



CULTURAL SYMBOLS AND ISSUES OF HEADSCARVES IN ORHAN PAMUK'S *SNOW*

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a feminist interpretation of Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, a book about women fighting to identify their identities in a patriarchal culture. Following the Young Turkish Revolution (1908), Turkish women experienced bravery and inspiration. The story depicts a microcosm of Ottoman civilization, Turkish politics, society, and culture, all threatened by Eastern and Western diagonal pulls before Turkish society ultimately turns into an ice lump. The writer uses the topic of girls' headscarf bans in schools to explain this complicated subject. The education department hopes to introduce Western culture to Turkey by doing this. Pamuk makes an effort to lessen the dichotomous oppositions between men and women. By doing this, he opens the door for a compromise between Turkey's New Republicanism and political Islam (traditional). *Snow* is a representation of loneliness and cold. Istanbul, then, represents a city isolated from the outside world. It has evolved into a conservatives' makeshift jail. By the time East and West meet, the snow should have melted. Finally, it is important to note that Pamuk supports Westernisation with a caveat.

Key Words: Religious Issues, Headscarves, Political Clashes, Feminism, and East-West
Conflict

Introduction

Orhan Pamuk was awarded the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. In his books, he addresses several global issues, including the search for a new identity, the rivalry between East and West, the influence of Western culture on Turkish society, the rapid growth of consumerism, feminism, and the tedious pursuit of love. He is the author of 10 books, some of which are excellent, such as *My Name is Red* (1998), *Snow* (2002), *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), and others. This essay offers a feminist interpretation of Orhan Pamuk's well-known book *Snow*. It tells the tale of Turkish women fighting to identify their identities in a patriarchal culture. The difficulties faced by Ottoman women may be understood by drawing comparisons to Victorian England.

The difficulties faced by Ottoman women Jerichau-Baumann's rationale for bringing so many of her paintings to Istanbul was not to gift them to Sultan Abdulaziz. Instead, she intended to use them to attract lucrative commissions from the upper echelons of Ottoman society. Indeed, her ultimate ambition was to paint portraits of women inside elite Ottoman." (Roberts, 2)

Tradition and religion played major roles in each of them. Furthermore,

patriarchal tyranny permeated every industry. Victorian women did not have to endure as much male tyranny compared to Ottoman civilization. Following the Young Turk Revolution (1908), the fight for women's emancipation in Turkey gained momentum. This had a significant influence on Pamuk's work. Under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkish society began to modernize Turkish women. Then, the male/female binary opposition began to disappear. Atatürk had to balance the new Republicanism and political or traditional Islam without gravely harming Turkish society today. Kemal's period was criticized.

Kemalists in the front rows weren't Kemalists at all — they were cowards!' said Turgut Bey to Ka after it was all over. It was not only religious extremists who objected to a covered woman baring her head; everyone else in the theatre was afraid that this spectacle might enrage the unemployed men witnessing it, not to mention the youthful horde milling at the back of the hall (Pamuk 151).

Orhan Pamuk takes a risk by engaging in that political game. During his interviews with international media, Pamuk repeatedly states that he is a secularist, contemporary, and, from the perspective of his readers, a postmodernist. Although he



expresses his opinions on feminism, he refrains from using the book as a vehicle for spreading misinformation about women's emancipation. Thus, searching for much didacticism in the book is unnecessary. Although he is a liberal secular, his love of Islam does not prevent him from becoming a postmodernist author: "Postmodernist thinkers disagree with one another about what postmodernism is and which artists and writers qualify as 'postmodern.'" (Berger, 36)

Ka's Adventure

Ka is the protagonist; after a twelve-year absence, he returns to Germany from Kars. "The protagonist, a poet known as Ka, is presented with different, often conflicting angles of the same story." (Hartle, 22) There is always a contradiction to his persona. He alternates between the commotion of the present and his early recollections. His notes are filled with nutritious recollections of his childhood home and his time spent with his parents, which inspire his poetry. His first poem, "Snow," was a startling flood of recollections. Ka now only expresses closeness to Ipek because of their love for her.

As he watched the snow outside the window fall as slowly and silently as the snow in his dream, the traveller fell into a long-

desired, long-awaited reverie; cleansed by memories of innocence, he succumbed to optimism and dared to believe himself at home in this world. Soon afterward, he did something else that he had not done for years and fell asleep in his seat. (Pamuk, 4)

In politics, he used conservatives and secularists alike for his gain. However, Ka finds herself in a binary once again while considering religion. As an atheist, he arrived in Kars. However, he is received as a convert upon his return to Germany. The diptych panel skilfully depicts the protagonist at both of these stages. Ka is also a flaneur who travels alone in Kars, encountering and seeing many people. Although his inner mind constantly processes his experiences and artistic inspiration, he exhibits a detached, less invested attitude toward everything around him. Meanwhile, his subjective mind never stops wandering within, searching for his ideas, eventually producing the lyrical result. Ka watches everything that goes on around him with objectivity. He records everything while simultaneously fading into his recollections like a flaneur.

