

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# *The Criterion*

An International Journal in English

Bi - Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

June 2014 Vol. 5, Issue-3

**5<sup>th</sup> Year of Open Access**

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

## The (Liberal Secular) “Outsider”, The Muslim Women’s Headscarf, and the Islamic Other: A Critical Reading of Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow*

**Hafis Pandikasala**

Guest Lecturer,  
Dept. of English,  
Sullamussalam Science College, Aeacode,  
Malappuram, Kerala.

This paper undertakes a critical scrutiny of contemporary Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* (2004) and *Other Colours* (2007), texts that majorly grapple with contemporary Turkey’s socio-political issues. I have tried to demonstrate the modes in which Pamuk frames the contestations regarding the public expressions of Islam in Turkey which has largely been about women wearing the headscarf and the State constraints on it with a view to deciphering its implications for our times.

Literature, as is well-known by now, can no longer be regarded as an apolitical business without any stakes in the world. It is partisan—ideological and committed to power structures, with its particular agendas—and an active participant in hegemonic constructions. Literary and cultural representations are struggles for power and meaning, and texts are sites where these struggles are carried out. Pamuk’s writings are located on a site where Islam and secularism—key concepts in our contemporary world—confront each other in particular ways. Moreover, Orhan Pamuk is a writer who addresses a global audience, a fact he himself is quite aware of. The award of the Nobel Prize for literature (2006) is not an insignificant factor in Pamuk’s receptivity throughout the global reading world as a voice of authority interpreting issues involving categories such as Islam, secularism, etc. Given these factors, it is important to read his texts for their ideological underpinnings and to comprehend the importance of such understandings for contemporary resonances. I have read *Snow* and *Other Colours* in order to lay out the liberal-secular ideology the texts are premised on, especially with regard to Islam, even as they make claims to be dialogic and polyphonic. This paper explores the issues attending liberal-secular readings of the polemical question of the Muslim women’s headscarf / hijab in the light of Pamuk’s self-avowed wish to know and engage the Islamic Other. My close reading of Orhan Pamuk’s select texts underscores the need for a critical distance from the liberal-secular ideology, something which our embattled times cry out for.

**Key Words:** Orhan Pamuk, The headscarf, Turkey, Liberal secularism

This paper seeks to explore the issues attending Turkish writer and Nobel awardee Orhan Pamuk’s engagement with the contemporary Islam in Turkey, focusing especially on his take on the question of the headscarf of Muslim women. With this end in view, it makes a close reading of *Snow* (2004), his self-avowed first and last political novel (orhanpamuk.net/biography) and complements it with inputs from his *Other Colours: Writings on Art, Life, Books and Cities* (2008) and a few of his interviews. This study, I think, would be incomplete without examining Pamuk’s take on political Islam / Islamism — an issue that he grapples with as something independent yet interlinked with the question of the headscarf of Muslim women — as well which, however, cannot be attempted here for lack of space.

### **The Popularity of Orhan Pamuk: Secularism, Islam and the West**

Orhan Pamuk is arguably one of the most prolific and a widely-debated writer of contemporary world literature. The straddling of Turkey, the country where Pamuk was born and continues to live, between the East and the West— caught between the centuries-old Ottoman Islamic cultural heritage and a twentieth century State-driven secularization drive in the aftermath of the modern nation state formation — is well documented. With its unique Muslim majority demographic status (according to the CIA's *The World Factbook*, the Muslim population of Turkey is 99.8%, the rest being composed of Christian and Jews, cia.gov), and given its relatively weaker economy among the European nations, Turkey has always been the odd one out. For instance, its entry into the European Union continues to be a political mirage. Thus, Pamuk weaves the tapestry of his oeuvre using certain central tropes such as East-West / Islam-secularism / tradition-modernity tension, something which demarcates the Turkish predicament and which he addresses from different chronological contexts. He minces no words in acknowledging that he gets his creative energy from this source (Interview with Michael Skafidas, 2000).

The public life of Islam in Turkey has witnessed a shift from the time of the Ottoman dynasty's Caliphate to the country's secularization by Kemal Attaturk, the father of the modern Turkey, to the anti-secularization drives by the Islamic circles. The contemporary political arena of Turkey is conspicuous for fierce confrontations between the Islamists and the secularists on questions such as the proper boundaries of religion and secularism, political freedom, and the Muslim women's headscarf. Pamuk's texts engage, among other things, with secularism and Islam—both that of the Ottoman past and the present—in his country.

