

CONSTRUCTING DIVISIONS BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE: ON
FERTILE LANDS AND DISTANT

Ebru Aykut *

One of the most fallacious habits and depravations that we are inclined to is our dislike of the other, necessary and unnecessary slandering of each other. The contempt of Istanbulites and countrymen who are the children of the same country and thus the contempt of the urban dwellers and the peasants toward each other constitutes one of the most important national catastrophes.¹

Urban life has been one of the main subjects of interest in literary genres since the nineteenth century. Parallel to the industrialization process, together with the rural-urban migration and urbanization accompanying it, novelists and poets began to write about the urban experience while philosophers and social scientists began to contemplate and search for the unanticipated consequences of urbanization and its effects on everyday life. Gustave Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*, almost all of the novels of Dickens, Baudelaire's poems on Paris, Georg Simmel's metropolis, *Das Passagenwerk* of Walter Benjamin and many other works reflect their authors' impressions of the speed, change and upheaval experienced in urban life triggered by the new forces of industrialization and modernization.

If we consider the Turkish novel, it would not be wrong to claim that it started in an urban context. The social milieu in early Turkish novels, from Ahmed Mithat to Hâlid Ziya, reflected Istanbul life to a great extent.² Not until the early Republican period, the country which signifies the massive territory outside Istanbul, that is Anatolia, receive any attention.³ The foundation of the Republic, its effort to discover and construct a unified, undifferentiated "nation" and its discourse on westernization and civilization generated a new interest in the problems of the peasantry in Anatolia. However, this interest functioned as a tool to disseminate the ideology and values of the Republic to the countryside rather than aiming at penetration of the actual problems there.⁴ This effort to reach and discover Anatolia reflects the Republican elite's perception of the countryside which affiliated itself

* Ph.D., Atatürk Institute, Boğaziçi University

¹ Mustafa Nazmi, "Bir Mukâyese: İstanbul, Taşra" *Sebilürreşad* 16, no.412-413 (1919): 215. "Sakim itiyatlarımızdan ahlaksızlıklarımızdan biri de yek diğerimizi beğenmemekliğimiz, lüzumlu ve lüzumsuz birbirimize buhtân etmemizdir. Her ikisi de aynı vatan evladı olan İstanbullu ve taşralının ve bu meyanda şehirliler ile köylülerin birbirini hor görmesi milli felaketlerimizin en mühimlerinden birini teşkil etmektedir."

² Robert P.Finn, *Türk Romanı 1872-1900* (İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2003), 49.

³ Nabızade Nazım's *Karabibik*, the first literary work on village life, and Ebubekir Hâzım Tepeyran's *Küçük Paşa* should be considered as exceptions.

⁴ Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature" *East European Quarterly* 36, no.2 (June 2002), 128. Cavit Orhan Tütengil calls this early peasantism "People's Houses' Peasantism" (Halkevi Köycülüğü) since it looks to the village from above and cannot go beyond a speechy and advisory discourse while perishing in the sightseeing and picnic activities of the intelligentsia. See Cahit Orhan Tütengil, "Köycülük Üzerine", in *75 Yılda Köylerden Şehirlere* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), 207-208 and "Türkiye'de Köy ve Aydınların Tutumu" *Türkiye'de Köy Sorunu* (İstanbul: Kıtış Yayınları, 1969), 93.

with a “civilizing mission”. On the one hand, the peasants were seen as “the masters of the nation” representing purity and honesty, while on the other hand, the country was seen as an exotic, mysterious, culturally different and backward place that was to be enlightened by the intelligentsia.⁵

The first phase of this double-ended vision of the peasantist discourse of the 1930s regarded the city as the origin of all evils, such as class conflict. Nusret Köymen, one of the prominent peasantists of the early Republic, in his *Köycülük Esasları* argued that there was no economic security in the city together with the dangers of unemployment and poverty that accompanied it. Since people living in the city were so distant from the peace and serenity of nature, this distance impoverished their souls and minds. In such an atmosphere moral breakdown became inevitable.⁶ The village, on the other, with its conservative character protected the national spirit. According to Köymen, an independent small peasantry constituted the core national values and the economic power of a nation.⁷

The second phase of the peasantist discourse, on the other hand, regards the village/countryside as a place that must be emancipated, civilized and modernized; therefore reflects an “Occidental” tendency, as Meltem Ahıska calls it.⁸ According to Ahıska, the imagining of the Turkish national identity and the fantasy of “the West” that was constructed in this process can be conceptualized with the term “Occidentalism”. Occidentalism points to how an imagined Western gaze is operative at the production and reproduction of a Turkish national discourse and a national self. Within this discourse, the East or the Orient is represented as “backward” and defined with a “lack”. This “lack” projected onto the people or the nation is compensated with concepts and techniques borrowed from the West which “[have] either been celebrated as a model to be followed or exorcised as a threat to indigenous national values” in defining the Turkish identity.⁹ The coexistence of admiration and hostility to the West makes up the integral part of the national identity.

