

THE ROLE OF ART IN EARLY REPUBLICAN MODERNIZATION IN TURKEY*

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Scholarship on nineteenth century European nationalism has shown us how the development of a national language, national literature and national art went hand in hand with processes of economic and bureaucratic modernization.¹ In this classic model the realm of culture could not easily be separated from developments in the economic and political realms and it was hard to say which preceded the others chronologically. In cases of late nation formation such as in the Middle East, on the other hand, art and literature are usually perceived as a direct extension of the modernizing project of the state. This is true for perceptions of the Turkish case as well. Scholars of Turkish modernization as well as conservative or liberal critiques of the nation-state in Turkey focus on the realm of culture as the ultimate target of republican modernization. There are two broad assumptions of most scholarship on Turkish modernization. First, it is stated that cultural reforms were imposed in an authoritarian and monopolizing manner by the state. Second, it is asserted that the cultural reforms were imitative of the Western model and therefore artificial.

This paper claims that this is a simplistic way of perceiving cultural modernization in Turkey. It is argued here that cultural modernization was taking place not only through statist measures, but also through the works of groups of intellectuals, artists, thinkers and writers who could be critical of the new state's cultural and social policies. Although it is true that the new republican state was the most influential actor in the cultural arena, this paper claims that a relatively independent sphere also existed for cultural production. This paper studies the cultural arena of the 1930s and 1940s in Turkey by analysing an important weekly journal *Yeni Adam* (the New Man) which appeared between 1934 and 1979. In this journal, creativity in art and literature was seen as closely connected with the ability to relate oneself to 'the local', in ways that differed from the official nationalist outlook. Three different approaches to art co-existed in the journal, namely a Westernist cosmopolitan stance, a social realist stance and an "unofficial" position defending nationalist art.

The first stance viewed art in terms of a strictly Westernist and imitative project of modernization. Among these three stances it is usually this one which is simplistically seen as the general model for early republican art and literature. Following this line of thought, it is generally assumed that in late modernizing societies artistic and literary work can only be produced under the direction of the state and reflect official concerns. In other words, the realm of artistic creation is perceived in an instrumentalist manner; it serves to support, maintain and spread the ideology of the nation-state. A parallel assumption is the one which perceives the early republican art scene as a monolithic body of works and ideas under the authoritarian single-party regime.

It is argued here that the latter two stances, namely the social realist and the "unofficial" nationalist, provided alternatives in the sphere of artistic creation, allowing for a number of approaches and not necessarily dominated by the official one. The paper claims that such pluralism of ideas actually point to the relative autonomy created in the field of artistic

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¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991.

creation vis-à-vis an official republican art propagated and commissioned by the state. Secondly, it is argued that these plural approaches did not necessarily contradict each other. It is asserted that the resolution of the tension among them is hidden within the internal theoretical tensions of nationalism.

The politics of culture in Turkey

The 1930s and 1940s represent a critical period in the republican experience of Turkey. These are the two decades when it seems that the republic (established in 1923) was gradually reflecting on its own mission and reviewing its modernization strategies. The realm of culture carried great importance for both the political (official) nationalists of the period and for the intelligentsia who were not direct extensions of the state.

In the scholarship on nationalism, it is customary to divide political nationalism and cultural nationalism without, of course, exclusively differentiating the two categories from each other.² The cultural nationalist tends to see the nation as the expression of natural solidarity, “united not by reason or law, but through passionate sentiments rooted in nature and history”,³ while political nationalists work to establish the nation-state as an institution. In the early stages of nation formation it is in fact especially difficult to differentiate the cultural nationalists from the political nationalists, since state building is an encompassing project involving all sectors of the population. Besides, in this transition period, social actors outside the state scarcely exist.

In these early stages, while being preoccupied with the nation’s culture as a sign of its worth among world nations, cultural nationalists were also well aware that culture could become an instrument for political mobilization, socialization and education. Political nationalists in turn were also aware of the potential of cultural symbols for the defining of national identity. That is why, especially in this early period, they came up with a cultural nationalism of their own (the official cultural nationalism).

