

# How is Contemporary Literature in Turkey Challenging the Country's Colonial Relationship with its Kurdish Population?

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction:.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework and Methodology: .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Turkish Colonialism:.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Blauner's first element: .....	8
Blauner's second element: .....	10
Blauner's third element: .....	12
Blauner's fourth element:.....	13
<b>Changes in Context: .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Contemporary Literature in Turkey:.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Dawn by Selahattin Demirtas .....	20
Seher: .....	20
A Magnificent Ending:.....	21
<b>Snow by Orhan Pamuk .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Discussion:.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Conclusion: .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>References: .....</b>	<b>34</b>

## Abstract

This project aims to identify the ways in which contemporary literature in Turkey challenges the country's colonial relationship with its Kurdish citizens. To do so, the project initially identifies the colonial practices of the Turkish Republic through using Robert Blauner's theory of internal colonialism and analyzing the history of the Turkish state with its Kurdish citizens through the scope of Blauner's four elements of colonialism. Beyond the establishment of this, the project uses the novel *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk and the short story anthology *Dawn* by Selahattin Demirtas. Through analyzing the contents of those literary works and relating it back to the history of Turkey, we can see that by criticizing the orientalist approach of the state and the Kemalist political foundations of Turkey, both Pamuk and Demirtas shine a light on Turkey's mistreatment of its Kurdish citizens. These practices which the two authors criticize can also be seen in the present-day policies of the Turkish state. By identifying the colonial dynamic of the Turkish state, we can potentially move toward a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey that would allow for democratic governance and peaceful coexistence.

## Introduction:

Framing the Kurdish Question (henceforth KQ) in Turkey has always been a difficult task. The relationship between the Turkish government and the Kurdish population has been consistently negative since the founding of the Republic in 1923, and this has led to a century of Kurdish citizens of Turkey struggling to attain basic rights.

Understanding this relationship can help transform Turkey as a republic as it could give way to a new era of prolonged peace within Anatolia, something that Turkey has not yet experienced in its century of existence.

Kurds in Turkey were non-existent according to the state up until recently. Until the 1990s the Kurds were often referred to as Mountain Turks, and their language was deemed a corrupted form Turkish due the influence of Arabic and Persian. The discourse of the Turkish government and the media within Turkey perpetuated this constructed reality.

In this project I aim to show that the Turkish Republic has essentially been engaged in a colonizer-colonized relationship with its Kurdish population, and explore how contemporary literature in Turkey has worked to challenge that government-perpetuated narrative which has shaped the reality of life for the Kurdish population. The scope of project will be limited to the following research question: how is contemporary literature in Turkey challenging the country's colonial relationship with its Kurdish population?

Through this question I hope to focus my research on the colonial practices of the Turkish government and the work of contemporary literature in the country as they push back against such practices.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

When looking at the literature on colonialism it is clear that the concept of colonialism is defined in many different ways, and the practices attributed to colonialism are equally different depending on what type of colonialism is discussed.

Often when we hear about colonialism the topic generally revolves around settler colonialism and franchise colonialism, this is perhaps due to the conflicts which are often discussed in the media. For example, one conflict which is heavily discussed is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and this leads to conversations about whether or not the Israeli state is a settler colonialist project. Likewise, the history of Western nations with the African continent

brings up the topic of franchise colonialism due to the fact that colonizing countries through imposing colonial rule have extracted resources from the continent. Essentially, the use of land and flow of resources are the most recognizable elements of settler and franchise colonialism. (Englert, 2022) However, it is important to note that there are other forms of colonialism, which do implement some similar tactics, but are different in their goals and differ in how the colonizer-colonized relationship looks like.

This project has its theoretical basis in the theories of internal colonialism, also known as domestic colonialism. The work of Robert Blauner and Charles Pinderhughes will form the foundational argument for internal colonialism.

Simply put internal colonialism as a theory of sociology is as follows, “a geographically-based pattern of subordination of a differentiated population, located within the dominant power or country.” (Pinderhughes, 2011, p.236) This is one of the main aspects of internal colonialism, which differentiates it from other forms of colonialism: the colonized and colonizer live in the same geographic location. Another aspect of this is that the colonizer does not extract resources from the land on which the colonized live. There is undoubtedly exploitation, as I will show in my project, but it does not follow the pattern of franchise colonialism. I must point out that this is a simplification, however it serves my purpose of showing why internal colonialism is more relevant for this project.

The theory of internal colonialism also fits the reality of the Kurdish population of Turkey more accurately than other theories of colonialism, as if we want to explore the KQ from the perspective of settler colonialism, there would be a need to refer to the history of Genghis Khan and his army settling in Anatolia. While such an approach would be interesting to explore, it would be beyond the scope of this project and would add nothing of value to the literature regarding the KQ.

Blauner (1969) in his paper regarding the African-American experience outlines the four tenants of colonization:

- 1) The forced entry of a dominant group into society
- 2) Impact on the colonized people’s ability to produce culture and social organization
- 3) The colonized being represented politically by the colonizer
- 4) Racism

The process of internal colonization subjugates the colonized through the four tenants mentioned above and through political and economic means which disenfranchises

the colonized: this includes institutionalizing racism, denying the colonized of rights, taking away their political voice, and dehumanizing the colonized.

The work of Blauner and Pinderhughes is likewise echoed by Latin American authors that focus on internal colonialism to analyze the experience in many Latin American countries.

Norma Chaloult and Yves Chaloult, in their paper studying the characteristics of internal colonialism write, “[...] the authors cited agree on one important aspect of the internal colonialism concept: that it implies the existence of social relations based on domination and subjection.” (1979, p.86) However, unlike Pinderhughes and Blauner, they point out the internal colonialism does not necessarily come about when two people of different cultural backgrounds live side by side in the same country, rather societies of homogenous backgrounds also have enacted in this practice.

Where there is significant overlap in these two perspectives is the fact that the colonized often revolt against the system which keeps them subjugated, “[...] every social movement directed against basic aspects of the social order will seek a confrontation with the political power apparatus serving the system of dominance.” (ibid. p.92)

I will be applying these theories to the history available regarding Kurds in Turkey to show that there is indeed a colonial relationship between the state and the Kurds, and through that analyze the messages and themes of contemporary literature in the country.

In looking at the history of Kurds and Turkey, the theory of orientalism also plays a role in understanding the relationship and the process of ‘othering’. Edward Said originally applied this theory to understand the role of othering and representation of non-European cultures, especially those of the Middle East and Islamic societies, as inferior compared to those of Europe and the Western countries in general. Orientalism “[...] operated as a tool and a justification of cultural, political, military and economic dominance, based on the presumption of the inferiority of non-Western cultures, religions and societies [...]” (Zeydanlioglu, 2008., p.2)

The construction of the idea that some cultures were superior to others played a major role during the imperial age of Europe when colonialism was rife, and colonies were under the rule of the European empires. In many ways this practice of ‘orientalizing’ other civilizations paved the way for concepts such as The White Man’s Burden, which is perfectly

described in Rudyard Kipling's poem of the same name, where Kipling urged the 'civilized West' to civilize those that he deemed savage. As he writes:

Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go send your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need  
To wait in heavy harness  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child

(History Matters, n.d.)

This type approach and understanding of cultures other than of your own, then, allows for a form of dehumanization, which leads the 'civilized' to the conclusion that a correction is necessary, as Zeydanlioglu writes, "[...] when nationalist elites project the internalised Orientalism "inwards" as part of the nation-building process, the 'native' emerges as an Other that becomes the target of 'corrective' and 'scientific' projects of modernity and progress. The transformation of the native is undertaken through a return to the 'disciplinary narratives of the West'." (Zeydanlioglu, 2008., p.3)

In analyzing the contemporary literature in Turkey for this project, there is also a need to understand the relationship of media with society and politics. For this purpose, I will refer to the political landscape of Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and contextualize the changes and trends in the media through McQuail and Deuze's critical media theory.

