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'Kafka is among us': Turkey's Transnational and Interlingual Literatures

Abstract

This article focuses on the reception of Kafka in Turkey in conjunction with the status and treatment of ethnic and religious minorities. Investigating the reception and appropriation of Kafka in Turkey reveals the ongoing effort to secure freedom of speech in a country that is marked by a long history of Turkification and Islamisation. The strong tradition of Kafka reception in Turkey sensitises readers to the kinds of literary allusions and rhetorical flourishes that are associated with the Prague author. Characters such as Herr K. and Gregor Samsa, labyrinthine narratives and the motif of estrangement left a lasting imprint on literary texts that openly challenge or circumvent censorship. This article argues that Kafka became a seminal figure for writers in Turkey, writers whose investment was not necessarily in Kafka's Jewishness but in specific narrative techniques that allowed them to develop their own literature of resistance. This article analyses four novels in this regard – Ferit Edgü's *Hakkâri'de bir Mevsim* (1977), Erhan Bener's *Böcek* (1982), Bilge Karasu's *Gece* (1985), and Orhan Pamuk's *Kar* (2004).

Keywords: Comparative literature, Franz Kafka, Turkish literature

1. 'Kafka is among us': Turkey's Transnational and Interlingual Literatures

Calls for the freedom of expression in Turkey have suffered pronounced setbacks in recent decades. By the same token, such calls have also generated notable strategies of resistance from writers, actors, artists and intellectuals. One of these instances dates to 1996 when a Turkish judge inadvertently issued a verdict on a long-dead Central European. Actor and theatre director Mahir Günşiray had been brought to trial for petitioning in support of novelist Yaşar Kemal (1923–2015). Kemal had been charged with separatism and the support of terrorism for criticizing state policies against Turkey's Kurdish population.[1] In lieu of a defence, Günşiray rose to address the court:

> Who are you? What are you doing here? What is this comedy of justice about? Why am I being interrogated and not somebody else? This is what I would like to know. You don't know either. You are just following orders. And this name, my name could have also been somebody else's name. A carpenter's, for example. After you leave, you return home where you embrace your mother, wife and your

1 Yaşar Kemal had published an article titled 'Feldzug der Lügen' (Campaign of Lies) in the German weekly newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* in which he accused the Turkish state of an ethnic massacre against the Kurdish population; Kemal 1995.

children. If one considers each one of you individually, a human being, a conscience is what you should... this is what I don't understand![2]

By invoking a passage from Kafka's *Der Prozeß* (*The Trial*), Günşiray turned the courtroom into a stage, questioned the arbitrariness of the judicial system and criticised the flaunting of judicial processes. The unwitting judge, not realising that Günşiray was quoting Kafka, saw in his speech a blatant provocation aimed at the judicial system and sentenced him to six months in prison for offending the court. The sentence attracted attention from leftist critics, who took pleasure in pointing out that a Turkish judge had sentenced Kafka to a posthumous prison term.

In the judge's defence, perhaps, the actor Günşiray had not quoted Kafka word for word but invoked the passage's essential message. In any case, Günşiray successfully exposed the judicial system to ridicule, albeit at great personal price. It is unclear whether Günşiray would have received the same verdict had he explicitly signaled that he was quoting Kafka. After all, he was not sentenced for plagiarism, nor for eroding the boundaries between fiction and reality, but rather for insulting the court. The irony lies in the fact that his trial echoed the plot of *Der Prozeß*, in which the protagonist is pitted against the absurd nature of the law and its arbitrary enforcement. Even twenty years later, when activists and writers who had been involved in supporting Yaşar Kemal's stance commemorated the event as a symbolic act of civil disobedience, their speech ended with 'Kafka is among us'.[3]

The fate of the Kafka-quoter is not a one-off in the history of Turkey's justice system; other examples in which fact and fiction are blurred spring to mind. Ultranationalist lawyer Kemal Kerinçsiz zealously pursued prominent writers, accusing them of 'denigrating Turkishness' as defined in article 301 of the Criminal Code. The charge brought against novelist Elif Şafak, for example, saw an explicit politicisation of the boundaries between fact and fiction. In her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* Şafak relates the story of Turkey's suppressed Armenian history, opening the novel with a scene in which Zeliha, one of its main characters, is on her way to an abortion clinic but gets stuck in Istanbul traffic. She swears 'like a trooper, hissing one profanity after another ... at the whole Ottoman dynasty for once upon a time conquering the city of Constantinople'.[4] Zeliha's profane outburst triggered the offence taken by some of the novel's readers.[5] Notwithstanding the novel's patent iconoclasms, the lawyer

2 If not otherwise stated, all translations from Turkish are the author's. Mahir Günşiray freely quoted from the second chapter of *The Trial*: 'Ich bin vor etwa zehn Tagen verhaftet worden, über die Tatsache der Verhaftung selbst lache ich, aber das gehört jetzt nicht hierher. Ich wurde früh im Bett überfallen, vielleicht hatte man – es ist nach dem, was der Untersuchungsrichter sagte, nicht ausgeschlossen – den Befehl irgendeinen Zimmermaler der ebenso unschuldig ist, wie ich zu verhaften, aber man wählte mich'; Kafka 2006, 41. The case was reported in the daily newspaper *Radikal;* Başlangıç 2005.

3 Kural 2015.

4 Shafak 2006, 1.

5 'Only a handful of Turks come from Central Asia, right? And then the next thing you know they are everywhere! What happened to the millions of Armenians who were already

failed to make the case that *The Bastard of Istanbul* constituted an insult to Turkishness. This was ironic, given that one of the characters, addressing head-on a central taboo in contemporary Turkish society, states,

> I am the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost all their relatives at the hands of Turkish butchers in 1915, but I myself have been brainwashed to deny the genocide because I was raised by some Turk named Mustafa![6]

The national and international support expressed for freedom of speech in Turkey eventually led to Şafak's acquittal in 2006 and a modest reform of article 301 of the Criminal Code.