The making of Pamuk as an established writer has of course much to do with the literary excellence and the peculiarities of the narrative adventures that set his work apart. It has perhaps a lot more to do with the particular thematic concerns that obsess it and their implications for the contemporary global geopolitical arena as well. Pamuk's popularity may also be read in relation to his location in a country where Islam and secularism—key concepts in our contemporary world— confront each other constantly. Pamuk himself is aware that he is no longer a writer writing exclusively for Turkish readers (Pamuk 2008: 375). Pamuk, it is sometimes contended, is probably being read more abroad than at home. Michael McGaha in his *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk* (2008) notes that Pamuk's much-celebrated *My Name is Red* (2001) sold more copies in the West than in Turkey thanks to the heightened interest in the Islamic world in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

### **The Liberal Secular “Outsider”**

Pamuk is not an outside figure in terms of the “tension” narratives that he chronicles. He cannot be, for he is an ineluctable part of it. He comes from an upper-class, Westernized bourgeois family which saw faith as an anachronistic entity in a world of scientific and technological breakthroughs (The chapter “Religion” in his *Istanbul: Memories of a City*). He is happy that Westernization / secularization did take place in his country, though he says he has reservations about the way the project was conceived. In Pamuk's words,

I'm not mourning the Ottoman Empire. I'm a Westernizer. I'm pleased that the Westernization took place. I'm just criticizing the limited way in which the ruling elite—meaning both the bureaucracy and the new

rich—had conceived of Westernization. They lacked the confidence necessary to create a national culture rich in its own symbols and rituals. (2008:369)

Pamuk is a self-proclaimed liberal secularist as well. The alternative that he suggests to a militant Turkish secularism which he blatantly critiques is liberal secularism. In his way of thinking, all is well with Turkey provided the Turkish secularists turned liberal. He says: “I am a secularist, but a liberal secularist. There should be a harmony between the people’s wishes and secularization energy. Turkey’s secularists should also be liberal” (kamilpasha.com)

Despite all this, he, however, sometimes appears to claim a disinterested take. In a 2005 interview to a German weekly newspaper, he makes reference to his politics-ridden country where there is always a chance for one being overexposed to “big ideas” .He says , “overburdening oneself with strong ideas is a very Turkish passion . . . I’ve had enough of ideas . . . ” (interview with Jorg Lau). He says that literature is his reaction to such an environment where it appears out of the ordinary not to be obsessed by any ideology. He often puts into words his desire to celebrate a kind of freedom that does not burden one with a commitment to anything and fears that his business of writing would suffer because of political activism. Every time he is made to talk about politics by the interviewers, it won’t be long before he would remind himself that he is talking too much politics while, after all, he is a novelist (see, for example, interview with Jorg Lau). All this do not mean, however, that Pamuk views politics as a forbidden fruit for a novelist. A novelist, according to him, can indeed take up political issues. The only thing is the way a novelist makes possible the political intervention is something unique. For Pamuk, it has nothing to do with the novelist’s affiliation to a community, a group or a political party. Nor does it have anything to do with a political cause. It is by his “ability to imagine himself as someone else” that he achieves it (Pamuk 2008: 229, 371).

Pamuk’s stance on life and politics that he consistently articulates every now and then might serve to deter from locating a political space where Pamuk operates from. Liberal secularism, which Pamuk identifies with, is a hegemonic ideology as has been persuasively argued by the recent scholarship on the same (see, for example, Asad, 2003). Pamuk, in fact, is indeed a man of “big ideas,” the “very Turkish passion” he observes among his countrymen.

### ***Snow* – A Narrative from the Outside or the Inside?**

*Snow* is the only novel where Pamuk tackles the secularist- Islamist clash, the roots of which go way back to the secularization project of the modern Turkish Republic, head-on. *Snow* chronicles the socio-political milieu of Turkey in the early 1990s, when the country was caught in its bitterest throes on debates about the issue. Pamuk, while creating *Snow*, seeks to transcend the barriers of the community he belongs to and venture an outsider’s “disinterested” literary enterprise. To quote Pamuk,

----- Once his consciousness is different from that of the community he belongs to, he is an outsider, a loner. And the richness of his text comes from that outsider’s voyeuristic vision. Once you develop the habit of looking at the world like that and writing about it in this fashion, you have the desire to disassociate from the community. This is the model that I was thinking about in *Snow* (2008:371).