McQuail and Deuze's critical media theory states that, "Most significant is the idea that the media are sought out by institutional advocates as channels for reaching the general public (or chosen groups and even micro-targeting individuals), and for conveying their chosen perspective on events and conditions." (2020, P.177) Here institutions are not only organizations and media outlets, rather individual publishers, authors, artists, and figures can also be categorized as institutions. This helps in understanding the literary works that I will analyze in this project, as it will allow me to define the aim authors want to accomplish and the strategies the employ to reach their goal.

McQuail and Deuze provide a polychotomy of social structure and media presence and effect. Essentially, they define four states of media:

- 1) Interdependence: where media affects society and society affects media
- 2) Idealism: where influence flows one way, from media to society
- 3) Materialism: where media is controlled by individuals in positions of power
- 4) Autonomy: media and society have no causal relationship

The theory of critical media analysis helps to put the changing cultural production into the context of the political landscape. The political landscape of Kurdish relations with the Turkish state has been, as previously mentioned, consistently negative, and has gone through different phases. By looking at the history of these changes and relating it back to the literature this project analyzes, we can contextualize the changes in cultural production and society.

This allows for a more precise understanding of how and why the representation of Kurds in Turkey changes, and the effects this might have on society in Turkey.

By understanding the history of Turkey, analyzing the practices of the state, and analyzing the media used, I will attempt to answer my research question.

It should also be noted that when I use the word Turkey I am referring to the state, the country, and the government, and not the people.

## Turkish Colonialism:

### Blauner's first element:

Robert Blauner argues that colonization, both internal and external starts with forced entry, whether that be the forced entry of the colonizer into the colonized's society or the colonized forcibly entered into the dominant society of the colonizer. (Blauner, 1969) He delineates the difference between what is a forced entry and what is a voluntary entry by describing the different experience of the colonized and those who voluntarily have become a part of the society, such as, for example, immigrants, "[the immigrants] have always been able to operate fairly competitively within the relatively open section of the social and economic order because these groups who came voluntarily in search of a better life, because their movements in society were not administratively controlled, and because they transformed their culture at their own pace [...]" (ibid., p.396)



Connecting this difference to the Kurdish Question, we can see Blauner's theory in action through the history of the Turkish government's relationship with its Kurdish population. The Kurds and Turks were allies during the Turkish War of Independence after the first World War, in fact the Kurds fought alongside Ataturk's army against those who attempted break up Anatolia into different regions controlled by European and Greek and Armenian administrations. (McDowall, 2007) The Kurds entered this alliance because Ataturk had promised to build a country based on equal rights for Kurds and Turks in a letter claiming that Kurds and Turks are brother who ought to fight together for their independence. (Mango, 1999)

However, Ataturk went back on his word and resorted to policies of resettlement, assimilation, and violence against the Kurds after they had won the War of Independence. (ibid.) The Kurds wanted autonomy within the borders of the newly founded republic, but this was something that Ataturk viewed as counterproductive, "For Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk] the priority was to create a modern, secular Turkey. He needed absolute power to do it. Any kind of provincial self-government would have been an obstacle to his designs, particularly self-government in what he, along with the entire Turkish elite, considered to be a backward region." (ibid., pp.18-19) These developments were followed by Ataturk publicly claiming that individuals who think of themselves as non-Turks were "the product of past periods of tyranny [...] [and are] the enemy's instruments." (ibid., p.20) This can be seen as the forced entry into the colonizer's society: either call yourself a Turk or you will be seen as an enemy. The Kurdish identity then became an outlier and seen as a parasitic entity which would only harm the nation from that point on. The authoritarian power of Ataturk during that age left little room for opposition movements, and Kurds were forced into Turkish society on those terms. As Mehmet Kurt argues, after the foundation of the republic, the shift from Ottoman Turkey to Ataturk's Turkey meant that, "the Muslimness contract was narrowed down to the 'Turkishness contract,' as now one also had to be Turkish, or to perform and declare loyalty to Turkishness, in order to benefit from the privileges. [...] In other words, if the contract was respected, the individual and his or her family members would potentially be able to climb the ladder in politics, business, bureaucracy, academy, art, etc. But those who were in breach of the contract were to be severely punished in the form of killing, torture, imprisonment, unemployment, stigmatization and/or ostracism." (Kurt, 2021, pp.925-926)

### Blauner's second element:

The following years became the stage of multitudes of policies, which prohibited, controlled, and destroyed vast swathes of Kurdish society in Turkey. As Blauner's theory states, the second step toward colonization is direct policy which has profound impact on the colonized people's ability to produce and maintain their culture, "The colonizing power carries out a policy which constrains, transforms, or destroys indigenous values, orientations, and way of life." (Blauner, 1969, p.396)

The process of disrupting Kurdish way of life started abruptly: the promise of autonomy was taken away without warning, leaving Kurdish provinces in the east to the mercy of Turkish policymakers. (McDowall, 2007) In the two years after independence, the Turkish government took away education, language, and identity from the country's Kurdish citizens, "All reference to Kurdistan was excised from official materials, and Turkish place names began to replace Kurdish ones. [...] In March 1924 these measures reached a climax. The insistence on the sole use of Turkish in the law courts, and the prohibition of Kurdish officially, including its use in schools, indicated a radical change in Kemalist thinking [...]" (ibid., pp.191-192) Replacing the names of Kurdish places with Turkish names is an action which needs to be considered as a large-scale attack against Kurdishness in Turkey for two reasons:

- 1) Erasing Kurdishness from Turkish maps negates the existence of Kurds in the history of Anatolia, which was one of the aims of the Turkish government in order to assimilate Kurdish citizens of Turkey. This is also evident by the fact that Atatürk approved the publication of a history book titled Outline of Turkish History which sought to argue that many cultures and societies find their origins in Turkishness. This was accompanied by banning the term Kurd from public rhetoric and education. (Mango, 1999) The act of denying Kurdish existence did not come about spontaneously as a way to quell domestic unrest, rather it seems that this was planned ahead of time, as during the negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne (the treaty which ratified Turkey's borders in 1923), the head of the Turkish delegation claimed that Kurds originated from Turanic roots. (McDowall, 2007) This in effect would negate any legal claim Kurds would have when asking for their basic rights of culture, language, and

identity. In essence, by constructing an alternate reality, the Turkish government wanted to disenfranchise the Kurdish population and keep their influence outside of politics and culture.

- 2) The second reason can be found in proceeding decades as the state continually disseminated this constructed reality, that Kurds don't exist, throughout the education system, reaching even the highest levels of academia in Turkey, as Ismail Besikci, a prominent Turkish academic, says regarding his university education, "It was said that the Kurds were Turks by origin and their language derived from Turkish, that Kurdish was a Turkish dialect. But in Elazığ I was confronted, in various districts, with different social and cultural realities: a different language, a different culture... [I saw that] realities on the ground and what was claimed by the universities and the press were at variance with one another." (Bruinessen, 2005, p.5) This allows for the state to push the narrative upon the Turkish citizens of the country by asserting that Anatolia is a Turkish place, void of non-Turkish elements. Much like Kurdish dissidents, Besikci spent many years of his life in and out of prison for wanting to talk about the Kurdish people in Turkey.