At a moment in which the crisis of literature is often proclaimed, these examples offer striking evidence to the contrary. What, we might ask, contributes to the sense of provocation felt in the case of fiction? How can we explain the fact that even among the highly literate the speech and actions of a fictional character were taken as the literal expression of an author's opinion? While the author was declared dead by deconstructionists decades ago, the Turkish case illustrates – for better or for worse – the close links between literature and the persona of the author, who occupies a central place as a public intellectual. Turkey has, of course, a long history of functionalising its own literature for political ends. Examples of the politicisation of literary narratives in Turkey include the pedagogic use of literature in implementing the humanist culture reforms of the 1930s and '40s, the use of literature as a site of resistance against military dictatorships, literature's potential for forming a new historical consciousness and the constitutive function of literature in minority rights activism. Ultranationalist as well as Islamist lawyers continue to target freedom of speech. The enemy, once embodied by the figure of the intellectual who denigrates Turkishness, has been newly defined as one who injures religious values. Article 216 is applied to those who are accused of 'denigrating' religious values held by a segment of the population.[7] In the 2000s we ultimately witnessed a shift from ethnos to religion and entered a new era in which trials – along with the threat of assassination – effectively created a climate of self-censorship.

there? Assimilated! Massacred! Orphaned! Deported! And then forgotten!'; Shafak 2006, 55. '... bütün akrabalarını 1915'te kasap Türklerin ellerinde kaybetmiş bir sülalenin torunuyum, köklerime ihanet etmeyi öğendim, soykırımı inkâr etmek üzere yetiştirildim...', '... Sen kalk gel Orta Asya'dan, dal dosdoğru Anadolu'nun bağrına, sonra bir bakmışsın her yerdeler. Orada yerleşen milyonlarca Ermeni'ye ne oldu peki? Asimile edildiler, eridiler, yetim bırakıldıar, sürüldüler, mal mülklerinden oldular...'; Şafak 2014; 68.

6 Shafak 2006, 1.

7 For a discussion of the Turkish penal code and its amendment, see Algan 2008.

2. Kafka's Echoes

An investigation of the reception and appropriation of Kafka in Turkey reveals the ongoing effort to secure freedom of speech in a country that is marked by a long history of Turkification and Islamisation. The strong tradition of Kafka reception in Turkey has sensitised readers to the kinds of literary allusions and rhetorical flourishes that are associated with the Prague author. Characters such as Herr K. and Gregor Samsa, labyrinthine narratives and the motif of estrangement left a lasting imprint on literary texts that openly challenge or circumvent censorship.

The Turkish reception of Kafka is also instructive for research in the field of Turkish-German Studies. There is a long-standing relationship between Turks and Germans dating back to Ottoman times that is marked by imperial and national interests, intellectual exchange, exile, labour migration and economic interests. A dynamic market for Turkish literature has evolved in Germany since the 1980s and vice versa. Since Kafka's work explodes most ethnic, national, imperial or religious categories, it continues to provoke debate about what it means to belong. The work of the most prominent German authors of Turkish descent, such as Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Zafer Şenocak, applies Kafka in new ways. Şenocak's most recent work, *In deinen Worten: Mutmaßungen über den Glauben meines Vaters* (2016), echoes Kafka's *Brief an den Vater* (*Letter to His Father*), in which the son discusses his father's transmission of religious tradition.[8] Albeit in different fashions, both texts address the transformation of minority religions in the context of migration and assimilation.

This article focuses on the reception of Kafka as a diagnostic means for assessing the status and treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey. For scholars and writers alike, Kafka remains a dominant figure, one who signifies the possibility of moving beyond nationally defined literary fields. Nurdan Gürbilek, for example, adopts a comparative approach in her analysis titled *Benden Önce Bir Başkası* (*Somebody Else Before Me*), in which she reads literary texts against each other ('çapraz okuma').[9] She analyses the evolution of the motif of the monstrous vermin from Dostoevsky to Kafka, arguing that readers' ability to appreciate the significance of Kafka's vermin depends on the literary groundwork laid by Dostoevsky. Likewise, intertextual links between Kafka's *Letter to His Father* and Oğuz Atay's (1934–1977) *Babama Mektup* (*Letter to My Father*) are explored in a manner that transcends the conventional styles in which Turkish writers' engagement with European literature has been analysed. The strength of Gürbilek's work lies in her comprehensive approach, an approach that moves away from the East-West paradigm. It is perhaps owing to the assertion that progress and the future lie in the West that a sense of belatedness and inadequacy has tended to infuse early Turkish literature. Gürbilek proposes the term 'criticism of lack' to capture the

8 For a forthcoming article, see Konuk, Kader. 'Kritikfähigkeit und Zweifel in Zafer Şenocaks Werk'. In Gutjahr, Ortrud (ed.). *WORT.BRÜCHE: Fragmente einer Sprache des Vertrauens im Werk Zafer Şenocaks*. Bielefeld: transcript.

9 Gürbilek 2011.

sense of insufficiency, deprivation, and shortage that pervades Turkish literature, which she attempts to overcome in her analysis of intertextual relations.[10]

An approach that merely conceptualises European literature as a medium of empowerment for Middle Eastern societies would be equally misleading. To invoke the title of Azar Nafisi's 2003 memoir, I am not proposing a 'Reading *The Trial* in Istanbul'. In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, the author, an Iranian professor of English literature, captures the liberating potential of reading Western literature in Tehran. Nafisi's memoir portrays Iranian women's engagement with Western literature as an act of intellectual freedom and feminist resistance to the theocracy that rules their lives. Although I have strong reservations about this perspective, it is worth noting that Nafisi also shows 'how *Lolita* gave a different color to Tehran and how Tehran helped redefine Nabokov's novel, turning it into this *Lolita*, our *Lolita*'.[11] Similarly the intention here is not merely to elaborate how Kafka's work plays out in Turkish literature as a way of articulating cultural critique and political resistance, but rather to ask whether Kafka's Turkish reception provides new angles to Kafka criticism generally. By following the traces of Kafka in Turkish literature since the 1950s, this approach provides a model for the study of Turkish literature and culture within a global context.

3. Ethnoreligious Affiliations

While only a small circle of writers and critics was aware of Kafka's writing during his lifetime, there are a number of decisive moments that mark the history of the reception of his work. Although his books fell victim to the infamous book burnings perpetrated by the National Socialists, Kafka came to be recognised after the war as one of the most significant authors of European modernism. The reception of his work, however, was divided along strictly ideological lines. With the relaxing of Cold War ideologies, Kafka came to be seen as a transnational writer par excellence and a cornerstone of world literature. Literary critics would henceforth identify the roots of his work at the intersection of the Habsburg monarchy, Jewish identity and European modernism. Today, Kafka's oeuvre is seen to uniquely demonstrate the interrelatedness of ethnic, religious, linguistic, imperial and national affiliations.[12]

Parallels may be drawn between Prague and Istanbul as sites of literary production – both cities underwent fundamental changes during the transition from empire to nation state. In *Prague Territories* Scott Spector argues that in the peripheral spheres of declining German power, language became the most politically charged issue.[13] The language politics of Prague at the turn of the century and the *Tschechisierung* (Czechisation) of the city finds a parallel in the Turkification of Istanbul in the early 20th century, and both

10 Gürbilek 2003, 600.
11 Nafisi 2003, 6.
12 David Suchoff 2007 gives a comprehensive overview of the changing modes in Kafka criticism.
13 Spector 2000, 68–82.

may be understood as a consequence of the kinds of assimilation processes that accompany modernisation. This prompts one to question whether there is a figure like Kafka in the Turkish literary context – an author who is a member of a minority group, writes in Turkish, develops a unique style, and "deterritorialises" the Turkish literary landscape. Is there, in other words, a Kafkaesque author who subverts Turkish national and ethno-religious boundaries? How is the isomorphism between national territory, language and literature that was created in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic challenged through literature?