Also, as far as Pamuk is concerned, *Snow* is an attempt at creating a novel of multiple voices while choosing not to comment on them individually.

My book has many voices, and I do not comment on them individually. Dostoyevsky was the master of this form of writing. Many of my characters hold ideas which run counter to my own. The challenge is to also make the voices representing opinions I find repugnant sound convincing, whether they belong to political Islamists or to the military vindicating a coup (interview with Jorg Lau).

Moreover, this novel is a medium for Pamuk to know and write the “Other”.

I am using this story [*Snow*] as a way into the subject that I am coming to understand more clearly with each new day, and that is, in my view, central to the art of the novel: the question of the “other,” “the stranger,” the enemy that resonates inside each of our heads... It was the other aspect that drew me to the streets of Frankfurt and Kars: the chance of write of others’ lives as if they were my own. It is by doing this sort of research that novelists can begin to test the lines that mark off that “other” and in so doing alter the boundaries of our own identities. Others become “us” and we become “others” (2008:227-8).

The text of *Snow*, where marginal groups are brought to the centre, does offer a site of multiple voices. People of various political / ethnic allegiances, including the secularists, the Islamists, Kurds, and Armenians find space in the novel. Yet, a close examination of the text that focuses on the author’s approach to Islam, I will attempt to demonstrate, does reveal Pamuk’s own take on the individual characters. I hope to show through my reading that Pamuk thereby detracts from his own claim of *Snow* being an outsider’s / objective dealing with issues. I would argue that *Snow* is very much an insider account, with liberal-secular moorings. Pamuk, as I will lay out, is not particularly concerned about approaching the headscarf question on its own terms. Hence, I argue, he fails to know and write the Islamic other the way he might have wished to.

### **Muslim Women’s Headscarf: The Liberal Secular Readings**

The headscarf /hijab/veil/purdah—the varying dress codes adopted by many a Muslim woman across the globe in accordance with varying local practices—have always been a fertile issue for discussion. Such visible signifiers have often come to be seen as potent signs of women’s subordinate status in Islam / Muslim societies in the vast body of literature on the topic. The focal point of the contestations regarding the public expressions of Islam in Turkey has largely been about women wearing the headscarf and the State constraints on it. Women wearing/ removing the headscarf, thus, is loaded with antagonistic significance in the country’s political landscape. While the secularists in Turkey and elsewhere always saw in it signs of radical Islam that threatened secular democracy and women’s subordination to men, the Islamists viewed it as a religious practice voluntarily chosen by women (Debbie Lovatt ,1997).

Turkey is the only country with a Muslim majority population that has been practicing a ban on women’s headscarves in public places. The Turkish constitutional court, the Council of State, which considered a case related to the headscarf issue in 2004, upheld the ban. In a judgment that resonated with the official Kemalist (Kemalism, the version of secularism framed by Kemal Attaturk, the father of the modern republic of Turkey, is

the official ideology of the Turkish State) vocabulary, the court viewed that the headscarf is a political symbol in the hands of the Islamists and no longer a mere expression of the freedom to choose one's dress (Karakas,2007). The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld this ruling in November 2005.

The headscarf is a recurring trope in *Snow*. Among the youth of the Westernized protagonist of the novel, "a covered woman would have been someone who had come in from the suburbs—from the Kartal vineyards, say, to sell grapes. Or the milkman's wife or someone else from the lower classes" (22). But, now the headscarf-clad women have proliferated in urban centres and educational institutions (21, 431). The novel specifically focuses on the State's ban on the wearing of headscarves in educational institutions and the pain that is involved in rebelling against the dictates of the State in this regard. *Snow* presents the dilemma of the headscarf girls dismissed from a local educational institution in Kars through the figures of a few such girls as Hande and Teslime as well as the young man who shoots its Director (38-49, 121-26); the text, it appears, upholds the right of the women to wear it.

