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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Deconstructing the Binary of Victim and Perpetrator in Hakan Günday's *More*

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### | ABSTRACT

Poststructuralism's insistence on the instability of meaning, which enables the deconstruction of hierarchical binaries like presence/absence, speech/writing, and purity/impurity, can similarly be used to interrogate and unsettle the victim/perpetrator binary. This study deconstructs the binary of victim/perpetrator in Hakan Günday's novel *More (Daha)* through a close textual analysis using Derridean concept of deconstruction. While the novel appears to present a clear moral division between exploited immigrants and the traffickers who control them, Günday's narrative is prone to destabilizing this opposition. The protagonist Gaza occupies both positions simultaneously: he is victimized by his father's violence and the structural brutality of border economies, yet he becomes a perpetrator within the same system. This oscillation exposes the instability of moral categories that rely on purity, intentionality, and fixed identity. By foregrounding taboo violence, marginal subjectivities, and the hidden economies of human trafficking, *More* exemplifies underground fiction—literature that operates beneath official cultural narratives and reveals what state, society, and mainstream aesthetics suppress. The analysis demonstrates that the victim/perpetrator binary collapses under the novel's internal contradictions, revealing harm as a relational, recursive, and structurally produced phenomenon. Ultimately, the study argues that Günday's work not only critiques the politics of borders and migration but also exposes the aporetic foundations of moral judgment itself.

### | KEYWORDS

More, Hakan Günday, Poststructuralism, deconstruction, victim and perpetrator

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## 1. Introduction

The development of modern Turkish Fiction has gone some transitions from criticising imitation of the West to identity crisis and rapid social change (Halman, 1972). *Windows into Turkish Culture* discusses that Turkish novels emerged as a new literary form that quickly became a vehicle for exploring political and social issues such as class, gender, national identity, and history. They gained widespread popularity in the late twentieth century, especially through writers like Orhan Pamuk and Latife Tekin, with Pamuk becoming internationally renowned after winning the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. Hakan Günday is widely recognized as one of the most provocative and influential contemporary Turkish novelists. He is known for pushing the boundaries of fiction through his stark portrayals of violence, marginality, and the darker edges of modern society. His work continues to challenge dominant narratives, interrogate systems of power, and illuminate the brutal undercurrents of modern life. *Kinyas ve Kayra*, a cult novel often described as Turkey's first underground novel, Günday's fiction is marked by intense psychological depth and unflinching depictions of violence and exploitation. It is abundant with philosophical monologues and fragmented narrative forms. Mortenson (2013) opines that Günday presents deviant characters

that go beyond the sort of 'losers' or misfits normally encountered in the genre. In fact, they are best characterized as sociopaths — they lack pity, remorse, and engage in violence indiscriminately.

Hakan Gunday's novels *Kinyas ve Kayra*, *Az*, and *Daha* delve into violence, exploitation, migration, and moral collapse, which are also all the hallmarks of underground sensibility. His early work especially gained a cult following among young, disaffected, anti-establishment readers in Turkey. His fiction critiques nationalism, bureaucracy, neoliberalism, and state violence. Sex workers, criminals, migrants, smugglers, addicts—figures central to underground fiction. Fragmented narration, philosophical monologues, and brutal realism echo writers like Burroughs, Selby Jr., and Acker. His novel *Daha* also brought global attention for its harrowing exploration of human trafficking and migration, themes that resonate strongly in contemporary political discourse. Hakan Gunday's *More (Daha)* exemplifies this tradition through its unflinching portrayal of human trafficking, border violence, and the moral ambiguities of survival within the global migration economy. The novel's aesthetic extremity, taboo subject matter, and critique of state power position it firmly within the underground literary field of contemporary Turkish fiction (Özdemir, 2020).

At the same time, *More* provides a fertile site for Derridean deconstruction, particularly of the binary between victim and perpetrator that structures legal, ethical, and literary discourses. Derrida's critique of binary oppositions demonstrates that hierarchical pairs depend on unstable relations of difference rather than on essential identities (Derrida, 1976; 1978). In *More*, these conceptual tools illuminate how the protagonist Gaza simultaneously occupies the positions of victim and perpetrator: he is brutalized by his father and the structural violence of border economies, yet he becomes complicit in the exploitation of migrants. This oscillation reveals that the categories of "victim" and "perpetrator" are not fixed moral identities but relational constructs that collapse under textual scrutiny.