Following Laurent Mignon, Murat Cankara, Hülya Adak, Etienne Charrière and others by expanding research to include the diverse literatures of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, we can resist the homogenisation enforced by the Turkish state. The language and cultural reforms of the early Republican period suppressed the diversity of Ottoman literatures and territorialised the newly emerging literary narratives. A Turkish Renaissance was invoked as a means to create a homogenous Turkish identity. Comparisons with other countries suggest themselves. Whereas the elevation of the vernacular to a literary language is usually thought to have catalysed the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and hence it is mostly regarded in positive terms, in the Ottoman Empire the valence is more ambivalent. On the one hand, elevating the vernacular had a democratising effect during the early decades of the Turkish Republic. The genre *köy edebiyatı* (village literature), for example, provided the means for a literary imagination in Turkish. On the other hand, elevating and standardising vernacular Turkish came at the price of minoritising and suppressing literatures in Ottoman, Armenian, Greek and Kurdish.

Because Turkishness is defined along religious lines (with the Sunni male constituting the norm for Turkishness), non-Muslim writers have historically occupied a precarious position within society. Since articulating affiliation to a religious minority constrains broader recognition as a writer, Turkish authors have developed a variety of strategies in the publishing world. These strategies range from those practiced by atheist poet and essayist Roni Margulies (b. 1955), who writes about Jewish life but prefers not to be referred to as a Jewish writer, to that of novelist Vivet Kanetti (b. 1956), who published her first books under the pseudonym E. Emine, a quintessentially Turkish name.[14] Other writers have resisted pressure – like that faced by Kanetti – to conceal their Jewish background, turning it instead into a wellspring of creativity. Mario Levi, one of the most important contemporary Turkish writers, for example, has written a number of books explicitly dealing with Jewish life in Turkey. Given both their shared

14 While Margulies keeps the memory of Turkey's diverse past alive, he does not mourn the loss of Ladino, nor does he want to be referred to as a Jewish poet or a representative of a minority literature. Nonetheless, Margulies was invested in making Yehuda Amichai's Hebrew poetry available in Turkish. Latife Tekin, whose family background is Kurdish, Arab and Turkish, is another writer who serves as an important example in this context. Her debut novels (*Sevgili Arsız Ölüm* and *Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları*), both published in the early 1980s, resist the standardisation and homogenisation of the Turkish literary language by elevating the vernacular spoken in Turkey's multilingual provinces to a literary level.

minority status and identification with Jewish heritage, it should come as no surprise that Kafka's literary influence is recognised in Levi's work.[15]

Bilge Karasu (1930–1995), a renowned author of Jewish and Greek Orthodox heritage, engaged even more directly with Kafka's work and developed a narrative style that for many resonates with Kafka's nightmarish plots. *Gece* – translated by Güneli Gün as *Night* – is a lengthy novel in which the author conceives of a society governed exclusively by fear and suspicion. There is no divine revelation, no security, and no coherence that might give meaning to human existence in the fear-driven world of the novel. Owing to the similarities between Karasu's and Kafka's narrative styles, Karasu is often referred to as the Turkish Kafka – an attribution that he himself strongly opposed.[16] Establishing literary correlations between authors on the basis of their religious and ethnoreligious affiliations is a temptation that ought to be resisted. Rather, it might be asked how Kafka has had a direct impact on literary imagination since the first Turkish translations of his work in the 1950s.[17] Süreyya İlkılıç provides a comprehensive account and analysis of the translations and their reception in Turkey, detecting a correlation between them and the political upheaval caused by the military coups.[18] One of the first people to recognise the significance of Kafka's reception outside of Western Europe and the United States, however, was Atef Botros. In *Kafka: Ein jüdischer Schriftsteller aus arabischer Sicht* (2010), Botros examines the Arab reception of Kafka, arguing that the question of Kafka's contested Zionist leanings became central to Arab intellectuals after the Six-Day War of 1967. Looking at the Turkish context, there is little evidence that Kafka's stance towards Zionism was central to his popularity in Turkey. For obvious reasons, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not had comparable political ramifications in Turkey and hence never provoked debate about Kafka's ideological position.

This article argues instead that Kafka became a seminal figure for writers in Turkey whose investment was not necessarily in Kafka's Jewishness but in specific narrative techniques, the adaptation of which allowed them to develop their own literature of resistance. This can be traced in works written from the late 1970s onwards, works that experiment with literary styles from realism to existentialism and postmodernism. Of particular interest to writers, artists and intellectuals are those themes that are readily identified with Kafka's work – alienation in the modern age, proto-existentialism, polyglottism and social subversiveness – themes that reveal society's ills. Kafka was not, as might be assumed, mobilised in Turkey primarily as a representative of Western literature or Jewishness. Rather, he has been received as an exemplar of resistance and alienation. By reflecting on the ways in which Kafka has been received in the Turkish literary landscape, it becomes possible to unravel various discursive threads that undermine the

15 Levi 2005.

16 Karasu 2007.

17 Within this context it is interesting to see that a Kurdish translation project, which started after the liberalisation of laws related to the Kurdish language, made translating *Die Verwandlung* into Kurmanji Kurdish a priority; Kafka 2010.

18 İlkılıç 2016, 276.

state's homogenising project. Four novels stand out in this regard: Ferit Edgü's *Hakkâri'de bir Mevsim* (1977), Erhan Bener's *Böcek* (1982), Bilge Karasu's *Gece* (1985) and Orhan Pamuk's *Kar* (2004).

