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Humanising the Actors and Working through the Conflict: The Role of Kurdish Literary Narratives and Culture in the Reconciliation Process in Turkey

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This paper examines the modern Kurdish literary narratives and their application to the potential reconciliation between Kurds and Turks. It argues that while the subtle forms of dehumanisation of the Kurds are still entrenched in the Turkish state policy and popular media production – hampering the peace process – Kurdish literary narratives might be helpful in changing the dominant image of the Kurds, humanising them, and stimulating the process of reconciliation. Moreover, they offer diverse perspectives which may assist reconciliation. The peace process in Turkey started in 2009, intensified in 2013, and collapsed in 2015. At the same time, Kurdish culture has not been fully recognised, and it did not become a meaningful factor in the process of ending military conflict and establishing dialogue. The author offers an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on Paul Ricœur's reflection on reconciliation and forgiveness, the results of socio-psychological study on the subtle forms of dehumanisation, and the role of literature in reconciliation with regard to the imagined contact hypothesis. Martha Nussbaum and Lawrence Hinman's ideas on moral imagination are also applied to examine examples from Kurdish contemporary literature.

Keywords: reconciliation, dehumanisation, infrahumanisation, imagined contact, Kurdish issue in Turkey, Kurdish literature, moral imagination

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The Kurdish-Turkish conflict dates back to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, and its assimilation policy towards other, non-Turkish inhabitants (Yıldız 2005, Saraçoğlu 2011, Gunes 2016). The first Kurdish rebellion against the Turkish state took place as early as 1925, under the command of Sheikh Said, and was followed by other uprisings in 1930 and 1938 (Yıldız 2005, 15). Kurdish political activism developed using the limited freedoms of the legal system, especially when the new constitution of Turkey was adopted in 1960 (Gunes 2016, 83). Suppression of Kurdish political engagement by the military coup of 1980, and the new, more restrictive constitution of 1982, led to a radicalisation, and culminated in a globally-known military conflict. In 1984, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) declared open war against the Turkish state, mobilising the Kurdish masses to resist state-designed assimilation and violence. The conflict cost the lives of more than 45,000 people, including Turkish soldiers, Kurdish guerrillas, and many civilians (Gunes 2016, 88). The Turkish assimilation policy was rooted in its nationalist ideology that became one of the pillars of the modern Turkish state (Yıldız 2005, 15). Between 2009 and 2015, the Turkish government intensified its efforts to bring an end to the decades-long conflict and solve the so-called "Kurdish issue". The "çözüm süreci" or "peace process" was believed to be another, more solid step toward reconciliation, which was initiated around 2005. The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speech in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir was followed by the so-called "democratic açılım" or "democratic opening" in 2009. In the spring of 2013, the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan sent a letter to his supporters underlining the need to end military actions, whereupon the Kurdish fighters withdrew from Turkish territory. However, due to internal and external circumstances, the peace process failed in the summer of 2015, and fighting soon began again, bringing more deaths and casualties. State repression has been a reality

since 2015 and the outcome of the 2017 referendum allowed the government to implement the presidential system. The authoritarian rule and aggressive rhetoric that have since dominated the Turkish government and media, as well as the imprisonment of the legal Kurdish and Turkish opposition, suggest that the peace process will not be revived any time soon. In early June 2018 President Erdoğan even declared that the "Kurdish problem' has already been solved" (2018).

According to Ayşe Betül Celik and Bahar Rumelili, the peace process was focused on the negotiations between PKK and the Turkish state, and its failure to promote the construction of new narratives made it vulnerable to spoilers from both sides (2017, 2). In my paper, I focus on the potential of Kurdish literary narratives, which remained out of sight of the main actors engaged in the peace process, and the researchers who scrutinised it.¹ I argue that Kurdish literature is a valuable, though completely ignored, resource that can assist the construction of new reconciliation narratives in Turkey. I link the obstacles to reconciliation with different forms of dehumanisation and suggest that while infrahumanisation is one of the factors hampering the prospects for peace in Turkey, and serving to justify maintaining power over the Kurds by the Turks, Kurdish literature may not only be applied in the reconciliation procedure, but may offer an antecedent humanisation for both sides, stimulating their will to take up and continue the peace process.

The paper consists of four sections. In the first, I refer to the analysis of the latest peace process attempts by Çelik and Rumelili. In the second, I connect Paul Ricœur's ideas on reconciliation, working through process and forgetfulness through a socio-psychological research on dehumanisation, infrahumanisation, and reconciliation through literature and imagined contact. This way, I reveal the negative impact of infrahumanisation on the peace process and seek a solution in humanisation through literary narratives. The third part focuses on the

¹ Nevertheless, there were some worthwhile non-governmental initiatives for intercultural dialogue. In 2002, Anadolu Kültür was trying to promote intergroup dialogue through artistic activity. In the following years, thanks to foreign grants and the commitment of activists, it served as a roof for many projects in various cities of Turkey, engaging theatre, photography, literature, and art. However, the project "To Look at World Literature and the Great Mas-

ters from Amed", implemented in the city of Diyarbakir, was focused on American literature, and not Kurdish. Another initiative, run by Leyla Neyzi from Sabanci University, entitled *Türkiyeli Genç Anlatıyor* (Youth from Turkey are telling stories, 2011–2013), was aimed at sharing life stories of Turkish and Kurdish youth in Diyarbakir, Muğla, and Berlin. The recorded stories were published as a book. See also: Aksoy (2014).

ways the Kurds have been dehumanised in Turkey, linking the dominating representation with inhumanisation. The fourth, empirical section, which also refers to Martha Nussbaum and Lawrence Hinman's concept of moral imagination, and Ricœur's idea of forgiveness, discusses the role of Kurdish literary works for potential reconciliations in Turkey.