In a similar fashion, this Occidental fantasy of imagining a “lack” also can be found in the divisions between the cities, the regions, the gendered identities, social classes, ethnicities and different religions.¹⁰ Within this framework, the privileged side of the duality dominates over the unprivileged side. Man rules over woman while city rules over countryside. The dominant part of every duality creates its own subaltern and attributes to it a “lack” that would legitimize the dominant’s rule over it. This “constitutive lack” appears at the center of every identity. If we refer to the peasantist discourse again, we see that the village or the countryside appears as a backward place that must be enlightened by the Republican elite. Here, the Western gaze is absorbed within the nation and reflected upon the nation’s

⁵ For a discourse reflecting this double bind, see Mehmet Saffet, “Köycülük Nedir?” *Ülkü* (Temmuz 1933).

⁶ Nusret Köymen, *Köycülük Esasları* (Ankara, 1934), 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 26, 30. In fact, peasantism as a discourse rises during the interwar period not only in Turkey, but throughout the world. Karaömerlioğlu asserts that the reasons behind the rising peasantism are directly related to the problems of urbanisation, industrialisation and Great Depression. He, then, underlines the similarity between the German and the Turkish peasantism since both aim to prevent the mobilization of the peasantry. See Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “İki Savaş Arası Avrupa’da İdeolojik Bir Söylem Olarak Köycülük”, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 185-217.

⁸ Meltem Ahıska, “Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2/3, no.102 (Spring/Summer 2003), 364-365.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁰ Meltem Ahıska, “Milliyetçilik, Yer ve Zaman” *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005), 46.

“other” that is, the countryside. The East/West divide is reproduced, imagined and reflected in the opposition between the countryside and Istanbul. The hostility/admiration or love and hate relationship also is reproduced, as mentioned above.

Within this framework, I will explore in this article the way the countryside and the city, the countryman and the townsman are constructed in two different periods through the analysis of a novel, *On Fertile Lands*¹¹ by Orhan Kemal and a movie, *Distant*¹² by Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Each of these works tells the story of migration in which the protagonists leave their village with the expectation of getting a job in the city. Although both narratives seem to share a similar desire to tell of the pursuit of hope, happiness and a future in the city, they differ dramatically in the way they construct their universe. In spite of all the glimmer and charm that the city offers the immigrants, I will argue that in Kemal’s novel, the city is represented as a giant, all-consuming machine while the countryside or the village is conceptualized as a space of relief and home in spite of its poverty and deprivation. In *Distant*, however, we find in the end that there is no home to which to return. Ceylan underlines the fact that there is nowhere to escape to from the disappointment stemming from the desperation that both the city and the countryside engender. Hence, he tells us the story of an impasse.

Unlike the chain migration common to the period between 1950 and 1980, *On Fertile Lands* and *Distant* tell a single migration story. Indeed, these stories correspond to the historical, social and political context of the time that they reflect. My aim here is to disclose that any work of art is bounded strictly to the historical period in which it is produced. Although fiction as a construct does not necessarily reflect the ideological choice and social background of its author, it is imagined and produced in a certain cultural and political context that determines in a way the perception and consciousness of its creator.¹³ Consequently, the analysis of any literary or artistic work may provide us insight into the social milieu that is represented in the work of art. In this article, I will discuss how the cleavages constructed in these works between country life and city life reflect their own temporality. I will claim that *On Fertile Lands* as the realist and peasantist novel of a socialist writer reflects its creator’s class consciousness while it is heavily burdened by the peasantist discourse of the 1930s and 1940s. On the other hand, *Distant*, as a movie in the tradition of realist cinema, reflects the post-1980s individualist discourse of the hegemonic neo-liberal ideology and its counterparts, that is, loneliness, alienation, lack of communication, the blasé attitude, indifference and distance from other persons.

¹¹ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* (İstanbul: Epsilon Yayınları, 2006).

¹² Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *Uzak/Distant* (DVD Palermo, 2002).

¹³ Ahmet Ö.Evin, “Novelists: New Cosmopolitanism versus Social Pluralism” *Turkey and the West*, eds. M.Heper, A.Öncü, H.Kramer (IB Tauris, 1993), 95.

On Fertile Lands

*Electricity in the streets turns the night into day.
Those automobiles, those women... I don't know.
It is impossible to tell you. It (the city) paralyzes
man at the first encounter. You lose yourself,
surprised, and do not know where to look.
However, brothers, we should not fall into the
trap of the townsman. I swear they make us needy
for a piece of bread.¹⁴*

Every year, the men of the eighty household "Ç" Village in Central Anatolia leave their home to the cities nearby to work and earn money. Three villagers, İflahsızın Yusuf, Pehlivan Ali and Köse Hasan leave their poor and infertile hometown to find jobs in the city. They hope to work in their fellow villager's factory in Çukurova. Except for Yusuf, Ali and Hasan are leaving the village for the first time. They all have expectations, like earning money and buying some presents in return. For instance, Yusuf imagines buying a gas furnace that emits the sound of a snake that would astonish the fellow villagers and give him prestige while Hasan wants to buy a plastic comb and hairclip for his daughter. At the same time they are afraid of their first encounter with the city and townsmen.

