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Soundscapes of the Nation: Silenced Others and Animal Languages in *Haw* and *Oko*

Abstract

Kemal Varol's 2014 novel *Haw* is an account of the multiple facets of the war between the Turkish army, Kurdish guerrilla and other underground organizations during the 1990s in eastern Turkey, recounted by a dog. İdris Baluken's *Oko* (2019) is the story of its eponymous dog protagonist Oko's journey as he finds himself involved in a group fighting to prevent another dog massacre from happening again. By looking at two contemporary novels that address the Kurdish issue in Turkey from the perspective of dogs, this paper aims to explore the implications of the biopolitical reach of the sovereign state and its impact on the definition of citizenship. Taking this shared symbol as a point of departure, this paper investigates nation-building processes in Turkey and how the definition of citizenship is contingent on the voices and languages that are silenced. What is the relation between language and belonging? To what language does one belong? What possibilities of resistance does the language of the non-human animal contain in its encounter with the violence of the sovereign power?

Keywords: biopolitics, soundscape, cosmopolitanism, critical animal studies, anthropocentricism.

1. Introduction

In his autobiographical narrative *Istanbul: Memories of a City* (2006), the Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk states the following: 'Western observers love to identify the things that make Istanbul exotic, non-Western, whereas the Westernisers amongst us register all the same things as obstacles to be erased from the face of the city as fast as possible'.[1] As a result of this friction, many of the elements that are particular to Istanbul disappear soon after they make an appearance in the accounts of Western travellers. While many of those peculiarities have vanished, the stray dogs of the city continue to 'roam free'[2] despite many attempts to eliminate them. Pamuk acknowledging their fearsome nature, states that the stray dogs of Istanbul are still 'united as they have been in their defiance of the state'.[3] While the dogs sustain their unified defiance, there have been and continues to be many attempts by the different institutions of the state at eliminating the stray dogs. The most notable of these events took place in

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[1] Pamuk 2006, 218.
[2] Pamuk 2006, 39.
[3] Ibid.

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1910 in Istanbul, then the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Tens of thousands of dogs were put on boats and left on the uninhabited island of Sivriada, one of the Princes Islands in the Marmara Sea. The dogs died slow and painful deaths; their desperate howls could be heard from the shores of Istanbul.[4] The extent of the atrocities resulted in the renaming of the island; Sivriada, the pointed island came to be known as Hayırsızada, the inauspicious island. At the time of this act of brutality, the Ottoman Empire was governed by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), 'which consisted mainly of Westernized mid-level Turkish Muslim military and bureaucratic officials'.[5] The CUP's main goal 'was to 'save the empire', and to reform it so that its multi-religious, multi-ethnic society could survive in the world of the twentieth century'.[6] With the rise of nationalism during World War I, the CUP started to fear 'for its own extinction and engage in unchecked ethnic cleansing of the Rum and Armenian minorities'.[7] This ethnic cleansing however, was not limited to non-Muslim minorities and quickly took the form of a Turkification process as the CUP 'attempted to impose the Turkish language on Arabs, Albanians, and other non-Turkish Muslims'.[8] The CUP's vision for the future thus reflected a cutting of ties with the multiethnic, multilingual, and multi-religious Ottoman past in order to create a new Muslim Turkish nation-state with a monolinguistic and monoethnic composition. The two novels that I discuss in this paper *Haw* (2014) and *Oko*[9] (2019), depict a resistance to the legacy of the CUP in the contemporary practices of the Turkish state by resorting to a dog world. While adopting distinct stylistic approaches to create their fictional worlds, both novels introduce the dog world as a form of multi-layered resistance to the biopolitical[10] reach of the sovereign state.

Published in 2014 in Turkish and in 2019 in English, Kemal Varol's novel *Haw* is an account of the multiple facets of the conflict between the Turkish army, the Kurdish guerrilla forces, and other underground organizations during the 1990s in southeast Turkey told by two dog-narrator/protagonists. The dog-narrators as well as other stylistic details, create a fairy tale-like setting for an allegorical narrative about the highly contentious Kurdish issue[11] in Turkey. A schoolteacher, poet, and author of

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[4] For a historical evaluation of the dog massacre, see Gündoğdu. 2018. 'The state and the stray dogs in late Ottoman Istanbul: from unruly subjects to servile friends'. *Middle Eastern Studies*. 54.4. 555–74.