The effects of this policy have had perhaps the longest lasting impact on Kurds and Turks in Turkey. Whether looking at the production of Kurdish culture and Kurdish societal organization or on the psyche of Turkish citizens.

The clearest example of this is the treatment of the Kurdish singer Ahmet Kaya, who had kept his Kurdish identity a secret up until an award ceremony in Turkey in 1999, "Ahmet Kaya [was] attacked at an award ceremony when revealing that he has included a Kurdish folk song on his new album [...] At this moment, other prizewinners in their tuxedos and formal outfits walked over to confront him - to beat him up, actually - while others threw their forks, knives, and plates, swearing at the famous singer. Everyone in the room started screaming, 'Get out of there,' and, 'There is no such thing as a Kurd.'" (Sørensen, 2012, p.622)

Beyond incidents like this, the policy has had, and continues to have, other large-scale effects on Kurds in Turkey. For example, the Kurdish language is not recognized in Turkish courts, which puts many Kurds, especially those of older generations who are monolingual in difficult positions, and this is made worse by the fact that often, as in the case of an

individual named Vedat Aydin, translations are also not permitted, “The court did not allow the defendants to be heard through a translator and referred to the language spoken as ‘a non-understood language’.” (Bayir, 2013, p.136)

Similarly, the culture and heritage of Kurds within Turkey is likewise targeted by this policy, as Kurdish places still retain their Turkish names, and in 2018 this policy was used to remove street signs which included both Turkish and Kurdish names in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakir. (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2018) This move was accompanied by sweeping reforms which also targeted cultural centers which aimed to promote Kurdish culture in the country’s Kurdish regions.

A century of this policy is one of the main reasons for why Kurdish cultural production and organization have largely been centered in the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, essentially causing Kurdistan in Turkey to experience a brain drain that left the region vulnerable to influence and hampered the development of Kurdish cultural and artistic production. (Maisel, 2018)

#### Blauner’s third element:

Blauner’s third element of colonization is the administration of the colonized by representatives of the dominant power, i.e. the colonizers, and similarly to the previous two elements this is quite easily identifiable in Turkey.

Starting from 1923, concentration of political power was in the hands of Turkish politicians: as Bruinessen writes, “All senior government officials in Kurdistan were Turks. [...] The government interfered in the eastern provinces in the 1923 elections for the Grand National Assembly. [...] In the army the Kurdish rank-and-file were discriminated against [...]” (Bruinessen, 1992, pp.282-283)

This is also true when looking at Turkey in the present day. The representation of Kurds and administration of Kurdish regions always falls into the hands of Turkish government officials, despite Kurdish politicians winning positions in democratic elections. Pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey are routinely banned by the Turkish government, leaving their constituents voiceless and their constituency in the hands of Turkish politicians. (Maisel, 2018)

Since 2015 the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) has become a powerful player in Turkish elections, becoming the first Kurdish party to enter Turkish parliament, but

their political power was stripped by the state after elections, as their founders and multiple politicians were jailed on terrorism charges. (ibid.) This is despite calls from the European Court of Human Rights rejecting Turkey's charges and calling for those politicians to be released. (European Parliament, 2021) While Turkey asserts that the country is democratically led, the government's historic and present treatment of Kurdish citizens negates that assertion.

#### Blauner's fourth element:

The fourth element of Blauner's theory is racism. On the matter of anti-Kurdish racism in Turkey there can be no debate, as the previous three elements mentioned here are all evidence to the fact that Kurdish citizens of Turkey have been and still are mistreated on the basis of their ethnic and cultural identity.

It can be argued that the racism within Turkey has taken an Orientalist approach when dealing with Kurds, as Mehmet Kurt writes regarding this issue, Kurds have been systemically portrayed as inferior, "[The] Kurdish ethnic identity has become racialized, with a host of negative attributions regarding their physical appearance, accent, morality, criminality, and civility. This Kurdophobic language [of the media and government] portrays the Kurds 'as culturally backward, intrinsically incapable of adapting to 'modern city life,' naturally criminal, violent and separatist people,' while casting 'the increasing number of Kurds in Western Turkish cities as the 'Kurdish invasion'.'" (Kurt, 2021, p.929)

The Orientalist element of Turkey's racism toward Kurds lies largely in the Kemalist ideology upon which the Republic of Turkey was founded. As mentioned, Atatürk wanted to have total power in order to shape the republic the way he deemed fit. He found inspiration in the societal structure and practices of Western European countries, and these aspects included secularism, cultural homogeneity, and an urban lifestyle. (Zeydanlioglu, 2008) Then it is no surprise that the Kurds who were largely living in rural regions of Kurdistan, majority Muslim, and by definition non-Turkish were subjected to Turkey's 'civilizing missions'. Whether deliberately or by accident, through western inspiration, Turkey arrived at a similar policy as the colonizing countries of the West which was that "they must, as the rightful teachers, educate Islamic, ethnic, tribal and rural Others deemed to be outside the sphere of Western modernity." (ibid., p.5)

During this time, Turkey talked about the Kurds and their rejection of the Turkish civilizing mission as nothing more than ‘regional underdevelopment’ and ‘tribal reaction to the project of modernization’. (Kurt, 2021, p.928) This type of discourse continued in public rhetoric, and with time the labels of underdeveloped, tribal, backward became the way Kurds were known to the Turkish public, “Through this construct, the Turkish state positioned itself as “the savior of the Kurds” [...] while also denying Kurdish existence altogether.” (ibid., p.928)

This view of Kurds is still openly expressed within Turkey, not only by public institutions and authority figures, but also by the media. Case in point the 2015 Turkish film *The Miracle*, which tells a story about a Turkish teacher from western Turkey sent by the state to a Zaza Kurdish village in the early 1960s. In the film the Kurds are represented as illiterate villagers who welcome the teacher with open arms, happy that their children will receive an education. The story focuses on one individual in the village: Aziz. Aziz is a mute man who has physical disabilities.

Throughout the film, the Kurds always seem to appear in groups, talking to the teacher as an entity rather than individuals, and on many occasions replying in unison. Their main concerns are presented as survival and procreation. This type of representation falls in line with how Edward Said described the Orientalist representation of Arabs in Western media, “[...] the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures.” (Said, 1979, p.288)

The savagery and stereotyped appearance which Kurt mentions, is used in this film as a way of bringing levity to the film, and while this is played for comedic effect it also reinforces Turkey’s view of Kurds. For example, at the 16-minute mark, when one of the young men in the village reaches an age where he is to be married, his family agree to find him a wife. As his mother goes to visit the house of their potential bride, the young man tells his mother to “make sure [the potential wife] does not have a beard or mustache.” (Kirmizgul, 2015, 16:00)

The themes of the educated Turk civilizing the backward Kurd is present through many scenes in the film as well. For examples, two scenes are juxtaposed in the film to deliver this message: one scene shows the Kurdish children bullying and beating Aziz as the Kurdish villagers stand by idly. (ibid., 40:00-42:00) A few scenes later in the film, we see this same bullying occur again, but this time the teacher intervenes to stop the children and educate

them, telling them that they must be nice and polite. Other instances in the film likewise reinforce this idea of the uncivilized Kurds: during the opening of the village's first school, the teacher asks them to stand in silence for a minute in honor of Atatürk's memory, however the Kurds seem unable to understand and grasp the concept of a moment's silence. (ibid., 46:00)

The backwardness is portrayed here and played off comedically in the film. In one scene where the adults watch the teacher show Aziz how to write, a pair of the Kurdish men immediately jump to the conclusion that the teacher must be some kind of mystic: this serves to show that the Kurds are unable to understand modernity and knowledge, and their perspective is bound to their rural mysticism and religion. (ibid., 1:01:00) Similar to how Said describes the Orientalists viewing Islamic mysticism and people of the East as backwards, this film portrays the Kurds as inherently backward due to their religion and beliefs.