The protagonists' experience with the city costs them dearly and creates disappointment since they have difficulty getting jobs at their fellow townsman's cotton ginning factory and are barely able to survive with their weekly earnings. They sleep in a crowded single room with many fellow workers in mud, filth and manure and eat only bread and onions. More terrible than that are the working conditions at the factory. Yusuf works in the section of dirty cocoons in dust. Hasan works in the section of wet cocoons, which means that he always has to work in ice cold water and is exposed to cold wind blowing in through the broken windows. His body cannot endure these harsh conditions and he dies from pneumonia.

In addition to these hard working conditions, Kemal describes the relations of power and exploitation that existed between the workers/peasants and the wardens, worker's sergeants and subcontractors at the factory, at the construction site and then at the farm. The city is represented as an exploitative machine that sucks the blood of the workers not only through extracting more surplus value by making them work longer hours in factories, but also through incorporating them into dependency relations. Without paying tributes, no one can get a job. The workers can be fired if they object to the unjust appropriation of their earnings by the head of workers (*amelebaşı/ırgatbaşı*) or wardens. Money becomes the keyword and penetrates into life in cities. What Simmel emphasizes in his work *The Metropolis and Mental Life* is depicted in Kemal's novel by the relations among people in everyday life.

Simmel describes the city in deep contrast to rural life. Contrary to the "impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course" in rural life, the city life shows "the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions."

¹⁴ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, 11. "Gece olmaz mı, sokaklarda bütün elektrikler yanar, gündüz gibi, ipil ipil. O tomafiller, o avratlar, o ne bileyim canım, dille tarifi mümkünsüz. Siftah gidince adamı bir çarpar ki eh. Kendi kendini yitirirsin, ne yana bakacağını şaşırırsın. Lakin arkadaşlar, biz biz olalım, şehirlinin dolabına düşmeyelim. Anam avradım olsun, bizi yek ekmeğe muhtaç ederler!"

The rhythm of life goes by more slowly in rural life and the countryman rests more upon emotional relationships. In the city, however, there are crowds and a multitude of stimuli that would uproot the metropolitan man. However, he develops an organ that would protect him against the shocks and the change that prevail in the city. This organ, Simmel says, is the intellect. Therefore, the metropolitan man “reacts with his head instead of his heart” to his external environment. He behaves in apathy and remains indifferent to the urban crowd to prevent the traumatic effect of the disconnected images and sounds.¹⁵

According to Simmel, the money economy and economic exchange relations dominate city life. Money and intellect are connected intrinsically since both reinforce anonymity and rationality. Money reduces every quality of life to the question “how much?”

...By being the equivalent to all the manifold things in one and the same way, money becomes the most frightful leveler. For many expresses all qualitative differences of things in terms of ‘how much?’ Money, with all its colorlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values...¹⁶

Kemal depicts the relations in Çukurova in a fashion similar to that in Simmel’s work. The city as the seat of the money economy reduces friendship, love, care and sexuality to a mutual contract, the value of which is determined by money. In the novel, women make love in exchange for pantyhose. Hasan dies due to lack of proper care during his illness since neither his fellows Yusuf and Ali nor the owner of the barrack he is staying in take care of him as he does not have any money. Additionally, Kemal displays this materialist inclination in urban life by way of Yusuf’s dead uncle’s advice. Yusuf always recites the warnings of his uncle about city life and the townsman to his friends. In the introductory pages of the novel, Yusuf says, “My poor uncle. He had said that the townsmen do not piss on an injured finger free of charge.”¹⁷ One of the basic motifs of the novel is thus stressed. On several occasions, this motif is repeated. For instance, Ali’s grievance about the city reveals this quality once more: “What you call city is a money trap. We get away from one and then fall into another.”¹⁸

In the novel, the rifts between the social classes, the antinomies between the oppressor and the oppressed are materialized in the contradiction between the townsman and the countryman. The injustices that the protagonists have to face, the tributes they have to pay and the people cheating and exploiting them appear in the novel as signs of the townsman/countryman antagonism.¹⁹ In addition, the dead uncle’s warnings about the threats posed by the city’s charming influence reflect how the peasants perceive townsmen and urban life:

¹⁵ Georg Simmel, “Metropol ve Tinsel Hayat”, *Modern Kültürde Çatışma* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 85-87. For the English version see “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

¹⁷ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, 40. “Fukara emmim. Şehirli beleş beleşine yaralı parmağa işemezler derdi.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108. “Şehir dediğin bir para tuzağıymış. Bir yerden kurtuluyoruz, bir yere düşüyoruz.”

¹⁹ Berna Moran, “Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde Köylü Şehirli Çatışması”, *Türk Edebiyatına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 2* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994), 39-40.