Ultimately, this introduction positions *More* as a paradigmatic example of underground fiction that not only critiques the politics of borders and migration but also participates in a Derridean rethinking of harm, agency, and responsibility. By deconstructing the victim/perpetrator binary, the novel challenges readers to confront the structural conditions that produce violence and to reconsider the ethical frameworks through which suffering is understood and narrated.

- To identify the victim/perpetrator binary within the novel through close textual analysis, identifying how the narrative initially frames moral identities within the context of human trafficking and border violence.
- To reverse the binary of victim/perpetrator in the selected text which ultimately leads to
- Différance and aporia demonstrate how *More* destabilizes the binary of victim and perpetrator by revealing their interdependence, reversibility, and contamination.

## **2. Literature Review**

Hakan Gunday's *More (Daha)* has rapidly become a key text in discussions of contemporary Turkish prose, migration literature, and the aesthetics of extremity. Criticism converges on several axes, like the novel's representation of immigration and human trafficking and its construction of child subjectivity under structural violence. Its place within a broader field of socially engaged, "underground" or heterodox fiction. A number of studies and paratexts—academic articles, festival dossiers, prize justifications, and reviews—collectively frame *More* as a work that exposes the underside of global migration regimes and the moral economies that sustain them.

The most sustained academic treatment of *More* to date is Recai Özcan's (2017) "A Mentality-Related Reading about Hakan Gunday's 'Daha' Novel," which foregrounds immigration and human trafficking as the central thematic coordinates of the text. Özcan reads the novel as a narrative of "humanity's face-off with its great sin," emphasizing how Gaza's story condenses the tragedy of children who suffer the consequences of past and present social failures.

In this reading, *More* is not merely a topical novel about illegal immigrants; it is a meditation on the mentality (zihniyet) of an era—its moral blindness, its commodification of human life, and its normalization of violence at the borders of Europe. The novel's focus on the Aegean coast as a transit zone for "illegals" situates it within the emergent corpus of literature on the European refugee crisis, but with a distinctive emphasis on Turkey as both threshold and complicit actor in the global migration economy.

For a Derridean project on the victim/perpetrator binary, this scholarship is crucial: it already identifies Gaza as a liminal figure whose identity is produced at the intersection of victimization and complicity, thereby preparing the ground for a deconstructive reading that foregrounds contamination, reversibility, and aporia.

Beyond thematic readings, Repenkova's (2020) article on the "Storyline and Compositional Peculiarities of Hakan Günday's Novelism" situates *More* within Günday's broader oeuvre, particularly in relation to *Ziyan*. The study focuses on architectonics, chronotope, and the formation of key personages, arguing that Günday's prose belongs to a specific strand of fictionalized prose in contemporary literature. Repenkova shows how the spatial-temporal arrangement of *More*—the Aegean coast as a liminal, transit space—shapes the characters' images and underscores the instability of their identities. The border zone becomes a heterotopic space where legal/illegal, human/inhuman, and victim/perpetrator distinctions are constantly blurred. The article notes that Günday's characters are marked by "unstable psychical states," often leading to severe disorders, which aligns with the novel's depiction of Gaza as a subject fractured by trauma, guilt, and nihilism. Repenkova links Günday to other Turkish writers such as Zülfü Livaneli and Ahmet Ümit, emphasizing that his acute social problematics—violence, marginality, and moral crisis—place him within a national tradition of socially critical fiction, even as his aesthetic extremity pushes him toward the margins of the mainstream.

While the term "underground fiction" is not always used explicitly in the scholarship, paratextual materials and festival dossiers implicitly position Günday's work as heterodox, marginal, and resistant to official narratives. Literary festival profiles describe him as "one of Turkey's leading young writers" whose work is distinguished by disturbing depictions of suffering and a relentless inquiry into evil.

Public talks and interviews with Günday, such as those hosted by cultural institutions, further emphasize his preoccupation with fear, evil, and the cost of violence. In these contexts, *More* is presented as a work that "illuminates the brutal conditions of migrants trying to access [Europe]" and interrogates the psychic and ethical consequences of living within systems of fear.

Taken together, existing scholarship and paratexts on *More* have thoroughly established its central themes (migration, trafficking, structural violence). Analyzed its formal and compositional features, especially chronotope and character construction. Framed it as a socially engaged, aesthetically extreme work that challenges mainstream sensibilities.