Two final points from *Miracle* appear to me as important to note. One comes in a short scene where the men from the village watch Aziz write and draw on a piece of paper, talking about how they never were educated, and one of the men comments, "Since Aziz started writing his wildness has subdued." (ibid., 1:04:50) The second point, which emphasizes Zeydanlioglu's analysis of Turkey's 'civilizing missions' comes near the end of the film: as the teacher's time in the village comes to an end, he decides to take Aziz back with him to the west to help him, and in the final scene we see Aziz return to his village as a well-dressed, clean-shaven, educated man; having been rid of his "savage appearance." (ibid., 2:09:30)

This racism, which is prevalent in Turkish politics and media, has served only to create a separation between the Turkish and Kurdish population. In a very similar fashion to how European colonists viewed the indigenous people of Australia, Africa, and other colonized continents as lesser-than, the Turkish population, through this constructed reality has come to believe the same about Kurds. While this buttresses the Kemalist assertion that the people of the eastern provinces need to be educated and civilized, it has also dehumanized the Kurds. This dehumanization has had many effects, among which is the normalization of the murder of Kurds, an act which is then legalized by the state. Pinderhughes makes this point abundantly clear, "Colonial law in many lands allowed the dominant group to murder dominated group members without significant sanctions." (Pinderhughes, 2011, p.246) And we can also see this in Turkey, as Kurt mentions multiple homicides in which Kurdish civilians, in some cases entire families, have been killed by

Turkish nationalists as Turkish authority figures standby idly, and when the legal system has become involved, they have denied the racial elements of the crimes and allowed the perpetrators to avoid punishment. (Kurt, 2021)

## Changes in Context:

The two authors whose work will be used for the purposes of this project have been targeted by the Turkish government, taken to court, and while one has retained his freedom, the other is currently imprisoned. That is important to mention, as this section of the project will shed light on the development of the Kurdish Question in the past two decades, yet this development has had adverse effects and should be seen within the context of Turkish politics.

In 2002 Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power and the landscape of Turkish politics changed dramatically. Looking at the shift retrospectively, we can make the argument that it was largely caused by Turkey's ambitions to become an EU member state, rather than a societal change which pushed for better treatments of its Kurdish population. This view is backed by the fact that in 2003 an EU reform package pushed Turkey into conceding to some of the Kurds' demands. (Dakheel, 2015) Outside of Turkey's EU ambitions, another reason for the perceived changes in Turkey's position regarding its Kurdish citizens stems out of the political necessity, "The [AKP] leadership felt that addressing a relentlessly violent and seemingly intractable conflict that was overshadowing a stable image of the party and the leader was essential in the unbridled competition to electoral power. Rallying the Kurdish population behind the party was an early way station in the career of the party and the leader." (Cizre, 2016, p.7)

The combination of these two reasons opened the way for Turkey's Kurds to finally become a visible part of the country. This allowed for further political power, Kurdish media outlets in Turkey, and for a freer flow of opinion.

However, the AKP backtracked on these changes when the changes no longer served their political goals. As Kurdish politicians threatened Erdogan's hold on power Kurdish school classes were once more shut down, pro-Kurdish parties were banned, and Kurdish politicians were jailed. (Medya News, 2023)



The books which I have used here have all been published in the two decades since these changes came into play.

We can look at this from the perspective of critical media theory to understand how these changes were allowed, and how they play into the political landscape of Turkey. Similar to how the narrative regarding the existence of Kurds within Turkey was constructed through media, education, and political discourse, we can view the changes within the contemporary literature of Turkey in the same manner. McQuail and Deuze have provided a simplified description of how these constructed realities are disseminated through media: Reality, viewed as social forces and events, is talked about and advocated for by individuals who appear in media and aid in the production of knowledge: these appearances and forms of communication with the public becomes the bridge between the media personalities and the public, and in turn this shapes the new reality of society. (McQuail & Deuze, 2020) This synergetic relationship between media and society is part of the dynamic which makes those in positions of power to become the arbiters of change within societies.

In the past the media and education institutions have upheld the state constructed reality that Kurds do not exist within Turkey, as Ismail Besikci writes, "All the Turkish universities do is spread propaganda that Kurds are in reality Turks, and that there is no such language as Kurdish in existence. The same can be said for the Turkish press and political parties. Again, they operate like subdivisions of the national intelligence organizations." (Besikci, 2015, pp.70-71)

Since Erdogan has come to power media, including literature, in Turkey has gone through two different phases: the early 2000's, signified by a growing political base for Erdogan, and Erdogan working to strengthen his hold on power, can be best described with what McQuail and Deuze call materialism in media. The second state of media in Turkey, idealis, will become more relevant when talking about the two works of literature in the next section.

McQuail and Deuze talk about two aspects of each state of media. The first aspect is societal influence: materialism as a concept signifies a state of media where society has little to no influence and those in positions of power choose what is discussed and how they are discussed, "It is assumed that whoever owns or controls the media can choose, or set limits to, what they do." (2020, p.169) We can see the effects of materialism in Turkish media from this period, as not only did outlets begin referring to Kurds as a part of the makeup of Turkey, but there were also public apologies by Turkish officials regarding the atrocities that

the state has committed against its Kurdish citizens. For example Erdogan's apology regarding the Dersim Massacre of 1938 was openly published on Turkish newspapers. (BBC, 2011) The changes that Erdogan brought to Turkey paved the path for more public figures to acknowledge the plight of the Kurds in Turkey as well as give space to the Kurds to speak and demand their rights. While many have argued that this was the period that Turkey experience liberalization, as I've mentioned before, we can see in hindsight that this was largely a strategic power grab from the AKP and Erdogan, rather than a political shift to incorporate Turkey's Kurds into a country-wide reform initiative.

Regardless of the intentions however, it opened the space which allowed writers and notable figures such as Orhan Pamuk and Selahattin Demirtas to explore the country's relationship with its Kurdish citizens.

### Contemporary Literature in Turkey:

When looking at the work which I am analyzing in this project, the second phase of media in Turkey can be explored. The second phase, conceptually defined as idealism in media, is best described as a form of cultural production which aims to bring about change in society, regardless of whether or not it is sanctioned by the state. Rather it is individuals that decide what type of change is needed, "The media are assumed to have a potential for significant influence, but it is the particular ideas and values conveyed by the media (in their content) which are seen as the primary causes of social change, irrespective of who owns and controls the media as an industry. The influence is thought to work through individual motivations and actions. This view leads to a strong belief in various potential media effects for good or ill." (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p.169)

As Orhan Pamuk said in his interview about Turkish politics, at present Turkish media is absolutely dominated by those in power, however there are still those who are rallying in their efforts to put their arguments in front of the public's eyes. (YouTube, 2017)

Regarding the case of Kurds in Turkey, this has taken the form of non-fiction books being published which outline the events of the Dersim Massacre of 1937-1938, the effect of Turkey's war against the Kurdish militant group PKK, as well as discussing Turkey's anti-Kurdish policies and its effects on the lives of individuals, to fiction novels and short stories talking about the forgotten people of Kurdistan and the everyday lives of those who have

endured the Kemalist and nationalist oppression. The authors of such work are often jailed on unfounded charges. (Sabanoglu, 2014) As Demirtas writes in the preface of his anthology *Dawn*, “In Western countries, prison is generally thought of as a place where people are punished for their crimes. In Turkey, however, it is a different matter. [...] The government believes that this policy of collective punishment will suppress the millions of dissidents ‘on the outside’ who are living in a semi-open prison as it is. [...] Like many other dissidents held in Turkey’s prisons, I, too, am paying a necessary price in the name of peace and democratization.” (Demirtas, 2017, pp.24-25) Similar to the case of others from decades ago, like Ismail Besikci, those who challenge the narrative are punished by the state, and yet there is an abundance of dissident voices who write to inform the public about the reality of life in Turkey.