1. The Difficult Peace

Çelik and Rumelili (2017) analysed the attempted peace process in Turkey through the lenses of ontological security and agonistic peace concepts, indicating that both Turks and Kurds produced their own divergent narratives about the conflict that were directed towards maintaining their own stability and security. At the same time, these narratives and practices undermined the security of their adversaries, causing a societal security dilemma and turning into a vicious circle where one party's ontological security was tantamount to the ontological insecurity of the other (7). The Turks were focused on maintaining a single nation vision of the country, where the Kurds continued to highlight their ethnic distinction. Nevertheless, this competition was ontologically asymmetric (Bilali, Çelik, and Ok 2014; Çelik and Rumelili 2017). The Turkish single-nation and supremacy narrative dominated the discourse, causing more insecurity on the Kurdish side. This resulted in an increased Kurdish willingness to consider changes, whereas the Turkish side was reluctant to make concessions, having its security entrenched in multiple-state institutions (Çelik and Rumelili 2017, 5). The Kurds were also very vulnerable to any failures in the peace process. As stressed by Çelik and Rumelili, such asymmetrical conflicts were easier to initiate than to conclude, and in order to "become ripe for resolution, both parties need to experience some degree of ontological insecurity so as to be ready for change" (2017, 5). The dominant, state-imposed Turkish narrative identified the PKK as a threat, also connected with the so-called "Sevres syndrome" – referring to the treaty of Sevres 1920, which discussed the partition of Ottoman Empire and establishment of a Kurdish state (8). This insecurity was used to justify the Turkish military interventions. The Turks often associated the Kurdish ethnic claims with the alleged conspiracy of foreign countries, and the idea of a Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood was endorsed as a remedy (8).

However, the Turkish side was reluctant to make concessions regarding the implementation of mother tongue education, which was one of the main Kurdish demands (8) (Çelebi, Verkuyten and Smyrnioti 2015). The PKK argued that military action against state personnel was justified on the grounds of Turkish colonial power and cultural genocide (9). Nevertheless, the pro-Kurdish party (HDP/BDP) adopted an anti-violence rhetoric, calling for the recognition of Kurdish rights (9), and the Turkish side initiated peace talks several times. Turkish society became less resistant to Kurdish claims (8). As Çelik and Rumelili point out, the narratives were not fixed but evolving, although they also proved quite resilient. (8) They suggest that:

under such conditions, a lasting solution can neither be based on a formula through which the conditions of ontological security of one party – whether Turkish or Kurdish – prevail over those of the other, nor can it entail the imposition of a shared identity narrative that reproduces ontological insecurity on both sides and hence renders the parties more vulnerable to spoilers. Rather, the aim should be to foster the construction of plural, separate, but mutually respectful narratives that entail an understanding of each other's distinct positions and needs, but which coexist without requiring the validation of the other. (Çelik and Rumelili 2017, 7)

This approach was defined in terms of agonistic peace. Following their lead, I argue that raising awareness about Kurdish modern culture, and literature in particular, paying attention to its philosophical and ethical content instead of discussing only identity and resistance, may considerably contribute to the creation of "respectful narratives" and "ontological security" on both sides. This is because the common humanity expressed in these texts can help to admit and transcend differences at the same time. It may convince the Turks that Kurdish language education is not a threat, but can be a source of beauty and creativity for both sides. Apart from this linguistic disparity, Kurdish literature offers a sense of cultural affinity that is understood in this text, with regards to Jacques-Philippe Leyens's research on humanness. Admitting the value of Kurdish cultural output, and its critical approach may mitigate the Kurdish sense of victimhood and make both sides more resilient to the peace process spoilers.

2. Forgetting the Human, Recalling Humanness, Inviting Contact and Making Space for Reconciliation

According to Paul Ricœur (1995, 31), the obstacles to reconciliation in national conflicts are closely related to the different collective memories of oppressors and victims. While the oppressors' memory suffers from "forgetfulness", the victims are engaged in "passive repeating" of their own sufferings and the injustices done by the oppressor. What is missing is the "working through" of the traumatic past, which, according to Ricœur, should be based on a critical review of the collective memory of the offenders, and the chance of forgiveness offered by the victim to the oppressor. However, we should not forget that in armed struggles the distinction between victims and oppressors becomes blurred. Therefore, the crucial moment for the "working through" process to occur is when we stop perceiving our ingroup from a view of exclusive victimhood, and decide to recognise and consider our faults, crimes, and obligations toward the outgroup. Ricœur's "working through" practice corresponds with "perspective-taking", which, in social psychology is defined as the willingness to consider the adversary group's perspective on the history of the conflict (Bilali and Vollhard 2013, 144). This prerequisite for reconciliation is difficult to achieve, especially in a time of ongoing conflict, and represents a very challenging task (2013, 145).

Ricœur (1995, 38) distinguishes between different forms of forgetfulness. The first is the passive one, which is part of our human nature, and conditions memory itself. However, it can also display a darker side in the unwillingness to know about something bad or unpleasant done by us, or a group we belong to. Active forgetfulness may become deliberate. It is often connected to the process of writing history, especially when this process becomes a part of the official ideology of a state, as happened in Turkey. This way, it produces a history of the winners, a selection of events seen as worth remembering for the sake of the state's glory. Finally, Ricœur (2004, 490) points out the blessed form of forgetting, which is associated with

love and forgiveness, and offers the guilty party a new credit of trust. It recovers a "happy memory", free from obligations, to remember only the sufferings of victims and the wrongdoings of the oppressors.

For the purpose of this paper, I wish to introduce another term, which is dehumanisation. Dehumanisation can be considered both as the reason behind and the result of passive and active forgetfulness, as defined by Ricœur. As I will show below, it may also be identified as a barrier to perspective-taking and intergroup contact. Dehumanisation is generally defined as "an act or process of divesting of human qualities and personality" (Woolf 1980, 296). It is often associated with the most serious crimes against humanity, like genocide. However, as shown by contemporary psychological studies, it can exist in subtle forms, such as *infracumanisation* (divesting of secondary emotions) (Leyens et al. 2000, 2003, 2007), mechanistic dehumanisation (divesting of human nature) (Haslam 2006), dementalisation (Kozak, Marsh and Wegner 2006) or lack of human potentials (Tarnowska, Sławuta, and Kofta 2012). These latter forms, such as *infracumanisation*, are especially pernicious because they do not need intergroup conflicts to occur, and are thus not only widespread, but also difficult to detect (Leyens et al. 2007, 151). This suggests that humans, overall, display a tendency to think about the members of an ingroup as "fully human" and outgroup as "less human" (Leyens et al. 2007, 140). As stressed by many psychologists, even subtle forms of dehumanisation can lead to moral disengagement,² allowing the ingroup members to ignore the sufferings of – or even to misbehaviour toward – the members of an outgroup (Bandura 2002, 109; Bilewicz 2012, 212; Leyens et al. 2007, 140; Tarnowska, Sławuta, and Kofta 2012, 157). Dehumanisation can be linked to forgetting about wrongdoings, because they can hardly be justified if the victim is perceived as possessing all human qualities (Bandura 2002, 109). The actions need to be justified, so that they are no longer remembered as "wrongdoings". This may involve

² Leyens (2007, 142) insisted that the process of denying secondary emotions should be called *infracumanisation*, and not *dehumanisation*, because it implies that the members of an outgroup are viewed as less human, and are not totally denied their humanness. Nevertheless, after taking into account the links between *dehumanisation* and *infracumanisation*, especially in the

context of Kurdish-Turkish relations, and the still debatable character of the latter term, in this article, I will apply both of them, using the word *dehumanisation* in a less strict sense.

consciously or unconsciously avoiding seeing any human qualities or personality in the alleged victims (Bilewicz 2012, 213).

