

A NARRATIVE OF CONTROVERSY: ORHAN PAMUK'S *SNOW*¹

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Abstract: Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow* (2002), which local scholars argue that it takes its name from 'karsu' (snow-water), takes place in Kars³, a city located on the north-eastern border of Turkey. As a borderline city, it stands as the nexus of distinguished civilisations, such as that of Armenians, Russians, and Ottomans; and bears the traces of several ethnic, cultural, and political characteristics of diverse identities. *Snow* represents modernist Turkey's political, cultural, and religious turmoil experienced in the late twentieth century. The novel depicts the city of Kars as a witness to deep-seated conflicting political views and social values. The concepts of secularism, nationalism, and the Islamic Revival, including experiences of poverty that have been felt, unemployment, and suicide are all inscribed within the plot of this provocative novel. Hence, depicted concepts and felt experiences stir up much controversy among critics who explore Pamuk's intention to understand the reasons why he might have thematised such problematic issues. However, Pamuk's elaboration of a political issue in *Snow* seems to have been misconceived through political standpoints minimizing his artistic ability to solely a political gaze. In this respect, I will explore and discuss Pamuk's *Snow* as a polyphonic novel inviting its readers to contemplate both the question of 'the other' and the dangers of radicalism rather than as a novel supporting a certain political group.

Keywords: Orhan Pamuk, Snow, Controversy, Politics, Polyphony, Tension.

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³ Referring to McGaha, Bazarkaya argues that "Kars is a shortened version of the Turkish Kar-su ("Snow Water"). Pamuk originally intended to title his novel Kars but later, concerned that it might be mistaken for a guidebook or a history of the city, changed it to Kar. The later title was more appropriate anyway, because snow is the novel's central, all-pervasive metaphor" (2015: 50)

BİR İHTİLAFA ANLATISI: ORHAN PAMUK'UN KAR ROMANI

Öz: Nobel ödüllü yazar Orhan Pamuk *Kar* (2002) adlı romanında Ermeni, Rus, Osmanlı gibi farklı medeniyetlerin izlerini barındıran bu nedenle etnik, kültürel ve politik özellikleri açısından çeşitlilik barındıran Kars şehrini modern Türkiye'de geçen anlatısının merkezine koyar. Bölge uzmanlarına göre ismi 'karsu'dan gelen Kars şehri sınır şehir olması nedeniyle tarihsel olarak kültürel ve politik çeşitliliğe ve aynı zamanda da karmaşaya ev sahipliği yapmıştır. Bu sebeple, Pamuk'un *Kar* romanı geç yirminci yüzyıl Türkiye'sinin politik, kültürel ve dinsel meselelerine ve gerilimlerine tanık olarak Kars şehrini mekân olarak kullanırken kökü geçmişe uzanan sosyo-politik meselelere de şahitlik yapar. Yoksulluk, işsizlik ve intihar gibi saikleri sosyopolitik köklerde aranması gereken konulara kurgusunda yer veren bu roman, sekülerizm, milliyetçilik ve İslami diriliş kavramlarını da anlatısının merkezinde tutar. İçeriğinin karmaşık ve ihtilaf yaratabilecek özellikleri nedeniyle bu roman, Orhan Pamuk'un yazar olarak politik tavrını anlamlandırmak açısından eleştirmenler için de tartışmaya açık bir anlatı yaratmıştır. Ancak öyle görünüyor ki Pamuk'un bu romanda tartışma götüren bir konuyu ele almış olması onun yazarlık becerilerinin bağlamından çok politik tavrının incelenmesine daha fazla sebep olmuştur. Bu nedenle, bu makaleyle Pamuk'un *Kar* romanında belirli bir politik grubun tarafgirliğini yapmaktansa, okuyucuya radikalizmin tehlikelerini ve öteki sorunsalını değerlendirmek için çok sesli bir anlatıyla nasıl bir imkân yarattığını tartışıyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Orhan Pamuk, Kar, İhtilaf, Politika, Çok Seslilik, Gerilim.

Introduction

Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow*, published in 2002, and translated into more than forty languages to date, represents the complexity of modern Turkey's social, religious, and political conflict on a large scale, encompassing particularly the upheavals occurred during the last decade of the twentieth century. The novel became a bestseller soon after its publication and was soon considered to be a work of controversies with provocative content touching upon entrenched political debates. However, the controversy⁴ of the narrative seems to stem primarily from

⁴ Citing Fyodor Dostoevsky, Gustave Flaubert, and Thomas Mann among his influences, Pamuk is guided by these authors' insights as he formulates detailed explanations of the human psyche and mind at large. Nonetheless, themes central to the narrative of *Snow* examine larger socio-political controversies.