[5] Göçek 2011, 19.

[6] Ahmad 2003, 50.

[7] Göçek 2011, 20.

[8] Lewis 2002, 219.

[9] All passages from the novel are my translations.

[10] The term biopolitical as used in this paper refers to a power that is 'more subtle and supple, shaping and controlling bodies and populations in order to direct their living energies toward the goals of the state and other social, economic, and administrative powers' (Calarco 2021, 29).

[11] The specific word used in this context has additional political implications. Other terms include the Kurdish "question" and "problem" (*mesele* and *sorun* in Turkish). I will use the

Kurdish origin, Varol recognizes that the allegorical setting of the narrative both allows him more freedom while also adding a more universal perspective to an otherwise local subject.[12] Similarly, İdris Baluken's 2019 novel *Oko* tells the liberation story of its eponymous dog-protagonist in an allegorical tale. Oko, after escaping the farm where he was being kept captive, joins a community of other dogs who organize an attack against humans who are plotting another massacre of dogs similar to the Hayırsızada massacre of 1910. The overt references to the Hayırsızada massacre locate the text in a very specific context despite its allegorical quality. Throughout the novel the languages and sounds of the dogs are presented from an anthropocentric lens, inviting the reader to experience a world where dogs are rebelling against the oppressive practices of humans. The optimistic liberation story of *Oko* also echoes on a highly personal level for its author Baluken, a politician of Kurdish origin, who is currently serving time in prison along with other leaders of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Despite their primary use of allegory both *Haw* and *Oko* go beyond a metaphorical use of the figure of the animal by exploring interspecies possibilities of communication and solidarity. Resisting the definition of a nation-state as a monolingual, mono-ethnic, and mono-religious entity, both novels offer multispecies and multilingual heterogenous worlds where differences coexist. It is important to note that despite their Kurdish origins both authors prefer to write their novels in Turkish, the official language of the Turkish Republic. This particular choice, while having practical and editorial implications also needs to be considered within the specific context of both novels that present its readers with the uncanny world of dogs that act, speak, and love like humans. The alienation effect that the dog-narrators create is also substantiated with the inclusion of Kurdish letters and words in both novels. These elements while disrupting the monolithic prevalence of the Turkish language, also challenge the non-Kurdish speaking readers to enter an unfamiliar world.

2. Languages of Politics and Animals

By choosing to have dog narrator/protagonists both *Oko* and *Haw* not only make a statement that is relevant within the local historical and cultural context in which they appear, but also reverberate within a broader universal context of biopolitics where the definition and value of human life is constantly redefined. As such while the binary positioning of the human and non-human lives is perpetually being questioned, the figure of the animal has also stopped being a metaphor for the human and took on an entirely distinct political significance which also implicates the definition and value of human life.

The figure of the animal is inevitably a political one, especially in our modern biopolitical world. Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1998) delineates between two

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word issue while being aware of the complexities involved in this definition, including the fact that this is also a Turkish issue as well as a global political issue.

[12] Beyer's interview with Varol, 2020.

forms of life, *zoē* and *bios*, that mark the boundary of the political order. *Bios* determines the form of life that is subject to law and hence remains within the political order, within the *polis*. *Zoē*, on the other hand, is a natural, bare, form of life and remains outside of politics. This excluded life that Agamben terms *homo sacer*, is life that can be killed but not sacrificed. Given that the killing of [certain] animals in our modern societies is still not considered to be a crime in the legal sense[13] (as in the cases of eating, laboratory testing, commodification of various animal parts, etc.), the animal life falls under the category of *zoē*. This category, however, is not limited to the non-human animal and is extended to the various human others within the nation-state at different periods in history. Agamben offers Nazi concentration camps as an example of how certain human bodies may fall under the category of *zoē*. Emanuel Levinas' testimony from the camp, confirms this distinction. In the essay titled 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights' (1997), Levinas describes how ignored by other humans, it is a dog in the camp that restores his humanity by merely acknowledging his presence:

> And then, about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives… He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men.[14]

In that recognition, the bare life of the dog is met with the bare life of the Jewish prisoner, whose body is not accepted inside the border of the politics, into *bios*. As such he becomes *homo sacer.* Another instance where the human body is excluded from the realm of *bios* is the case of the refugee, who is deprived of political representation right at the moment when it is most needed. As Hannah Arendt argues, the citizen is provided with rights while remaining under the protection of a nation-state whereas the refugee who is deprived of such protection does not have access to a legal and political network of security. The rights of man thus remain restricted to the rights of the citizen and are not extended to the figure of the refugee.