The text introduces multiple perspectives and offers this space through the figures of people holding conflicting views to present their arguments with regard to the headscarf. According to the Kemalist viewpoint, it is a form of religious coercion (150). Therefore, taking it off embodies a rebellious gesture (21-22). According to them, now it has become the symbol of political Islam too (22). Notably enough, the text shares and validates the Kemalist standpoint in this regard. For instance, the narrator Orhan says: ... on her head was one of those nondescript headscarves Ka had seen thousands of women wearing since childhood which were now the symbol of political Islam (112, 150). In the view of the Director of Education Institute, it is the politicization of the headscarf that makes the whole situation a mess. According to him, "people" have turned the headscarf into a political weapon and are making use of women as pawns in a political game (43). The arguments put forward by the young man who shoots the Director are those that emanate from many Islamic circles. As far as he is concerned, the women by covering themselves are making a statement against being harassed. This is the reason, according to him, behind the low number of the incidents of rape and harassment in Muslim countries. He goes on to argue that it is because the State wants the Turkish girls to be the slaves of the West that they are outlawing the headscarf. He argues that the State contradicts the educational and religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution through this ban (42).

The liberal-secular positions on the headscarf preoccupy themselves with the supposedly patriarchal dimensions underlying the practice. Muslim women adhering to such Islamic norms are often seen by the liberals as, to use the words of Saba Mahmood, "pawns in a grand patriarchal plan." Mahmood also points out that it is women's clothing, not men's, which is taken to be a sign of social coercion (Mahmood 2005:75). The liberal discourses totally sideline the pietist aspects of the practice as well while for a majority among those who observe it, it is an important Islamic injunction in terms of female modesty and piety (Lila Abu-Lughod, Feb. 1990; Saba Mahmood, 2005). *Snow's* position, as I would demonstrate, on the same stands testimony to it. Yet, in keeping with the "rights" discourse at the heart of liberalism, liberals generally uphold the right of Muslim women to wear the headscarf provided the women do it of their own free will. But, the liberal discourses on the headscarf find it hard to admit the alleged free will operative in the Muslim women's decision to cover themselves;

instead, such a discourse is suspicious of such claims. Motives are imputed and sexism is read into the practice; this comes out clearly in the stance of the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) on the ban of the headscarf in Turkey.

A medical student, Leyla Sahin challenged the headscarf ban in her country before the ECHR alleging that the ban violated her right to religious freedom and right to an education under the Convention of European Human Rights. The ECHR pronounced a judgment not in her favour, stating that religious freedom “does not always guarantee the right to behave in a manner governed by a religious belief . . . and does not confer on people who do so the right to disregard rules that have proved to be justified” (Leyla Sahin, v. Turkey, 11 Eur. Ct. H.R. 175, 208, 216 (2005); cited in Valorie K. Vojdik, July 2010). The Court also referred to the Turkish Constitutional Court’s judgment on the same issue which viewed the headscarf a threat to secular democracy. Despite the girl’s claims of a voluntary choice on her part in terms of her clothing, ECHR also judged the headscarf as a custom that entails coercion and something that stifles gender equality. According to the Court, “the headscarf is a ‘powerful external symbol’” that “appeared to be imposed on women by a religious precept that was hard to reconcile with the principle of gender equality.” The ECHR here does not see women believing in their faith as active agents in making decisions regarding their own lives. Neither does the Court analyze or pause to consider any possible motives behind the women’s decision to use a headscarf.

### **The Headscarf: A Shield to Guard Man’s “Property”**

In *Snow*, the issue is also presented through various protagonists to bring out the range of responses to question of the headscarf. Muhtar Bey, the moderate Islamist and usually portrayed as an inconsistent character, is a convert from communism to Islamism. His first port of call, however, was Sufism before his eventual disillusionment with it (53-59). When the novel begins, we learn that he has divorced his beautiful wife Ipek because, among other things, of her refusal to cover herself (58, 64). However, he now realizes that it was a “mistake” for him “to ask her to cover herself in accordance with the sharia” (64). He wants to re-marry her, and asks Ka, an old friend from their days at the University together, to convey to Ipek how much he regrets his actions. He tells Ka: “Tell her I am through acting like a *jealous provincial husband*; that I’m ashamed and sorry for *the pressures I put her under during our marriage*” (64, emphasis added).