It is true that official nationalism took a particularly monopolizing attitude to culture in the 1940s: attempts at a re-writing of Turkish history and a re-interpretation of the philological sources of Turkish language are two cases in point.⁴ While realizing the difficulty of differentiating between two types of nationalists in this early period of state formation, we still find the distinction useful. The political (official) nationalists perceived and used cultural nationalism as a means to realize the dual missions of legitimization of the republican regime and modernization of the people, while the cultural nationalists accepted the notion of a national culture as a natural way of life for the whole community. In this paper, by cultural nationalists we are referring to circles of intellectuals grouped around literary or art currents and journals who could question the cultural strategies and specific policies of the single-party regime.

The contribution of cultural nationalists to defining national identity is interesting to study since they are the ones developing the various nuances, shades and even criticisms of Turkish nationalism. It has been observed that cultural nationalism which does not directly work for the establishment and empowering of a nation-state carries within it the seeds of criticism of

² Eugene Kamenka, ed., *Nationalism: The Nature of the Evolution of an Idea*, Canberra: Australian University Press, 1973; John Plamenatz, “Two Types of Nationalism” in: Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism*, 23-36; John Hutchinson, “Moral Innovators and the Politics of Regeneration: the Distinctive Role of Cultural Nationalists in Nation-Building”, in A. D. Smith, ed., *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, 101-17.

³ Isiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, London: Hogarth Press, 1976, 158-63, quoted in Hutchinson, “Moral Innovators”, 103.

⁴ Büşra Ersanlı Behar, *İktidar ve Tarih*, İstanbul: Afa, 1992.

the official nationalism.⁵ Of course cultural nationalists are nationalists ultimately and they, too, are constrained by their assumptions about the superiority and unity of the nation's identity. Nevertheless, the vocabulary of cultural nationalism has to emphasize an additional assumption. This is the assumption of national difference or the cultural difference of the nation from other nations. The contents of this cultural difference are never clearly definable and never strictly formulated. Their preoccupation with the ambiguous nature of cultural difference lets cultural nationalists exist in and tolerate a pluralist environment. Cultural nationalism provides an arena of negotiation for the differing definitions of culture.

Social realists and collectivists with leftist tendencies constitute another group within the unofficial intelligentsia of the 1930s and early 1940s. The cultural nationalists consisted of those who built their intellectual or literary careers on the idea of the differentiation between culture and civilization underlined by Ziya Gökalp. These were preoccupied with the resolution of this question through a sort of synthesis (between the Western and the local), and can broadly be named the 'synthesists'. Such figures as Yahya Kemal, Ahmed Hamdi Tanpinar, Peyami Safa, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, Mümtaz Turhan are some important names from this group. For them cultural difference of the nation stemmed from its local traditions, namely traditions inherited from the Turco-Islamic experience of living. Their cultural nationalism, though conservative in its dealings with the local culture, was politically more liberal and self-critical than the official nationalism, due to its emphasis on the human element and on the concrete experience of everyday life.

The social realist/collectivist group consisted of intellectuals such as Suat Derviş, Hüsamettin Bozok, Kerim Sadi, Rasih Nuri İleri and Suphi Nuri İleri. The common perspective connecting these names to each other was a preoccupation with representations of the working and living conditions of the lower classes. These representations had to be realist; in other words, they had to reflect social conflicts, inequalities and class struggle. In their vocabulary, the nation did not necessarily exist as a cultural collectivity. Rather, for them, there was a need for a new definition of culture and a new art which would represent the nation in its reality, namely by concerning itself with the labouring industrial and rural masses. This group cannot be called cultural nationalists since they concentrated on the material conditions of working sectors of the population. On the other hand, however, they employ a nationalist vocabulary to the extent that their writings are preoccupied with theoretical questions about an aesthetics for the new nation rather than with crude everyday politics. They were influenced by Soviet art, literature and criticism but did not necessarily favour the Soviet political model. Their concern was with the notion of true representation of the nation's realities through art and literature.