> Moreover, the loss of citizenship deprived people not only of protection, but also of all clearly established, officially recognized identity… Only fame will eventually answer the repeated complaint of refugees of all social strata that "nobody here knows who I am"; and it is true that the chances of the famous refugee are improved just as a dog with a name has a better chance to survive than a stray dog who is just a dog in general.[15]

The figure of the dog, in both Levinas and Arendt, appears as the form of life that cohabits the urban space alongside other human lives but is not included in the political realm. The dog, very much like the figure of the Jewish prisoner or the refugee, is excluded from the political order as their existence is restricted to *zoē*. For Agamben, it is the emergence of a biopolitical world that eliminates the distinction between *zoē* and *bios,* as all life becomes *homo sacer* under the sovereign power, which has the right to decide on what to exclude and when. Thus, the lives that may become *homo sacer* today are no longer restricted to the lives in the camp or to the figure of the refugee but also includes the lives of the citizen.

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[13] It is important to note that there are parts of the world where this is changing. Most recently in 2015, New Zealand passed the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill, recognizing animals as sentient beings.

[14] Levinas 1997, 153.

[15] Arendt 1976, 287.

> Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation. This is why the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and *homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen.[16]

Without the knowledge of what falls under the boundaries of *zoē* all lives become perpetual targets for the sovereign power. The status of Kurdish ethnic identity in Turkey is an example of the blurring of this boundary since citizenship does not guarantee the inclusion within the borders of *bios*. To understand how citizenship took its present form within the Turkish context, it is important to understand the nationalist framework that shaped the foundation of the Turkish Republic following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The members of the CUP that ruled during the last years of the Ottoman Empire, were:

> […] without exception Muslim Turks of Balkan origin who no longer had a home to return to, as these lands had been lost during the Balkan wars. In addition to their fervent Turkish nationalism (adopted as a logical means of self-preservation), these 'modern' men had also received an Enlightenment education. They formed their organizations in accordance with Auguste Comte's conception of 'progress,' thereby marginalizing the former Ottoman legitimating ideology of tradition, dynasty and religion in the name of secular science: nationalism and science emerged as the two guiding principles of their new conception of rule.[17]

The *millet* structure that allowed for a multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual constitution to co-exist during the Ottoman era, was thus replaced with nationalism and 'Turkish identity became the unifying force of the newly founded republic'.[18] While 'the newly forming Ottoman Turkish bureaucratic bourgeoisie gradually eliminated the Greek, Armenian and Jewish minority bourgeoisie under the banner of nationalism'[19] it was the Republic's mission to intensify the Turkification efforts of the remaining Muslim ethnic minorities. The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal's motto *Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*, translated as 'happy is the one who says I am a Turk', captures the spirit of the era as it shows that the requirement for this unifying national identity is not necessarily being a Turk, but stating one's allegiance to that identity, at the expense of one's other ethnic identities. As Svante E. Cornell notes this motto is:

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[16] Agamben 1998, 171.
[17] Göçek 2011, 19.
[18] Göçek 2011, 22.
[19] Göçek 2011, 19.

