kindness” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 74), as they watch a woman sitting at another table at the same restaurant. His friends “all seize the opportunity to sneak a better look at the woman’s eyes, nose, and lips.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 75) They believe that beauty is more important than kindness because it doesn’t demand anything in return. This proves Han’s perspective that inner beauty, kindness, and even mystery are erased for the sake of appearance. The woman is treated as a man’s object for pleasure as they look at her beautiful facial features. This is, according to Han, the pornographization of the body and the sacrifice of humanity for the sake of visual gravitation.

Sönmez portrays Istanbul as a neoliberal labyrinth; as he argues that “while outside it’s bustling with street sellers, rowdy children, and taxi drivers listening to loud Arabesk music, despite everything, I feel safe in this house that, for some unfathomable reason, is mine.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 8) Despite the crowd, Boratin feels safe at home and prefers to be alone. Throughout the novel, characters like Boratin and his friend feel lonely and alienated, while people are running, consuming, and producing in the background. Modern men feel lonely

no matter how crowded the surround is. Everyone is busy producing themselves, and nobody cares about what the other is going through. In chapter eight, Boratin is sitting on a bench in a park, eating simit and observing people around him minding their own business.

Boratin sees someone around his age coming from his direction. He sits with Boratin and tells him that he “can’t trust these people” and “I’m human too, right, but no one gives a damn about my troubles.” (Sönmez, 2019, p. 51). This quote shows how people are transferred into isolated projects who are responsible for solving their own problems. Therefore, this privatization makes violence invisible and corrupt.

In summary, Boratin’s amnesia represents the erasure of collective history, memory, and identity. The neoliberal power systems control the minds of the individuals and predict their actions without them even realizing it. In the novel, Boratin does not realize that he is being controlled and directed; he is taking medicine and other motivational agents from his friends and doctors. Boratin’s situation is a symbol of neoliberal dehumanization, particularly in the context of the Middle East, with Turkey serving as the backdrop for this global phenomenon.

Conclusions

Dehumanization is one of the key concepts, among others, that has been depicted in Burhan Sönmez’s *Labyrinth* through the character of Boratin. The researcher has analyzed the theme of dehumanization in the novel according to Byung-Chul Han’s psychopolitical theory and his ideas on the new forms of dehumanization. Boratin’s suicidal attempt shows the destructive psychological impacts of neoliberalism on modern individuals. Boratin serves as a symbol of a modern man who has stripped of his identity, dignity, and selfhood as he faces

dehumanization in the process of recovery. The appearance of the idea of suicide among other normal characters in the novel suggests that psychological suffering is not a personal weakness, but a systematic condition produced by the neoliberal order. Sönmez does not explicitly reference politics, he subtly exposes the hidden mechanisms of power that runs the whole world to control the psyche of individuals through self-optimization and positive encouragement. Boratin's and his friend's secret attempt of suicide creates perfect example of the society of performance, where individuals try to hide their negative feelings and perform their best version. The reference of medicine several times in the novel indicates the disappearance of cultural codifications of dealing with pain. Finally, Boratin's amnesia functions as a powerful metaphor for the erosion of collective identity and historical consciousness.

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له مروڤخستن له پۆمانی لیبرانتی بورهان سۆنمیز: تویژینه وهیه کی سایکۆپۆلۆتیکیه

ئەم تویژینه وهیه هەڵدەدات پۆمانی لیبرانتی بورهان سۆنمیز لەبەر پۆشنای تێوری سایکۆپۆلۆتیکیی بیونگ چول هان شیبکاتهوه، که هان له تیۆرهکهیدا رەخنە له لایەنە جۆراوجۆرهکانی کۆمەڵگای نیولیبرالی مۆدێرن دەگریت، لهوانه ئامرازهکانی له مروڤ خستن و بهکالاکردنی تاکهکان. پۆمانه که لیکه و ته سایکۆلۆژییهکانی ژیان له دنیای نیولیبرالیدا له پێگهی دەسهلاتی نهرم، هەڵدەدات کارهکتهرکان به کالای بکات. ههروهها ئەم تویژینه وهیه ئەوه نیشاندادات که چۆن پالەوانی سهرهکیی پۆمانه که بههۆی تووشبوون به نهخۆشی لهبیرچونهوه دهلالهت له سهرینه وهی ناسنامهی به کۆمهڵ و پهگهزه مرویییهکان و میژووی مروڤایهتی. به هۆی شیکردنه وهی پۆمانی لیبرانت که شوینکاته کهی تورکیا و گوزاراشت له تهواوی پۆژههلاتی ناوهراست دهکات. ئەم تویژینه وهیه به شیوهیهکی گشتی پهنجه دهخاته سهر دۆخی ژیانی مروڤی مۆدێرن و میکانیزمهکانی له مروڤ خستن بهبێ ئەوهی ههست بهو له دهستدانه بکهن. ههروهها ئەوه دهخاته پوو که چۆن به پێگهی میکانیزمی سهرینه وهی ناسنامه و میژوو و یادهوهرییهکان

کۆنترۆلی بێرکردنهوهی مڕۆڤهکان دهکهن و پهروهردیهان دهکهن که به پێی خواستهکان دهسهلات ههلسوکه وتبهکن.

وشه کللیهکان: له مڕۆڤخستن، سایکۆپۆلۆتیک، لیبرانت، نیولیبرالیزم، یادهوهری.

التجريد من الإنسانية في متاهة برهان سونميز: دراسة نفسية سياسية

يحاول هذا البحث تحليل متاهة برهان سونميز استنادا إلى النظرية السيكلوجية السياسية لبيونغ تشول هان ، والتي ينتقد فيها جوانب مختلفة من المجتمع النيوليبرالي الحديث ، بما في ذلك معايير وأدواته لتجريد من الإنسانية. تستكشف الرواية العواقب النفسية للعيش في العالم النيوليبرالي حيث تجرد القوة الذكية الصديقة الشخصيات من إنسانيتها وتختزلها إلى مجرد أشياء. إنه يثبت أن فقدان الذاكرة لدى بطل الرواية يعكس محو الهوية الجماعية والتاريخ والإنسانية.

من خلال دراسة المتاهة ، التي يقع مقرها في تركيا ، تسلط هذه الورقة الضوء على الآثار اللاإنسانية للنيوليبرالية في سياق أوسع من الشرق الأوسط. بشكل عام ، تشرح هذه الورقة كيف تجرد الرأسمالية النيوليبرالية البشر المعاصرين من إنسانيتهم ، غالبا دون أن يدركوا ذلك. كما يدرس كيف يتم محو الهويات والتاريخ والذكريات للسيطرة على عقول الشخصيات وجعلها تتصرف وفقا لرغبات من هم في السلطة. الكلمات المفتاحية: التجريد من الإنسانية ، السياسة النفسية ، المتاهة ، النيوليبرالية ، الذاكرة