Although they sounded similar to the proponents of the *Kadro* group⁶, who voiced their demands for a Turkish revolutionary art in terms of historical materialism and constituted one of the important ideological formulations of official nationalism, the social realists did not have access to positions in the state or were not able to climb the higher echelons of the bureaucracy as members of *Kadro* were. Besides, unlike the *Kadro* intellectuals, they were perceived by the single-party regime as part of the opposition. Their writings were frequently persecuted, their papers and journals closed down.

This article focuses on the journal *Yeni Adam* as a site where the unofficial cultural nationalism of both the more conservative synthesists and the social realists is elaborated. There are two basic aims in the rest of the article: one, to show the differences between the nationalist art of the "synthesists" and the realist art of the "social realists", second, to explain

⁵ Hutchinson, "Moral Innovators".

⁶ *Kadro* was a group of prominent intellectuals (Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Burhan Asaf Belge; Vedat Nedim Tör, İsmail Hüsrev Tökin and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu) associated with the journal *Kadro* (1932-34) who had announced as their aim the formulation of the new regime's nationalist ideology.

why these two positions, emphasizing two different modes of representation, could smoothly coexist in the journal *Yeni Adam* during 1930s and 40s.

Yeni Adam and the cultural life of the new nation

The republican intelligentsia inherited two questions about art from late Ottoman society. One concerned the relationship between artistic representation and reality, and the other the question of the utility of art to society. The debate about the nature of artistic representation had already started in 1910s when a group of painters established the Ottoman Painters Society and discussed whether art (painting) meant an imitation of nature or its reinterpretation through the artistic imagination. Along this axis attitudes could then be classified as realist or idealist. Both the realists and idealists were concerned with the utility of art, though in their own ways. For the realists its pedagogic and documentary qualities mattered, whereas for the idealists its ethical and morally refining qualities carried importance.⁷

Early republican thinking on art was, not surprisingly, preoccupied with the question of the “nationality” of art. The question was important to both proponents of a national, reformist art (as in *Kadro*), and also more cosmopolitan artists favouring the notion of a universal art (such as the artists within and critics of the D Group, 1933). For groups following them, such as *Yeniler* (the New Group, 1940), or the *Onlar* (the Group of 10, 1947), the question of art’s nationality became a driving preoccupation with “the local sources of modern art”.⁸ The awareness of becoming a nation (or building a nation) actually brought the two questions together. In other words, the relationship of art to society could not be conceived without addressing the methodological problem (of realism versus idealism) and the problem of utility. Such were the questions central to the intelligentsia of the 1930s and 1940s and reflected in the pages of *Yeni Adam*.

Yeni Adam presented itself as a weekly journal of ideas when it first appeared in 1934. Its owner and director was İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu (1888-1978). One of the longest surviving journals of republican Turkey, though twice shut down for political reasons, *Yeni Adam* was very much influenced by the person and charisma of Baltacıoğlu who was also a calligrapher and playwright in addition to his career in the field of education. Baltacıoğlu had served as the rector of Istanbul University (Darülfunun) between 1923-27, and was a professor of pedagogy there until the university reform of 1933. With the encouragement of such literary figures as Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar and Nurullah Ataç, Baltacıoğlu started the newspaper *Yeni Adam* after he lost his job at the university, and was to run it until his death.

From the beginning the journal was preoccupied with the art and culture of the new republic. The paper voiced oppositional viewpoints by explicitly criticizing several government policies, including the university reform and the village institutes project. It opened its pages to several figures of the Turkish left like Suphi Nuri İleri, Hüsamettin Bozok and Kerim Sadi as well as to more conservative figures like Peyami Safa. The paper was first shut down in 1938 for one year because of its anti-German articles and later in 1946 for about 15 months. The reason for the second closure is not very clear but seems to be related with the journal’s critical attitude toward certain RPP policies concerning the passage to multi-party politics.

The case of *Yeni Adam* shows that in 1930s and 1940s Turkey neither the question of national identity nor the problem of political legitimization and mobilization were resolved. As political opposition was suppressed, cultural opposition (opposition formulated through the

⁷ Kemal İskender, “Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Sanat ve Estetik”, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: İletişim, Vol. 7, 1746.