“The townsman makes the peasants paralyzed.”²⁰

“The townsman is a genie.”²¹

“My uncle said to treat the townsman according to his appetite. If he says white, do not say black.”²²

“The townsman is accustomed to bribery. My uncle said not to forget to bribe the townsman.”²³

“This is the city, the factory. It does not look like the village. Your fellow countryman or any other... It does not work here.”²⁴

“My uncle said not to be misled by the townsman. They make you needy for a piece of bread.”²⁵

“My uncle said to handle the townsman with tact. The only thing he does is praise of himself.”²⁶

The city is depicted as a place where people live for money and do not move a finger for anything unless it is to their advantage. The townsman’s indifferent and distant behavior in the novel discloses itself when Yusuf asks a man passing by in a hurry on the street whether he knows their fellow villager or not. The man is irritated by the over-familiarity in Yusuf’s attitude. He pushes him away and says: “don’t get too close, stay away!”²⁷ This attitude of the townsmen is called “reserve” by Simmel. He says:

As a result of this reserve we frequently do not even know by sight those who have been our neighbors for years. And it is this reserve which in the eyes of the small town people makes us appear to be cold and heartless.²⁸

The townsmen, represented by aghas, factory keepers and other middlemen, bribe and cheat the workers while remaining indifferent to their bad living and working conditions. Moreover, they want to take advantage of their vulnerable situations. Only the two foremen in the novel are represented as honest, fair, outspoken and hardworking men performing their own craft. Yusuf, in the end, learns his craft from a master and becomes a stonemason. Anyway, only Yusuf is able to return his village since Hasan and Ali die in the city. In this way, Kemal also makes his political position evident. His preferences about what to tell and how to tell it reveal his ideological background as a socialist who had been imprisoned in 1939 for five years on charges of spreading of communist propaganda. He was incarcerated in Bursa Prison, where he met Nazım Hikmet, who had a deep impact on him.²⁹ His life

²⁰ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, 8. “Şehir adamı köylüyü cin çarpar gibi çarpar.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12. “Şehirli bir cin...”

²² *Ibid.*, 42. “Emmim derdi ki siz siz olun şehirlinin suyuna göre gidin, şehirli ak derse siz kara demeyin derdi.”

²³ *Ibid.*, 44. “Şehir adamı yeyime alışkın olur. Emmim derdi ki siz siz olun, şehirliye yeyimi eksik etmeyin derdi.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51. “Burası şehir, fabrika. Köy yerine benzemez. Hemşeri memşeri... geç bir kalem.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60. “Emmim derdi ki siz siz olun şehirlinin fendine düşmeyin. Sizi vallaha yek ekmeğe muhtaç ederler derdi.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 375. “Emmim derdi ki siz siz olun, şehirlinin sakalına göre tarak vurun derdi. Şehirlinin merakı, partal atmak.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁸ Georg Simmel, “Metropol ve Tinsel Hayat”, 93.

²⁹ For Orhan Kemal’s life story, see “Kim Kimdir? Orhan Kemal (1914-1970)”, <http://www.kimkimdir.gen.tr/kimkimdir.php?id=767>.

as a socialist makes clearer why the two lead characters in the novel are privileged as honest persons while the middle men are depicted as parasitic and creep. Although we can conclude that the passages underlying the antagonisms between social classes and the relations of exploitation prevailing among them indicate the class consciousness and ideological position of the author, we also should stress the fact that the novel was rewritten in 1964, not to neglect the role of historical context. According to Fethi Naci, the second edition of the novel, which was extended nearly a 150 pages, reflects the more liberal context of the post-1960 period.³⁰ Kemal, unlike the first edition, appeals to indoctrination in the second edition and attributes a class consciousness to his characters that they lack in 1954 version. In the second edition, a more labor-focused perspective is put forward by the author. For instance, the foreman says in anger to the *irgatbaşı*, who says that the agha possesses the laborers: “I am a laborer, not a slave!”³¹ He also says in one place: “Without you and me and even the agha, the work goes well; however, without them (the workers) it does not!”³²

Nevertheless, we cannot claim that the narrative in *On Fertile Lands* is built upon a discourse of class. Rather, the basic premises of the text are constructed around the antagonism between the countryman and the urban dwellers, just as Berna Moran rightly mentions. The reason for this engagement can be explained why his background and, more important than that, why the rise of village literature in the 1950s.³³ On the one hand, Kemal’s background and his life again make it easier for us to grasp the realist universe in his novel. Before he started his career as a writer in Istanbul in 1950, he worked in Adana in cotton ginning mills as a worker, weaver and clerk. In other words, he lived and experienced the hard working conditions that he reflected in his novels. When asked in an interview why the topics of his stories and novels were always the poor people and workers, he replied: “I am a realist author. I write about the subjects that I know best. I do not know how wealthy people live.”³⁴

On the other hand, he wrote *On Fertile Lands* in a period when village literature was on the ascent. Kemal is accepted in the canon of village literature, which reached its peak from the 1950s onwards parallel to the success of the Democrat Party in the elections and the effects of the authors who were graduates of the Village Institutes.³⁵ In spite of the fact that Kemal is not a writer of Village Institute origin, some of his novels concentrate on the power relations in the countryside. *On Fertile Lands*, too, is acknowledged in this literary canon since it

³⁰ Fethi Naci, “Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde” *Cumhuriyet Kitap*, 06.06.2002.