its highlighting of a secular and Islamic debate that is still at the heart of many political tensions in present-day Turkey. As a narrative of secularism, nationalism and Islamic Revival, *Snow* triggers political debate and controversy among critics of different socio-political persuasions. It has been suggested that many through strict political adherences of their own misperceive the focus and value of the novel by housing the merits of the novel inside specific particular political camps. For example, Gloria Fisk rejects such misreading of *Snow* and invites readers “to negotiate a path between the foreign and the familiar, and to use that path to extend [with ease] their imaginations beyond the point at which they travel.” Pamuk writes in “a cultural grammar that readers may not know well,” she argues, with [a] breadth of reference [with which] he renders virtually all his readers uncertain of our inclusion among his implied audience.” (2017: 203)

To this end, I will explore and discuss *Snow* as a polyphonic novel that invites its readers to put aside competing concepts defining political camps and, instead, to contemplate our ‘fixed ideas of the other’ and ‘the dangers of radicalism’.

1. The Idea of Writing of *Others’ Lives*

Snow foregrounds deep-seated conflict between Islamists and Secularists. The events told in the novel occur during a three-day period in Kars, a city located on the Northeastern border of Anatolia. Secluded from the rest of the country, in reality, Kars is a small, remote, sparsely populated city with a high rate of unemployment, where intertwining communities’ clashing views are easy to spot as citizens go about their daily routines. Accepting ‘The Peace Prize of the German Book Trade’ in 2005, Pamuk describes Kars as follows: “[I soon realized that it is] Turkey’s most remote and forgotten city, [as I spent time] conversing with unemployed men who spent their days in coffeehouses, without even the hope of ever again finding jobs; conversing, too, with lycee students, plainclothes and uniformed policemen who followed me wherever I went, and with publishers of the newspaper whose circulation never rose above 250” (2005: 2).

Overall, *Snow* is a political novel focusing on poverty and its effects on society, political and religious oppression, gender roles, the violation of women’s rights, and on the lack of Westernization. The novel primarily tells the story of Ka, an eyewitness of events during his stay in Kars. Ka after a twelve-year period of political exile in Germany returns to Turkey. He travels to Kars to investigate the consequences municipal elections there and the increasing number of suicides of women who wear

headscarves. He also hopes to rekindle a relationship with a former classmate, Ipek, whom he once loved, and who, after her divorce from her religious husband, now lives with her father, Turgut Bey, and her sister Kadife in Kars. Yet, arriving in Kars, Ka finds himself roiled by a dispute between the secular politics of the state and Islamic religious absolutism.

Pamuk's novel draws our attention to the political upheavals that have occurred in Turkey's recent history. The concepts of secularism, nationalism, and also the Turkish Islamic Revival are all inscribed within the plot of this provocative novel, and hence cause much controversy among critics exploring and inferring Pamuk's intention in order to understand the reasons why he might have wished to thematise such problematic issues. Pointing out that his novel is a polyphonic novel rather than a novel functioning as a mouthpiece for a certain political group, Pamuk insists:

I am using this story as a way into the subject that I am coming to understand more clearly with each new day, and that is, in my view, central to the art of the novel: the question of the 'other,' the 'stranger', the 'enemy' that resides inside each of our heads, or rather, the question of how to transform it. That my question is not central to all novels is self-evident: a novel can, of course, advance the understanding of humankind by imagining its characters in situations that we know intimately and care about and recognise from our own experience. When we meet someone in a novel who reminds us of ourselves, our first wish is for that character to explain to us who we are. So we tell stories about mothers, fathers, houses, streets that look just like ours, and we set these stories in cities we've seen with our own eyes, in the countries we know best. But the strange and magic rules that govern the art of the novel can open up our families, homes, and cities in a way that makes everyone feel as if they can see their own families, homes, and cities reflected in them. (2005:2)

In terms of his representation of political Islamists in *Snow*, Pamuk has been criticized to such an extent on this score as if he is being conceived of as 'a supporter of this group'⁵. Most critics have failed to recognize a

⁵ Üner Dağlier argues that "Pamuk's bitter criticism of state-led modernization in Turkey does not necessarily correspond to Islamic ties or sympathies. If anything, Pamuk defines himself as a rationalist, and according to his former translator Güneli Gün's account, he is a nonbeliever. Scholarly opinion, however, is divided over the extent of his commitment to rationalism. The majority of Pamuk's critics characterize him as a relativist, or a sceptical postmodernist, but Marshall Berman, on the contrary, maintains that Pamuk would probably die for ideas including modernity, the Enlightenment, and secular humanism" (2012: 147-148).

