Group C: Social and historical context

Ottoman Empire:

* historically known in W Europe as the Turkish Empire.
* State that controlled most of Southeast Europe, Western Asia and north Africa between the 14th century and the early 20th century.
* Founded at end of 13th century in NW Anatolia in the town of Sogut by Oghuz Turkish tribal leader Osman I.
* During the 16th/ 17th centuries, at the height of its power under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, the empire was a multinational and multilingual empire.
* Constantinople was the capital and controlled lots of lands around the Mediterranean basin, therefore the Ottoman Empire was at the center of interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds for six centuries.
* The empire maintained a flexible and strong economy, society and military throughout the 17th and much of the 18th century even after the death of Suleiman the Magnificent.
* Military system fell behind European rivals during a long period of peace from 1740 to 1768- consequently suffered severe military defeats in the late 18th and 19th centuries, this prompted them to initiate a comprehensive process of reform and modernization known as **Tanzimat.** Thus over 19th century, Ottoman state became more powerful and organized.
* Empire allied with Germany in early 20th century, hoping to escape diplomatic isolation and thus joined WW1 on the side of central powers.

**Demise**

* At its peak in the 16th/17th century the empire covered more than 15 mill people and 2 mill square miles through Med Sea and SE Europe, W Asia, the Caucasus and N Africa. But the spread of the Empire upset neighboring W European powers, which saw the Islamic empire as encroaching on their own conquests.
* House of Habsburg was one of their most aggressive rivals and the two fought a series of wars in the 16th through 18th century. Most important was the second siege of Vienna in 1683. The Ottomans attacked the Austrian city for the period of 2 months, while Poland and the remaining western Holy Roman Empire cooperated to fend off the invaders. Eventually, Austria and neighboring forces overwhelmed the Ottoman army, finally stopped their advance through Europe.
* Defeat was so great that within years the Ottomans were also pushed out of Hungary and Transylvania and forced the empire to stop expanding through Central Europe via Treaty of Karlowitz.- **Mark of the beginning of the end.**
* After being forced into peace, throughout 18th century, Ottoman military lost ground, both geographically and morally against their European counterparts. Seeing their power waning, Ottomans instituted strict reforms known as **Tanzimat**, which encouraged empire- based nationalism and equality among vast diversity of Ottoman citizens.
* In early 20th century, WW1 provided an opportunity for the Ottomans to reclaim lost territory. In 1914, joined with Euro Central Powers against the Allies consisting of Britain, France and Russia.
* British troops occupied Ottoman capital of Constantinople, and the entire empire was ceded to the Allies, who partitioned it away, so it would no longer threaten Western power.
* Empire’s defeat and the occupation of part of its territory by the allied powers in the aftermath of WW1 resulted in partitioning and the loss of its Middle Eastern territories, which were divided between the UK and France.

Kemal Atäturk (1881- 1938)

* Was a soldier, statesman and reformer who was the founder and the first president (1923-38) of the Republic of Turkey. He modernized the country’s legal and educational systems and encouraged the adoption of a European way of life, with Turkish written in the Latin alphabet and the citizens adopting European- style names.
* Rescued the surviving Turkish remnant of the defeated Ottoman Empire at the end of WW1. Through these struggles he founded the modern Republic of Turkey, succeeded in restoring people’s pride in their Turkishness, coupled with new sense of accomplishment as their nation was brought into the modern world.

Westernization+ Modernization of Turkey under Atäturk

* Was convinced Turkey needed to become a modern nation, believed that if Turkish people continued to follow their traditions they would be attacked by another western power.
* Often traveled the countryside to encourage people ‘let science and new ideas come in freely’, ‘if you don’t, they will devour you’.
* Greece attacked Turkey in 1921 and 1922 but Kemal led the Turks to victory. By the mid-1920s, the Turkish leader began a modernization program in Turkey
* Said that men and women must be equal- girls allowed to attend school, also gave women the right to vote and take jobs in business and government.
* Set aside religious law and established western system of Justice- set up legal structure that was like European nations.
* Also forbade men from taking more than one wife, although polygamy allowed in Quran.
* Forbade traditional Turkish clothing veils etc. Kemal said people must appear civilized and should wear shoes, trousers, shirts, tie etc. Turks who continued to wear traditional clothing were arrested and imprisoned.
* Introduced western alphabet and order all newspapers, books etc. to be printed in the new script- believed difficulty of Arabic script used led to illiteracy in Turkey and was difficult for merchants and traders from other nations to learn.
* Declared everyone should have a surname or family name
* Was a very popular leader. Most accepted his changes, but some disagreed because he created a more secular society (non- religious). Didn’t matter if people disagreed.
* Leader allowed only one political party and did not permit people to openly disagree with his policies.
* Through the eyes of a naive yet observant child-narrator, it describes life in an economically and politically uncertain environment where forces of Westernization, notably Americanization, are gaining influence over more traditional ways of life, and where, at the end of the book, emigration is the best option for the 17-year-old narrator.
* Thus, instead of thematizing the difficulties of adaptation to a new and sometimes hostile environment, or exploiting the topos of the abused or confined Turkish woman which has been a staple of cinema and popular writing by certain Turkish authors in Germany,3 Özdamar focusses on the source culture, and some of its troubles
* Her descriptions of daily life in a family of six, constantly on the verge of, or in, bankruptcy and constantly in search of new lives in different parts of the country, provide fascinating and lively insights into another culture, while her unsentimental view of life in Turkey, her powerful and subversive women characters, and her inventive use of language and myth achieves what earlier works by migrant workers haven’t: she avoids a confrontational stance vis-à-vis Germany, as well as clichéd, folklorish elements with regard to Turkey.
* Even more importantly, Ozdamar here employs her female protagonist to explicitly criticize not only the Western world, and the practices of Western exploitation, but also the patriarchal practices of traditional Turkish culture- significant since the issue is not a conflict between the loss of traditional Turkey and the difficulties with the new, secularized Germany, but rather a female voice who stakes out her ground against both the Western and the traditional culture.