The theory of infrahumanisation is based on the distinction between “primary” and “secondary emotions” (sentiments) and implies that the latter are attributed to a lesser degree to the members of an outgroup than to the ingroup, whereas the level of primary emotions remains unmodified (Leyens et al. 2007). “Secondary” or “uniquely human” emotions, such as shame, sensitivity, love, and indignation appear later in life, through education and socialisation. In contrast to the primary emotions that we share with other species, they depend on other social variables, such as development of morality or cognitive capacities. They are considered culture-specific, and may differ between cultures (Demoulin et al. 2004, 75). We can conclude that uniquely human emotions require insights into cultural context to be observed and furnished with meaning, which, as will be shown below, is especially important with regards to the Kurdish issue.

Infrahumanisation has been already identified as an obstacle to reconciliation and forgiveness, among others, in a study on intergroup conflicts of Northern Ireland (Tam et al. 2007) and in case of the difficult Polish-Jewish relationship (Tarnowska, Sławuta, and Kofta 2012). The former concluded that for intergroup forgiveness, it is vital to see the humanity of others, and interventions should be based on emphasising upon the humanity of an outgroup. (Tam et al. 2007, 132-33) The latter study revealed that when Poles were informed only about Polish crimes against Jews who had survived the Holocaust in the aftermath of the Second World War, they were reluctant to admit Polish guilt, became very negative about Jews, and were more likely to support the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy. However, when they were also informed about the contemporary cultural affinity between them and Jews in Israel (i.e. shared values, norms, and lifestyle), they were much keener to recognise Polish guilt, attributed more secondary emotions to the victim’s families, and wanted to contact them (Tarnowska, Sławuta, and Kofta 2012, 153). Research conducted by Ahmed Demirdağ in Turkey also linked the attribution of secondary emotions with the prospects of reconciliation between the Kurds and the Turks. When the call for peace was delivered by a member of the respective outgroup (Kurd or a Turk), the

bearer was attributed less secondary emotions by the ingroup, while the level of primary emotions remained unchanged. Although Kurds tended to infrahumanise the Turk calling for peace, it did not impact their support for the peace process. At the same time, Turks also infrahumanised the Kurd, but displayed less support for reconciliation (Demirdağ 2014, 63) This indicates that both sides were not equally involved in the process and corresponds with the analyses by Çelik and Rumlili (2017) and Çelebi, Verkuyten and Smyrnioti (2015).

Having said this, it is now important to consider the role that literary narratives may play in the process of reconciliation and humanisation. Emphasising humanness and cultural affinity obviously plays a role in bringing people together and making them revise their wrongdoings, but there are, most probably, some instruments that can be of assistance in this matter. Literary and cinema narratives played a significant role in recent decades in Poland’s opening up of the difficult debate about Polish responsibility during the Holocaust (Plaice 2012). A six-month radio broadcast of a novel in Rwanda helped in developing perspective-taking. Bilali and Vollhardt describe how the fictional features of the novel, which was not directly linked to the conflict, created a safe space that allowed listeners to engage with the different perspectives of the former enemies and work through the divergent narratives of the conflict (2013, 145). They found that when the novel was read aloud by a person respected by different groups, it positively stimulated perspective-taking. Literary texts often serve as a platform to explore responses to conflict and offer people the possibility to articulate their private anxieties (Riegert, Scott, and Shuler 2009, xii). Nevertheless, it is clear from the empirical research that not all literary narratives are capable of supporting perspective-taking. The realism of narratives, referring directly to particular actors and events, or presenting only one-side vision of the conflict, may be an obstacle (Bilali and Vollhardt 2013, 145). Also, when the conflict is ongoing, the prospects of comprehending others are lower (149). At the same time, one should not overlook the fact that creating awareness about the discriminatory policy towards the outgroup is vital to the ingroup acknowledging any need for change. The Turks who knew about the discrimination of the Kurds turned out to be more supportive of Kurdish language rights than those who did not

possess such awareness (Çelebi, Verkuyten and Smirnioti 2015, 12). Accordingly, complete avoidance of remembering the wrongdoings of the ingroup and of raising awareness about the discrimination of the outgroup may not necessarily prove fruitful for reconciliation.

Kurdish literature may also be perceived as the mediator in intergroup contact, which is crucial in case of the advantaged group (i.e. the Turks), contributing to weakening their “determination to maintain the existing conditions” (Çakal et al. 2016, 14). Çelebi, Verkuyten and Smirnioti (2015) found that Turks had fewer Kurdish friends than Kurds had friends among the Turkish outgroup (10). Furthermore, the Turks who had more Kurdish friends were more supportive of the Kurdish language rights than those who had fewer or no Kurdish friends (11–13). Having more friends from the outgroup means that one is more exposed to their narratives, which are usually less audible to the majority. Thus stimulating intergroup contact by the means of narratives of the outgroup may have a positive effect on the willingness of the majority to make some concessions (for example regarding language rights) for the purpose of the minority in ontologically asymmetric conflicts. The abovementioned positive impact of intergroup contact resonates with the contact hypothesis as first theorised by Allport (1954), confirmed and updated by Pettigrew and Tropp’s meta-analytic study (2006), and more recently expanded into the imagined contact hypothesis (Crisp and Turner 2009, 2012). Whereas Allport (1954, 453) suggested that imagination through fiction, drama and film may play a role as a “milder invitation” to bringing people together, the Crisp and Turner’s analysis (2012) of the wide range of experiments concluded that imagining positive contact with members of an outgroup diminishes the obstacles to establishing intergroup relations (such as anxiety or avoidance), provides people with tools (such as behavioural scripts), and positive emotional responses (such as trust) that make them feel able to contact others even in the situation of open conflict. What is more, it

tended to be the majority and not the minority that became more willing to engage in contact after imagining it. This is due to the higher level of anxiety experienced by the minority in majority-minority relations (Tropp and Pettigrew 2006; Crisp and Turner 2012). This is why encouraging Turks to deal with the Kurdish narratives may bear fruit for reconciliation, though the process should probably be moderated in order to communicate the necessary context.