Ka's identity as a flaneur is concreted in every sense by this simultaneous to-and-fro travel between his subjective recollections and objective

actuality. Ka also reaches a flaneur level in his line of work level. Ka visited Kars to write a news article on the rising suicide rate. In this instance, he is an impartial journalist who shows little personal interest in or contact with the subject. Ka's subjective poetic sensibilities were stimulated by his objective experiences with these kinds of individuals and circumstances. Ka, the flaneur in this photograph, is a subjective poet and objective journalist.

The female lead, Kadife, demonstrates incredible strength on par with the male characters. She represents the women in Turkish politics who are unable to define themselves. She seems like a revolutionary. She was both a religious and a political person. In this instance, religion turns into politics. She is the leader of the group of head scarf girls. Kadife and Blue are in a relationship. And the Turkish police use this as justification to enforce their rule banning headscarves.

This was how Ka discovered that Blue was also known as 'the Master' among his admirers. But it was just about the only thing Ka knew about Blue — aside from his being a political Islamist of some notoriety. He remembered reading in the Turkish newspapers in Germany that, years ago, Blue had been involved in a murder. Still,

plenty of Islamic terrorists committed murders, but few of them became famous (Pamuk 71).

They believed that because Kadife was the headscarf girls' leader, they could end the uprising via her. "Kadife accepts this proposal and is ready to bare her headscarf and show her hair to the public. She is ready to change sides and remove her headscarf to the audience's chagrin" (Makandar, 5). However, Kadife disproved their estimates. Even though she consented to take off her headscarf in exchange for Blue's freedom, she killed the general with a gunshot at the point where she was supposed to execute the deed. This was an insult to the authority and independence of women. With her objective approach towards political crimes and her feelings towards her love, Kadife turns into a flaneur. She resisted temptation and provocation to fight for her beliefs and stand by them. She demonstrated that she was a regular girl who yearned for love and her love's presence simultaneously as she emerged as a political figure. Her main motivation for removing the scarf was to give Blue more freedom.

The Holy Koran is the Word of God, and when God makes a clear and definite command, it's not a matter for ordinary mortals to question,' said Kadife. She sounded very sure of herself. 'But



do not assume from this that our religion leaves no room for discussion. I will say that I'm not prepared to discuss my faith with an atheist — or even a secularist. (Pamuk 114)

She notices everything around her, just as Ka does. However, Ka studied the outward manifestations more closely and related them to his inner personality and past experiences. Without regard to religious bias or prejudice, Kadife kept a watchful eye on the inner workings of every event. Her discussions with Blue demonstrate her subjective phase. She was always afraid to tell him she needed a life with Blue and worried about his safety, even if they talked about the turmoil and upheaval. Because of their numerous complimentary and contrasting characteristics, Ka and Kadife may be placed in the panels next to each other in a diptych. They each create two love tales that run parallel to the main narrative. Despite being sisters, Ipek and Kadife have quite different ideas and aspirations from one another. She is positioned next to Kadife in the diptych to highlight the two extremes of the circumstance because of her contrasting characteristics from Kadife. As a flaneur, Ipek's objective sense is the least apparent. She looks at things with a cursory observation, not giving them much consideration or allowing her mind to

wander. She doesn't give anything any particular attention; everything goes past her. Her family is the primary focus of her subjective thoughts, and she is unsure about accepting Ka's offer. The story doesn't reveal much about the emotions and thoughts of the other characters since the narrator mostly focuses on Ka's thoughts and feelings as an impersonal entity. Their discussions with Ka are still available for them to examine further.

The feminist portrayal in Pamuk

In Orhan Pamuk's female characters. This introduction of "woman" is loud and booming, especially in Snow. "Pamuk brings together all the female characters in Snow towards their common feminist struggle for freedom of identity and individuality from the chains of traditional, cultural, and patriarchal restrictions." (Devi, 4) The protagonist of the book's female characters, Kadife, seems to be a revolutionary. In his best-selling book Snow, written in 1990 and set in the remote region of Kars on the Turkish-Armenian border, Orhan Pamuk explores political themes via a love tale. In Snow, Turkey's politics, society, and Ottoman culture are all microcosmized and threatened by the forces of the East and the West. After living in exile in Germany for twelve years, the protagonist Ka—a poet and leftist—returned to her native Turkey.

His buddy, a writer, asked Ka to write a story on the next municipal election, which would pit leftists, Kurds, and Islamic extremists against each other in a heated battle. In addition, he is tasked with looking into the reasons behind the suicides of young girls who are forbidden from attending schools unless they wear headscarves. Ka takes this offer to learn more about his beloved Ipek. The education department and the school administration restrict female pupils from wearing headscarves on school property, which sets off the female struggle. The institution's director is assassinated in the bid. This is the first shot fired by the fundamentalist Islamists who are impeding the advancement of women against the reformists.