This new wave of literature in Turkey can be aptly described as post-colonial literature, as the authors attempt to rectify the accepted view of history and make their experiences visible. Similar to Edward Said’s work on Orientalism, these works can be seen as “attempts to write ‘histories from below’ or ‘recover’ the experiences of those who have been hitherto ‘hidden from history’.” (Loomba, 2005, p.193)

In comparison, the political views expressed in literature in Turkey for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were largely nationalist, anti-leftist, and anti-non-Turkish. One of the authors who exerted influence through literature in this period was the ultra-nationalist Huseyin Nihal Atsiz, whose political beliefs were akin to those of extremists, “[...] Atsiz extolled the glorious past of the Turks, emphasizing the superiority of their race (one notes the influence of Nazi race theories) and calling on them to unite again in a huge, powerful state.” (Landau, 2003, p.205) The bulk of Atsiz’s work centered around the same themes, namely Turkish nationalism and pan-Turkism. Given his political ideology, then it is no surprise that his views on non-Turkish elements of Turkey were likewise extreme, declaring things such as, “The best way to get rid of this microbe [foreign elements or races] is massacre. Only the Turks should have the right to live in Turkey.” (Burris, 2007, p.616)

Thus, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, the history and stories of Kurds were either unrecorded or, when they were, they were written by the representatives of the colonizer, as one Kurdish man said, “The system does not want our written literature to flourish because if our history is written, it would not get lost.” (Sengul, 2018, p.98) Then the contemporary work can be seen as post-colonial reaction to a period of misrepresentation and repression.

## Dawn by Selahattin Demirtas

Demirtas' anthology titled Dawn resorts to a method which is unlike Orhan Pamuk's Snow, which will also be used in this project. While Snow applies a, more or less, direct method to tackle the Kurdish Question in Turkey, Dawn instead lumps the Kurdish Question alongside other social problems in Turkey. The problems that Kurds face in Turkey are not highlighted through their relation to the state, rather they are described and told through story as societal problems which affects the whole of Turkey.

Beyond the preface, which I have outlined in the previous section, Demirtas's approach to the political stigmas and political failings of Turkey are all very subtle and told through simple stories. For the purposes of this project, I will focus solely on two chapters which deal directly with Kurds and the Kurdish Question.

The main motifs in Dawn are feminism and post-colonial critique of the state. In many instances throughout the book, these motifs are visible underneath an intricately woven network of tragedy and humor.

## Seher:

The second story in the book, titled Seher after the main character, follows the life of a young woman. After agreeing to go out on a date with a young man named Hayri, Seher is ambushed by Hayri and his two friends and they sexually assault her. Seher returns home in shock, covered in dirt and blood. She is washed by her mother, and when the men of the house return, they decide that Seher must be killed to restore the family honor. The mother begs and pleads with her husband to not kill their daughter, but it is no use. (Demirtas, 2017)

There are two main reasons why Seher as a story is relevant to this project. The first reason is the location in which Seher is set: Adana. Adana is a city that has a mixed population: while it is majority Turkish, there are also minority populations of Kurds and Arab. The second reason is that the author does not at any point reveal the culture and ethnicity of Seher and her family. The name Seher itself is emblematic of this deliberate ambiguity within the story as, despite originating from an Arabic word, it is a common name within Kurdish, Arabic, and Turkish societies.

These two reasons play into the overarching theme of this book, which is that the problems of Turkey are not a necessarily Kurdish nor Turkish; rather it is a broad issue which affects the whole of the country. The issue of honor killing, which has religious connotations, has been largely associated with the country's Kurdish population due the orientalist relationship that Turkey has with Kurds, is here shown to the reader as an issue stemming from patriarchal cultures, and hence should not be attributed to any particular ethnic group.

The feminist motif, despite being very present in nearly all of the scenes within this story, is emphasized in the final two lines of the story, "One evening in a forest, three men robbed Seher of her dreams. One night in an empty field, three men robbed Seher of her life." (Demirtas, 2017, p.51) This motif allows the story to bypass the problem of ethnicity and instead bring attention to the victims of such practices, regardless of their cultural background, which negates the effects of othering that the state has perpetuated since its foundation.

As Edward Said argues, the sense of self and other "is a part of the creation of colonial authority." (Loomba, 2005, p.66) From this perspective Seher serves to dissolve the barrier between ethnic groups within Turkey, and instead of laying the blame at the feet of a particular ethnic group, it points to a culture of patriarchy. The policy of the Turkish state, which has emboldened racists and nationalists and created an effect of othering, cannot be reinforced through stories like Seher, because through its deliberate ambiguity Seher makes patriarchy the enemy to all readers who sympathize with women who have had their agency stripped from them. Through this Demirtas is able to challenge the constructed orientalist narrative, and instead he identifies a non-culture specific problem with which many cultures struggle.

Seher can be seen as the antithesis to another story that I have highlighted in this project: The Miracle, which reproduces the orientalist themes and attributes backwardness to the Kurdish population.

### A Magnificent Ending:

The second story worthy of highlighting for this project is the last one in Dawn titled A Magnificent Ending. A Magnificent Ending describes the future that Demirtas and his contemporaries aspire to attain. In that story the horrors, which are sprinkled through the

rest of the book, are non-existent. Peaceful coexistence and equal rights and opportunities have been achieved and the Kurdish Question is seemingly solved. In many ways *A Magnificent Ending* is the natural ending for a book that aims to break down the concepts of othering and division in Turkey.

It tells the story of Bêkes, a Kurdish young man, who after finishing medical school is chosen by the city council to be their representative at a conference in America. (Ibid.) The story references present day events which allows Demirtas to link his story world to our reality. For example: “[Bêkes’ mother] had been pregnant with him when they killed her husband. It was only after years of hardship and persecution that things finally took a turn for the better.” (ibid., p.148) However, these events are relegated to the pages of history, as the description of society tells of Kurdish schools being established, healthcare being provided, and “Knowing how hard it would be to rid themselves of their old habits, they cultivated patience, building their lives one brick at a time. [...] Their goal was to create a model of social economy that was fully democratic. [...] the judicial system was fair and unbiased. People’s assemblies worked on the principle of direct democracy, adopting an open-minded approach to issues such as gender, faith, and lifestyles. [...] and now, despite its painful history, the country had become a model for peaceful coexistence, earning the admiration of the entire world.” (ibid., pp.149-150) Here Demirtas is referencing his party’s political ambitions of direct democracy on the foundation of the political philosophy of democratic confederalism, a political philosophy developed by PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan. (Maisel, 2018) It is also a reference to Turkey’s broken promise of autonomy for the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Beyond this there are also smaller details that point to present day problems that Kurds face in Turkey, such as the freedom to give their children Kurdish name; this is highlighted in a short paragraph where the main character visits his father and uncle’s graves, and names on their headstones are Mehmet Tunç and Ahmet Tunç, Turkish names, while the main character and his friend are called Bêkes and Bawer, Kurdish names. (Demirtas, 2017, p.151)

In many ways, when looking at *Dawn* from start to finish, similarities can be seen to James Baldwin’s *A Letter to my Nephew*. Both *Dawn* and *A Letter to my Nephew* reinstate the agency of the oppressed and call for, not anger and hatred against the oppressors, but understanding and compassion. Demirtas’s stories outline the struggles of Kurds and Turks,

showing that neither is inferior to the other, and ends the book with optimistic future based on coexistence and democracy.