⁸ Nurullah Berk, Kaya Özsezgin, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Resmi*, Ankara: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1983, 106-108.

realm of culture) could survive only if it was expressed in terms of nationalist concerns. The realm of culture allowed some opposition since what was meant by “the nation’s culture” was somewhat open to interpretation. It is through this gap created in the sphere of culture that a plurality of voices could creep in.

The director of *Yeni Adam*, Baltacıoğlu himself, had been pushed into the ranks of the opposition (or, at least, found himself distanced from the singleparty regime) with his expulsion from Istanbul University during the 1933 university reform. This act aimed to reform the Turkish university system and to revolutionize the mentality of higher education in Turkey. It was performed under the guidance of a group of foreign professors (mostly German) and it seems that Baltacıoğlu was removed from his office upon the recommendation of one of these professors. The existing cadres of the university at that time were considered as not serving the interests of the new regime and Baltacıoğlu himself was viewed as a figure of the *Meşrutiyet* (the Second Constitutional Period, 1908-09) rather than of the Republic.

The marginalization of Baltacıoğlu within the higher education cadres (at least until 1939 when he was offered another position at Ankara University) must have contributed to the overall non-conformist attitude in *Yeni Adam* in the 1930s and early 1940s. Baltacıoğlu explicitly voiced his criticisms of the policies of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, for example. He could never forget his removal from office and in several writings drew attention to the fact that he was the original father of some of the ideas that were now being applied in the system without reference to him. In 1934, the prominent *Kadro* member Şevket Süreyya criticized *Yeni Adam* for being an eclectic publication and later Baltacıoğlu himself for the idealism he demonstrated.⁹ Baltacıoğlu responded by stating that he was neither an individualist nor a collectivist, but was drawing a synthesis between Durkheim and Bergson. To the accusations about eclecticism, Baltacıoğlu responded by saying that for his journal eclecticism was not a disadvantage since *Yeni Adam*, unlike *Kadro*, did not aim at formulating the ideology of the new regime.¹⁰ The relatively independent intellectual stance of *Yeni Adam* thus makes it a good source for research into perceptions of art in the 1930s and early 1940s.

Representing the nation: social realism versus national art

A Westernist attitude is the one that is normally expected from a journal of art and culture and it has an important place in *Yeni Adam*’s agenda as well. The numerous works of art the journal displays and the topics its articles cover reflect this. The journal’s cover pages are full of reliefs and statues from ancient Greece, examples of Renaissance art, or of modern works of art from impressionists and even cubists. Articles on the philosophy of art, aesthetics and criticism are mostly translated from European thinkers. The journal also announces and welcomes any art exhibitions, regardless of the currents of art involved. A critical yet always encouraging tone is noticeable in the comments on these exhibitions. In fact, this attitude reflects the general mood of the Turkish republican intelligentsia with regard to Western cultural production, where the belief is that it is great art that built Western civilization. The underlying assumption is that only those societies with important works of art (acknowledged so internationally) deserve to exist as societies (nations) in the present-day world. I am not interested in this Westernist outlook *per se* since it is an attitude normally to be expected from the intellectuals of a country undertaking a belated project of modernization. What interests me is the two other positions that follow.

⁹ *Kadro*, No. 27 and 29, 1939.

¹⁰ “*Kadro’ya Göre Yeni Adam, Yeni Adam’a Göre Yeni Adam*”, *Yeni Adam*, 23, April 1934, 11; “*Kadro’ya Cevap*”, *Yeni Adam*, 9 July 1934, 5.