³¹ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, 242. “Emekçiyim ben, köle değil!”

³² Ibid., 241. “Sen, ben hatta ağa olmasa da işler yürür amma, onlar olmasa yürümez!”

³³ The difference of the village literature genre from the previous interest in villages and peasants during the early Republican era is that the novelists of the early Republican period had no organic ties with rural life and its problems. In fact, they did not know the Anatolian peasantry since they had been born in Istanbul. The countryside appears in their novels as decor and they always emphasize the ignorance and poverty of the peasantry. The early Republican intelligentsia looks at the countryside as a traveler that would observe its problems and find solutions. As Ömer Türkeş mentions, these romantic intelligentsia ascribe to themselves an elitist role and an emancipatory mission in a modernizing tendency. See Ömer Türkeş, “Orda Bir Taşra Var Uzakta” *Taşraya Bakmak*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 162; and Demirtaş Ceyhun, “Edebiyatımızda Köy, Köylü ve ‘Köy Edebiyatı’ Akımı” *Varlık* 62, no.1048 (1995), 41, 43. However, the realists novelists of the village literature genre are either born in the villages or graduates of Village Institutes.

³⁴ Cevdet Kudret, *Türk Edebiyatında Hikaye ve Roman 3* (Ankara: İnkılap Yayınları, 1999), 272, cited from *Yeni Adam*, April 1965.

³⁵ Mahmut Makal and Fakir Baykurt are the two well-known authors in village literature genre and are graduates of Village Institutes.

renders the tension between the countryside and the city visible in a context of class antagonisms.

Although we see the antagonism between the urban dwellers and the countrymen in the novel through the perspective of the subalterns, the last shot of the author revealed by a dialogue between Yusuf on his way back to his village and an officer at the train station eventually depicts how a townsman perceives countryman. When Yusuf tells him that he intends to take his children and wife and migrate to the city to settle there, the officer gets angry. His words make clear the disdainful attitude of the townsman towards the countryman: “Let me say something? Do not dare to leave your village... You have fouled the city enough.”³⁶ The cultural polarity revealing itself in the popular discourse in the 1980s by the words “maganda”, “zonta” and “kiro” appears in this novel as “foul and vulgar peasant.” Just as the polarization and exclusionary practices and discourse in the 1970s owing to the realization that the rural-urban migration was not temporary; in the novel, too, the urban classes appreciate the peasants only when their existence in the city is temporary and functional.³⁷ Peasants are welcomed only as a cheap and reserve labor force: “Don’t worry. Thank God, the labor market is full of laborers.”³⁸

The effort to converge in his narrative the axis of social classes with the axis of polarization between the city and the countryside compel him to simplify the oppositions existing in the novel. The characters are portrayed in a Cartesian duality. The peasants coming to the city for work are depicted as the oppressed while the urban dwellers who may not necessarily have been born in the city but penetrated the metropolitan money economy are symbolized as the oppressors. Just as the bourgeoisie exploits the labor force of the proletariat, the townsman exploits the simple-minded and naïve peasant-workers who are unaware of the tricky relations in city life. The city grinds up and destroys Hasan and Ali’s lives while Yusuf manages to survive and returns his village as he never forgets his uncle’s advice.

One important point here is that the village in *On Fertile Lands* is depicted as a home, as a place to which one can return. Though the city, Çukurova is represented as “fertile lands”, it also is depicted as an uncanny, dangerous and destructive place. Despite the possibilities it may offer to poor peasants, it poses dangers for those who do not take guard against it. In this way, Kemal does display an open hostility to city life.

I claim that the origins of this hostility stems from the early peasantist discourse of the 1930s, which criticized urbanization, industrialization and modernity with nostalgia for rural life. Although Kemal does not praise rural life, he constructs the village as an alternative to the chaotic city life. He tells us a story about the destruction taking place in the city. The only character that does not wither away in the city –Yusuf- succeeds at returning to his village. The poor middle Anatolian village is in a way constructed as a shelter distant from the moral breakdown of the city life.

³⁶ Ibid., 379. “Hem sana bir şey deyim mi? Köyünden de çıkmaya kulak asma!.. Şehri pislettiğiniz yeter!”

³⁷ Meral Özbek mentions how this exclusionary discourse is resisted and then accommodated by the migrants with “arabesk”. As the customs, values, language and music of the migrants and the urban middle and upper-classes clashed with each other, the permanent existence of the ex-villagers in the city creates a tension between these two groups of inhabitants. See “Arabesk Kültür: Bir Modernleşme ve Popüler Kimlik Örneği”, *Türkiye’de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 176, 180.

³⁸ Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, 259. “Korkma ırgattan yana. Irgat pazarı ırgat dolu şükür.”

Distant

...*Uzak nedir?
Kendisinin bile ücretinde yaşayan benim için
Gidecek yer ne kadar uzak olabilir?...³⁹*

Yusuf, early in the morning on a snowy winter day, leaves his village, Yenice, to go to Istanbul. He plans to stay in his nephew's apartment when he arrives at the city since they had a prior agreement that Mahmut would help him in his search for a job. Yusuf leaves his village because the local factory at which he and his father worked closed down, leaving for more than a thousand workers unemployed. He wants to work on a merchant ship where the earnings, he expects, will be good. However, Mahmut, a commercial photographer who once upon a time, dreamed of being a director like Tarkovsky, and lived alone in his apartment, does not welcome Yusuf in a hospitable manner. He immediately sets various rules for Yusuf's movements and behavior.