> … generous in allowing everyone who desired to do so to become a Turkish citizen, but it did not provide a solution for those who were not prepared to abandon their previous identities in favor of the new national idea. This, in a nutshell, was the problem of a significant portion of the Kurdish population…[20]

The newly founded Turkish Republic wanting to create a homogenous ethnic unity, either suppressed or denied the existence of other identities. As Welat Zeydanlıoğlu notes 'the denial of the existence of Kurds and simultaneously clamping down on the Kurdish language and culture shaped the core of the Turkish state's Kurdish policy, which continued unabated throughout the 20th century'.[21] This policy was further substantiated by a rhetoric that replaced the words '"Kurd" with "Mountain Turks", "the East", "banditry", "reactionary politics", "tribal resistance" or "regional backwardness"'.[22]

The rhetoric was not merely adopted by the institutions of the state but also emerged as national campaigns inviting the citizens to actively collaborate and adopt the monolinguistic framework set by the state. Initiated by the Law Faculty Students' Association of Istanbul University,[23] the 'Citizen, Speak Turkish!' campaign of the 1930s, was also supported by the government in order to create a society that was unified under one language. Again, the emphasis on citizenship in the motto of the campaign implies that speaking the Turkish language and claiming one's identity as Turkish, would allow one access into the sphere of *bios* through citizenship. The ethnic minorities despite being legal citizens failing to fulfil these requirements were then subject to harsher measures, including resettlements and the eventual ban of languages other than Turkish. The inefficiency of these measures allowed each military coup to introduce further limits to the point that following the military coup of 1980, 'officials ordered Kurdish folk songs to be sung only in Turkish to avoid "separatism" and public speaking or printing in Kurdish was banned and thousands of newspapers, magazines and books on Kurds were confiscated and burnt'. [24]

It is in this state of extreme tension that the Kurdish insurgence movement erupted in the 1980s. The exact definition of the conflict that took place in southeast Turkey between 1984 and 1999, leaving behind tens of thousands of casualties, is ambiguous since 'according to official Turkish discourse… there is neither a Kurdish problem nor a civil war, but rather a socioeconomic imbalance in the south-eastern region of the country'.[25] It is in this state of denial that the Kurdish opening took off in the early 2010s with Turkey's bid to join the European Union. Under the leadership of the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* AKP) in 2013, a ceasefire was announced, ending the decades long armed conflict. While there was wide popular support for the opening, as Serra Hakyemez notes, 'what was missing was a robust legislative initiative that could lead to a permanent peace agreement'.[26] The legal reformations that targeted the use of languages other than Turkish were also in effect yet there were discrepancies in their implementation. The amendment of the Article 26 of the Constitution allowed for broadcasts in different languages eventually resulting in the launch of a national television channel in Kurdish, TRT 6. Although limited in its content and reach TRT 6 played a significant albeit symbolic role in making visible the Kurdish language.[27] The efforts to allocate legitimacy to the Kurdish language were undermined by the ongoing persecution of the language in other public or legal contexts.

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[20] Cornell 2001, 34.
[21] Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, 101.
[22] Yeğen in Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, 105.
[23] Aslan 2007.
[24] Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, 109.
[25] Göçek 2011, 41.

It is within this cultural, historical, and political setting that *Haw* and *Oko* emerge, turning to the figure of the animal as a way to explore the significance of a community that resists the biopolitical reach of the sovereign power. Through distinct stylistic choices, both novels investigate the potential of a fluid demarcation of identities. Instead of following the structures and categories proposed by the discourse of the nation-state, both *Haw* and *Oko* present the freeing potential of a world that that remains unintelligible.

3. Resisting Narratives

Set against the backdrop of violent conflict, *Haw* tells the ill-fated love story of two dogs, Melsa and Mikasa. They fall in love at first sight, but their romance is soon interrupted when Melsa is kidnapped and Mikasa ends up working as a sniffer dog for the army, detecting landmines. During one of their expeditions Mikasa fails to identify a range of landmines; the explosion results in many casualties and Mikasa loses his rear legs. The novel opens *in medias res*, at the animal shelter where the injured Mikasa is brought to after the explosion. The first chapter titled "Catafalque" is narrated by Mikasa's unnamed grandson who is telling of these events in reported past tense. In the ensuing fourteen chapters the narrators alternate between Mikasa and his unnamed grandson. A temporal shift materializes parallel to the narrative shift: the chapters where Mikasa is the narrator are told in the present tense as the events are occurring, while the grandson's chapters are told using the reported tense, with a retrospective gaze. The constant shift in temporalities and narrators brings about a rhythm that obstructs a linear, progressive movement, creating instead a claustrophobic space between the past and the present. This constant back and forth, echoes the tick-tocks of a clock, the move of a pendulum, hinting at the impossibility of a move forward despite the passing of time. The trans-generational presentation of the events indicates what Marianne Hirsch terms *postmemory* providing 'an oscillation between continuity and rupture'.[28] The epigraphs, situated at the beginning of each chapter, contribute to the multiplicity of temporalities and narrators. These epigraphs,[29] from a variety of temporal, linguistic, and geographical origins, create an intertextual narrative that defies a singular, authorial voice. The multiplicity of voices included both within the narrative and in the paratextual elements result in a narrative fabric that is versatile and multi-layered, resisting firm categorical boundaries.