4. Encountering Silence: Ferit Edgü

Alienation emerges as one of the key concepts with which Turkish intellectuals and writers in the 1950s and 60s engaged in their attempts to constitute 'meaning and mystery in an alienating world'.[19] Kafka, Beckett and Camus – whose works were eagerly translated into Turkish during this period – were celebrated as the foremost interpreters of such ideas. In the postwar period, alienation and the search for extra-spiritual meaning resonated with a number of writers whose interest in existentialism had been sparked by Kafka and Sartre.[20] The notion of human freedom in a world free of transcendental certainties inspired young writers such as Erdal Öz (1935–2006) to found in 1956 the first Turkish existentialist magazine, entitled *A*.[21]

Existentialist texts continued to be influential into the late 1970s. Ferit Edgü's 1977 novel, originally entitled *O* (*He*), centres on the experiences of a seaman, stranded in a small and strange village, who reluctantly assumes the role of an elementary school teacher during a long, cold winter. The story was adapted for film by Erden Kıral under the title *Hakkâri'de bir Mevsim* (*A Season in Hakkâri*) and it is under this name that Edgü's novel has since been distributed. The story is set in a mountainous village (abbreviated as *Pir.*) in the province of Hakkâri, where the archetypal lifeways of a minority community on the Turkish periphery are played out. The narrator opens the novel by identifying Hakkâri's location on Turkey's southeastern border with Iran and Iraq. The place name Hakkâri, the narrator tells us, comprises *hak* and *kar*. While *hak* means 'right', 'justice' or 'God', the word *kar* denotes 'snow'. Adding another layer to these obscure meanings is the abbreviation of the village name as *Pir.*, which can be translated as 'spiritual leader'. These multiple meanings have a magical realist effect on the otherwise sober narration of everyday life in the village. The author seems to suggest that in a place with a name mysterious and indeterminate yet also representative, odd things can happen.[22]

The stranger's arrival raises the hopes of this forsaken community but also provokes the community's ridicule. When he introduces himself to the governor's officials, the protagonist says: 'Ben, diyorum, Pir. Köyünün yeni öğretmeniyim'/ 'I am, I say, Pir. The

19 Şenocak 2006.

20 For a discussion of translations of Sartre and emerging existentialism in Turkey, see Kos 2010. Mustafa Kurt 2009 analyses the beginnings of existentialism in 1950s Turkey.

21 Altuğ 2001. Süreyya İlkılıç discusses the appropriation of Kafka's *Der Prozess* in the so-called 12 March (1971) novels, for example in Erdal Öz and Sevgi Soysal; İlkılıç 2012, 277.

22 Edgü 2009.

new teacher of the village.'[23] The syntactical placement of 'Pir.', with a full stop following the abbreviation, is in itself an obscure choice. It invites the reader to interpret the beginning of the sentence to mean that a messianic figure arrives in this godforsaken world. Hakkâri represents a place beyond the reach of reason, where the narrator is faced with a futile search for meaning. Edgü establishes Hakkâri as a place from which some communities were driven into exile but where others found refuge. The nameless narrator maintains that neither persecutors nor persecuted – nor even the gods – left a mark on Hakkâri's landscape. We are told that Hakkâri is a place of *gurbet* – 'exile' – a place of non-belonging and suffering in which the narrator paradoxically finds himself at home as a 'stranger among strangers'.[24]

Perhaps Kafka, the narrator speculates, dreamed of Hakkâri in his nightmares. Had he known of its existence, it might have become material for his 'frightening book'.[25] Edgü weaves an intertextual net for his narrative, a net that connects Kafka as well as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Although varieties of realist styles inform Edgü's work, *Hakkâri'de bir Mevsim* is best understood as the result of the author's engagement with the central themes of *The Castle*: the arrival of a stranger, the sense of complete isolation in a remote village in severe winter conditions and the experience of intense alienation. Like Kafka's K., Edgü's O struggles to understand the social hierarchies behind the obscure rules that govern village life.[26] Edgü uses Kafka's nightmarish representation of reality to amplify the absurdity of life and impossibility of reason in this isolated and harsh landscape. A series of mysterious events cause the protagonist to question the meaning of human existence. Repeatedly faced with the fatalistic worldview of the villagers, he feels intensely alienated. From the outset, an inconsistent and at times circular logic determines the plot. Edgü's novel oscillates between its existentialist and magical realist leanings: it remains unexplained how a stranded seaman, the narrator, might have found his way to Hakkâri and then be singled out for a teaching post in Pir.

Hakkâri is a liminal place, a province that is not only at the edge of Turkey's map but also linguistically banished to the periphery.[27] Ferit Edgü alludes here to Kurdish, Turkey's second most commonly spoken language, which was suppressed and censored until 2002. While allusions to Kurdish remain concealed in the narrative, the Aramaic language and script are presented as key to another past. In fact, the historical legacy of the Assyrians constitutes a starting point for the protagonist's search for meaning. Shortly after his arrival, the narrator, who sees himself as a 'stranger among strangers', encounters an Assyrian bookseller, who welcomes him as if long expected and presents

23 Edgü 2009, 25.
24 Edgü 2009, 17.
25 Edgü 2009, 10.
26 Kurt points out the correspondence between Kafka's and Edgü's use of names; Kurt 2009, 150.
27 '(Sen benden, ben senden olduğum halde, garip, yüzyıllar boyu hiç öğrenememişiz birbirimizin dilini.) Ama her sözcüğümde, senin kokun, senin soluğun, senin yokluğun, senin yoksulluğun ve senin ölümlerinle doğumun vardı'; Edgü 2009, 10-11.

him with a selection of ten Aramaic books, an enigmatic map and an Ottoman seal. The bookseller maintains that his father had left him the map to sell to a stranded seaman and presents it, together with the Ottoman seal, as his *kismet*. He predicts that Aramaic will reveal itself to him: 'the language of the book that you don't understand will start to understand your language and open up to you.'[28]

As if following a hidden script, the stranger is drawn into events in which the boundaries between the present, past and future collapse. As somebody who rejects a fatalistic view of life and belief in divine predestination, the narrator feels deeply challenged. Whenever he attempts to decipher the map, he is interrupted and his readings are infused with bizarre coincidences. The books slowly reveal themselves to him and when he arrives at the tenth book the narrative comes full circle. It turns out that this last volume carries the title *O* and is empty – it is the book that he will write and that we are reading. Shortly after this discovery, the narrator finds out that the Assyrian was driven into exile after his books were set ablaze. His was not only the last bookstore in town but his departure also represents the demise of Assyrian culture. Despite the mysterious entanglement of books and events, the novel ends with the teacher declaring to his pupils: 'Nothing is predestined'.[29] His sense of individual freedom is entangled with an intense feeling of anxiety about enduring a world without God.[30]

Director Erden Kıral, who escaped to Germany after the military coup in 1980, directed a film based on Edgü's novel that won the jury award at the Berlinale in 1983. *Hakkâri'de bir Mevsim* was subsequently banned in Turkey, not because it investigates the freedom of the individual beyond religious certainties, but because it implicitly criticises the treatment of the Kurdish population in the region. The film ignored the mysterious blurring of temporalities in the novel, giving the story's atmosphere a socialist-realistic touch. Kıral's film emphasises instead the oppressive treatment of ethnic minorities in Hakkâri. It politicises a central moment in the plot, namely that in which the teacher encounters his students for the first time and realises that they do not share a common language.[31]