Another position reflected in the journal is the social realist one which claims that art should reflect society: its material, moral and social state and needs. This collectivist attitude carries a humanist tone and focuses on the socio-economic inequalities both within the new nation and around the world. In doing this, it seems that the journal writers have been influenced by the writings of Soviet social realist thinkers on art and literature. The cover pages of the journal during the Second World War years, are full of drawings and caricatures which take a critical view of the war and the losses brought by it. These figures mostly employ sarcasm, irony and even cynicism about the human condition and the experience of war (see figure 1 and 2). The social realist is best observed in a series of articles in the journal about the daily lives of the working classes of Istanbul. In this series, different authors visit the locations where the lower classes live, work and entertain themselves. They get into warm conversations, write about their interactions and offer observations. Interestingly, the scenes from the lives of the working classes are illustrated not through photographs, but through drawings. These drawings and the drawings on the cover pages belong to such important figures as Fikret Mualla, Zeki Faik İzer and Mahmud Cuda. They employ both impressionist and realist techniques.

The social realist stance emphasizes social needs and material life.¹¹ The emphasis is on the objective representation of social life and realities. In an article called “New Art for the New Man”, Vahdet Gültekin views art as born from the society and as serving the society in return.¹² The inner world of the artist is secondary to social life and is to be expressed only in its relation to the outer world. Social life is the only rule which art should follow. The artist’s work is a work of documentation of life in its lived and daily sense. Here, the body of the nation is represented in the body of the peasant, worker or the revolutionary youth, all working, struggling with nature or utilizing tools and machinery (see fig.3/4).

The emphasis on life is actually an emphasis on people’s notion of beauty rather than that of the artist himself. The values of the artist always follow those of his audience.¹³ Therefore, the new art propagated by social realists with its explicit stress on the figurative representations of a social collectivity differs from modern art both in technique and philosophy.

The other position on art in the journal is the strongly delineated nationalist stance with its emphasis on national art. This concern is voiced especially in the writings of Baltacıoğlu under such titles as: “*Türk Ressami Uyan*”¹⁴ (Wake up, Turkish Painter) “*Milliyetçiliğim*”¹⁵ (My Nationalism); “*Fatih’in Heykeli ni Türk Yapabilir*”¹⁶ (Only a Turk Can Make the Statue of Fatih); “*Resimde Türk’e Doğru*”¹⁷ (Toward the Turk in Painting); “*Bir Sanat İhtilali*”¹⁸ (A Revolution in Art).

The emphasis on utility and service to the collectivity demanded by social realists is observable too in Baltacıoğlu’s writings; though he founds his ideas on a different philosophy, the American pragmatism of William James and John Dewey. When describing the secondary school of his dreams, Baltacıoğlu portrays students in their art classes creating not for the sake of pure training and education but producing “works” with real social function, theatre posters, newspaper advertisements, and so on.¹⁹ For Baltacıoğlu, like the

¹¹ “Yeni Adama Yeni Sanat”, *Yeni Adam*, 72, 1935, 12 and “Collectif Sanat”, *Yeni Adam*, 75, 1935, 12.

¹² “Yeni Adama Yeni Sanat”, *Yeni Adam*, 72, 1935, 12.

¹³ Vahdet Gültekin, “Sanatın Seyri”, *Yeni Adam*, 71, 1935, 12.

¹⁴ *Yeni Adam*, 4, 1934, 6.

¹⁵ *Yeni Adam*, 384, 1942, 2.

¹⁶ *Yeni Adam*, 361, 1941, 2.

¹⁷ *Yeni Adam*, 368, 1942, 2.

¹⁸ *Yeni Adam*, 616, 1949, 2.

¹⁹ “Rüyamda Mektep”, *Yeni Adam*, 142, 1936, 4.

social realists, any art that does not respond to the necessities of its social context is ill and degenerate.²⁰ For him, too, the artist is the “social man *per se*.²¹

The artist should work for the low socio-economic sectors of the population, for the streets and the city rather than for the privileged few.²² The poor should be represented as a whole, as a collectivity. Baltacıoğlu equates the importance of the arts for the new nation with the importance of pedagogy or the economy. In fact he calls the new republic “the republic of fine arts”.²³ Artistic works are indispensable to the new nation-state for spreading its values. Possible themes that could connect the artist to his people are: the Anatolian railways, the new Turkish woman, the Turkish aeroplane industry, Turkish shipping, Turkish folk pedagogy, Turkish youth and children, Turkish population growth and so on.