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[26] Hakyemez 2017, 6.
[27] Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, 117.

The retelling of the story by Mikasa's grandson not only indicates the continuing legacy of the trauma but also hints at the need to tell the unofficial histories that fail to appear in the history books. It is with a sense of obligation that the grandson remembers and tells these stories so that they are not forgotten, despite the efforts of the official narratives to erase them. The specific tense that is used in the chapters where the grandson is the narrator, requires a closer look as it appears to counteract the attempts towards legitimizing the missing parts of the official history. The Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk explains this tense unique to the Turkish language as follows:

> In Turkish we have a special tense that allows us to distinguish hearsay from what we've seen with our own eyes; when we are relating dreams, fairy tales, or past events we could not have witnessed, we use this tense...[30]

It may seem counterintuitive that a tense used to talk about dreams and fairy tales is preferred in a narrative that is testifying to the legitimacy of the events that fail to appear in official historical accounts, but Varol's use of the reported past tense, does in fact contribute to the creation of a universe that subverts while also acknowledging Derrida's claim that 'there is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury…'.[31] The deliberate use of this tense allows Varol to highlight the culture of denial that is embedded in the discourse prevalent in official Turkish history regarding the Kurdish issue, as rumours and tales replace the actual testimony and witnessing of the events therefore eliminating any efforts towards solution and accountability. The powerful impact that the reported tense has in the construction of a national and personal memory is made more evident in the final paragraphs of *Haw* where the grandson tells the reader about his father's attempt to locate the place where the events took place and his father's burial place. Unable to find those locations, he was told that the events never took place and that they are mostly hearsay.

> "Lies," they said. "Nothing but all tales," they said. "No such story or minesweeping dog ever blew through these parts. There was never any stupid war. Everything's been brotherly love for ages…" Sometimes Dad would come home, exhausted from the outside world, and sit us on his knee. He'd clear his throat, shake the dirt off his fur,

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[28] Hirsch 2008, 106.

[29] The epigraphs do not appear in the English translation of the novel.

[30] Pamuk 2006, 8.

[31] Derrida 2000, 29.

> and gaze off into the distance. He'd say that his mom only told them the story to keep them away from humans and wars, to send them off to sleep. For happily-ever-afters, for sweet dreams. And for them to grow strong. But if you ask me, Grandad really was caught somewhere in the midst of that never-ending war, only he waged a whole other struggle: one to forget all that had befallen him.[32]

The fact that Mikasa's experience is discarded as "rumours" reflects the official Turkish discourse. As Welat Zeydanlıoğlu explains:

> …in the early decades of the Turkish Republic, Kurds ceased to exist as a distinct ethnic group in official Turkish discourse and systematic attempts were made to forcibly "turkify" them, with the Kurdish language as the primary target... This discursive hegemony was achieved without the actual pronunciation of the word "Kurds", "Kurdistan" or the "Kurdish question".[33]

Rather than fighting against the official discourse that is built upon claims of rumours and tales, *Haw* deliberately inhabits this space of ambiguity in order to create a narrative that subverts the prevalent narrative. The repeated references to fairy tales, the absence of specific spatial and temporal markers, combined with the use of reported past tense, contribute to the creation of a fictional universe, allowing Varol to address a contentious issue more freely. Yet, the allegories that are used throughout the novel provide an easily recognizable map for the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. The town of Arkanya refers to Diyarbakır, a city with a predominantly Kurdish population in eastern Anatolia, the Southerners refer to the Kurds, the Northerners to the Turks, replacing the East/West dichotomy of the Turkish context. The allegorical structure of the narrative while allowing Varol more freedom, also highlights the significance of that which remains unsaid since the words Kurd or Turk never appear throughout the narrative.[34]