In his preface Demirtas writes that he is imprisoned not for what he has done, but for who he is and what he believes in. (Demirtas, 2017) Likewise, Baldwin writes, “You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. [...] You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being.” (Baldwin, 1962) However, neither of the authors leave their reader with hopelessness, rather they suggest that those who oppress them are likewise victims however they are equally capable of changing society. Demirtas makes this point by saying that many look to him as a moral compass and an agent for change, but if that quality is what makes people look to him, then they surely find the same quality in every citizen of Turkey regardless of ethnicity, age, or religion so long as they choose to come to terms with the reality of the country. (Demirtas, 2017) Similar to Demirtas, Baldwin writes to his nephew that he must accept those who have caused oppression as they too are victims, “They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.” (Baldwin, 1962)

In this sense what Dawn, and in particular A Magnificent Ending, achieves is emanating the same message that Baldwin’s Letter does, which is that the oppressors and the oppressed are both victims, and society requires both if there is to be progress.

Baldwin finishes his piece by writing, “You have, and many of us have, defeated [the oppressor’s intention to leave you to perish in the ghetto] and by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality. But these men are your brothers, your lost younger brothers, and if the word "integration" means anything, this is what it means, that we with love shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it, for this is your home, my friend. Do not be driven from it. Great men have done great things here and will again and we can make America what America must become. (Baldwin, 1962)

A Magnificent Ending creates the same effect. Through referencing the country’s past pain this effect is emphasized. And while historically Turkey has labelled the Kurds as backwards, Demirtas challenges that assumption by providing a future vision of democratic society founded on the principles of a political philosophy that was developed by a Kurdish

politician. Like Baldwin, Demirtas encourages his Kurdish readers by reminding them that they are not what the oppressors describe them to be as they too have contributed to society and are able to help in its development.

Like Baldwin's Letter, Dawn falls perfectly into the scope of post-colonial literature, which aims to rectify history and give agency back to the colonized. As Loomba argues about African-Americans engaging in restructuring their cultures to break free from the colonial dynamic that has shaped their reality, within the United States (Loomba, 2005), the same can be said about Demirtas' writing here, where he brings attention to the achievements and potential of Kurds in Turkey. This touches on Loomba's view on post-coloniality where "post-coloniality should 'signify not so much subjectivity 'after' the colonial experience, [rather] as a subjectivity of oppositionality to imperializing/colonizing discourses and practices'" (Ibid., p.16)

Both of these stories in Dawn are the author's attempts to challenge the colonial history and present of Turkey. While the two stories engage with this problem in different ways, we can see that it breaks from the established narrative and presents a view which is in opposition to the constructed reality.

## Snow by Orhan Pamuk

Orhan Pamuk is among the most successful Turkish writers of the modern age. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006, and has, due to his writings, been taken to court by the Turkish government on more than one occasion.

His novel Snow is a drama in genre and political in nature as it focuses on the diversity of cultures and political opinions in Turkey. Snow follows the main character Ka, who is a poet, as he returns to the city of Kars from Germany, where he has lived in exile for over a decade, to win the love of a woman named Ipek. However, Ka does not reveal this intention, and instead he goes claiming to want to investigate the rising suicide rates among Muslim women and girls in Kars in order to write an article about it. The motivation of the women, labeled as the head-scarf girls, is explained to be a form of ultimate protest in opposition to the government depriving them of the right to wear headscarves. As Ka arrives in Kars, a heavy snowfall isolates the city from the rest of the country. Sunay Zaim, a washed-



up actor and aspiring politician, takes advantage of Kars' isolation and stages a political coup, which leads to the city being dominated by murder, treachery, and chaos.

In *Snow*, Kars represents the whole of Turkey, with its divisions and its problems. The drama that takes place in Kars throughout the novel is a look back at Turkey's history, and a commentary on how the divisions between east and west, religious and secular, and Turk and non-Turk have shaped the reality of the country.

The main conflict, outside of Ka's romantic pursuit of Ipek, is the clash of the Muslim population with the Kemalist ideology of the state. The novel's inciting incident happens in a café where Ka and Ipek meet to talk. While there, they witness the murder of the director for the Institute of Education. Ipek tells Ka that, "The director of the Institute of Education wasn't letting covered girls into the classroom, [...] That's why that poor dear man was killed." (Pamuk, 2005, p.43) Immediately, Pamuk involves the reader in the political divide in Turkey, and the oppression of certain sections of the population, while also providing an example of the reaction of the oppressed. In contrast to how politicians and the media in Turkey has painted the eastern regions of the country, we can see that Pamuk aims to provide a reason for the violent act rather than attribute the violence to some notion of cultural inferiority or anti-Turkish sentiment. While not excusing the murder, Pamuk does provide context.

The themes in Pamuk's *Snow* are many, ranging from feminism, to nationalism, to the dichotomy of Turkey's eastern and western identities. For the purposes of this project, however, I will focus most of my analysis on the parts of the story which directly address the forceful imposition of Turkey's Kemalist ideology on the more conservative population of the eastern provinces of Turkey, Kurdish and non-Kurdish, and outline how this part of the story is Pamuk's commentary on the foundation of the Republic of Turkey and the chaos which it has caused. For this, the character of Sunay Zaim is most relevant.

Starting with his name, Sunay Zaim is a combination of the words 'zaim', originating from Arabic (زعيم), which means leader, and 'sunay' which is a common name in Turkey, but is also the romanization of the Arabic word (صناعي), literally translated: 'artificial'. Then, looking at Sunay Zaim's name, we can understand him to be an artificial leader, or fake leader.

This name also fulfills a secondary purpose in revealing Sunay's character in this story, which becomes clearer throughout the novel. The name Sunay Zaim, through its

connection to Arabic, is a nod to language in Turkey in the 20<sup>th</sup> century before the Kemalist modernization efforts, when the language used in literature and in intellectual circles was “dominated in the by Arabic and Persian vocabulary. [...] For instance, the written language consisted of 75% Arabic, Persian, and French words, but by 1970 words of Turkish origin had risen to 80% and borrowals [sic.] reduced to only 20% [...]” (Halman, 1972, p.227) Sunay’s name provides an apt description for his character as someone who is a representative of a past period of Turkey, and who, throughout the novel, aims to supplant himself as the head of a movement which he believes Kars desperately needs.