In a little editorial essay most probably written by Baltacıoğlu, the figure of the labourer from Karabük, one of the centres of Turkey’s iron, steel and coal industry is designated as the model for the “new man” of the republic. The essay is accompanied by a drawing, showing the miner with his pickaxe in his hand, smoking and relaxing in front of the huge iron, steel and coal factories (see fig. 5).

Up to this point, what we have drawn from Baltacıoğlu permits us to equate his ideas with those of social realists. But a more comprehensive reading of Baltacıoğlu will reveal his call for a national art, which is quite distinct from a social realist approach. Although both views share the perception of art as being ultimately for and about a collectivity, Baltacıoğlu took art as a representation of the inner, spiritual, moral world of a people whereas the social realists saw it as a way of describing an outer, material reality.²⁴ According to Baltacıoğlu, the new painting will be more nationalized as it is popularized and vernacularized while admittedly losing some of its earlier grace, perspective and sensitivity.²⁵

The relation of national art to the society is different. Art from this perspective should reflect the inner, spiritual and moral collectivity and reflect the society in this sense. The national artist feels the values, emotions and pains and joys that trickle down from the mass of the population and reflects them back to the society through his artwork.²⁶ The particular cultural nationalism of Baltacıoğlu, formulated with attention to a national “tradition” that remains unchanged while other social institutions are changing, gives clues about his conception of national art. The religion, language, morals, law, art and cuisine of the Turkish nation are indeed changing, according to him. But things like the logic of language, musical melodies or philosophy of life remain unchanged in these instances and make up “tradition”.²⁷

Form, according to Baltacıoğlu, is a national value, and there is an ideal human form for Turks. Also there are colours that Turks use often and together. Every nation has a way of composing the world and the universe. Technique is international but it is necessary to search for national painting techniques. For reaching the national painting old and new folk painting should be studied in search of commonalities in form, colour, composition and technique.²⁸

For Baltacıoğlu, the basic principles of the philosophy of Turkish plastic arts are as follows: In Turkish plastic arts the work is both a copy of nature and different from it; it is a new creation produced according to the rules of nature. Nature is a whole, it does not consist

²⁰ “Türk Ressami Uyan”, *Yeni Adam*, 4, 1934, 6.

²¹ “Sanatın Cemiyet Hayatına Hizmeti”, *Yeni Adam*, 226, 1939, 13.

²² “Türk Ressami Uyan”, *Yeni Adam*, 4, 1934, 6.

²³ “Güzel Sanatlar Cumhuriyeti”, *Yeni Adam*, 3, 1934, 6.

²⁴ “Yeni Adama Yeni Sanat”, *Yeni Adam*, 72, 1935, 12.

²⁵ “Türk Ressami Uyan”, *Yeni Adam*, 4, 1934, 6.

²⁶ “Sanatın Cemiyet Hayatına Hizmeti”, *Yeni Adam*, 226, 1939, 12-13.

²⁷ “Millet Nedir Ne Değildir?”, *Yeni Adam*, 416, 1942, 2.

²⁸ “Resimde Türk’e Doğru”, *Yeni Adam*, 368, 1942, 2.

of fragments and parts. Baltacıoğlu's organicist notion of the Turkish plastic arts is more developed in his later writings where he argues that no organ in natural plant or animal life is useless, and that every organ has its particular use.²⁹

Baltacıoğlu illustrates his point by telling this story. While writing a play for the traditional shadow theatre Karagöz in 1940, he asked painter Mahmud Cuda to draw representations of such additional characters as Greta Garbo, Tarzan, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Chaplin and Nurullah Ataç³⁰ to be included in the play. Cuda tried but finally confessed that these new faces and bodies had a completely different anatomy than that of the traditional characters of Karagöz. Baltacıoğlu later admitted that this problem led him to think about an aesthetics which defied naturalist anatomy and naturalist perspective in painting.³¹ Still at the time Baltacıoğlu insisted on the creation of such characters and with the help of painter Abidin Dino his play, called "*Karagöz Ankara'da*", was performed in Ankara in 1940 (see fig. 6).³²

Starting from the 1920s Baltacıoğlu had obviously started thinking about the Turkish plastic arts as anthropomorphic and as inspired by the proportions of the human body, human postures and human communities.³³ The letters of the Arabic alphabet and the ways in which these letters are reinterpreted by Turkish calligraphers demonstrate, for him, that the Turco-Islamic plastic arts are founded on a conception of form following human proportions. Turco-Islamic architecture is similarly based on these proportions and human postures (see figures 7, 8 and 9).