Finally, to consider the possible humanisation through literature we need to pay more attention to humanness as studied by Leyens (2007, 145), who pointed out the substantial consensus regarding the understanding of humanness. His participants identified the three main factors related to the unique human characteristic: intelligence, language or communication, and sentiments (2007, 145).³ All these elements always gain their meaning within a given culture, language, and experience and create a so-called “unique human essence” which forms a wider basis for denying or attributing humanness (2007, 142). Secondary emotions or sentiments are nothing but abstract words, such as hope, pride, love, disenchantment, disappointment, and indignation, which draw on associations, images, symbols and narratives that we all access through the process of socialisation, education, and culturalisation. At the same time, we have naturally limited access into the constructs of humanness, as expressed in other languages and within other cultural contexts and narratives. Therefore, emphasising humanness should entail dealing with cultures and narratives of others, which can offer insights into their thoughts, sentiments, and aesthetics, especially, as will be shown later, where the sole expression of the abstract notions describing sentiments is not helpful by itself. The essence, though in fact imaginary, of being socially constructed and evolving, tends to be perceived as unchangeable and an eternal feature of a group, which considerably exacerbates inhumanisation (2007, 142). Notably, inhumanisation happens not only with regards to a positive secondary emotions

³ These elements are, in fact, interconnected, and deeply rooted in the vision of humans in many different cultures. In the introduction to the poem *Mem and Zin* (1694), the Kurdish classical poet Ehmedê Xanî [Ehmede Khani] explained that he wrote his poem in Kurdish to show the Kurds to be not only more knowledgeable, but also capable of love: “Pouring limpid drink to the

dreg/ As the pearl of the Kurdish tongue/ Bringing it into order and regularity/ Suffering hardship for the sake of public/ So that people might not say: The Kurds/ Have no origin, knowledge and base/ (...)/ Also the foresighted may not say: The Kurds/ Do not make love one of their aims/” (2008, 33).

(for instance love and sensitivity), but also for negative ones (shame or indignation) (2007, 146). The members of the out-group are perceived as less prone to more complex good and bad emotions. Thus, it is clear that others are rejected for not being “complex”, “sophisticated”, or “subtle” enough, and not simply “worse”. This is also well-illustrated in the study by Bilali, Çelik, and Ok (2014, 253) on Turks and Kurds living in Izmir. While the Kurds perceived Turks as *barbaric*, the Turks considered the Kurds to be *rough*, devoid of a certain degree of subtlety. Finally, any reconciliation, working-through process or perspective-taking will imply that there are different perspectives on the conflict that may be expressed and comprehended by both sides stimulating empathy and forgiveness. In other words, these practices are already predicated upon the idea of humanness, as described above. Hence, reconciliation, in order to be successful, requires re-establishment of equal humanity on both sides. In the following section, I will discuss the ways Kurds have been portrayed and dehumanised in Turkey, which will help to explain how Kurdish literary narratives and modern culture are important for the process of reconciliation, but may also foster the will on both sides to seriously undertake and continue such a process.

3. The Dehumanisation of the Kurds in Turkey

The history of the Kurds in Turkey suggests that there might be certain political conditions that foster different kinds of dehumanisation. From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, the Kurds were divested of their political and cultural roles. Gradually, after the republic was founded in 1923, and especially after the military coup of 1980, in line with Kemalism – the founding ideology of the state – the Kurdish identity became forbidden, along with their culture, language, and version of historical events (Yıldız 2005, 15; Saraçoğlu 2011, 48). This process was often discussed in terms of cultural or linguistic

genocide (Skutnab-Kangas and Bucak 1994; Koivunen 2002; Zeydanlioğlu 2012), so its links to dehumanisation are not accidental. It is because – as discussed above – language is accepted as one of the main elements constituting and representing humanness. Furthermore, this indicates that Turkey’s modernity was built on the denial of the Kurdish identity (Saraçoğlu 2011, 59). Until 1984, the Kurds were mostly seen as ignorant and cultureless; that year the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) declared war against the Republic of Turkey (Erdem 2014; Saraçoğlu 2011, 21). When the ban on the Kurdish language was finally lifted in 1991,⁴ the only example of Kurdish cultural activity that gained some attention was Kurdish songs (Aksoy 2014), or folklore, which represented traditional culture and not the modern one to which Turkey aspired. Notably, according to some studies, the representatives of traditional cultures are more often divested of their human qualities (Haslam et al. 2012, 200). Due to the decades-long ban on the Kurdish language, the citizens of modern Turkey could not comprehend that there were Kurdish thoughts, sentiments and culture expressed in this “non-existent language”. The image of the Kurds in modern Turkish literature, although diverse, was not devoid of many falsifications, and started to change only after the 1990s (Alakom 2010, 282).⁵ Kurdish society was mainly portrayed as feudal, men as robbers, cruel landlords, poor shepherds, or peasants, who often resisted the blessings of the Turkish civilisation (Alakom 2010, 155), while the Kurdish woman in Halide Edip Adivar’s novel *Kalp Ağrısı* (1924) was sweet and primitive (Marilungo 2016, 277). The popular media’s outlook is still dominated by this kind of representation. Among Turkish soap operas, a special type emerged: “eastern melodramas” portraying the eastern provinces and their inhabitants as harsh, uncivilised, unforgiving, tribal, rustic-looking characters (Öncü 2011, 58; Kuzu 2015, 136). The remote areas are often discovered by a Turkish character, who

⁴ Law no. 2932, introduced, in 1991, allowed the use of “non-Turkish” language in private conversation, songs, and publications, but heavy censorship remained (Yıldız 1999, 171). In fact, more changes occurred after the amendments to the Turkish constitution in 2001 (Szymański 2006, 28), between 2008 and 2010, when the Turkish government launched the project of so-called Kurdish or democratic opening, aiming to solve the long-lasting conflict in Turkey. Still, there have been rather cosmetic

changes (Bayir 2013, 12) that do not allow the Kurdish people to fully express themselves and take part in public life on an equal basis.