There is also the Kemalist artist Sunay Zaim who tells Kadife, “the leader of the headscarf girls,” when she bares her hair on stage: “Your hair is so beautiful, Kadife. Even I [a secularist], would certainly want to guard you [like the Islamists, or other religiously observant Muslims] jealously, to keep other men from seeing it” (412, emphasis added). Strikingly enough, both the Islamist Muhtar and the Kemalist artist Sunay Zaim, perhaps from an understanding of the Islamists’ or other Muslims’ reason on the insistence of their women’s wearing the headscarf, share a common denominator in terms of their view of the headscarf. Both men both regard it as a shield which men make use of in order to jealously guard their “property” from other men. The headscarf here is a tool which masks certain patriarchal aspirations.

### **Three Muslim Girls: The Headscarf and the Islamic Sexual Ethics**

The figure of Kadife is a more interesting one. The daughter of a liberal-leftist named Turget Bey and the sister of Ka’s love, Ipek, she is “the leader of the headscarf girls.”

At one point in the novel, she tells Ka that it was to make fun of the headscarf girls that she went to see them first. Understanding the necessity of rebelling against the State which one fine morning wanted the girls to remove the headscarf, she first wore it to make a political statement (115). She didn't, however, go back to remove it afterwards because she feared that the whole of Kars would spit in her face for her lack of integrity. Now, in the end, she has "come to see that God put me through all this suffering to help me find the true path" (116). On meeting Ka for the first time, she avoids shaking hands with him "out of deference to Islamic convention" (112). When they meet next time, Kadife hastens to cover the strands of her hair not within the hold of the headscarf (249).

But the same Kadife does not appear to have any problem in embracing Ka when they meet later (323, 380). Later in the novel, we are told that Kadife has been the "militant Islamist Blue's mistress for quite some time now. Her headscarf, it appears, is only a costume for being a suitable lover for Blue. Not only does her sister Ipek assert this but also claims that Kadife had actually been eying Blue even when she was in love with him (368). Thus, a reader may be forced to conclude that her amorous advances towards Blue, even as she speaks of the headscarf as the word of God and as an emblem of faith, negate the very meaning of this piece of cloth she herself claim to be behind it (123, 288).

Kadife is, therefore, a woman who is so pious in public that she does not bare her head even at home before her father (374-75), despite the Islamic allowance that one can remove one's headscarf among blood relations with whom marriage is forbidden. She is not worried about the nuances of the practice of donning the headscarf perhaps because, I would argue, she has been blinded by political Islam which, according to Pamuk, has much less to do with Islam than is commonly thought (Pamuk 2008: 166). This comes through both her sexually active life as well as her obduracy about not baring even a single strand of her hair even before her father.

The girl Hande who couldn't even "concentrate herself without a headscarf" (123-5) and who has "accepted the headscarf as the word of God and the symbol of faith" (123)—such a deeply pious girl—is seduced by Blue, or, perhaps, she offers up herself to Blue. Kadife realizes that Blue has betrayed her when she hears the news that both Hande and Blue have been killed in a State operation while at a hideout. She confirms for herself whether both were in the same house (417). To come to the case of Teslime, the covered girl who had killed herself, the Director of the Institute of Education—a figure from the secular camp—says she was naïve enough to give herself to a police man twenty-five years her senior even before she got married and even after he had told her he was married and had no intention of marrying her (47). Blue who belongs to the opposite camp, albeit without the details, asserts that she killed herself over a love affair and not on account of the headscarf issue (77).

### **(Women's) Religious Responsibility or (Men's) Political Responsibility?**

As I noted earlier, the text, resonating with the Kemalist viewpoint, states that the headscarf is now the symbol of political Islam in Turkey (112,150). There is no evidence, documented or otherwise, that the headscarf was ever a political symbol in Turkey, literally speaking. The text also says that its proponents themselves think of it as a political symbol and it is their rallying point. The narrator Orhan says, "Certainly, it was they who taught her [referred to Teslime, the covered girl, and her friends] to *think*

of the headscarf as a symbol of ‘political Islam’ (16; emphasis added). Besides, despite the long rhetoric of the youth who murdered the Director of the Institute of Education and the claims of the women themselves—such as Kadife on the ethical dimensions and the dimensions of faith on the headscarf issue—one doesn’t come across a single woman in the novel who covers herself on such grounds.