When Edgü published his novel in 1977, Kurds had already been subject to decades of forced assimilation. Phrases in Kurmanji, the language spoken by most Kurds in the Hakkâri region, are absent from Edgü's novel and Kıral's film, but this silence is a powerful indication of the oppression it faced. Since Kurdish was, at the time of the film's premiere, outlawed in the public sphere, the film faced the same fate. The critique that Ferit Edgü's novel conveys through its eerie silence is addressed at the linguistic assimilationism that determined cultural life in Turkey. Using Yasemin Yildiz' term, this could be interpreted as Edgü's criticism of the pervading paradigm of

28 Edgü 2009, 35.
29 Edgü 2009, 189.
30 See also Edgü 1976.
31 For more on the invisibilisation of the Kurdish language, see Haig 2004. For illuminating articles on the effect of censorship on the art world in Turkey and the positionality of Kurdish artists, see Karaca 2011; Karaca 2012.

monolingualism.[32] Taking the critique of monolingualism a step further, however, I would argue that Edgü underscores the interlingual connections that were silenced through the 'Speak Turkish' campaign of the 1920s. What the protagonist is left with are enigmatic texts of an Assyrian past and children whose language he does not understand. Parallel to the process through which the Aramaic texts reveal themselves to him, he starts searching for a common medium with which to communicate with his pupils. Both processes indicate the creative role of languages other than Turkish in informing Turkish literature. Both Kurdish and Aramaic function here as shadow-languages, creating historical depth. Analogous to David Suchoff's definition of transnational writing as 'constructed of more than one national voice', I suggest the term interlingual literature here to mark exchange processes between languages in an enforced monolingual environment.[33]

5. Critiquing Fascism: Erhan Bener

> It was a small room with four corners, a low ceiling and whitewashed walls. There were six to seven people. All wore floor-sweeping, long and wide white robes. White cords were fastened around their waists. On their heads they wore pointed hoods with broad brims that left their faces in the dark. They had brought him here to hang. There were no gallows in sight. One could also not discern a door in any of the four walls of the room. They had not tied up his hands. He did not know what his crime was, what he was going to be hanged for. He could also not remember whether he had been sentenced or not. … He did not know how and when he had been brought here. He could only feel that time disappeared backwards into an infinite emptiness.[34]

Recai Bey, the protagonist of Erhan Bener's (1929–2007) novel *Böcek* (1982), is a police detective who awakes from a nightmare, described in the quotation above, in which he anticipates his death through hanging. Disoriented by the intensity of the dream, he tries to collect himself so that he can pursue his everyday activities and go to work. The sense of entrapment in a place without doors and the pull of the past – the fall into the 'infinite emptiness' – assumes control over him during the course of the day, which turns out to be the last day of his life. The narrator describes Recai Bey's last twenty-four hours in painstaking detail, revealing the psychological state of the police detective who suffers from depression and anxiety. The protagonist is portrayed as someone with an extreme penchant for order, cleanliness and punctuality. As if this tremendous need for control is being challenged, Recai Bey's morning is interrupted by memories of his deceased wife's disgruntled, biting remarks. Flashbacks of suicide

32 Yildiz 2012.
33 Suchoff 2007, 66.
34 Bener 2000, 9.

victims and murder victims likewise occupy his mind while he is getting ready for work.

Recai Bey's need for order is revealed to be excessive when he catches sight of a cockroach in his bathroom. The insect intensifies his terror of dirt and decay. In Recai's mind, the small cockroach has become monstrous in size. After repeated attempts to ignore it, he squashes the cockroach with a flycatcher but only manages to leave it limping. In an act of desperate rage, Recai finally pours alcohol over the insect and sets it ablaze. The title of the novel, *Böcek*, is a generic word for insect, but perhaps 'vermin' – closer to Kafka's 'Ungeziefer' in *Die Verwandlung (The Metamorphosis)* – would be a more appropriate translation, for the narrative elements of nightmare, fear, death and disgust all recall Kafka's signature story.[35] In his novel, Erhan Bener uses the cockroach as a metaphor to articulate people's fear of the abject and of death. Recai's burning of the cockroach at the beginning of the novel is the harbinger of his own death. Hidden in this act is his unresolved traumatic childhood, interconnected with feelings of guilt and terror that dog him until his own demise.

The mere thought of dirt, bacteria and death causes Recai Bey to experience panic attacks and feelings of nausea and terror. He has an aversion to particular bodily smells and fluids, and thus also to the sight and thought of prostitutes, pornography and homosexuality. The sources of his revulsion are not only of a physical and sexual nature; they also encompass political issues. Recai harbours a particular hatred of leftist revolutionaries. The sense of disgust is intimately connected to the intimation of death. In the last twenty-four hours of his life, narrated over approximately 200 pages, Recai Bey is literally on the brink of death. The detective compares prostitutes with cockroaches, feels a deep hatred towards leftist students, fantasises about burning all the books in the world, and imagines himself to be Nero setting Rome ablaze. Nevertheless, the author manages to sustain readers' empathy for the psychologically disturbed protagonist. From the very beginning, the narrator indicates that the burning of the cockroach is connected to the protagonist's past, that 'infinite emptiness' in his nightmare. The odor of the burning cockroach conjures memories of his traumatic childhood. Piecing together a story narrated in fragments, we learn that Recai was forced to look on helplessly as his little sister died in a fire. Since her death, Recai has been haunted by his mother's unreasonable accusations and his own feelings of guilt. Experiences of sexual abuse add another layer to Recai's traumatic childhood memories, which have destroyed the possibility of a healthy mental and sexual life in adulthood. Recai Bey's flashbacks illustrate the way in which fires have become a fetish and an expression of his disturbed sexuality. He ultimately becomes complicit in his wife's death when he refuses to assist her during an asthma attack.

Recai Bey finds it difficult to distinguish his nightmarish obsessions and fantasies from reality.[36] In the surrealistically inflected scenes of *Böcek* there are intimations of

35 Abdurrahman Kolcu 2012 analyses three literary texts by Bener with regard to Kafka's motif of metamorphosis.

36 Bener 2000, 165.

Gregor Samsa from *Die Verwandlung*. A tall man with a hunchback leans over the sick Recai Bey to check whether he is sleeping. It is as if the man's shadow embodies the text that underlies and shapes this novel. During the twenty-four hours preceding his death, Recai Bey is as incapable as Gregor of eating: he refuses food brought to him by a neighbour, a caring young woman reminiscent of Gregor's sister Grete. Moreover, he has the sense that he is rotting from the inside.[37] Recai's feeling of terror is so great that he dreams of insects as big as buffalo and fears being squashed by cockroaches.[38] He imagines that countless cockroaches are infiltrating his brain – some of them have died helplessly on their backs, others are in a rage, attacking his brain in order to kill him.[39] The vermin are both the abject as well as part of him. When Recai suffers a stroke on the street, a limping cockroach appears to him, collapsing in cruel laughter at the sight of his misery.[40] Like their counterparts in *Die Verwandlung*, the vermin in Bener's novel may be thought of as an externalised form of the protagonist's psychological state.