It is now clear that the call for national art diverges from the realism of the social realists with their emphasis on the objective (outer, material) realities of the people. Evidently, these material realities interest Baltacıoğlu as well, but the emphasis on the outer reality of the society exists along with the call for a national art that reflects the spirit of the nation.

From a theoretical standpoint, Baltacıoğlu's demand for national art is caught in the tension between the call for a search for national sentiments in art and the urge for the description of such sentiments as already existing realities. In other words, is the nation to be reflected as a reality through artistic work, or is it going to be searched for in the folk traditions and reimagined? The tension becomes clearer in his argument on humanism. According to him, in the same way that Greek humanism is embodied in Greek sculpture or the Renaissance conception of the human being is reflected in Renaissance art, Turkish culture and art should be founded on a particular conception of "the Turk as a human being". This conception should dwell on the distinct status and position of the Turk in this world, his moral and human mission.³⁴ In this idea, there are simultaneously references both to the Turk as having a particular mission and to the Turk as a universal human being.

Representing the nation is a problematic endeavour because of the simultaneous reference of the nationalist ideology to the nation as a past entity waiting to be discovered, and as an existing collectivity in the present. This particular tension is rooted in the existential tension in the ideology of nationalism where the nation is an entity simultaneously belonging to the

²⁹ "Türk Plastik Sanat Felsefesinin Ana Çizgileri Nelerdir?", *Yeni Adam*, 903, 1976, 5.

³⁰ The famous literary critic and essayist (1898-1957) who is well known for his efforts at the simplification and reformation of the Turkish language. Ataç himself wrote in *Yeni Adam* several times, yet apparently his and Baltacıoğlu's views diverged on many issues.

³¹ "Karagöz Suretleri Naturalist Olmayan Bir Resim Anlayışının Güzel Örnekleridir", *Yeni Adam*, 906, 1977, 5.

³² Baltacıoğlu, "Karagöz Davası", *Yeni Adam*, 332, 1941, 8-9.

³³ Baltacıoğlu, "İslam Sanatlarının Tetkikine Methak", *İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 2, March 1926, reproduced in Baltacıoğlu, *Sanat*, İstanbul, 1934. These earlier ideas were developed in a later book called *Türklerde Yazı Sanatı* (İstanbul, 1958), which was reprinted by the Ministry of Culture in 1993. Also see "Milliyetçiliğim", *Yeni Adam*, 384, 1942, 2.

³⁴ "Ümanizma Davası", *Yeni Adam*, 241, 1939, 5.

present and the past.³⁵ A call for national art is divided between representing the nation as an existing reality in the present and representing it as a “tradition” to be searched for in the bosom of cultural folk heritage. For this reason both the journal *Yeni Adam* and the particular writings of Baltacıoğlu himself are divided between a realism emphasizing work, function and utility, and a concern with surrealist, primitivist tendencies in traditional folk art as providing a model for national art.

Conclusion

This study focused on the journal *Yeni Adam*, a journal capable of criticism of and opposition to certain policies of the single-party regime, in order to demonstrate the inherent pluralism of the early republican perceptions of art in Turkey. The concept of an officially directed, modernizationist and propagandist art does not rightly capture the realities of this era. Despite being a major actor in the promotion of Western art and in the motivation for representing the new life of the nation, the republican state does not seem to have been able to monopolize the field of artistic production. Instead, we can portray the cultural and intellectual scene of the 1930s and 1940s as a platform where social realist viewpoints coexist with demands for a national art. This is perhaps evidence of the autonomy that art produces around itself, through its quality of representation. The sphere of art, with its quality of representing things, overlaps perfectly with the political sphere of the nation, as a represented entity itself. The Republic, which is the site for the political representation of the majority, also becomes the site for pluralist artistic representations of the nation.