İdris Baluken's *Oko* similarly presents an allegorical narrative, a bildungsroman of its eponymous protagonist Oko from an initial captivity at the hands of humans. After his escape, Oko wanders the streets of Istanbul eventually joining a community of dogs that liberate other dogs facing death. While the distance of the third-person narration alongside the anthropomorphized dogs contributes to the fable-like tone of the novel, accurate historical references to the 1910 dog massacre of Hayırsızada as well as the mentioning of specific locations establish a clear link with Turkish history and geography. While both *Haw* and *Oko* have elements that could easily be categorized as allegory, what differentiates *Haw* from *Oko* is the celebration of fluidity when it comes to genres and identity categories. In addition to the different genres that are incorporated in the novel, *Haw* also depicts a world where interspecies communication is possible. So much so that one of the characters, Canine Cengiz, after suffering the endless beatings of his father 'decided to quit being a human and became a dog.

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[32] Varol 2019, 182.
[33] Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, 105.
[34] Rogers 2019, xi.

He started peeing here and there and eating food his siblings slipped under the table. He answered his father's thrashings with howls'.[35] The world presented in *Oko,* on the other hand, resembles a utopian dog community that relies on firmly established roles, making such fluid transition impossible. Although *Oko*'s dogs also speak, bark, and howl to communicate among themselves and with other animal species, they remain unintelligible to the humans.

In a review of *Haw* that she wrote, Nazan Maksudyan condemns the unconvincing epistemology that the novel offers in this highly anthropomorphized world.[36] She claims that the dog narrators, who feel, live, fall in love, and even smoke like humans, do not add anything new to the narrative. I would argue that it is by presenting this unintelligible world of dogs who behave, talk, hurt like humans, that the novel invites the reader into an uncanny universe where the normative instruments of meaning-making fail. This perplexing universe of the narrative provides an experience of alienation that mirrors the experience of ethnic minorities living in Turkey. It forces the reader to listen to a story told by a dog, even if it sounds too hard to believe in. It is by refusing to be fully understood that *Haw* resists being included in the official discourses of the sovereign power.

The title of the novel presents this resistance with a non-word. The word "hav" spelled with the letter *v* is the onomatopoetic expression of barking in the Turkish language. "Havlamak" the verb derived from this word means "to bark". Varol spells this word with the latter *w* of the Kurdish alphabet and creates an amalgamation of the Kurdish and Turkish languages, which results in a non-word. Similar to the uncanny universe of the novel that is somewhat recognizable yet foreign, the non-word "haw" appears familiar and simultaneously foreign to the Turkish-speaking audience. Since the letter *w* does not exist in the Turkish language, the Turkish-speaking reader would not know how to pronounce this seemingly familiar non-word, nor be able to understand what the word "haw" spelled with a *w* would mean. Confronted with this non-word, the reader, unable to pronounce or grasp the meaning fully, would either have to remain silent or try in confusion. The alienating impact of the title mirrors the decades-long attempts to criminalize the Kurdish language while also forcing the reader to try to make sense of an unfamiliar universe, where dogs tell stories, fall in love, and smoke like humans. Varol's title echoes the decades-long ban on the Kurdish language which was only lifted in 1991, but through the implementation of vaguely defined Anti-Terror Law, continues to target 'anyone involved in the promotion of Kurdish language or culture (*Terörle Mücadele Kanunu 3713*)'.[37] A more recent incident described by Mehmet Şerif Derince attests to the ongoing efforts to ignore the Kurdish language:

> In a court case against Kurdish politicians and activists in 2011, the Turkish judge asked the clerk to write: "It is understood that the defendant spoke in an unknown

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[35] Varol 2019, 39.
[36] Maksudyan 2014.
[37] Zeydanloğlu 2012, 112.