Yusuf immediately starts to look for a job on a merchant ship. Unfortunately, he realizes quickly that there is no hope for that. He desperately continues with his search. Mahmut meanwhile tries to follow his daily routine, taking commercial photos in a room at his apartment, going out to drinking in bars and is sometimes visited by his married lover. Yusuf's presence at his house begins to disturb him as his visit becomes prolonged and begins to turn into a permanent residence. Mahmut regards Yusuf as a countryman disrespectful of his life and order. He wants him to adhere strictly to his rules. He does not allow him to smoke in the living room while he warns him not to forget to turn off the lights and also not to forget to flush the toilet. However, Yusuf forgets or ignores these rules, which then become a pretext for Mahmut's hostility. The tension between the cousins erupts. Mahmut shouts in anger when he realizes that Yusuf has smoked in the living room and has not flushed the toilet. He says: "You spoil immediately when I am a little indulgent of you...Do I have to clean up your mess?"⁴⁰

Then he asks what Yusuf is planning to do if he cannot find a job. He wonders whether he will return to his village or not. Yusuf tells him that he can no longer go back due to the desperate situation there. He asks Mahmut to arrange a job for him at the ceramic factory. Mahmut gets angry and says that the factory does not give jobs to unqualified men like him. Yusuf's reaction to these words reveals his disappointment. He says: "This place (the city) has changed you. You, all, are like this."⁴¹ Mahmut gets angrier and disdainfully replies:

You come from the countryside and the only thing you do is
looking for a friend at court. You don't care about acquiring a skill.

³⁹ İsmet Özel, "Mataramda Tuzlu Su" *Erbain Kırk Yılın Şiirleri* (İstanbul: Şule Yayınları, 2005), 116.

⁴⁰ Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *Uzak*. "Azıcık yüz verince hemen civıyorsun... Bir de senin pıslığıni mi temizliycem!" The attitudes of Mahmut and Yusuf and the hostile relation between them can also be analyzed with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu uses the concept of *habitus* to explain the social distinction practices and mechanisms. Habitus can be defined as a system of dispositions in which any person's subjectivity is constructed in a social context. This social subjectivity creates distinctive practices in thoughts, attitudes and actions. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Toplumsal Uzam ile Simgesel Uzam", *Pratik Nedenler* (İstanbul: Kesit Yayıncılık, 1995), 23. The symbolic distinctions between Yusuf and Mahmut which construct a real power relation between the cousins and the social distinction between the countyman and the metropolitan man can also be understood within this context.

⁴¹ Ibid., "Burası değiştirmiş sizi. Siz hepiniz böylesiniz zaten."

You try to enjoy the fruits of others' labors through uncles and deputies... You come to Istanbul without any plan, without learning anything and then are left destitute.⁴²

Yusuf understands very well that Mahmut no longer wants him at his apartment as he has become a burden for him. He also comprehends that his expectations of getting a job, earning money and supporting his family will not be realized.

The charming city –Istanbul- no longer provides a shelter for the villager as it has lost its glamorous face since the 1980s due to “deteriorating employment opportunities and social integration mechanisms of the previous period” parallel to the new forces of globalization and neo-liberalism.⁴³ It can no longer provide an outlet for the desperate immigrants while turning into a space of exclusion. In fact, *On Fertile Lands* and *Distant* represent two different periods in the history of urbanization and migration in Turkey. Though the former was written in 1954, it reflects the social conditions prior to the 1950s just before the start of a massive wave of urban-rural migration. The latter emerges as a narrative of the post-80s, which signifies the end of a process called “chain migration”. Many field studies that are extensive in urban studies in Turkey support the fact that the years between 1950-1980 are widely accepted as having been a period of chain migration.⁴⁴ In chain migration, the relations and collective ties among immigrants mostly depend on place of origin. When new migrants arrive in a city, they are supported by the earlier migrants of the same place of origin, providing them with opportunities for employment and housing which are the basic mechanisms of incorporation to the city. Though this model could explain the earlier dynamics of migration in the 1950s, urban sociologists stress the changing nature of the process after the 1980s and put forward the fact that the immigrants no longer have the means of incorporation to the city. The lack of social networks makes them vulnerable to poverty and they constitute the new urban poor on the fringes of the city.⁴⁵

The relationship between Mahmut and Yusuf reflects the conditions in the city after 1980. Yusuf comes to the city as an individual immigrant, unlike those who came previously as part of a process of chain migration. Therefore, he is unable to find social networks that would make his first encounter with the city easier. Instead, he takes refuge in a hostile relative's apartment. When Mahmut's depressed and individualistic life is invaded by Yusuf, the tension between the villager and the urban dweller is revealed.