Just as Bener's and Kafka's works evince thematic similarities, Bener also adopts some of Kafka's narrative techniques, images and his nightmarish atmosphere. This allowed Bener to circumvent the political censorship that forestalled any critique of the military coup of 12 September 1980. *Böcek* was published shortly after the coup that was legitimised as a means to end the recurrent violent clashes between right- and leftwing organisations. Military dictatorship and censorship prevailed until the process of democratisation began in the mid-1980s. Bener's prose depicts violence not only as characteristic of the police state, but also as a force that permeates much more deeply into society, infiltrating intimate relationships among individuals. *Böcek* portrays the troubled policeman, for whom the use of violence and torture has become ordinary, with great sensitivity. Read in the context of the aftermath of the coup, *Böcek* is a subtle investigation of the questions of guilt and the banality of violence. The story does not merely expose the sufferings of a mentally unstable individual, with his anxieties, phobias and feelings of utter isolation. Instead, Bener explodes the boundaries of the psychological novel and offers us a reading of a dysfunctional society. Thus, *Böcek* might be considered an investigation into society's ills during the 1970s. Managing to circumvent the political censorship of the early 1980s, Bener creates a language to articulate the extent of the suppression and aggression that characterised society. By employing Kafka's literary strategies, he portrays paranoia such that it is not merely a symptom of a disturbed individual; the paranoid policeman embodies a fascist system that is doomed to destroy itself.

37 Bener 2000, 168-169. Just as Gregor's death signifies the liberation of his sister Grete's sexuality, Recai's death releases the young woman who tried to look after him.

38 Bener 2000, 123, 157.

39 Bener 2000, 124.

40 The rape scene (Bener 2000,100), transgressions in the hamam (Bener 2000, 159) and references to homosexuality (Bener 2000, 181) are significant moments in the narrative that deserve greater attention in a more detailed discussion of the novel.

6. Purifying Language: Bilge Karasu

Bilge Karasu's novel *Gece (Night)* provides an intricate narrative about the oppressed and oppressors trapped in a system of surveillance and fear. Although it was not published until 1985, the novel had been written ten years earlier, emerging from the anxious climate following the military coup of 1971.[41] Despite cultural and political references that echo 1970s Turkey, the plot unfolds independent of a specific temporal and topographical frame. *Gece* is a universal story of resistance against an anonymous, amorphous power. The narrative accentuates the nature of political oppression, linking it also to heterosexual oppression and surveillance as methods of subjugation. Agents of the night – the nightworkers – intrude into the day to restrict freedom of movement and thought. Night, as Keith Hitchins points out, represents order, whereas day signifies 'the probing mind and the freedom of the thinking individual to stand against the tide'.[42] Whilst using realist means, Karasu steadily defamiliarises night and day. *Gece* provides the reader with a disturbing picture of human relations under tyranny in which the concept of the real is continuously threatened.

The plot's purported logic is made incomprehensible by labyrinthine plot lines and a discontinuous sense of time. These narrative devices are translated spatially into Escherian staircases which cause the protagonist to become disoriented. At first, the staircases seem to have a regular structure, but the illusion quickly breaks down when the protagonist is challenged by their unexpected turns and dead ends. Illogically ascending and descending stairs mirror his sense of growing despair. Upon entering the National Library (*Ulusal Kitaplık*), a grand building also called the Palace of Knowledge (*Bilgiler Sarayı*), the protagonist is faced with staircases and halls that run contrary to logic.[43] The library can be thought of as the spatialised form of a puristic nationalism that prevailed after the founding of Turkey as a secular republic. In Karasu's novel, the library is devoid of human beings and represents nationalism in its incomplete, grandiose stage. It is essentially Karasu's symbol of Turkish modernity, which is both a continuous project and a project already in ruins.

Here the author plays with two words that convey the meaning 'national', namely *ulusal* and *milli*. The national library established in 1946 is referred to as *milli kütüphane*, using the word with an Arabic root, which describes a community that shares a common religion or belief. The name borne by the library in Karasu's novel, in contrast, represents a puristic form of nationalism that intended to eliminate Arabic from modern Turkish. Karasu refers to the library as *ulusal*, a word derived from the Old Turkic word *ulus* or *ülüş* for people or nation. By describing the architecture of the library as *ulu* (great, exalted) and depicting a centre from which radiates a light as bright as day,

41 In Engin Kılıç's view, the book does not merely belong to the '12 Mart romanları' – novels written in response to the coup of 12 March 1971 – because it constitutes a more generic response to totalitarian regimes; Kılıç 2013.

42 Hitchins, Karasu and Gün 1995, 218.

43 Karasu 2013, 65–66.

Karasu renders it sublime. The light suffusing this place of secular knowledge and bestowing on it a sense of the sacred accompanies the protagonist on his quest until one of the Escherian staircases threatens to plunge him into a dark abyss. Coupled with the sights of people being randomly beaten and killed on the streets, the sense of being trapped in a nightmare turns first into paranoia and finally terror.

Karasu's emphasis on human alienation, a suffocating atmosphere and a sense of disorientation in a world devoid of justice bears unmistakably Kafkaesque undertones. However, *Gece*'s experimental form also adopts Borges' and Calvino's postmodern techniques. The absence of a conventional linear plot, the unreliability of the narrator, a blending of a self-conscious author and multiple narrators and the insertion of metaliterary footnotes all point to Borges as an inspiration. The playing of ritualised games and the sense of enacting performances, on the other hand, recall Calvino's style. Consciously recreating Kafka, Borges or Calvino in Turkish or not, *Gece* can only be fully appreciated as a reaction against the social realism (*toplumsal gerçekçilik)* that dominated Turkish literature for decades. While realist depiction prevails in Karasu, his work departs from the kind of realism that makes claims to objectivity. Unlike social realist literature, *Gece* questions the relationship between reader, narrators and text by mingling different points of view and introducing a metanarrative level.

As one of the forerunners of magical realism and postmodernism in Turkey, Karasu introduced new literary possibilities that – at times – enabled writers to overcome the confines imposed by censorship.[44] That Karasu's realist stories often share features with parables is evident in his *Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi*, a collection of short stories that is greatly responsible for the acclaim he has won. In these intricately entwined short stories, Karasu created an extraordinary range of twisted plots in which he experiments with time by way of constantly deferring endings, using circular logic and employing spiral concepts of time. Through the juxtaposition of archetypal themes and quotidian concerns, these whimsical, philosophical stories assume a quaint quality. Interspersed with numerous puns and neologisms, *Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi* also displays a linguistically unique style.[45] Karasu experiments with what is etymologically plausible, while at times only giving the illusion that a word adheres to the puristic, nationalist language reforms. From the outset, he plays with the reader's expectation of reading 'pure Turkish' when in fact he inserts words that either have double meanings or are products of his own imagination. The experience of reading the stories results in a sense of unreliability and ambivalence that provides a space to critically reflect on those puristic language reforms.