In other words, the novel appears to say that Muslim women in Turkey do not need the headscarf on grounds of piety. To put it differently, it is not the religious responsibility of the Muslim women. It is, rather, the political responsibility of the Islamist men. They are the ones who badly need it and have turned it into their very symbol for settling political scores. Believing Muslim women are merely pawns in the political plans of the Islamist men who are, of course, patriarchal just like “moderate” Islamist Muhtar in the novel is.

### **Women in Political Islam: Victims or Agents?**

Moreover, in Pamuk’s view, women and minorities are the ones at the receiving end of political Islam. In an interview, Pamuk answers a question on what sparked the controversy about *Snow*

Some of my secular readers were furious that I showed so much empathy towards a young girl who wears a headscarf of her own free will. I can understand that, especially when it comes from women. Women are the hardest hit by political Islam . . . (interview with Jorg Lau).

Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood contend that one of the reason why liberals and progressives are uncomfortable with political Islam is because they argue that “[W]hen religion is allowed to enter into public debate and make political claims . . . [I]t results in intolerant policies that are particularly injurious to women and minorities” (Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, 2002); this appears to hold true, particularly in the case of Pamuk.

But, the secular discursive contexts have made the headscarf a *political statement*. Secular countries like France, Tunisia, Belgium and Turkey have instituted a ban on the dress code in public places. As Mahmood argues, “... the reason the veil elicits such strong responses is that it continues to assert a kind of religiosity that is incommensurable with, and inimical to, those forms of public sociability that a secular-liberal polity seeks to make normative” (2005:75). I argue that it is essential to distinguish between the headscarf as a political statement in the Mahmoodian sense where the headscarf wearers are agents and a political symbol in the Pamukian sense where men’s concerns dominate.

Besides, there are narratives on political Islam vis-à-vis women in the particular Turkish context which contest the framings of people like Pamuk in this regard. They, rather, see women as the forefront figures of the Islamist movement. Dr. Merva Kevakci (currently a Lecturer in International Affairs at George Washington University, Kevakci hit the headlines for her not being allowed to take her oath of office as a parliament member due to protests over her wearing a headscarf ), for instance, says that she was the person responsible for International Affairs at the headquarters of the Welfare Party, the Islamist movement during the time-setting of *Snow*( interview with Richard Peres). The studies which argue that Islamism in Turkey has more often than not avoided direct confrontation with the State but chosen to ground its strategies of mobilization on

transforming everyday practices and life styles have also foregrounded the centrality of women in Islamic activism. Ayse Saktenber in her ethnographic study, for instance, has argued that women functioned as the “signpost of Islamic revitalization” in the Turkish secular order by “the organization of ‘domestic’ space and raising children as ‘true’ Muslims – something which she would describe as the “discursive reordering of life” (Ayse Saktenber, 2005).

#### **“Muslim religious conviction is a big fraud”**

To come back to the novel, it either has Muslim women being pressured by their menfolk to put on the headscarf, as in the Muhtar-Ipek episode, or they voluntarily choose it and yet betray the Islamic spirit of female modesty and piety behind the practice which they themselves claim to be behind it, as in the case of Teslime, Kadife and Hande. Also, Teslime commits suicide, maybe on account of being prevented by the State from wearing the headscarf. Perhaps Kadife relents to the pressures around her and takes it off like the friends of Teslime. This, I argue, would amount to declaring in a rather circumlocutory way that “the Muslim religious conviction is a big fraud” (Fateme Keshavarz, 2007:56) and the traditional Islamic standards of ethics are not feasible. Note that this is not to say all Muslim men and women will invariably function as some sort of Islam- programmed machines. But a rather flat, homogenous representation in which no character is able to uphold an Islamic code of conduct, or even appears interested in doing so, is a different thing altogether. It should be noted that Turkey has showed stiff resistance to the secularization process but neither has the zeal for a public avowal of religion diminished in the least(see, for example, Metin Toprak and Nasuh Uslu,2009). Pamuk’s representation of the sexual life of the faithful in such a country, therefore, seems lopsided to say the least.