³⁵ Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation, in H. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, 291-322.



Fig. 1: "Adam and Eve"" Yeni Adam, 57/cover page, 1935.



Fig. 2: "The Three Beauties, Coal, Bread, Meat" Yeni Adam, 444/cover page, 1943.



Fig. 3. "Struggle with Nature", *Yeni Adam*, 331/cover page, 1941.

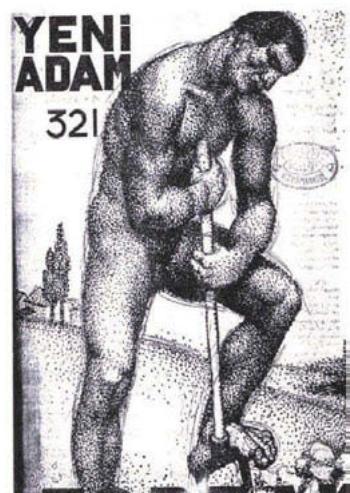


Fig. 4: "Soil", *Yeni Adam* 321/ cover page, 1941.



Fig. 5: “The Karabük Man or the ‘New Man’”, *Yeni Adam*, 179/3, 1937.



Fig. 6: New Characters for Karagöz Shadow Theater, İ. H. Baltacıoğlu, Karagöz Ankara'da, İstanbul: Sebat Basımevi, 1940.

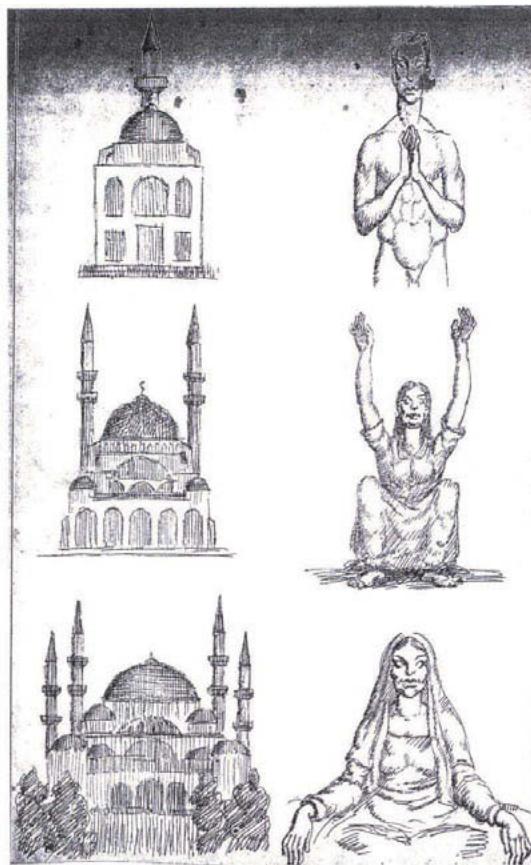


Fig. 7: *Turkish Architecture and the Proportions of the Human Body*, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, *Türk Plastik Sanatları*, Ankara, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1971.

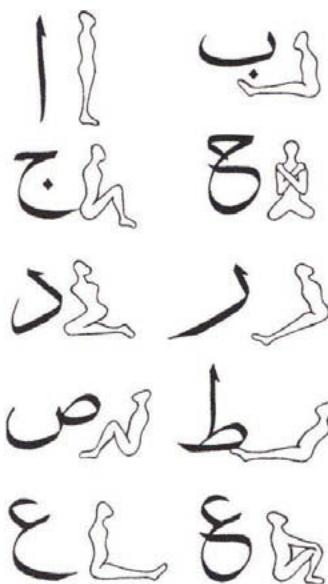


Fig. 8: *The Relationship of Turkish Calligraphy with Surrealist Art*, İ. H. Baltacıoğlu, Sanat, Istanbul, 1934.



Fig. 9: *The Relationship of Turkish Calligraphy with Surrealist Art*, İ. H. Baltacıoğlu, Istanbul, 1934.