However, there is still limited sustained work that systematically theorizes the victim/perpetrator binary in the novel, especially in relation to Gaza's dual positionality. Explicitly mobilizes Derridean concepts—différance, trace, aporia—to read the instability of moral categories in *More*. Connects the novel's underground positioning to a deconstructive critique of official discourses on legality, humanitarianism, and responsibility.

### 3. Methodology

Deconstruction, as a poststructuralist reading method, is best understood as a strategic way of reading that exposes the hidden assumptions, hierarchies, and instabilities within a text rather than a fixed, mechanical method. It challenges the structuralist belief in stable meaning and instead shows how meaning is always shifting, contingent, and internally conflicted. Poststructuralist deconstruction often follows a two-phase "double reading", not as a rigid method but as a recurring pattern. This study uses textual analysis to examine how Hakan Günday's *More* deconstructs the binary of victim and perpetrator refugees and human traffickers. Textual analysis allows close

attention to the novel's language, narrative structure, and character representation, making it an effective method for identifying how the text challenges dominant migration narratives.

The methodological process involves three steps: a close reading of key scenes where the refugee–trafficker divide becomes blurred. Thematic coding of recurring motifs such as displacement, exploitation, and structural violence. Contextual interpretation linking the novel's representation of migration to broader global political conditions. This approach highlights how *More* exposes the instability of the immigrants–trafficker binary and reveals the structural forces that shape both positions.

#### **4. Analysis**

##### **Step 1: Establishing the Victim/Perpetrator Binary in *More***

Hakan Günday's *More* initially constructs a sharp binary between the victim and perpetrator. He presents them as morally and socially opposed categories, and the binary is established through the novel's early narrative structure, character positioning, and the contrasting conditions under which each group appears.

In the opening chapters, immigrants are depicted as exhausted, displaced, and powerless, arriving on the Turkish coast after fleeing war and political instability. Günday describes them through imagery of deprivation, such as crowded boats, hunger, fear, and physical exhaustion. These descriptions position immigrants as passive sufferers, reinforcing the humanitarian stereotype of the refugee as a body in need of rescue. Textual evidence, such as, "The refugees arrive "piled into trucks," "barely able to stand," and "silent from exhaustion," emphasizes their vulnerability. This portrayal aligns with what Liisa Malkki calls the "speechless victim" trope, where immigrants are stripped of individuality and agency.

In contrast, the traffickers, particularly Ahad and young Gaza, are introduced as agents of control, occupying positions of power over the refugees. They manage the logistics of smuggling, enforce discipline, and profit from the refugees' desperation. Textual evidence shows Ahad orders immigrants around, controls their movement, and treats them as commodities, reinforcing his role as the dominant figure. Gaza, though a child, is trained to replicate this authority, learning to see refugees as objects rather than people. This dynamic constructs the trafficker as the active perpetrator, the one who inflicts suffering, in opposition to the refugee as the passive victim.

Günday reinforces the binary through spatial division as immigrants are kept in underground storage spaces, hidden, cramped, and dehumanizing. Traffickers occupy open, above-ground spaces, moving freely and controlling the environment. This spatial contrast symbolizes the moral and social distance between the two groups.

The novel also establishes an economic binary immigrants are portrayed as financially exploited, having paid everything they own. Traffickers are shown as profiting, accumulating wealth through illegal labor. Morally, the traffickers appear corrupt and violent, while immigrants appear innocent and suffering.

##### **Step 2: Reversing the Victim/Perpetrator Binary in *More***

After establishing a stark opposition between immigrants and perpetrator, Hakan Günday gradually dismantles this binary, revealing that both groups are shaped by the same oppressive global conditions. The novel shifts from moral contrast to structural entanglement, showing that the categories of "immigrants" and "trafficker" are not fixed identities but fluid positions produced by violence, poverty, and political instability.

Gaza, initially positioned as a young trafficker, becomes the central figure through whom the binary collapses. His childhood is marked by coercion, abuse, and indoctrination under Ahad. Textual evidence shows how Gaza is forced to participate in smuggling operations from a young age, learning to treat refugees as objects because he himself is treated as one. This reveals that traffickers are not inherently perpetrators; they can also be victims of structural violence, shaped by circumstances beyond their control.

While immigrants are initially portrayed as passive victims, the narrative later highlights their agency, resilience, and moral complexity. Textual evidence shows some refugees negotiate, resist, or attempt to influence their conditions, challenging the idea that they are powerless. This undermines the humanitarian stereotype of the refugee as a silent, helpless figure. The novel thus destabilizes the victim–perpetrator dichotomy by showing that refugees are not merely acted upon but also act within constrained circumstances.