fictively structured, semi-historical narration suggesting multi-layered perceptions of identities varying in time and geography, including an elaboration of political issues commonly misperceived through a political lens minimizing his artistic ability to solely a political gaze. Pamuk himself points out that an author's turning his/her own story into stories about someone else is a commonly practiced authorial tendency. However, with respect to his intentions lying behind the story told in *Snow*, Pamuk argues that it was the idea of writing of others' lives, as if they were his that really mattered to him, thereby suggesting that any perception regardless of its content might be a natural consequence of an individual's socio-politically shaped identity. In relation to his accounts of otherness for which he makes room largely in his works, he argues as follows:

So, yes, one could define the novel as an art that allows the skilled practitioner to turn his own stories into stories about someone else; but this is just one aspect of the great and mesmerising art that has entranced so many readers and inspired us writers for going on four hundred years. It was the other aspect that drew me to the streets of Frankfurt and Kars: the chance to write of others' lives as if they were my own. It is by doing this sort of thorough novelistic research that novelists can begin to test the lines that mark off that 'other' and in so doing alter the boundaries of our own identities. Others become 'us' and we become 'others.'(2005: 3)

Pamuk's goal is to direct us to see other people's lives as if they were our own: The act of observing others will relate our own lives to the lives of others, "[offering] us the chance to describe other people's lives as if they were our own" (Pamuk, 2005: 3). Maureen Freely, *Snow's* English-language translator, implores us not to misjudge the author's way of narrating *Snow*: "How you read that tragedy depends very much on what your politics are and how much you know about recent Turkish history."⁶ Freely suggests that a reader or even a critic should keep in mind that while analysing a text with respect to its historical and political discourse, a monolithic perception of the subject dealt with in the text seems to offer only a unified and homogenous reality rather than suggesting further explorations. Attempting to put himself in others' shoes and to identify with their pains and troubles, Pamuk seems to question the definitiveness of our judgements concerned with our others.

The Other in his view not only surpasses the ones we know and with whom we have no disputes, but also resonates with the ones we know and for whom we raise some contradictory attitudes. His drive is

⁶ The rest of Freely's explanation can be found in <http://orhanpamuk.net/popuppage.aspx?id=98&lng=eng>.

more like an epistemological questioning the roles of place, memory, and culture affecting every individual's perception of his/her environment, including the same person's position as an agent transmitting some belief codes. His portrayal of the protagonist of *Snow*, Ka, with some inconsistencies represents the difficulty of stabilizing a certain identity inevitably affected by the conditions any individual finds himself in. Ergin points out that

[i]n Kars, Ka feels like a member of the bourgeoisie from Istanbul. That his background is different from that of the Kars locals becomes both an advantage and a disadvantage, depending on the conditions he finds himself in. Next to a German person in Frankfurt, Ka feels the same way that a local person from Kars feels next to him: humble and angry for remaining in the margins of a central culture. He constantly oscillates between two versions of himself: the Western-secular-atheist-cynical Ka, and the melancholic poet Ka who entertains the possibility of faith and identifies with the minority groups he encounters (2009: 39).

Likewise during a conversation with the sheikh, Ka's insightful inquiries, including ontological premises revealing his questioning a Creator God, represent his hesitant situation and vulnerability before life itself:

I grew up in Istanbul, in Nişantaşı among society people. I wanted to be like the Europeans. I couldn't see how I could reconcile my becoming a European with a God who required women to wrap themselves in scarves, so I kept religion out of my life. But when I went to Europe, I realized there could be an Allah who was different from the Allah of the bearded provincial reactionaries. (Pamuk, 2004: 96)

For example, in spite of his religious affiliations, Necip, a religious student in the local imam-preacher high school, represents to Ka the significant role of confession as he expresses sincerely what confuses him when he reveals his doubt concerning the existence of God. His words depict a relative similarity to Ka's own questioning, despite their contrasting backgrounds: "There is another voice inside me that tells me, 'Don't believe in God'. Because when you devote so much of your heart to believing something exists, you can't help having a little voice that asks, 'What if it doesn't?'" (Pamuk, 2004: 135).

With his doubtful stance, Ka comes to be a character who, as Ergin argues, "wants to find a way of accepting his conflicted identity, by restoring some kind of stability ... like a snowflake, which has six faces and still possesses a shape that is harmonious and symmetrical" (2009, 45). He therefore searches for a middle ground for his conflicted identity ... that is a "two-faced" (Pamuk, 2004: 99) feeling representing the tension experienced by the Turkish society since the late nineteenth

century. His anxiety⁷ seems to be related to a desire for finding a way, as Ergin posits, “to be both provincial and urban, at once modern/secular and faithful” (2009: 45).