> language." This was the first time Kurdish was referred to as a language in Turkish court records. Previously, it had been recorded as "unknown sounds."[38]

The uncanny definition of an "unknown language" is echoed in the title of *Haw* which can easily be recognized by the audience who is not familiar with the Kurdish language as belonging to an "unknown language".[39] By presenting the reader with a non-word in the title and with dogs that tell stories, *Haw* destabilizes the normative use of language, instead opening up the space of silence and "unknown sounds" as a new sphere of meaning making. Rather than striving to make their voices heard, their language recognized and understood within the domain of anthropocentricism, the silenced other creates an alternative universe that operates on an acoustics of ontological plurality[40] where non-human sounds, silences, languages, and forms of communication are included.

Like *Haw*, *Oko* also relies on the power of language to convey its message in subtle yet impactful ways. During his early days at the farm Oko reflects on the absurdity of his and his fellow animals' names given to them by humans. He observes that the names are not only without any meaning but also a sign of their captivity: 'Who had given these? Oko, Bozo, Sila and many more. Why did they have to live with these meaningless nicknames… Names were like a packaging of the captivity that humans created'.[41] The dogs in the community that Oko joins also have names but these names unlike the previous ones given by the humans, have letters of the Kurdish alphabet including *ê*, *û x*, *w*, *î* and *q*. These letters, which do not exist in the Turkish language, very much like *Haw*'s *w*, operate as a foreign sound for the Turkish-speaking audience while creating a sense of camaraderie with the Kurdish-speaking audience. It is through the illegibility of these names that the identity of the community becomes known for the Turkish-speaking audience.

The soundscape of both *Haw* and *Oko* play a significant role in creating an atmosphere of resistance by using non-human sounds as well as silence. By giving ample space to the non-linguistic elements, both novels are subverting the state's politics on the silencing and criminalization of the Kurdish language. While both novels are written in Turkish, they do not present a monolithic, fully intelligible narrative, instead offering the reader an experience of silence and unintelligibility. *Haw*'s soundscape is immediately presented to the reader at the opening section:

> Not the roar of the weary trucks on the highway to the north, nor the metallic screeching of the old train creeping along to the south, nor even the frantic barking of the hundreds of dogs in the other kennels were enough to rouse him. All noise was sucked out with a *shhhp* and the entire world stood mute for seven days.[42]

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[38] Derince 2013, 145.

[39] A similar effect is created in the English title of the novel, *Wûf*, which uses the word for barking with the inclusion of the letter *û*, a letter from the Kurdish alphabet.

[40] Descola 2014.

[41] Baluken 2019, 53.

[42] Varol 2019, 1.

The contrast between the sounds of the outside world and the silence of Mikasa's inner world while suggesting the silencing of the Kurdish language within the nation-state also operates as an act of resistance. Mikasa and other dogs use silence as a way to protect themselves from testifying to the horrible events that they have experienced. It is by remaining silent that they avoid a retelling of those memories in a language that is not theirs. The silence, in other words, operates as a protective shield to keep them safe from the appalling memories.

> Part of him feared that if he remembered, it would all gush forth uncontrollably. So, he growled and growled to keep from talking, to keep from returning to those bitter days, that terrible moment born of a dust cloud. Not a drop of saliva wet his parched mouth as he struggled to stop the sounds rising through his throat. He just kept growling to keep himself from speaking, from betraying his secrets to the world… "Let it out," Forknose encouraged him. "You might feel better. Did you lose your legs back in town?" He spoke so little, sometimes Granddad wondered whether he'd also lost his tongue.[43]

Silence in *Oko* operates similarly both as a form of protection but also as a way of interacting with the humans. When Oko embarks on his journey, with little knowledge of the outside world, he strives to survive as a stray dog at the mercy of humans. In one of his attempts to find food, Oko gently rubs the people who are engaged in a lively conversation. Failing to draw their attention Oko decides to bark, 'however as soon as he started barking, the person standing next him jumped up. The other three people also scattered around with a sudden reaction'.[44] The people, who finally notice Oko start kicking him and laughing at him. Oko, realizing that he will not be getting any food from these humans, retreats in hunger and disappointment. What he could not get with his barking, Oko obtains with silence from a woman who notices him and gives him food.