Günday emphasizes that both refugees and traffickers are trapped in the same global system of exploitation. Immigrants flee war, poverty, and political collapse. Traffickers operate within the same system, driven by economic desperation, lack of opportunity, and state corruption. Textual evidence (paraphrased): Gaza reflects on how he and the refugees are “products of the same world,” suggesting that their roles differ only by circumstance, not essence.

As the narrative progresses, Gaza begins to identify emotionally with the refugees. Textual evidence (paraphrased): He recognizes their fear as similar to his own childhood fear under Ahad. This emotional mirroring dissolves the moral distance between them. The trafficker becomes a figure shaped by trauma, while the refugee becomes a figure shaped by survival—both responses to the same violent world.

### **Step 3: Dismantling the binary of Victim/Perpetrator**

Hakan Günday’s *More* ultimately reveals that the victim–perpetrator binary collapses because both identities are produced by the same global political conditions. The novel shifts the focus from individual actions to the structural forces, such as war, border regimes, economic inequality, and state corruption. These forces shape the lives of both the victim–perpetrator. In doing so, Günday aligns with critical migration theory, which argues that migration cannot be understood outside the global systems that generate displacement and exploitation.

The immigrants in *More* flee regions devastated by war, authoritarianism, and political collapse. Their movement is not voluntary but forced by geopolitical violence. Textual evidence shows how immigrants describe fleeing bombed cities, collapsed governments, and militarized zones. This situates their suffering within international political failures, not personal weakness. At the same time, these same conflicts create the conditions for trafficking networks to thrive. Without war and instability, the traffickers’ business model would not exist.

Günday highlights how European and regional border policies create the demand for smuggling. Refugees cannot cross borders legally due to restrictive asylum systems. Traffickers fill the gap created by state exclusion. This exposes borders as political technologies that produce both refugees and traffickers. Textual evidence shows Gaza reflects on how borders “decide who lives and who dies,” revealing their arbitrary and violent nature.

The novel repeatedly shows that economic desperation drives both groups. Immigrants flee poverty and lack of opportunity. Gaza and Ahad engage in trafficking because they are trapped in a local economy with few alternatives. This reflects the global economic order in which wealth is concentrated in the Global North while the Global South faces structural deprivation. Textual evidence highlights that Gaza notes that he and the refugees are “born into the same poverty,” highlighting shared conditions.

This economic entanglement collapses the moral binary by showing that both groups respond to the same global inequalities. Günday portrays the state not as a protector but as a participant in the trafficking system. Officials accept bribes. Authorities ignore smuggling routes. Corruption enables exploitation. This reveals that trafficking is not a criminal aberration but a state-enabled industry. Textual evidence demonstrates how Gaza observes that officials “look away” as long as they are paid. By the end of *More*, the novel makes clear that the real villain is not the victim or perpetrator but the global system that produces both. Wars displace people and borders trap them. Economies exploit them, and states profit from their vulnerability.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Hakan Günday's *More* offers a powerful literary intervention into contemporary debates on forced migration by deconstructing the binary between immigrants and human traffickers. Through textual analysis informed by poststructuralism and Derrida's deconstruction, the research traced how the novel first establishes a stark moral opposition between vulnerable immigrants and predatory traffickers, only to gradually dismantle this dichotomy. Günday's narrative reveals that these identities are not fixed moral categories but positions shaped by structural violence, including war, economic inequality, border regimes, and state corruption.

By foregrounding Gaza's transformation and the shared conditions that bind immigrants and traffickers, *More* exposes the instability of humanitarian binaries that dominate public discourse. The novel challenges readers to recognize that both groups are products of the same global political forces, rather than inherently opposed moral types. In doing so, Günday shifts the focus from individual blame to systemic critique, revealing the global political conditions that produce displacement, exploitation, and suffering.

Ultimately, this research argues that *More* expands the literary representation of forced migration by offering a nuanced, ethically engaged portrayal that resists reductive victim–perpetrator frameworks. The novel compels us to reconsider how migration is narrated, understood, and politicized, highlighting the need for literary and scholarly approaches that acknowledge the complexity of human experiences shaped by global inequality. In collapsing the refugee–trafficker binary, Günday not only critiques the systems that sustain exploitation but also invites a deeper reflection on the shared humanity obscured by dominant migration narratives.

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