What makes Karasu's literary style distinguishable from that of Kafka, Borges or Calvino is his treatment of language and history. *Gece* is essentially a critique of the manipulation of memory under a despotic regime. The nightworkers who intrude into the private lives of the *gündüzcü* (daymakers) try to control language, narration and

44 For an analysis of Latife Tekin's magical realist novel *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm*, see Konuk 2001.

45 For discussions of Karasu's take on Turkey's modern language reforms, see Aji 2013 and Dickinson 2014.

representation of the past. Under these conditions, history has lost its connection to collective memory. One of the nightworkers portrays history in two ways: as a frozen structure that may be open to reinterpretation or, alternatively, as a memorised construct devoid of any real content. The purpose of the latter kind of history is not to represent the past but to provide a foil for its reenactment in the future.[46] Hence the nightworkers seek to control the representation of the past in order to secure their own future. While the nightworkers continue to extend their power, the protagonist fears for his sanity and upholds language as a site of resistance and writing as a desperate attempt to escape.[47]

7. Unlocking History: Orhan Pamuk

Kafka's echoes continue to reverberate in Turkish literature in the twenty-first century. Among the contemporary writers who engage with Kafka, the most notable is Orhan Pamuk, who tackles questions of imperialism, secular nationalism and the deterritorialisation of ethnoreligious minorities in his novel *Kar*. In a number of ways *Kar*, first published in 2004 and translated as *Snow*, picks up narrative threads from both Kafka's *Das Schloß* and Ferit Edgü's *Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim*. Pamuk's novel, set in 1990s Kars, an Anatolian city located at the northeastern border with Armenia and Georgia, opens with a journey to that city. The protagonist – an atheist poet who has recently returned to Turkey after twelve years of exile in Germany – travels on a bus from Istanbul across Anatolia in the middle of winter. The protagonist's name is Ka, short for Kerim Alakuşoğlu. Falling into a 'long-desired, long-awaited reverie', Ka does not realise he is heading straight into a blizzard that limits the visibility on the road.[48] The scene is reminiscent of K. arriving in the snowed-in village in *Das Schloß*, where he loses his orientation and gazes into a void. In *Kar*, Pamuk maps the experience of estrangement that Kafka elaborated in *Das Schloß* onto an exile's return to a liminal place in his home country.

Pamuk's Ka is an easily discernible code for Kafka's K., a name that alludes to the author and the protagonist of *Das Schloß*. Both characters are quintessential strangers arriving in a wintry place off the map, struggling to define their respective places in a narrow society dominated by an invisible centre of power. Both embody solitude, inner exile and detachment. Pamuk spins Kafka's play on names a little further. Ka, Kar, and Kars are placed into each other like Russian dolls. First, Ka alludes to the word *kar*, snow, which isolates him from the rest of the world. *Kar* also represents silence, perfection and spirituality and starts melting at the novel's climax.[49] The word *kar* is, in turn, part of the name of the city where Ka lodges in the *Kar Palas Oteli* (Snow Palace Hotel). The final layer of this ultimate name game is revealed when the narrator

46 See, for example, Karasu 2013, 87, 111, 118.
47 Karasu 2013, 231.
48 Pamuk 2004, 4.
49 Pamuk 2004, 343.

Orhan – the namesake of the novel's author – enters the narrative world.[50] Orhan retraces Ka's encounters in Kars and tries to investigate Ka's assassination in Frankfurt: He died under a neon light that illuminated the letter 'K'. Orhan's quest is to reconstruct the past through Ka's notebook, but the mystical poems Ka composed after his journey to Kars remain irretrievable.

Unlike Kafka's *Das Schloß*, Pamuk's novel is set in a concrete time and place. Kars serves as a microcosm of 1990s Turkey that struggles with the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and Atatürk's vision of a secular republic. The plot evolves in the midst of ruins of the centuries-old Armenian civilisation, remnants of the Russian occupation in the late 19th century, and symbols of early Turkish modernity. Eighty years earlier, the narrator tells us, when Kars had been abandoned by the Ottoman and Russian armies, 'leaving the Turks and Armenians to massacre each other, the Turks had somehow devised a brand-new flag to announce the birth of a nation'.[51] Kars had once been a stage for the battle of empires over a population diverse in religion, culture and language. In subtle ways, Pamuk's numerous references to the city's Armenian past bring Turkey's denial of the elimination of Armenian culture to the fore. For the duration of Ka's visit, this forgotten, isolated border city is seemingly frozen in time and exudes a deep sense of loss. Ka's travel to Kars, to the 'end of the earth', turns into a Dantesque journey into Turkey's past.[52]

In this once cosmopolitan town, Ka travels through his own memories while he is confronted by the signs of a failed modern state built on the remains of a multiethnic empire. Ka seems to find his mission right upon arrival: he is determined to uncover the reasons for the emergence of political Islam and reflects upon its appeal among young men and women. Readers are invited to assume that Ka was sent to Kars as a journalist for a Turkish newspaper to investigate the reasons for the increase in the number of religiously devout young women who commit suicide. The novel draws attention to the conflicts that arose from the construction of the modern, unveiled, secular Turkish woman as an icon of modernity. *Kar* arguably critiques progressivist modernism and calls into question the principles on which the secular republic was founded. Ka himself is a stranger to religious belief, but as a poet, he is attracted to mystery as a force that shapes his imagination. The poetry that emerges out of his sojourn in Kars has a mysterious underlying structure and is arranged like a hexagonal snowflake. Fulfilling his role as an exilic poet, Ka's elegies have a melancholic undertone and are conceived of as a poetics of loss.[53]

Pamuk transforms Kafka's uncompleted novel into a political thriller with a postmodern spin. According to Max Brod, to whom Kafka left his manuscripts to be destroyed, Kafka had planned for the protagonist K. to die. Pamuk's protagonist Ka ac-

50 For a detailed analysis of the homonymic narrator Orhan and the homophonic heroes K. and Ka, see Gramling 2002, 5.
51 Pamuk 2004, 366–367.
52 Pamuk 2004, 132.
53 Pamuk 2004, 379.

tually dies four years after returning to Frankfurt, where he finishes his poetry collection entitled *Kar*. Like Max Brod, Orhan takes charge of the legacy of the author and tries to save it from oblivion. The narrator's self-consciousness about the status of his own discourse, however, adds to the unreliability of the narration. Instead of presenting facts, the narrator pieces together a version of truth from rumours, interviews unreliable witnesses, and approximates the past by reenacting Ka's travels and encounters.[54] Orhan fails to retrieve Ka's poems, but instead readers become intimately familiar with their structure, which mirrors the hexagonal arrangement of snow crystals.[55] The three axes of the hexagon represent memory, imagination and reason; it is a structure inspired by Bacon's tree of knowledge.[56] Each of the eighteen poems placed around the middle poem, which is entitled 'I, Ka', are unique. In these poems Ka 'mapped out a vision of himself and his place in the world, his special fears, his distinctive attributes, his uniqueness'.[57] Ka's poetry mirrors Pamuk's own attempt to unlock the subjugated parts of Turkey's history. Suggesting that 'his country can only discover itself through storytelling', his 'account takes the form of a meticulously constructed snowflake in which nothing is out of place, and where revelation and concealment occur in impeccable order'.[58] Silence and oblivion – embodied in snow – structure the novel. Neither Ka's poetry nor the past can be recovered. All that is left is a sense of being trapped in a cycle of atrocities that relentlessly repeat.