As Ashlı Daldal clearly stresses, *Distant* symbolizes first the dreams of Yusuf, who wants to escape from the monotonous life of the countryside. Then, it reflects the values of the countryside and the warmth of the family that are left behind by Mahmut. Last, it represents the distance, alienation and lack of communication

⁴² Ibid., “Taşradan gelmişsiniz, işiniz gücünüz torpil aramak. Vasıf bulmak diye bir derdiniz yok. Amcaydı, dayıydı, milletvekiliydi, herşeyi hazır bulmaya çalışıyorsunuz...Bir bok öğrenmeden plansız programsız geliyorsunuz İstanbul'a, sonra kalıyorsunuz ortada.”

⁴³ Çağlar Keyder, “Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.29, no:1 (March 2005), 124.

⁴⁴ Sema Erder's research on Ümraniye, Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu's study on Sultanbeyli and Şükrü Aslan's recently published doctoral thesis on 1 Mayıs Mahallesi can be cited among these works. See Sema Erder, *İstanbul'a Bir Kent Kondu: Ümraniye* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006); Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000); and Şükrü Aslan, *1 Mayıs Mahallesi: 1980 Öncesi Toplumsal Mücadeleler ve Kent* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004).

⁴⁵ Çağlar Keyder, “Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul”, 126-127; and Şükrü Aslan, *1 Mayıs Mahallesi*, 64-69.

among people.⁴⁶ Mahmut is depicted as a person with no personal or emotional ties with his family or even with his lover. He naturally cannot get close to Yusuf either. We see all the characteristics that Simmel attributes to metropolitan man in Mahmut's personality. He remains indifferent to everything and everybody around him. His reserved behavior and blasé attitude toward the rapidly changing environment provide him an amount of personal freedom, but it also creates a feeling of worthlessness. What we see in Mahmut's life is depicted perfectly in Simmel: "What appears in the metropolitan style of life directly as dissociation is in reality only one of its elemental forms of socialization."⁴⁷

Although we find the characteristics of the metropolitan man in Mahmut, we cannot find the chaotic face of the city or "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity..." etc., that Simmel describes as peculiar to the metropolis. The city is never displayed in such a context except for a scene in Beyoğlu where we see Yusuf wandering in the crowds as a lonely man. Mahmut's apartment and the cafes in which he spends time represent the city space in the film.

The countryside, on the other hand, is constructed as a place that offers no more than acute boredom for Yusuf. In fact, except for the opening scene of the film, we do not see the countryside. Even in this shot, it is displayed from a distant hill that Yusuf is climbing up to reach the highway. That is, the countryside is constructed in the movie not as an image but as a discourse, not as a geographical space but as a psychic mood. Yusuf leaves his village to escape from the anxiety and boredom of the countryside and to start a new life at the city. However, he finds himself trapped within a familiar situation. He is enmeshed within the same anxiety since he cannot penetrate the inaccessible world of the city life. As Asuman Suner writes, Yusuf cannot escape from the countryside since he feels the deprivation of being a countryman more deeply here at the city than at his village because he loses his dreams which give him power to overcome his anxiety and, he realizes that the countryside is everywhere.

Suner, therefore, describes *Distant* as a movie about the countryside although the setting is Istanbul.⁴⁸ Just as Nurdan Gürbilek puts forward clearly, the countryside points to an experience not specifically connoting a geographical and physical space; rather it represents an experience of exclusion and boredom.⁴⁹ The countryside begins to besiege its natives only when they recognize that they are impoverished by being at the periphery of the center.⁵⁰ The countryside is, thus, constituted as a "lack" when it sees itself with the gaze of the city. This is the point where the Occidental fantasy is reproduced. Yusuf cannot stay in his village once he has realized that the countryside is disabled by a lack and this lack can only be fulfilled by the promises of the city. But when the city does not open up a space for him to pursue his goals, the Occidental fantasy does not occur. In this way, neither the city nor the countryside is privileged or glorified by the movie. The impasse that *Distant* poses differs from the double bind of hostility/admiration relation of the Occidental discourse. This impasse here manifests itself in the desperation of

⁴⁶ Aslı Daldal, "Gerçekçi Geleneğin İzinde: Kracauer, 'Basit Anlatı' ve Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sineması" *Doğu Batı*, no.25 (2003-4), 268.

⁴⁷ Georg Simmel, "Metropol ve Tinsel Hayat", 94.

⁴⁸ Asuman Suner, "Oyun/Bozgun" *Hayalet Ev* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2006), 115-119.

⁴⁹ The center and the periphery or the countryside and the city are floating concepts if we conceive them as geographical markers. As we see in *On Fertile Lands*, Çukurova may be called as a city with respect to an eighty-housed village; however it is countryside when compared to a larger city like Istanbul.

⁵⁰ Nurdan Gürbilek, "Taşra Sıkıntısı" *Yer Değiştiren Gölge* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005), 52.

Yusuf when he discovers that there is no place to go that would relieve his anxiety. In the end, he returns home like the other Yusuf in *On Fertile Lands*, but this is not told as a story of success.