Sunay’s beliefs seem to be entirely based on his reverence for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Kemalist ideology. Throughout the novel Pamuk shows that Sunay is an avid Kemalist, and Sunay’s partiality to Atatürk and his ideology is one of his defining characteristics. For example, writing about Sunay’s theater company, one newspaper in Kars describes it as being “known throughout Turkey for its theatrical tribute to Atatürk, the Republic, and the Enlightenment [...]” (Pamuk, 2005, p.34)

Pamuk delves deeper into Sunay’s mentality, and his beliefs are best presented in a conversation with Ka, where he talks about the citizens of Kars as being lower than himself and in need of saving and guidance, “‘For days on end, they sit in those teahouses; day after day they go there and do nothing,’ he said. ‘You see hundreds of these jobless, luckless, hopeless, motionless poor creatures in every town; in the country as a whole there must be hundreds of thousands of them, if not millions. They’ve forgotten how to keep themselves tidy, they’ve lost the will to button up their stained jackets, they have so little energy they can hardly move their arms and legs, their powers of concentration are so weak they can’t follow a story to its conclusion, and they’ve even forgotten how to laugh at a joke, these poor brothers of mine.’ [...] These men were all too numerous, ‘as we’ve seen in the wretched city of Kars.’” (pp.194-195) Sunay’s beliefs very accurately reflect the Kemalist approach and the Orientalist discourse disseminated by the state claiming that the Turkish Kemalist elite needed to civilize the backward-minded population of the country. This is similar to what Zeydanlıoğlu’s remarks about Turkey, where he argues that the Kemalist elite saw themselves “as the rightful teachers” who must bring the others into modernity. (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008 p.4) Pamuk reinforces this point further in the story, through Sunay claiming that those in Kars vote for politicians not because they represent their religious culture and want to have their voice represented politically, but rather because they want to

torture themselves, "During elections, it was out of a desire for self-punishment that they voted for the most wretched parties and the most loathsome candidates [...]" (Pamuk, 2005, p.194) Likewise, Zeydanlioglu, argues that the Kemalist elite believe that the 'natives' are unable to rule themselves or represent themselves, "they therefore need to be ruled and represented." (Zeydanlioglu, 2008, p.5)

This orientalist belief is repeatedly shown to be a core characteristic of Sunay's ideology throughout the novel. Pamuk goes to the extent of even creating a sense of cognitive dissonance within Sunay to show how deeply he is wrapped up in the Kemalist ideology that he wants to force upon the citizens of Kars. When the leader of the head-scarf girls, Kadife, tells Sunay that the women's choice to commit suicide was a decision they made on their own, Sunay replies, "But everyone knows that here in Kars there's no such thing as a free choice; all people want is to escape from the next beating, to take refuge in the nearest community." (Pamuk, 2005, p.392) Pamuk's use of irony here to expose the Kemalist philosophy as a simplistic one shines through in Sunay's understanding of the world and his blindness to his own hypocrisy. While Kadife explains that women's suicide is not merely a means of escape, rather it is a means to protect her pride, Sunay continuously misunderstands her, or chooses to misunderstand her. (pp.393-395) The cognitive dissonance within Sunay, a subconscious effort to hold both his worldview and the reality which contradicts it, is shown when he claims that his coup was for the purpose of freeing women, "I staged this revolution precisely so you women could be as independent as women in Europe. That's why I'm asking you to remove your scarf." (p.396) Here again Pamuk uses irony to make his point and we see Sunay, and by extension his Kemalist ideology, reject the idea that women can make decisions independently while simultaneously attempting to control what they wear in order to allow them to be free and independent. In these scenes we can see Pamuk reflect on the history of Turkey by showing how the reader that the Kemalist elites' actions were hypocritical in nature. That while they claimed to liberalize Turkey and bring the country into modernity, they imposed an authoritarian system, which decreased freedom, and instead of a true form of secularism they created an anti-religion dynamic, which affected groups such as the Kurds in a major way.

Orhan Pamuk's point regarding the Kemalist mindset in *Snow* is a thread throughout his body of work. In his nonfiction work he talks about this as well. For example, regarding

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's views toward the people of the more conservative provinces, including the Kurds, in his collection of essays *Other Colors* he writes, "Either way, it is evident that Atatürk identifies Europe with civilization; it follows that that which is not European is humiliatingly uncivilized." (Pamuk, 2007, p.189) Pamuk likens Atatürk's worldview to that of the French writer Andre Gide, whose opinion on civilization culminated in one paragraph of writing, which Pamuk describes as 'inelegant racism': "For too long I thought that there was more than one civilization, more than one culture that could rightfully claim our love and deserve our enthusiasm... Now I know that our occidental (I was about to say French) civilization is not only the most beautiful; I believe-I know-that it is the only one." (Pamuk, 2007, p.185) Pamuk uses the example of Atatürk imposing the statutory adoption of Western clothing as one of the ways Atatürk forced Westernization, or as they called it 'modernization', on the country. He quotes Atatürk during one of his speeches, where he ridicules a man in the audience for wearing a fez and calling him uncivilized. (Pamuk, 2007, p.188) Pamuk points out the same contradiction, leading to the same type of cognitive dissonance as Sunay Zaim, among Kemalists and Atatürk himself. Atatürk believed that the nation was civilized, but their apparel misrepresented them, yet simultaneously he believed his country was in dire of need of being civilized through Westernization. (ibid.) If reading that confused you then it is for good reason: the hypocrisy of the Kemalist ideology inherently creates confusion and identity crises. Much like the contradiction in Sunay Zaim's belief that he must force his will upon the women in Kars in order for them to be free, the rest of the Kemalist ideology is equally contradictory. According to Pamuk, herein lies the problem of Turkish nationalism through Kemalism: it is based on a foreign concept, that nationalists want to impose on their citizens, which makes the country's own non-Western traditions, identity, and history something to be ashamed of, making those who keep their traditions and non-western identity alive, such as the Kurds, a target for violence and repression, "In our own country, the concept of Europe justifies the use of force, radical political change, the ruthless severing of tradition. From improvement of women's rights to violations of human rights, from democracy to military dictatorship, many things are justified by an idea of the West that stresses this concept of Europe and reflects a positivist utilitarianism." (Pamuk, 2007, p.187)

Beyond Sunay's character, Pamuk also uses the story to comment on the way Sunay gains power, recreating the dynamics of how historically the Kemalists in Turkey have gained

and maintained power, and how it has affected Kurds and others who have rejected Kemalism. The Kemalist ideology's rise to power is put under the spotlight, quite literally, in the chapter titled *A Play About a Girl who Burns her Head Scarf*. (Pamuk, 2005, p.147) In this chapter Sunay puts on a performance of a Turkish play that is called *My Fatherland or my Head Scarf*. In the play a scarved Muslim woman declares her independence through removing her headscarf and burning it. When the Muslim men in her family find out, they demand that she put the scarf back on, and as a result she suffers the violence of the "bearded, prayer-bead-clutching religious fanatics" who want to kill her. But suddenly, "the brave young soldiers of the Republic burst onto the scene and save her." (Pamuk, 2005, p.148) Sunay's coup and proceeding brutality against those he deems a threat to his power, runs parallel to the early days of Turkey and Ataturk. Who, after having won the war of independence, began labeling those who opposed him as tools of the enemy, repressing them militarily and culturally, with the Kurds bearing the brunt of those policies. (McDowall, 2007) Likewise, in the aftermath of the coup, it is the Kurds who become Sunay's target. Similar to how Ataturk's government removed Kurds from positions of power, in *Snow* a detective placed in Kars is pushed aside because of his Kurdish background. (p.209) Then, as a reaction to the coup, Kurdish youth start supporting the Kurdish PKK guerillas out of desperation and their repression radicalizes them, "[...] this situation had led some of these youths to nurture strange and frightful dreams of revenge, as was reported by quite a few of the detectives who spent their days dozing in the city's coffeehouses. They'd overheard youths discussing bomb and kidnap plots, possible attacks on the statue of Atatürk, a scheme to poison the city's water supplies, and another to blow up its bridges." (p.209) Pamuk here challenges the state's narrative: where Ataturk disenfranchised the Kurds who had been denied of their autonomy and reacted with rebellions, Pamuk creates the argument that it was the authoritarianism of the state which pushed Kurds into rebellion. Where the state has labeled the PKK as terrorists (Maisel, 2018), Pamuk creates the argument that they are acting out of desperation to protect their freedom against an authoritarian state. Pamuk's way of looking at Kurdish unrest in Turkey also mirrors the way the literature of theory of internal colonialism describes the reaction of the colonized against the colonizers, which states that the colonized group turns to revolt and rebellion against the colonizers as a response to their subjugation. (Chaloult & Chaloult, 1979)