2. Testing the Limits of Their Identities: Pamuk and Ka

Discussing the role of an author in his attempts to understand and thematise the discrepancies widely found in life, Pamuk argues that the first step to be taken is to test the very limits of one's own identity: “Behind every great novel is an author whose greatest pleasure comes from entering another's form and bringing it to life – whose strongest and most creative impulse is to test the very limits of his identity” (2005, 3). In order to exemplify what he means by ‘testing the limits of one's identity’, he invokes Kafka's *The Metamorphoses*, exactly where Gregor Samsa awakens in a nightmare of his physical appearance transforming into a giant insect:

If I woke up one morning to find myself transformed into a cockroach, I would need to do more than research insects: if I were to guess that everyone else in the house would be revolted and even terrified to see me scuttling across the walls and the ceilings, and that even my own mother and father would hurl apples at me, I would first have to find a way to become Kafka. But before I try to imagine myself as someone else, I might have to do a little investigating. What I need to ponder most is this: who is this ‘other’ we so need to imagine? (3)

Pamuk highlights the necessity of testing the limits of one's identity as he believes that it “will help to liberate him from the confines of his own persona,” thereby bringing out only goodness from one's identifying with the other. He accordingly considers the art of writing as a mediator to achieve a liberation that opens up new ways to recognize one's limits. He posits that “the history of the novel is the history of human liberation: by putting ourselves in other's shoes, by using our imaginations to free ourselves from our own identities, we are able to set ourselves free” (3). He, therefore, gives examples of identities from the great classics of all times, such as, for example, that of Anna Karenina, Don Quixote, Moby Dick, all through whom we learn of a world of multiple representations of human history. Hence, we learn of humanity with stories of others focusing neither solely on a single and unified account of the events

⁷ Ergin likens Ka's anxiety of identity to the anxiety experienced by A. H. Tanpınar's characters: “The conflict he embodies recalls Tanpınar's use of Janus as a metaphor to explain the East-West entanglement in modern Turkey” (2009:45).

taking place in the novel's plots, nor excluding some controversial themes.

Pamuk, in this respect, argues that a German novelist "speaking to all of Germany" but excluding "the country's Turks along with the unease they cause," ends up with a story failing to speak to all of Germany. Similarly, a Turkish author neglecting "to illuminate the black spots" in his country's past might end up with a work with a hole at its centre (3). In this context, Pamuk's works in general become provocative as he focuses on controversial and hence taboo concepts. His works therefore according to Göknaar contain "secular national 'taboos,' including multi-ethnicity, multi-lingualism, cosmopolitanism, religion, and homosexuality, among others (2006: 34).

Pamuk's *Snow* has been highly criticized by scholars, as he has, in their view, made room for an intolerance performed not only by religious fundamentalists but also by secularists. Can a work of this sort be a salutary offering, they argue, since it invites its readers to explore, imagine, and discuss conflicting concepts that primarily and reflexively -- through our already learned, usually expected assumptions -- be discussed via their opposing premises, without thereby encapsulating the author in a certain political camp.

In contradiction to this point of view, Pamuk himself avers: "Contrary to what most people assume, a novelist's politics have nothing to do with the societies, parties, and groups to which he might belong -- nor to his dedication to any political cause. A novelist's politics rises from his imagination, from his ability to imagine himself as someone else" (2005: 3). In an interview (qtd. in Ergin, 2009: 36), Pamuk therefore states of the protagonist of *Snow*: "Ka does not believe in politics, but he becomes entangled in the political problems in Kars solely as a consequence of his pursuit of the woman he loves, Ipek. Ka is initially cynical about taking a political stand, but he gradually finds himself caught in the middle of the current political debates in Kars, and takes on the role of mediator"

Ka as an eyewitness to events occurring in Kars actually functions as a figure in Pamuk's view as someone 'testing the limits of his identity'; an act that eventually helps to liberate him from the confines of his own persona. Ka undoubtedly bears some salient similarities to Pamuk. Coming from a wealthy and educated family, and also from the most populated and westernized city of İstanbul, Pamuk comes to stand for a stereotype representing one of the members of the secular elites of İstanbul who in this regard is not taken seriously by the majority of the religious groups in Turkey. Likewise, Ka, who comes similarly from

İstanbul and as a member of the secular elite, with his relatively more liberal views about religion, is harshly criticized by Blue -- a radical Islamist figure in the novel: "I don't want to destroy your illusions, but your love for God comes out of Western romantic novels," says Blue to Ka. "In a place like this, if you worship God as a European, you're bound to be a laughingstock. Then you cannot even believe you believe. You don't belong to this country; you're not even a Turk anymore. First try to be like everyone else. Then try to believe in God" (Pamuk, 2004: 327). Similarly, as Coury points out (2009: 346), Necip, one of the young Islamist boys in the narrative, accuses Ka of belonging to the Western intelligentsia, which according to him, makes Ka an atheist: "People in the intelligentsia never believe in God. They believe in what Europeans do, and they think they are better than ordinary people" (Pamuk, 2004: 103). Although Ka recognizes that he might be regarded as a member of the intelligentsia in Turkey, he is nonetheless a worthless nobody in Germany.