#### **Who is more “Liberal”?**

Artistic representations can no longer be taken as “innocent” endeavours in isolation. Studying the politics of representation, thus, would involve recognizing the extent of be interpellation of subjects through the claims of artistic license. When asked about the criticisms against *Snow* in Turkey, Pamuk has said, among other things, that “the political Islamists were upset because I wrote about an Islamist who had enjoyed sex before marriage” (2008:374). He dismisses criticism saying “it was that kind of simplistic thing.” He maintains that although there were some questions from a few people including the Islamists, there were no untoward incidents and everyone read his book thanks to an increasingly liberal attitude. One tends to ask, however, who is more “liberal” here: Pamuk, the liberal-secularist who dismisses criticisms of the Islamists, or the Islamists who read his book and raise in a democratic manner certain representational issues?

One may not be a person who is very particular about matters such as ethics and morality. Nonetheless, one is obliged to respect the values and sentiments of a people who value them. A person who claims to be on a venture to know the Other is particularly supposed to be serious in this respect. In fact , as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood (2009) has argued in their analyses of the Danish cartoon controversy, such liberal secular representations fail to engage the sense of moral injury believers are left with on account of such representations.

#### **Engaging the Other: Need for Textual and Personal Dis-identification and Humility**

As the recent scholarship on liberal secularism points out, denouncing other ways of seeing the world and even seeking to make them in its own image are characteristic of it. Taking this into account, a liberal secularist like Orhan Pamuk setting out to know and write the Islamist Other is indeed laudable. Pamuk's was a modest beginning. He began seeking a dialogic narration in terms of Islamists and ended up recycling the liberal understandings of Islam. He has chosen to impute motives, allege sexism, and an exploitation of religion to settle political scores into Islamist activism as well as disparage the sexual life of the practicing Muslims in his country and pass over the sense of moral injury his representations left on them. This sort of a finish, among other things, is the outcome of a lack of textual and personal dis-identification, something which the postcolonial feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood foregrounded. She herself once undertook a venture similar to Pamuk's while doing an ethnographic project with the participants of mosque movement in Egypt the product of which came in the form of her ground-breaking *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005). Mahmood contends towards the conclusion of book,

Critique .... is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might also be remade in the process of engaging another's worldview, that we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we undertook the engagement. This requires that we occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to leave open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other (36- 7).

Again , "It ... is a mode of encountering the Other which does not assume that in the process of culturally translating other lifeworlds one's own certainty about how the world should proceed can remain stable"( 199). Pamuk's particular climax can also be accounted for by a lack of humility on his part which is a prerequisite of a fruitful dialogue with the world of the Other. Mahmood maintains, "[T]his attitude requires the virtue of humility: a sense that one does not always know what one opposes and that a political vision at times has to admit its own finitude in order to even comprehend what it has sought to oppose" ( 199) .

### **Pamukian Liberal Frames: Larger Implications**

In this paper, I have tried to investigate the contours of the liberal-secular take on Islam, especially the headscarf by means of an examination of Orhan Pamuk's self-declared "disinterested" fictional venture to know and write the Islamic Other. My reading of his *Snow* and a few non-fictional texts, I hope, showed that by setting up fictional characters and making direct personal intervention, he has, in effect, ended up recycling the liberal understandings of Islam. He has chosen to impute motives, allege sexism, as well as disparage the sexual life of the practicing Muslims in his country and pass over the sense of moral injury his representations left on them. It is needless to emphasize, such undertakings of knowing the Other will not bear fruit.

Literature, according to the insights generated by the shifts in literary studies in the twentieth century, is not an apolitical business without any stakes in the world. It is partisan- ideological and committed to power structures, with its particular agendas - and an active participant in hegemonic constructions. Literary and cultural representations are struggles for power and meaning, and texts are sites where these struggles are carried out. Pamuk's writings are located on a site where Islam and secularism confront each other in particular ways. As I have pointed out, Pamuk is a writer who addresses a global audience, a fact he himself is quite aware of. Added to this, the award of Nobel Prize for literature (2006) is not an insignificant factor in

Pamuk's receptivity throughout the global reading world as a voice of authority interpreting issues involving categories such as Islam, secularism, etc. Given such an understanding, I have read *Snow* in order to lay out the liberal-secular ideology the text is premised on, especially with regard to Islam, even as they make claims to be dialogic and polyphonic.