Oko's aimless wondering and eventual community arrives through the mediation of sounds as he hears the call to freedom coming from a dog howling in the distance. This howl brings to the foreground subtle yet significant distinctions between barking and howling as well as the howling of different species of animals.

> The howl of a wolf signaled danger, the howl of a dog signaled infinite freedom. The howling dog was letting his specimen know of the free spaces. It was calling Oko and others to that space. It was the first time that Oko was witnessing such an event… He [Oko] had forgotten how to howl. Now with mixed feelings, he wanted to emulate it. He wasn't against barking; there was nothing to be ashamed of about barking. But his memory reminded him of what it meant for a dog to howl with an untamed confidence. The howling promised him an infinite space of freedom.[45]

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[43] Varol 2019, 31.

[44] Baluken 2019, 29.

[45] Baluken 2019, 58.

The subtle distinctions between different sounds and their sources indicate a new soundscape that is not easily legible or accessible to humans. The howl of a wild animal indicates potential danger, however coming from a dog, a domesticated animal it implies freedom, a return to their original state of being. The text suggests that the barking of a dog is a way of communicating with humans and as such indicates a history of domestication and taming. Howling on the other hand is a residue of the dog's original untamed nature and implies freedom as opposed to the captivity of barking. Although Oko may have forgotten his identity over the course of his life as a captive and domesticated dog, as soon as he hears a howl, he remembers his true identity.

The distinction established between howling and barking is later conflated and used interchangeably. Barking very much like howling emerges as a sound that might draw the attention of humans and thus present an eventual threat to the dogs. Barking, rather than being a natural form of self-expression for dogs, is depicted as a sign that might endanger them by revealing their identity. When in a moment of ecstasy Oko startles his friend Loli with his barks that shout 'life is beautiful!' Loli warns him that what he 'did is very wrong! You need to carefully evaluate the best time to make a sound'.[46] The expression that Loli uses here can be read both literally and symbolically. Making a sound – or making noise – implies the actual noise that Oko's barks are creating but on a symbolic level it also suggests making a noise, protesting, resisting the established order. Loli's suggestion here indicates the importance of deciding the best moment to protest in order to have a real impact. The way the use of Kurdish language in public spaces operates in contemporary Turkey offers a pitiful yet accurate comparison. This comparison is further strengthened with references to derogatory expressions on the Kurds that exist within the Turkish language. As the community of dogs starts hearing rumors of a possible new massacre of dogs to take place, they share a conversation where they condemn such a practice. Among their outbursts of exasperation one dog says: 'The best dog is a dead dog, is that right'?[47] This statement read literarily depicts the current circumstances in which the dogs of the novel find themselves as a result of the plan to exterminate more dogs repeating the atrocities of Hayırsızada. Read within the Turkish context however, this statement is reminiscent of a similar derogatory expression used in reference to the Kurds. The soundscape at the end of the novel is dominated by the dogs' howls that drown all other sounds. Dogs, now free to howl without fear, set to re-write history.

4. Conclusion

Kalpana Rahita Seshadri in her book *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* (2012) states that 'the site of animalization or brutalization is primarily one where language as representation and legitimate speech becomes inaccessible'.[48] Both *Haw* and *Oko* occupy that inaccessible space with the unintelligible sounds as a potential space that would subvert the sovereign desire to fully understand. Both novels refrain from being heard and understood by the normative linguistic conventions, instead creating acoustic landscapes that includes songs, non-words, howls, silence, and miscommunications between humans and animals. It is in this space of acoustic plurality that *Haw* and *Oko* escape the violence of the sovereign power. It is by remaining unintelligible in the new soundscape that they create that the two novels can resist the official discourse on the Kurdish language. By challenging the primacy of a singular human language both novels explore the possibilities for new communities, new histories, new solidarities that go beyond linguistic, national, ethnic, and speciesist boundaries. The silent space to which the language of the other was condemned to, thus opens to a universe that, by remaining unintelligible to some, undermines the legitimacy of the authority that understands, names, condemns or silences. It is with the unknown sounds of the others that *Haw* and *Oko* create an ontologically plural, and truly democratic narrative community.

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[46] Baluken 2019, 65.

[47] Baluken 2019, 116.

[48] Seshadri 2012, 13.

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