Despite the accusations aimed at them -- Pamuk and his doppelgänger Ka -- both Pamuk and Ka struggle to understand different political views and religiously led life practices. The middle ground for both Ka and Pamuk might be said to be their critique of not only militant secularism but also politicized Islam. They, in this respect, seem to test the limits of their identity, thereby problematizing ontological selves -- self-identities -- that have been refined through ideological concepts. Their similarity is more about their attempt to negotiate toward understanding the differences between cultures, religious tendencies, and stories, all of which otherwise seem to be cultural agents functioning perpetually as black spots in history, differentiating peoples rather than uniting them, thereby originating dualistic thinking through dichotomies such as West vs. East, civilised vs. primitive, religious vs. secular.

Having once left his political idealism behind with his departure from Turkey to Frankfurt, Ka years later started writing poems again in Kars, suggesting that Ka begins to shatter the chains confining him inside the borders of a certain world vision. Having been raised in a secular elitist environment, and thus having lived in accordance with the Western concepts of European Enlightenment, *Snow's* Ka, now in one of the poorest, most forgotten, and most ignored parts of Turkey, not only regains his ability to write poetry but also finds an opportunity to test his knowledge of religions and politics, including his understanding of the

West vs East dichotomy.⁸ Kars comes to stand for a place defamiliarizing and challenging his knowledge of both his world view and his self-identity. It is where Ka seems to recover his identity through the tests he goes through in the “antinomies of religion and atheism, authoritarianism and freedom, aesthetics, and politics, love and duty” (Birt, 2007)⁹. In this context, as Ergin argues, “*Snow* helps the reader develop a better understanding of the trespassing, intersecting, overlapping, and diverging paths of different ethnic and religious communities, by interweaving their filiations, without treating East and West, Turkey and Europe as two distinct civilizations evolving in segregated geographies” (2009: 20). Hence, instead of taking the role of an ideologue supporting overtly or covertly ideological views, we should be considering Pamuk as an author who has structured the plot of *Snow* around the dichotomy of ‘loss and gain’, in the revelation and reflection of the transition from an Empire to a nation, along with all the attendant changes experienced in the course of history: all of which capture and suggest to the reader the struggle to understand the causes of different political views and life practices.

3. A Narrative of Controversy: *Snow*

A work that is political in nature, representing political accounts of events having occurred in the history of a country, does not necessarily mean that its author will inevitably take a side within the narration of the story history has to tell. When the subject matter thematised in a fictive work comes to be political, the work then naturally seems to open itself up to political readings as well. Therefore, the translator's warning to the readers that the eminent role of a reader's political affiliation might affect his/her perceptions is of high importance. Arguing that “at the heart of many social and political tensions in present-day Turkey, even the secular-Islam debate, lie the repercussions of the rupture brought about by the nationalization-westernization-modernization movement,” Ergin highlights the significance of an author's position in telling a political story concerning some controversial issues of a country, because an author might assuredly provide the reader a way to retackle already well-known stories through a fictitious frame where the black spots might be confronted (2009: 21). Through the spectrum of such a narration concerned with political events, the reader according to Pamuk, might

⁸ For detailed accounts of Pamuk's elaboration of a West and East dichotomy, see Tülin Kartal Güngör's article entitled “Karşılaştırmalı Bir Yaklaşımla Orhan Pamuk'un Romanlarında Doğu- Batı Sorunsalı”. *Yerel Bağlımlar Küresel Yakınlıklar*, V. Uluslararası Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi Kongresi Bildiri Kitabı, Mersin Üni. Yayınları, 2015, 123-132.

⁹ The rest of the article can be found in <https://yahyabirt1.wordpress.com/2007/03/>.

travel “to another world” s/he has “never visited, never seen, and never known”. Or as Pamuk adds: a novel might take the reader “into the hidden depths of a character who seems on the surface to resemble those we know best. I am drawing attention to each of these possibilities singly because there is a vision I entertain from time to time that embraces both extremes” (2005: 5).

Instead of telling stories from some ideologically oriented perspectives, Pamuk structures his stories around some layered world views that will include the anxieties of more than one political group, thereby liberating liberals, radicals, and seculars to speak in his texts in general and in *Snow*, in particular. The protagonist of *Snow* for instance seems to have an opportunity to witness and analyze views different from the teachings that Ka himself has brought along with him to the city of Kars. During his investigation of the headscarf girls' suicide in Kars, Ka learns empirically about “the perspectives of a wide array of people” embroiled in the disputes among “former Communists, Kemalists, secularists, and Islamists” (Cory, 2009: 342).