Few literary critics have recognised and analysed Pamuk's engagement with German literature in *Kar*.[59] David Gramling demonstrates this engagement in great detail and argues that Pamuk 'generates a landscape of naive *doppelgängers* and estranged mirror images, signaling the mutual imbrication of Turkish and European cultures'. Resisting the temptation to read *Kar* and *Das Schloß* as 'equidistant mirror-images' in terms of a 'parallel project', Gramling sees *Kar* as an extension, reanimation or reassemblage of Kafka's unfinished text, positing both literary texts in a 'textual partnership'.[60] For Venkat Mani, Pamuk's engagement with German literature in *Yeni Hayat* (*The New Life*) constitutes an argument for expanding the definition of Turkish-German literature, commonly understood as German texts produced by Turkish immigrants.[61] Mani approaches Pamuk's *Yeni Hayat* as a 'Turkish road-novel inspired by an aphorism from the German romantic author Novalis'. Building on this observation, he discusses 'literary exchanges that occur outside of migratory contexts'.[62] Although his point about

54 Pamuk 2004, 160.
55 Pamuk 2004, 261.
56 Pamuk 2004, 376.
57 Pamuk 2004, 215.
58 Miano 2004.
59 Nergis Ertürk indicates parallels to Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* but misses the context that Kafka's work provides for *Kar*; Ertürk 2010.
60 Gramling 2002, 1–2.
61 For Mani, 'the cultural hyphen [between Turkish and German] signals at best a sustained criticism and a sustainable scrutiny of affiliations to Germany or to Turkey'; Mani 2007, 7.
62 Mani 2007, 39.

literary exchanges outside of migratory contexts is well taken, applying Mani's definition of a Turkish-German text to Pamuk's *Kar* would not expand our understanding of the new textual dimensions that are created when two narratives are tied together: it changes the way we understand and interpret the first text.

Scott McClintock reads Kafka's literary work as speaking 'out of the twilight of one empire to us in the twilight zone of another empire'. McClintock develops a reading of Kafka's *Penal Colony* as an 'unsettled and unsettling fiction' linking 'one imperial time and place to another, thereby affording a comparative study of global imperialisms'.[63] While McClintock links Kafka's work to American imperialism, I suggest staying closer to Kafka's own time and place. For Pamuk, Kafka's position as a multilingual author in Prague, one of the cultural centres of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, resonates with his interest in articulating Turkey's loss of historical consciousness with regard to the non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire. Pamuk uses Kafka as leverage to amplify the sense of detachment and estrangement caused by the violent break with the Ottoman past. At the same time, Pamuk's *Kar* enhances the political-historical dimension that lies barely concealed in the background of *Das Schloß.*

8. Transnationalising Turkish Studies: A Deterritorialising Project

Reading Turkish literature through the lens of Kafka – be it in terms of reenactment, intertextuality, interlingual relations or reassemblage – yields new insights. Ferit Edgü's reimagination of K.'s arrival in a strange village provides a powerful subtext in a climate of censorship, heightening the awareness that Assyrian and Kurdish were subjugated and forced into oblivion. Erhan Bener, on the other hand, was fascinated by the absurd and the monstrous in Kafka's works, qualities he employed in *Böcek* to portray the fascist mentality of a particular generation. Bilge Karasu's almost puristic, technical approach to language in *Gece* and *Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi* is reminiscent of Kafka's linguistic style. Karasu articulates the consequences of linguistic assimilationism in subtle ways. Pamuk, on the other hand, adopts K. as a figure of exile, creating a narrative that functions like a spectre of the destroyed multilingual and multireligious worlds of the Ottoman Empire.

Reading Turkish literature through Kafka delivers several insights: running the risk of stating the obvious, it is a reminder that there is nothing essentially Turkish about Turkish literature. Turkish literature is inherently transnational not only by virtue of its history of encounters and exchange with European literatures, but also because of its interaction with the indigenous languages and literatures of the Ottoman Empire. Second, there is a strong correlation between sociopolitical conditions and aesthetic developments – including those brought into being by existentialism and postmodernism – that mark the evolution of Turkish literature. In addition to the aesthetic transformations traced in this article, we can observe how Kafka is repeatedly deployed as a figure of resistance against the suppression of free speech and processes of en-

63 McClintock 2004, 153.

forced linguistic assimilation. Edgü and Karasu in particular serve as examples of the ways in which Kafka's style evolves into new forms.

The interlingual literature that negotiates and sometimes resists linguistic assimilationism in Turkey sheds new light on the linguistic consciousness triggered by Kafka's oeuvre. Acknowledging and illuminating Turkish literary history from the point of view of minoritised communities does not mean distinguishing authors according to fixed ethnoreligious rubrics and constructing parallel, neatly segregated literary histories, something Mario Levi succinctly referred to as *ada edebiyatı*, 'island literature'.[64] It is the diverse, intertwined, and at times interlingual nature of these literary histories that are slowly coming to the fore.[65] Etienne Charrière, Will Stroebel and Laurent Mignon have contributed to the reconceptualisation of literatures in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, perhaps most notably in Mignon's article on the use of Kurdish expressions in Turkish texts that have the effect of transcending national and linguistic borders.[66] Reconnecting modern Turkish to its Ottoman heritage while illuminating its continuing exchange with Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Persian, Ladino, Arabic and Kurdish literatures will allow us to transnationalise Turkish Studies from within and construct a more comprehensive picture of Turkey's multicultural and polyglot heritage. This is all the more important at a moment when such plurality is being disavowed and Ottoman history is being co-opted for nationalist and neoimperialist ends.

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64 Sayın 1999, 195.

65 Roni Margulies' critique and Mehmet Yaşın's intervention in his *Poeturka* – a collection of essays published in the mid-1990s – are early landmarks in this direction; Yaşın 1995.

66 Mignon 2014, 199.

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