The fight for justice and equality for women in patriarchal societies has not been a recent development. The main issue in this book is that headscarves are prohibited at Turkish institutions and schools by government decree. "In *Snow*, gender discrimination is there when women have been deprived of the right to wear headscarves in public places by the government. Thus, *Snow* becomes a typical example of women living in a patriarchal system." (Abbas, 461) Conventional society strongly objects to this. However, the government forbids wearing head coverings. The situation gets

so out of control that some girls drop out of school, and others even consider suicide.²²

Headscarves

With the whole family's support, the girl's mother, who donned a headscarf, had undoubtedly set the standard. However, the actual force behind the fight against the expulsion of covered women from the Institute had come from her schoolmates. Undoubtedly, it was they who instructed her to see the headscarf as a representation of "political Islam." Therefore, the child refused to take off her headscarf despite her parents' stated wishes, which meant that the police would have to remove her from the institute's hallways regularly. "Some women have to give up the headscarf entirely, or wear wigs, just to finish their education or work. When a woman removes her headscarf, the major obstacle disappears, but not entirely." (Elver, 34) The child started telling her father that life had no purpose and that she didn't want to live after seeing some of her classmates giving up and covering their heads and others choosing to wear wigs instead of headscarves.

When the authorities outlawed wearing headscarves in educational institutions nationwide, many women and girls refused to comply. The rebels at the Institute of Education in Kars had been



barred first from the classrooms and then, following an edict from Ankara, from the entire institute (Pamuk,16)

Kadife is the brave girl and head of the conservative faction among the traditionalists. She confirms with a few males who share her beliefs. They assassinate the institution's director for outlawing head coverings. This led to the country's declaration of martial rule, during which time certain leaders suffered horrendous treatment and even lost their lives. The Turkish military is doing a good job of controlling the activists. The government quickly gained control of the activists in this conflict: shortly after the coup began, Z Demirkol and his allies shot and murdered one of the two Kurdish lads they had discovered painting slogans on the walls of Halitpaşa Avenue. They had grabbed another youngster and battered him till he passed out.

Turkey is a secular nation akin to the West. Sunday aims to incite women's reformist sentiments to rebel against headscarves, which, at this point, have come to represent the feminist movement. Because Sunay assisted the police in arresting Blue, her lover and fellow revolutionary activist, Kadife despises Sunay and wants to murder him. She receives an invitation from Sunay to participate in the anti-headscarf play "My

Father Land or My Headscarf." Accepting this offer, Kadife is prepared to remove her headscarf and reveal her hair publicly. To the crowd's dismay, she is prepared to switch sides and take off her headscarf. This is just Kadife pulling a fast one to get her pet, Blue, out of Sunay's grasp. The crowd began booing and jeering Kadife as she removed her headscarf. The best is yet to come, however. As the play ends, Kadife is supposed to shoot Sunay in the last scene. Although she is supposed to play this scenario with an empty pistol, Kadife uses a real gun and murders Sunay despite her best efforts. "Kadife avenges the murder of her lover as well as her humiliation."(Erol, 417} Kadife retaliates against those who compel others to abandon their headscarves. She has exacted retribution on the girls who killed themselves, and her actions serve as a warning to others who support the government's decision to ban headscarves. It may be a message to those who, in the guise of religion or modernity, impose their will on women. The metropolis that is sealed off from the outer world is depicted in the word Snow. As a result, snow represents seclusion and is a Muslim religious emblem. Women who wear headscarves are cut off from the contemporary world. The drama Before the Ice Melt by Cevat Fehmi (Baskurt), written in Turkish, is the source of

Pamuk's title. He conveys several meanings using the metaphor of snow. The lady is the focal point of all his activities. The lady experiences what transpires outdoors first. Snow is a metaphor for icy dread, which drains and pulls.

Religious Metaphor

Snow is a metaphor for how Turkish society, secular before Atatürk, has to become more liberal and secular. Liberal secularism does not interfere with a person's right to choose which God to worship, what to dress, or what to eat. Women's wearing headscarves or veils cannot be made into a governmental policy. "Some traditional views consider it a symbol of obedience and purity, while others see it as the oppression of women." (Karimullah and Aliyah, 200) The State Intelligence Agency (MIT) maintains a very tight vigilance of individuals in Snow. The reader is informed, for example, that they employed a tenth of the populace as informers and had the files on every person in the city (197). All those spreading false information about the actors and soldiers in the city's teahouses and saying nasty things about them had been rounded up 311 thanks to various informers.

The informant is one in ten men in the nation. Whether they get married or elope with revolutionary guys, young ladies are scrutinized. Snow then

highlights a sad historical moment that contemporary Turks would want to forget. The horrific genocide between the Armenian and Turkish populations left the nation with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and teenage suicide. Young people even lost the desire to put on their filthy, tattered coats. Another idea from Pamuk that resonates with his audience is that he maintains Westernisation with a twist. Orhan Pamuk is trying to say that attempting to westernize traditional culture has probably done more harm than good.

Conclusion

Snow highlights a sad historical moment that contemporary Turks would want to forget. The horrific genocide between the Armenian and Turkish populations B left the nation with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and teenage suicide. Young people even lost the desire to put on their filthy, tattered coats. Another idea from Pamuk that resonates with his audience is that he maintains Westernisation with a twist. Orhan Pamuk is trying to say that attempting to westernize traditional culture has probably done more harm than good.



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