From this ground point, *Snow* portrays a point of view where there are various forms of otherness and remoteness, both from inside and outside of clashes between old and new, Eastern and Western, European and Middle Eastern, Islamist and Secularist, modern and non-modern. A country going through great changes from the mid-nineteenth century onward first from an Ottoman Empire to a modern Middle Eastern nation¹⁰, then from a modern nation of the Middle East to the early twentieth century Kemalist cultural revolution¹¹, finally comes to

¹⁰ “The roots of the Westernizing cultural reforms in Turkey can be traced to Tanzimat Dönemi, the period of reformation, which began in 1839 and was characterized by attempts to modernize the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state in the nineteenth century was more than six hundred years old, and weakened by the increasing nationalist rebellions among the ethnic communities under the rule of the Empire. In this period, several westernizing reforms, especially in military forces and cultural life, were reinforced to save the empire by strengthening its relations with Europe. These Tanzimat reforms were designed both to modernize the empire and to forestall foreign intervention. Much of the Ottoman system was reorganized along largely French lines” (Ergin, 2009: 15).

¹¹ “In the following decades, however, particularly for the generation that helped establish the Turkish Republic in 1923 and witnessed the transitional period between the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Turkish nation, the East-West question took on a drastically different meaning. Mustafa Kemal led the Turkish national movement and the Turkish War of Independence (1919). The final outcome of the independence war was the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey on 29 October 1923, a modern, democratic, and secular nation-state. Mustafa Kemal re-adjusted the entire social framework, passing a number of reforms from the Hat Law, which outlawed the use of the

represent legitimately a modern country with its legislations conducted particularly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic by Kemal Atatürk. However, former values hinging mostly on religious tendencies shaped over the course of several centuries owned and practiced pervasively in the Middle East seem to maintain their de-facto influence in both the politics of the country and the life of many people in modern Turkey. In this respect, as Azade Seyhan posits, Pamuk's *Snow* portrays a picture of "the fortunes of a land entangled in the thorny ramifications of its past and the pressure of conforming to the dictates of modernity" (2006).¹² It is for this reason that the novel's polemical theme represents a political tension between Islamic and secular politics, thereby suggesting a historical picture of a conflict having been experienced for over a century in the country.

Such a clash between secularists and Islamists, rooted in the history of Turkey from the Tanzimat ("Reorganization Reforms" of 1839 and 1876 onward) is particularly represented by the conceit of the headscarf in *Snow*. The narrator's explanation of the differences between urban and rural Turkey enhances the reader's understanding as the reader learns that Ka's "westernized upper-middle-class circles" of Istanbul are different from the lower-class circles of Istanbul who mostly reflect the rural towns of Anatolia: "Since childhood, [Ka] had scarcely been in the habit of noticing covered women. In the westernized upper-middle-class circles of the young Ka's Istanbul, a covered woman would have been someone who had come in from the suburbs - - from the Kartal vineyards, say - - to sell grapes. Or she might be the milkman's wife or someone else from the lower classes" (Pamuk, 2004: 22).

Pamuk's including the headscarf issue in *Snow* is not a coincidence in this respect as the novel "takes place in the 1990s, during a revival of religious movements in different parts of the world, including Turkey, where the pro-Islamic Refah Partisi (the Welfare Party) began to receive an increasing share of the national vote" (Ergin, 2009: 19). The novel highlights that in the course of history, the state banning the wearing of the headscarf in schools, including all educational institutions, comes to represent how the conflict continues with a faster pace in the 1990s.

turban and other religious symbols and encouraged Western clothing for men and women, to the adaption of the new Turkish alphabet in Latin (rather than Arabic). The ideological foundation for Mustafa Kemal's reform program became known as Kemalism. Its main points are enumerated in the "six arrows" of Kemalism known as republicanism, nationalism, populism, reformism, statism, and secularism" (Ergin, 2009: 16-17).

¹² For the rest of Seyhan's analysis see

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/archive/2006/817/cu5.htm>

The clash between the secular state and Islamist groups is clearly revealed during a conversation between the Director of the Institute of Education and 'the stranger' who comes all the way from Tokat to Kars for the execution of the director. When the stranger questions the director as to how he "can reconcile God's command with the decision to ban covered girls from the classroom," the director answers him as follows: "We live in a secular state. It's the secular state that has banned covered girls, from schools as well as classrooms." However, the stranger's next question reveals the primary conflict between the parties: "Excuse me, sir. May I ask you a question? Can a law imposed by the state cancel out God's law?" As a representative of the secular state, the director replies to him as follows: "That's a very good question. But in a secular state these matters are separate" (Pamuk, 2004: 40). A common dispute between Islamists and secularists, the banning of the headscarf in public places as a controversial issue, is therefore thematised in *Snow*. Scenes of such conversations have a documentary value as well.