⁵ It is also important to mention Turkish writers of Kurdish origin, such as Yaşar Kemal, Seyit Alp, and Ruşen Arslan, who managed to present a more Kurdish point of view.

projects himself as a hero exploring the East or Turkish Orient (Scalbert-Yücel 2015, 123). The violence of the Turkish army is absent, as are any examples of Kurdish culture, and the productions render an image of emptiness awaiting discovery and development by the Turks (Öncü 2011, 57). All these depictions share one common characteristic relating to inhumanisation. These “inhabitants of the East” are not totally dehumanised, but they are devoid of the more complex features and affinity connected with modern culture, and are simply attributed less of the uniquely human characteristic.⁶ The above-mentioned representations can also be interpreted in relation to Michał Bilewicz’s (2012) concept of functional dehumanisation, assuming that subtle forms of dehumanisation often serve the purpose of maintaining power and subordinating one group. They also demonstrate that in Turkey there is no acceptable image of the Kurdish humanness. This is because, in order to be approved as a member of the modern Turkish society, Kurds had to adopt the Turkish shape of humanness. It usually meant expressing oneself in the Turkish language, and adopting to the Turkish culture.⁷ The dehumanisation was a result of a long-lasting assimilationist policy, but also a side-effect of rapid modernisation and co-existence of different – modern and traditional – forms of expression. At a time when the Turkish culture was able to demonstrate a wide spectrum of modern genres, like literature, cinema, or art, the Kurds could hardly do the same. This could be called an effect of

delay, and explained through the different pace of modernisation in the western and eastern provinces, unless we take into account the long-lasting ban on Kurdish culture, and, accordingly, the scant knowledge that Turks have about Kurdish culture and literature.⁸ It is clear that in the case of the Kurds in Turkey, dehumanisation caused by the policy of assimilation is heavily linked with its subtle forms, and it does not render the Kurds equal adversaries with whom one may want to reconcile. Thus, the significant question in the context of Turkish-Kurdish conflict is: what might encourage the Turks to make room for the Kurds and their distinct ethnic identity in the country, that, for a long time, was deemed only Turkish? This obviously requires an incentive. One such incentive may be the humanisation of the Kurds, defined in this text as providing more attention and access to their modern cultural output and thus offering insight into their humanness. While many Kurds still insist that convincing the Turks to make room for them requires military resistance, there are also others, such as the representatives of the Kurdish cultural institutions, who believe in the role of artistic discourses and dialogues (Bocheńska and Kaczorowski 2016). If we expect dialogue and reconciliation to supersede military conflict, the second group should be effectively supported.

However, while talking about the reconciliation process, and the prospects of forgiveness, we must not forget that in the case of Kurdish-Turkish relationship, the Kurds are not the only ones in the victim’s position. The ongoing conflict between the

⁶ Of course the other types of subtle dehumanisation, especially dementalization or lacking in human potentials can be also discussed in this context.

⁷ According to Benedict Anderson’s (1991) concept of *imagined communities*, the process of forming any national identity is closely connected with the creation of a specific social imagination. What follows is that the contacts within a society are shaped not only by direct interactions between people, but first of all by images, symbols, and narratives.

⁸ Kurdish literature has mostly been discussed in Turkish by Kurds and not Turks. It is translated into Turkish exclusively by Kurds, and reaches a largely Kurdish audience. Kurdish books and their Turkish translations can rarely be found in the main Turkish bookstores, and one must know where to find them. Nevertheless, some Turks have discussed Kurdish literature (for example Omer Türkeş, Murat Belge, Necmiye Alpay, Sibel Oral, Jale Parla, Semih Gümüş, Süreyya Evren, Pakize Barişta). Not being able to read it in original, they always refer only to the translations or

works already written in Turkish by Kurds. The Turkish take on Kurdish contemporary literature, though diverse, corresponds with the dominating representation of a “not very competent and sophisticated Kurd”. Whereas Murat Belge (2009) and Pakize Barişta (2009) underscored the value of Kurdish works, though avoiding calling them “Kurdish”, Süreyya Evren (2014) claimed that there is no contemporary Kurdish art and literature, because it is too weak and undeveloped. He did not even mention the difficult conditions for the Kurdish language and was obviously unaware of the many works written in Kurdish. One Kurdish writer, Firat Cewerî, became a guest of Turkish TV programmes, such as “Söz sende” (2013) or “Zaman Işık Kelimeler” (2016), which created some awareness of Kurdish modern literature. According to Ferzan Şer (2017), a Kurdish literary critic, “The Turks always look at Kurdish literature from a distance and are unable to grasp the value which is visible only when one comes closer”. See also his blog: Ferzanname.

Kurdish guerrilla and the Turkish state has taken the lives of Turkish soldiers, police, and civilians. Thus, Turks consider themselves as the victims of the conflict rather than oppressors. Hence, there are no doubt that the Turks should be humanised in the eyes of the Kurds too, because if the dominating image of the “barbarian Turk” is not challenged, there will be no chance for forgiveness to be offered, or for any will to remember and correct Kurdish wrongdoings.⁹ Nevertheless, in the following paragraph, I will focus only on Kurdish narratives, taking into account the difficult history of the Kurds in Turkey, as well as their culture, which to my mind should be acknowledged in the first instance, especially as the Kurds have access to Turkish culture at school and through multiple media outlets.

4. Humanisation and the Role of Moral Imagination and Kurdish Literature in the Potential Reconciliation between Kurds and Turks

According to Leyens “to combat inhumanisation, rather than emphasizing differences and similarities between groups, politicians, media and educators should insist upon complementarities and universalism” (2007, 160). Apart from the fact that such a recommendation is very abstract, and does not answer the question of how to speak about the conflicts and problems which unavoidably embrace many differences within the groups, it also neglects a postcolonial critique of the Western vision of universalism.¹⁰ Elisabeth Anker (2012, 224) suggested that the blurred idea of universalism should be substituted by the “globality from below”, which directs wider attention toward different groups, their languages, and various forms of expression.

Kurdish literature must be seen as an expression of humanness, simply because it is written in the Kurdish language, whose existence was denied in Turkey.¹¹ Though not comparable to Turkish literature with regards to the number of titles, the Kurdish literary space is slowly creating a parallel linguistic and cultural reality, which aspires to be recognised as a part of Turkey’s modernity. It represents Kurdish thoughts, sentiments, and ethical considerations, and should be perceived in context of the aforementioned complementarity and cultural affinity, which is in sharp contrast to the previous forced emulation of the Turkish culture. Moreover, some Kurdish writers created intertextual references, applying motifs from world literature and blurring the real context, calling Kurdistan metaphorically “the land of mountain” (Mehmed Uzun) or *Asûs* (Mehmet Dicle). This suggests that they intuitively seek links with the world and do not want to be interpreted only in relation to the Kurdish issue. Giving up a realistic context is also important to the process of perspective-taking.