Snow's messaging comes to a simple conclusion in the final chapter of the book, where Pamuk, abandoning subtlety, leaves the reader with a statement that directly addresses them. After Ka's death, his friend Orhan visits Kars four years later. Orhan meets an author named Fazil who takes him around the city. It is then revealed that after Sunay's death, the Kemalists still had won, as when the snow melted, special operations teams had come in and taken out all they deemed a threat, and in the process, "stayed here for a few days so they could kill a few more Islamists and Kurdish nationalists." (Pamuk, 2005, p.413) Before Orhan leaves Kars, Fazil delivers the story's poignant message, "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, anything you say about any of us. No one could understand us from so far away." (p.421)

The relevance of Snow in any political and historical analysis of Turkey and the Kurds lies in those final lines. While Turkish politics is rife with nationalist Kemalist discourse, it remains relevant to understand how the country has reached the point it is at today. The state has hidden the troubles which it has imposed on its citizens, and Snow does a good job of bringing attention to that problem.

## Discussion:

Traditionally we have not looked at the countries that Kurds are indigenous to, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, as colonial projects, mainly because they have been products of periods of decolonization. However, at least in the case of Turkey, it seems that such a designation is appropriate. While when we think of colonialism we often think of forms of colonialism where the indigenous groups have been pushed out and the colonizers have replaced them or forms of colonialism that has exploited a geographic location outside of its own borders and its population for resources, the literature on colonialism shows that there is a need to broaden our definition of what we think of as a colonial project.

Ania Loomba's comments regarding colonialism of the modern age is particularly relevant. She identifies the role of the colonality of power in the nation-states that have been established as a result of decolonization through analyzing the inequalities in power distribution in India as presented in Indian literature, "In a moving story, 'Shishu' (Children), the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi describes how tribal peoples have been literally and figuratively crippled in post-independence India. National 'development' has no space for

tribal cultures or beliefs, and the attitude of even the well-meaning government officer, Mr Singh, towards the tribal people replicates colonialist views of non-Western peoples—to him, they are mysterious, superstitious, uncivilised, backward. In other words, they are like children who need to be brought into line with the rest of the country.” (Loomba, 2005, pp.14-15) Here again the role of literature in challenging this reality remains of utmost importance. Much like Ataturk’s attitude toward Kurds and others who he deemed uncivilized, the groups in India which have retained their non-Western views are chastised and their cultures scrutinized.

The role of the modern nation-state in colonizing its own people remains a problem in many places around the world, and in this way, colonization has not ended for them: one cannot be post-colonial when they are effectively still colonized.

In May of 2023 Turkey held elections for parliament and the presidency. Throughout the period of elections, the elements of colonialism that Blauner points out have been in full view. In the first round of the presidential elections none of the three candidates reached the 50% requirement to win, which meant the election headed into a runoff between the two candidates with the most votes. The third candidate, Sinan Ogan, who received nearly 6% of the votes, announced that he would support the candidate who promised to push the HDP and Huda Par (two Kurdish parties on opposite ends of the political spectrum) out of politics in Turkey. (Karakas & Hayatsever, 2023) It is clear from this statement that Ogan’s intention is to cripple Kurdish political voices, as the HDP is a secular left-wing party and Huda Par is an Islamist right-wing party. The only thing common between the two parties is that they are Kurdish. Only days later, Ogan announced his support for Erdogan in the runoff, leaving us with the assumption that Erdogan and his AKP party have agreed to this condition. (ibid.)

Similarly, the racism and othering of Kurds has been a main component of the election, as Erdogan continuously attacked his opponent Kilicdaroglu of being supported by terrorists, while the reality was that Kilicdaroglu had the support of the Kurdish HDP. Erdogan’s efforts went as far as publicly claiming that a doctored video which shows the Kurdish PKK supporting Kilicdaroglu to be proof of his statement. (Sparrow, 2023) The othering of Kurds in contemporary Kurdish politics is continuously used by politicians, and this allows for the racism to continue. Pamuk’s *Snow*, in the way it shows Kurds being treated

in Kars, becomes relevant once again when we look at how elections in Turkey become a platform for hatred and racism against Kurds.

Finally, one of the big problems for Kurdish voters in Turkey is the removal of democratically elected representatives and being replaced by Erdogan's allies. This also has become a major point in the elections, with Kilicdaroglu vowing to end the practice, while the AKP has doubled down on it using the argument of terrorism to justify their actions. (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2023) Once again, following Blauner's concept of the colonized being represented by the colonizers, we can see how this element of colonialism is practiced presently in Turkey.

As mentioned, post-coloniality as concept of living in the aftermath of a colony cannot be applied to Kurds in Turkey who are effectively still living in a colonial reality. Demirtas and Pamuk's work is not post-colonial in the sense that they are writing about a by-gone period, rather they are post-colonial because they are challenging the practices of a colonial state which is still active today. Pamuk's *Snow* might look at the history of Turkey, but it can be applied to understanding Turkey's present problems, as they stem out of that history.

This trend of writing and speaking about Kurds in Turkey in opposition to the state's narrative has been growing in the past two decades. Sabanoglu's article from 2014 explores this very thing, while also talking about the pushback from the government during that time. The detainment of those who speak up has been a common occurrence, showing that despite the AKP opening the public space for conversations about Kurds, there still is a limit to what can be talked about and what cannot be talked about. This type of control over the media and public rhetoric is emblematic of the materialist state of media which McQuail and Deuze have conceptualized. When the discourse has reached points that the government could no longer tolerate, the police and military have taken lethal measures. One example is the case of the Kurdish human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi: Tahir Elçi's message was one of peace, calling an end to the violence which has ravaged Turkey's Kurdish region, yet despite calling for peace the police still killed him. (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2021) The case of Elçi shows that the government takes deliberate actions to ensure the continuation of the conflict. Like the case of Demirtas, Elçi's murder shows that it is in the colonizing government's best interest to kill or silence any voices which call for a solution, because a solution likely means equality and justice and those two things are incompatible with a



system which is built upon the othering and subjugation of one group of people. Like Demirtas and Elçi, and the number of writers mentioned in Sabanoglu's article, Pamuk likely would have been jailed or killed if not for his popularity with the Turkish public, which staged mass protests when he was taken to court. (Flood, 2021) His Turkish identity likely is another factor which should be considered, because this has allowed him a level of freedom that Kurdish figures have not enjoyed. As Mehmet Kurt argued, this contract of Turkishness does come with benefits, which allow individuals who accept it to attain a privilege not granted to those who reject it. (Kurt, 2021)

## Conclusion:

In Dawn Demirtas writes that literature and politics are not all too different and both play similar roles in the development of society. In the case of Turkey, this is undeniably the case. Whether looking at the history of the state, through the work of Atsız, or looking at the present problems through the Pamuk's Snow, we can find the sparks of hope and the roots of problems.

Understanding Turkey as a colonial state helps to simplify the process of solving the problems which have plagued the country for a century. Since 1923, millions in Turkey, of various backgrounds, have become victims of an ideology that has subjugated them for the goal of modernizing the state, and now, a hundred years later, we can see that the ideology has repeatedly failed the citizens of the country.

Acknowledging that failure can help in creating a Turkey which in a hundred years will resemble Demirtas' A Magnificent Ending more than Pamuk's Snow.

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