However, having been highly criticised in terms of his representation of such a deep-rooted dispute, Pamuk, contrary to common belief, seems to depict a picture where he actually helps the reader ponder both the discrepancies and the anxieties experienced by the both sides. There is no single voice but a multitude of views through which the readers' attention is drawn onto the public and private stages of various possible interpretations of such events narrated in the novel. *Snow's* underlying question is – *Who decides?* On one hand, for instance, we read that Sunay -- the Westernist-secular-actor aspiring to be a heroic leader of the belated Turkish Enlightenment -- points out that "no one who's even slightly westernized can breathe free in this country unless they have a secular army protecting them" (203). Then we read that Blue, on the other hand, poses a challenge to the Western understanding of Democracy as he believes that local values and beliefs might be jeopardized by means of imitating the West. *Snow's* second underlying question, no less important than the first, is *Who is speaking?* The warring narrator's impulse of the Pamuk/Ka persona, therefore, questions the universality and the validity of the regulations conducted in the country by the secularists across one geography and by the religionists across another geography. Pamuk/Ka "with a grand gesture" asks :

Will the West, which takes democracy, as its great invention, more seriously than the word of God, come out against this coup that has brought an end to democracy in Kars? ... Or are we to conclude that democracy, freedom, and human rights don't matter, that all the West wants is for the rest of the world to imitate them like monkeys? Can the

West endure any democracy achieved by enemies who in no way resemble them? I have something to say to all the other nations that the West has left behind: Brothers, you're not alone. (228)

Representing a deep-rooted tension experienced to a large extent by local, intellectual, cultural and religious anxieties of Turkish society, *Snow* comes to depict this tension, as Ergin argues, "between sameness and difference in the relation between Turkish and European identities. On the one hand, there is a desire to mimic the West (accompanied by a sense of being belated with respect to European modernity); on the other hand, there is a persistent fear of becoming an inauthentic imitation of the West. The tension between this desire and fear is embodied by Sunay and Blue throughout *Snow*" (24).¹³

4. The Danger of Absolutism in *Snow*

Pamuk, accordingly, simultaneously portrays both a picture of the ills of the state's secular extremities and the ills of the extremities of religious absolutism. While the secular-military alliance is represented by Z. Demirkol, Colonel Nuri Çolak, and the coup leader -- leftist revolutionary Sunay Zaim; Islamic fundamentalism is represented by Blue, and leftist socialism is represented by Turgut Bey. Pamuk invites his readers to make an analysis of socio-political-religious events when they are practiced *in extremis*: that is, at the point of death, in extreme and difficult situations. Pamuk depicts Sunay as a character who is a "rich and enlightened member of the ruling elite", and "enjoys dancing and joking with the poorest villagers and, indeed, engages them in erudite discussions of the meaning of life" (392). Moreover, he is represented in such a way that the reader may feel the problems ascribed to character and personality through a tellingly exaggerated depiction:

This man was Sunay Zaim. He was wearing an army uniform from the thirties with a fur hat in the style of Atatürk and the heroes of the War for Independence. As he strode purposefully across the stage (no one could have known he had a slight limp), the two "fundamentalists" took fright and threw themselves at his feet. The brave old teacher stood up once more and applauded Sunay's heroism with all his might. One or two others shouted, "Bless you! Bravo!" Standing in the centre of the

¹³ In her "East West Entanglements," Ergin argues that "following the radical Westernization Turkey underwent in the early twentieth century, it has become more and more difficult for Turkish people to situate themselves in a distinct Eastern or Western identity. For European nations, Turkey continues to be a Middle-Eastern country; whereas for several Middle Eastern nations influenced by Arabic culture, Turkey is considered to be part of the Western culture, bordering Central Europe" (2009: 28).

spotlight, he seemed to all of Kars to be a wondrous creature from another planet. (154-155)

He is not characterized solely as a powerful member of the ruling elite, but also as a figure acting in extremity to accomplish what he believes to be the ultimate truth. Ahead of a probable electoral victory by the Islamic party in Kars, a military coup taking place during a theatrical performance is supported by Sunay Zaim. His words, depicting the extremity of his belief, including the murder of several people among the audience, reveal that the play is only a means of announcing a military coup d'état:

It was as if they'd decided that the dead bodies before their eyes belonged to the dream world of the stage; a number of those who had ducked for cover now had their heads in the air but then covered again at the sound of Sunay's voice. "This is not a play; it is the beginning of a revolution," he said reproachfully. "We are prepared to go to any lengths to protect our father-land. Put your faith in the great and honorable Turkish army! Soldiers! Bring them over." (160)

During a dialogue with Kadife, an extremity is again revealed similarly through Sunay's words defending the necessity of the coup: "You probably detest me for having staged this coup and opening fire on the audience, just because they weren't living like Westerners. But I want you to know I did it all for the fatherland" (403).