Furthermore, as revealed in some studies on inhumanisation, including the one conducted by Demirdağ in Turkey, when the members of the outgroup directly expressed secondary emotions it did little to humanise them. On the contrary, such direct reference to uniquely human characteristic was treated as pushy, and the level of inhumanisation became higher (Cuddy, Rock and Norton 2007; Wohl, Hornsey and Bennett. 2012; Demirdağ 2014). This means that people are sensitive not only to the identity of the speaker but also to the way the information is presented. Being suspicious about the humanity of the outgroup, we would not easily believe that its representatives possess uniquely human qualities when they try to assure us about it. Obviously, the expression of abstract notions

⁹ Considering the term “barbarian” (but also “robot” that I sometimes heard from Kurds describing the Turks), I believe that the Kurdish form of dehumanisation of the Turks may probably be better described within the concept of “mechanistic dehumanisation” or “denying human nature” as described by Haslam (2006).

¹⁰ As stressed by many thinkers, including Edward Said, the idea of universalism needs serious refinement in order to be made applicable and trusted again (Scherer 2014). This implies that universal values should become anchored in a wider, and not only Western, imagination.

¹¹ There are still many Turks who doubt the existence of the Kurdish language. I witnessed this many times when telling Turkish

people about my research on Kurdish literature and about teaching Kurdish at my university. Many times I saw Turks surprised and disbelieving when shown Kurdish books. They kept asking me if they were really written in Kurdish and if one could read them. One day I was interpreting a conversation between a Turk and a Kurd who was from Iraq and did not speak Turkish. My Turkish friend was told in advance that I would interpret from Kurdish into Turkish and knew that the other man was Kurdish. Nevertheless, after fifteen minutes he asked me what the language was and “if it really is Kurdish”. This shows how deeply the rejection of Kurdish identity is entrenched in Turkey.

is not helpful by itself. However, literature works otherwise, making a bridge between abstract notions and perceptive insights into the life of characters. We follow characters when they think, feel, and act, dealing with their own problems and those of other people. Having access to diverse narratives that present others as actors in their own lives, we are invited to engage our moral imagination that guides us to the inner, social, and cultural contexts of others, which is the fundament of a moral life (Hinman 2007, 17). According to Martha Nussbaum, literature may be considered a part of philosophy that aids us to see the world in its surprising variety and complexity (1990, 3). Furthermore, literature provides an “ethical understanding that involves emotional as well as intellectual activity and gives a certain type of priority to the perception of particular people and situations, rather than to abstract rules” (1990, ix). Interestingly, Husnu and Crisp’s study (2010) corresponds with these ideas by showing that elaborated imagined contact (containing more details about the potential situation), fostered willingness to engage in real contact with the outgroup. This is because the more detailed picture provided the cognitive road map and enhanced intergroup relations (Crisp and Turner 2012, 154).

In addition, contact with literary narratives leads us to internalise stories and identify with others (including adversaries), which plays a key role in inviting different groups to establish relations with each other (Allport 1954, 453). However, if we want the Kurdish culture to contribute to the reconciliation process, we have to look at these works from a different angle than that which has been offered through the existing research (Ahmedzadeh 2003; Belçim-Galip 2015; Scalbert-Yücel 2014). We need to go further than discussing only the Kurdish struggle for independence, resistance and identity, which often hews to a one-sided perspective, and may cause a backlash.

¹² In predominantly Kurdish cities: Mardin Artuklu University, Dicle University, universities in Muş, Bingöl, Van and Dersim. In Istanbul: Boğaziçi, Koç and Sabancı universities. However, some of them require a basic knowledge of Kurdish. Kurdish is also taught privately in courses organised by Kurdish cultural institutions, such as Nûbihar, Kurdi-Der, Istanbul Kurdish Institute (closed down by the Turkish authorities at the end of 2016). Kurdish lessons, “on an elective basis” were to be officially introduced to primary schools from 2012, but this project has never been fully implemented. (Bocheńska and Kurpiewska-Korbut 2015, 205)

Moreover, it simplifies the image of so-called Kurdishness, and may tend to overlook the multiple identities stressed by Kuzu (2015), resulting in the essentialisation of the Kurdish ethnicity and further discrimination instead of any effective recognition. What is more, such interpretations promote the collective self rather than the personal self, where the latter is deemed more effective in stimulating intergroup contact (Crisp and Turner 2012, 162). Therefore, we should rather ask what role Kurdish culture and language play in constituting the personal and interpersonal dimension of thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters that constructs their humanness. Furthermore, by tracking down the ways in which modern Kurdish writers update their traditional heritage, forcing old motives to speak in a modern form, we can grasp the ethical and aesthetic changes that Kurdish society undergoes, and expose the dynamic character and continuity of the group, which are crucial for overcoming the dangerous conviction of the “unchangeable essence”, and thus for humanising the Kurds. One such example is the modern application of Yezidi motives by Kurdish writers (Bocheńska 2014), present in the novel *Hawara Dicleyê* by Mehmed Uzun, discussed below.

Raising awareness about Kurdish works is certainly not only a task for the Kurds, but also for Turkish intellectuals and European institutions, because both Turks and Kurds constitute a considerable diaspora in Europe. As emphasised earlier, the ethnic identity and social position of an outgroup member who presents information has an impact on the ingroup. If the Kurds alone may have trouble reaching out to the Turks, they should be supported from outside. Sadly, apart from Iraqi Kurdistan and limited options in Turkey,¹² few universities anywhere in the world teach Kurdish,¹³ and the first Kurdish novels were published in English translation only in 2016.¹⁴ In comparison to other Middle Eastern languages and literatures, Kurdish is

¹³ Principally: Exeter University, University of Gottingen, Uppsala University, Jagiellonian University, Indiana University, and UC Berkeley.

¹⁴ Bakhtiyar Ali’s *I Stared at The Night of the City*, translated from Sorani Kurdish by Kareem Abdulrahman and *When Fish Gets Thirsty* by Hefim Yüsiw translated by Midja Ahmad Karimi and Serkewt Karimi. Ali represents the literature of the Iraqi Kurds and Yüsiw of the Syrian Kurds.

given disproportionately little attention in academia, and the “Kurdish problem” prevails in the news. The existence of this culture remains out of sight, adding to the dehumanisation of the Kurds.