Pamuk's portrayal of the headscarf issue and Muslim sexual life may in fact be contributing to a pervasive Islamophobic ethos in which Muslims are being Othered. As cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar points out, the brute force that occupies the minds and bodies of Muslims who "live in a world that is not of our own making, that has systematically marginalized our physical, intellectual and psychological space. . ." sometimes comes in the guise of scholarship and literary fiction as well (2003:17-18). Pamuk's representations of the sexual life of faithful Turkish Muslims who have already had to put up with the assaults the secularization process perpetrated on their faith, I argue, is one such brute force masqueraded as literature.

Pamuk's narratives foreground the supposedly patriarchal aspirations of Muslim men, their political agendas, coupled with an alleged lack of agency of the women, women being seen as mere pawns in grand patriarchal plans. Such a liberal discursive framing of, for instance the headscarf issue, has a far-reaching impact: it contributes robustly to a resounding silence that follows a ban on the dress a practising Muslim woman may wish to wear in a supposedly liberal-democratic nation.

Such constructions also feed into a particular line of inquiry. Let me take up here, for instance, a question that Tawakkel Karman who was at the forefront of local struggles against autocracy in Yemen which spearheaded the Arab Spring and who later received the Nobel Peace Prize of 2012, had to face. She was asked by journalists in one of her post-Arab Spring European visits "if her headscarf/hijab was proportionate with her level of intellect and education" (forum.mpacuk.org). As Saba Mahmood has persuasively argued in her *Politics of Piety* (2005), it is liberal secularism which contributes to and fuels the specific discursive and political conditions in which such questions which seek to ask as to why the "enlightened", "rational", "modern" articulate women choose to wear headscarf gain legitimacy. A nuanced critique of the liberal-secular frame of writers such as Pamuk is essential, I contend, in order to open up our world for believing Muslim women who will not be suspected.

### Works Cited:

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women" *American Ethnologist* 17.1 (Feb. 1990): 41.
- Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Asad, Talal. "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism," and Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities University of California, 2009), pages 20-63 and 64-100 respectively.
- Hirschkind, Charles and Saba Mahmood. "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter- Insurgency" *Anthropological Quarterly* 75.2 (Spring 2002): 339-354. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3318265>>

- Kavakci, Merva. "Will She Return to Her Vacant Seat in the Parliament?," Interview with Richard Peres. <<http://networkedblogs.com/9U5Vp>> Web.
- Karakas, Cemal. *Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the Interests of State, Society and Politics* Frankfurt: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2007.
- Keshavarz , Fateme. *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More Than Lolita in Tehran* (New York: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 56.
- Lovatt, Debbie. "Islam, Secularism, and Civil Society" *The World Today* 53.8-9 (Aug.-Sep. 1997): 226-228.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* .Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Mcgaha, Michael. *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk: The Writer in His Novels* Utah: The University of Utah Press, 2008, p. 36.
- Pamuk, Orhan.*Istanbul: Memories of a City*.Trans. Maureen Freely. 2005.London:Faber and Faber,2006.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *Other Colors: Writings on Art, Life, Books and Cities*. Trans. Maureen Freely. 2007. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *Snow*. Trans. Maureen Freely. 2004. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.
- Pamuk, Orhan. "The Turkish Trauma." Interview with Jorg Lau. *Die Ziet* 14 April 2005. <<http://www.signandsight.com/features/115.html>>.
- Pamuk, Orhan. "Soft Islam takes over in Turkey." Interview with Michael Skafidas *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Winter 2003): 27-30.
- Sahin, Leyla. v. Turkey, 11 Eur. Ct. H.R. 175, 208, 216 (2005); cited in Valorie K. Vojdik, "Politics of the Headscarf in Turkey: Masculinities, Feminism, and the Construction of Collective Identities" *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 7.28 (9 July 2010): 661-684.
- Saktanber, Ayse. *Living Islam: Women, Religion and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* .London: I.B Tauris, 2005.
- Toprak, Metin and Nasuh Uslu. "The Headscarf Controversy in Turkey" *Journal of Economic and Social Research* 11.1 (2009): 43-67.
- Sardar, Ziauddin. *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, Eds. and Intro. Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell. London: Pluto, 2003, pp. 17-18. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>> <<http://forum.mpacuk.org/showthread.php?49959-Hijab-Is-a-Symbol-of-the-Highest-Level-of-Civilization-Says-Noble-Prize-Winner.>> <[www./biography.orhanpamuk.net.aspx](http://www./biography.orhanpamuk.net.aspx)>