On the other hand, Pamuk also gives a critique of radical Islamism through his representation of the character and personality of Blue. As he is introduced to the reader, Blue's fundamentalism is explained by a reference to his popularity as "a political Islamist of some notoriety" (69).

What had made Blue notorious was the claim that he was responsible for the murder of an effeminate exhibitionist and TV personality named Güner Bener, on whose quiz show, broadcast on a minor channel, contestants vied for cash prizes. Bener wore gaudy suits and had a penchant for indecent remarks, favoring jokes about "the uneducated." One day, during a live broadcast, this freckled master of sarcasm was making fun of one of his poorer and clumsier contestants when by some slip of the tongue he uttered an inappropriate remark about the Prophet Muhammad. (69)

Pamuk's narration here reveals a criticism of radical Islamism. The stranger who comes from Tokat to murder the Director of the Institute of Education comes upon Pamuk's stage of extreme characters as a representative of another ensuing extremity. He seems to be an inconsistent character with an ambiguity in his attitude toward the Director, reminding readers that he might not be more than a pawn sent to

Kars for the execution by 'somebody else'. When he introduces himself to the Director, he tells him that he is from Tokat, and adds that it is a beautiful city and hence the director should come and visit the city. He even offers him to stay at his own place. However, no glimpse of irony is sensed in his tone: "Sir,... If you ever do come to visit, you must stay with me. I've spent my whole life in Tokat, all thirty-six years. Tokat is very beautiful. Turkey is very beautiful, too. But it's such a shame that we know so little about our own country, that we can't find it in our hearts to love our own kind" (39). After this conversation, it doesn't take long for this stranger to murder the director. In terms of Pamuk's critique of the danger of fanatic affiliations with radical beliefs, the murderer's statements -- through which he seems to have persuaded himself for to murder -- are highly important since they function to justify his brutal conduct.

You're not a Jew either, are you? —No, I'm not. —You're a Muslim? —Yes. Glory be to God, I am. —You're smiling, sir. I'd like to ask you to take my question seriously and answer it properly. Because I've travelled all the way from Tokat in the dead of winter just to hear you answer it. —How did you come to hear of me in Tokat? —There has been nothing in the Istanbul papers, sir, about your decision to deny schooling to girls who cover their heads as dictated by their religion and the Holy Koran. All those papers care about are scandals involving fashion models. But in beautiful Tokat we have a Muslim radio station called Flag that keeps us informed about the injustices perpetrated on the faithful in every corner of the country. (40)

The murderer represents Islamist extremism, and imprisoned in this context, reminds the us of the danger of any kind of fanaticism that within the scope of his own history causes the assassination of his others. As Ergin argues, "[Pamuk] uses Sunay and Blue as two stereotypical and negative examples of the populations divided along the axiom of Islam vs. secular nationalism" (2009: 57).

Conclusion

Consequently, when Pamuk's own words concerning the role of an author in illuminating 'the black spots in history' are taken into account, it should be pointed out that Pamuk also suggests that "underneath such politicized labels, there lies a wide range of overlapping ideologies and belief systems, whose complexity cannot possibly be economized by a simple dichotomy" (Ergin, 2009: 57). It is for this reason that Pamuk creates a story into which the reader is invited to explore *the beyond* of what is seen. Instead of taking side with any political group, Pamuk highlights the dangers of radicalism everywhere it resides. Moreover, he

creates a plot both of whose implicit and explicit questions have more importance than automatic textbook answers. Responses are more expected than mere answers.

A conversation at the end of the novel between Orhan – who narrates the story in the final part - - and Fazıl - - a young religious boy and a local of Kars, reminds the reader of an observation of the English translator of the novel, Maureen Freely, that “how you read that tragedy depends very much on what your politics are and how much you know about recent Turkish history.”¹⁴ In this final conversation, Orhan asks Fazıl what he would like the reader to be told if he were the writer of a novel telling a story that takes place in Kars, and Fazıl responds: “I did think of something, but you may not like it If you write a book set in Kars and put me in it, I'd like to tell your readers not to believe anything you say about me or anything you say about any of us. No one could understand us from so far away” (Pamuk, 2004: 425-426). Instead of taking the role of an ideologue supporting some ideological views, Pamuk should therefore be considered as an author who seems to have attempted to illuminate the black spots in a certain period of a country, which has not been discussed much because of its controversial content. However, pointing out that his novel is a polyphonic novel rather than a novel supporting a certain political group, Pamuk himself emphasizes that his story functions as an introspection to help his readers -- as much as himself – to understand more clearly the question of ‘the other’, the stranger within, the enemy that inhabits the inside of each of our heart and head. Otherwise, a work, that is only political by nature might be analysed only solely through the tenets of a certain political camp.

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¹⁴ For the rest of Maureen Freely's explanation, see <http://orhanpamuk.net/popuppage.aspx?id=98&lng=eng>.

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