Nevertheless, we should also admit that the impact of literature is very limited, especially as Kurdish works are not a part of any school curriculum in Turkey. Kurdish films, the number of which has increased considerably in the recent years (Candan 2016, 11), have managed to reach a broader public,¹⁵ but their Turkish audience is limited due to the certificate each movie must obtain before commercial distribution, with films often banned even from participating in festivals (Carney 2016; Koçer 2016). What is more, reconciliation through literature requires training and methods and thus qualified staff (Riegert, Scott, and Shuler 2009). Also, not all the Kurdish literary works offer multiplicity of voices, as some represent a black-and-white vision of reality and should be avoided.

Finally, I wish to enumerate a few types of motif offered by modern Kurdish literature that seem to be significant for the humanisation and reconciliation process, mirroring some of Ricœur’s ideas on “working through” practice and forgiveness. Also, the results of empirical studies on the role of literature in reconciliation will be taken into account. I classify Kurdish works according to the messages they provide.

4.1 History Belongs Not Only to the Winners

The idea that there is a historical narration of the losers (the Kurds) that should be heard by the winners of history (the Turks) if they really want to reconcile was argued by Mehmed Uzun (1953–2007), a Kurdish writer who wrote his novels in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish.¹⁶ In *Hawara Dicleyê* (The Calling of the Tigris River, 2001, 2003), he revised historical events and figures, and told the story of a Kurdish Duchy in the nineteenth century at the time of Kurdish emir and prince Bedirkhan’s rebellion against the Ottomans. Uzun referred to a more distant history of Kurdish-Turkish relations, which may be seen as helpful in avoiding making direct references to the

conflict. The reader is confronted with thoughtful, emotive, and critical narrations by many characters, including the protagonist, Biro, who is a storyteller. They are telling the history of the losers, especially those representing different minorities: Assyrians, Armenians, Yezidis, and finally the Kurds. The lyrical pieces intertwine with the dominating prosaic narration by Biro, giving access to the inner world of the character, and thus humanising him. Like the legendary Kurdish poet Feqê Teyran, Biro is able to hear differently, and not only human voices. For example, the River Tigris is also entitled to speak and be heard by him. Its voice is crucial, because it makes us see the historical events as a part of an endless saga of mankind inhabiting the earth since the time of Adam. It universalises the topic of Kurdistan’s sufferings, making them a part of wider human experience and history, which adds to the process of humanisation and reconciliation. Moreover, Biro happens to listen to the story as told by a Turkish storyteller, and understands the mechanism through which one version of history becomes officially accepted, and the other gets banned. This way, Uzun offers a diversified set of views of the conflict, fostering the perspective-taking and working-through processes. It is not yet a critical appraisal of history (which cannot be done solely through the means of literature), but rather, a meaningful invitation to do so. Interestingly, Uzun does not refrain from talking about the Kurdish Muslims’ wrongdoings toward Christians or Yezidis: his idea is to start a critical revision of history from his own group, and not only to point at the responsibility of Turkish outgroup. This makes his attempt more credible, forming a stable platform for the working-through process. Moreover, he recovers what Ricœur calls “happy memory” by describing in detail the peaceful coexistence of different religious and ethnic groups on the eve of prince Bedirkhan’s rebellion.

4.2 Humanity of Victims

Although it is clear from the socio-psychological research that the simply reminding of a crime is not helpful and is likely to backfire, in terms of Kurdish-Turkish relations remembering

¹⁵ For example: *Yol* (The Way, 1982) or *Gitmek: My Marlon and Brando* (2008). There were also successful films about the Kurdish issue made by Turkish directors such as *Journey to the Sun* (1999) or *Hejar* (2001) (Köksal 2016, 131).

¹⁶ All the novels mentioned in the article are available in Kurdish and in Turkish translation.

the humanness of the victims is something else. The abstract violation of human rights becomes visible and personalised through the narratives. In his short story, *İdam* (Execution), written in Turkish, Ruşen Arslan described a night experienced by a Kurdish father, Riza, who is about to leave for a prison to witness the execution of his daughter Gülçin, who has been accused of working against the Turkish state. We listen to his last talk with his daughter, and learn about a sense of honesty, patriotism, and dignity. Interestingly, we are not confronted with any cruel scene, but rather, with the thoughts of the father and the daughter on the eve of her execution.

4.3 Encouraging a Form of Kurdish Admission

Some authors suggest that Kurds are also responsible for building the Turkish regime and for its crimes. Rather than seeking to hide this, or to apportion guilt, they focus on the mechanism that has resulted in crimes. This is achieved by portraying an ambiguous relationship between the Kurds and the Turks. In Mehmed Uzun's (2002) *Ronî Mîna Evîne, Tarî Mîna Mirinê* (Light like love, dark like death), we are told about Baz, a Turkish officer of Kurdish origin who became the hunter of Kurdish guerrillas. Notably, the epithets "Kurdish" and "Turkish" are not used in the novel. Instead, they are substituted by "the land of mountain" and "the big country", and their metaphoric sense blurs the disfavoured realism. Baz was found by a Turkish soldier as a small child, after all other members of his family had been killed by the Turkish army. He was brought up to be a Turk. He followed the state's propaganda, and, as a devoted soldier, joined the fight against its enemies, that is, the guerrillas. Baz's story is confronted with the story of a young girl, Kevok, who decides to follow her boyfriend and join the guerrillas in the mountains. When Kevok is caught by Baz's soldiers, and forced to give away her companions, she becomes responsible for their deaths. Tormented by her own weakness and treachery, she ceases to speak with anyone, and is held in Baz's flat. Her silent presence changes his life. Living side by side with "the terrorist", Baz gradually acknowledges her humanness. Simultaneously, he becomes bored with his job and starts to ask himself increasingly difficult questions about his own ethnic origin and the acts he has committed. Finally, he discovers that the only thing he cares about is

the wellbeing of the ex-guerrilla. Baz's love toward Kevok brings him to reconsider the state's policy, and he undergoes a deep moral change. The pair try to escape from the country, but are caught, and Baz is executed. Uzun successfully shows that in the reality of the regime and violence, no one can remain innocent, neither Baz, who committed many crimes for the Turkish state, nor the gentle Kevok, who was weak and betrayed her comrades. This way, Uzun challenges both the glory of the Turkish state and the image of the brave guerrillas. Furthermore, these types of narrative offer us an important distinction between the guilty person and his or her deeds, which is important for forgiveness to take place (Ricoeur 2004, 491). We perceive characters in their moments of transition, and cannot associate them only with good or bad deeds, which also challenges beliefs about immutable essence. As Ricoeur (2004, 490) argues, "this intimate dissociation signifies that the capacity of commitment belonging to the moral subject is not exhausted by its various inscriptions in the affairs of the world. This dissociation expresses an act of faith, a credit addressed to the resources of self-regeneration." This way, the guilty person is held responsible, but his or her capacity for good has not been exhausted, and a new chance can be offered along with forgiveness. Moreover, in the case of Baz, we cannot easily decide whether he is Turk or Kurd, so it is not easy to pin responsibility to only one side. It is rather the regime and the policy of discrimination that are on trial here. Additionally, the novel offers a positive vision of imagined contact between the Turkish general and the Kurdish guerrilla which, though provocative, has great potential to challenge prejudices and stereotypes. Finally, it shows perfectly how ethnic identity is not an unchangeable essence but a social and cultural construct, hence undermining the basis for dehumanisation. The ambiguity of Kurdish-Turkish relations and the violence of both sides are also exposed in Hesenê Metê's short story, "Şepal" (Bocheńska 2016a)

4.4 Humanity of Enemies

Humanisation of the enemy is significant in the short story "Du Kanî" (Two springs) by the young Kurdish author Mehmet Dicle (2013). In the story, a Kurdish guerrilla and a Turkish soldier are sworn to kill each other. However, before the event

takes place, the reader is invited to listen to the two parallel first-person narratives, which guide us into the inner world of the Kurdish guerrilla and the Turkish soldier. Their situations are not comparable. While the guerrilla is alone, a whole army stands behind the soldier. It is not the soldier's but the guerrilla's dead body that is defiled. Nevertheless, the two men share similar emotional characteristics, life experiences, and finally, the honourable name of *şehid* (martyr), granted to them by their compatriots. As Dicle's stories take place in the imagined country of *Asûs* (see Bocheńska 2016b), the reference to the conflict is not immediate, and this helps to establish perspective-taking.

4.5 We Want to Forgive You and We Ask You to Forgive Us

The message of forgiveness permeates various Kurdish narratives and constitutes what Ricœur (2004, 457) calls "the horizon of experience"; that is, new hope offered to the difficult history in the name of love. Forgiveness cannot have any practical reason or aim. Contrary to reconciliation it is unconditional (2004, 478). Yet, it still possesses a reciprocal dimension hidden in the etymology of the word, which in many languages is rooted in the verb *giving* (480). In many cultures, the act of *giving* evokes the actions of *receiving* and *giving back* (481). Ricœur highlights how:

the problematic character of the presumed transaction results from the asymmetry, which can be termed vertical, tending to mask the reciprocity of the exchange: in truth, forgiveness spans an interval between the high and the low, between the great height of the spirit of forgiveness and the abyss of guilt. This asymmetry is constitutive of the forgiveness equation. It accompanies us like an enigma that can never be fully plumbed. (483)

Moreover, if "institutions have no moral conscience" (479), we cannot point towards a person or institution responsible for deciding to forgive in the name of a community (479). However, certain gestures, such as Chancellor Brandt's kneeling in Warsaw in 1970, can be interpreted as possessing "secret alchemy" (477), inviting people to ask for forgiveness and to

forgive. Noticeably, the idea of God-Love and forgiveness constitutes of the core of the Kurdish literary icon, the classical poem *Mem and Zin*, written in 1694 by Ehmedê Xanî in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish (Bocheńska 2016c).

Thus, it will always remain rather a mystery why Baz, the Turkish officer from Uzun's novel, fell in love with the mute ex-guerrilla and totally reconsidered his life, abandoning what he had previously valued. We do not know why Kevok finally answered his love, passing over all his crimes and atrocities. What is more, we are left in doubt whether it really happened, because the writer does not provide us with any explanation, but merely a terse description of the intimate situation between them. However, in this allusive form, Uzun manages to portray the reciprocal and intangible dimension of the exchange: Baz's moral transformation and love toward his victim become an equivalent of the request for forgiveness and bring him Kevok's love, along with forgiveness, as a response. Kevok offers love to Baz as an individual, who, of course, cannot be a representative of all the Kurdish community,¹⁷ but the fact that she was previously a guerrilla persecuted by Baz's soldiers adds an important message to this act. It becomes a symbolic invitation to offer forgiveness to one's enemies, which was addressed to other members of the group as well. It is obvious that such an invitation cannot be accomplished through a scheduled programme, but is a non-committal proposal that can be affirmed or rejected. It does not constitute a strict rule to be followed, but an example addressed to an individual's imagination and conscience.

5. Conclusions

The literary examples described above suggest that Kurdish literature can support humanisation of the Kurds, perspective-taking, establishing intergroup contact and the reconciliation process, which will never be successful without the working-through process addressing individual conscience, rather than politicians or an abstract society. In the case of Turkey, the working-through method is closely linked to humanising the

¹⁷ Uzun's picture of love between the Turkish general and the Kurdish guerrilla might have been inspired by the tribal custom offering a woman from one's own family to marry a man from a family or tribe after a member of the latter family had been killed

by the former. This custom served to mute the spiral of vengeance. Uzun gives this tradition a new meaning by reshaping it in the light of modern ethics, accentuating the love and free will of the characters instead of the customary family arrangements.

actors of the conflict, because forgetting about the ingroup's wrongdoings toward the outgroup is always closely related to dehumanising the members of the outgroup. Thus, others are likely to be viewed as threat, and not as victims of the ingroup's past or present actions. As shown by socio-psychological research, humans display an overall tendency to divest others of their uniquely human qualities. However, the subtle forms of dehumanisation, such as attributing fewer secondary emotions, may be strengthened and developed by certain policies. It is clear that the assimilation policy of the Turkish state has fostered the dehumanisation of the Kurds. This has resulted in moral disengagement and supported heavy-handed policies. Hence, it is obvious that without considering the Kurds to be more human, and thus worthy of contact, reconciliation discourse and plans for the future, the Turks can hardly concede and enter a difficult working-through process. Therefore, raising awareness about the modern Kurdish cultural output and making it more audible is important, and should be enhanced not only by the Kurdish, but also by Turkish and European academia and non-governmental organisations. However, hard as it is to imagine a peace process in the current situation, efforts to raise the voice of the modern Kurdish culture can bring results in the long term. To initiate and support reconciliation, to make it more effective, understandable, and justified, both actors must be humanised, which means they should see each other as thoughtful, emotive, and thus, similar creatures who are capable of action, take responsibility, and forgive each other. In the end, we should not forget that because of their unreal and imaginary nature of literature, films and works of art possess an unique ability to both assist with difficult reconciliation processes and distract attention from them.

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