Contrary to *Distant*, Ceylan portrayed the countryside as a pastoral environment in his previous movies, *The Small Town* (Kasaba, 1997) and *Clouds of May* (Mayıs Sıkıntısı, 1999), which try to establish a dialogue between nature and the people. As rightly mentioned by Daldal, he makes us remember that a different life is possible for the alienated individual who has gotten lost in the technological chaos of the city.⁵¹ Though he shows us the penetration of the city into the countryside in various ways, he underlines the serenity of nature. The countryside is represented as a place where time flows slowly. By scrutinizing these features of the rural life, Ceylan depicts a countryside different from that in *Distant*.

Change does exist in the countryside, contrary to the imagination of the early peasantist discourse on it as a static and unchanged entity. Time, of course, does not flow slowly there than in the city. However, when Ömer Türkeş shows us how the countryside is perceived in the 2000s, we are surprised that the hegemonic imaginary of an Occidental fantasy persists. Türkeş quotes from novels written in the 2000s to demonstrate how the countryside appears from Istanbul in these works.⁵² The countryside is still depicted as the site of the non-modern, of poverty, backwardness and ignorance. What Anne McClintock calls “anachronistic space” perfectly fits this perception of countryside, which also represents the national hegemonic imaginary. Just like “imperial progress across the space of empire is figured as a journey backward in time to an anachronistic moment of prehistory”,⁵³ when those writers go forward into the countryside, they imagine themselves penetrating a temporally different space. The countryside is, therefore, constituted as Turkey’s anachronistic space in these novels. What make the two works under scrutiny diverge from these novels is that neither of them depicts an image of countryside like that. *On Fertile Lands*, as a socialist realist novel written in the village literature genre, and *Distant* as a realist film of the new cinema, explores the everyday relations of power between the villager and the townsman. While Kemal builds his novel on a meta-discourse elaborating on the daily relations in the city, Ceylan stresses the ordinary lives of ordinary people in their daily lives without any exaggeration.

Consequently, I have argued in this article that the divide between the countryside and the city is a historical construct and this historicity is related closely to imagining an Occidental fantasy. I have examined Kemal’s novel and Ceylan’s movie by borrowing the concept of Meltem Ahıska to understand how the countryside and the city construct each other. I suppose that culture plays a much more significant role than is assumed in the construction of the hegemonic imaginary and also of the present. Therefore, the examination of any social force in an historical period should entail the analysis of the cultural works that construct the period and that are the constructs of the period.

⁵¹ Aslı Daldal, “Gerçekçi Geleneğin İzinde: Kracauer, ‘Basit Anlatı’ ve Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sineması”, 267.

⁵² See Ömer Türkeş, “Orda Bir Taşra Var Uzakta”, 172-174.

⁵³ Anne McClintock, “The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism” *Imperial Leather* (New York&London: Routledge, 1995), 40.

Bibliography

- Ahıska, Meltem. "Milliyetçilik, Yer ve Zaman". In *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı*, 15-49. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005.
- Ahıska, Meltem. "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern". *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, no.102: 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 351-379.
- Aslan, Şükrü. *1 Mayıs Mahallesi*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Toplumsal Uzam ile Simgesel Uzam". In *Pratik Nedenler*, 15-29. İstanbul: Kesit Yayıncılık, 1995.
- Ceyhun, Demirtaş. "Edebiyatımızda Köy, Köylü ve 'Köy Edebiyatı' Akımı" *Varlık* 62, no.1048 (1995): 39-45.
- Ceylan, Nuri Bilge. *Uzak/Distant*. DVD Palermo, 2002.
- Ceylan, Nuri Bilge. *Mayıs Sıkıntısı/Clouds of May*. DVD İmaj Entertainment, 1999.
- Daldal, Aslı. "Gerçekçi Geleneğin İzinde: Kracauer, 'Basit Anlatı' ve Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sineması". *Doğu Batı*, no.25 (2003-4): 255-273.
- Evin, Ahmet Ö. "Novelists: New Cosmopolitanism versus Social Pluralism". In *Turkey and the West*. Edited by M. Heper, A. Öncü, H. Kramer, 92-115. IB Tauris, 1993.
- Finn, Robert P. *Türk Romanı 1872-1900*. İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2003.
- Gürbilek, Nurdan. "Taşra Sıkıntısı". In *Yer Değiştiren Gölge*, 42-67. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1995.
- Karaömerlioğlu, Asım. "İki Savaş Arası Avrupa'da İdeolojik Bir Söylem Olarak Köycülük". In *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta*, 185-219. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006.
- Karaömerlioğlu, Asım. "The Peasants in Early Turkish Literature". *East European Quarterly* XXXVI, no.2 (June 2002): 127-153.
- Kemal, Orhan. *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*. İstanbul: Epsilon Yayınları, 2006.
- Keyder, Çağlar. "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.29, No.1 (March 2005): 124-134.
- Kim Kimdir? Orhan Kemal (1914-1970)*,
<http://www.kimkimdir.gen.tr/kimkimdir.php?id=767>
- Köymen, Nusret. *Köycülük Esasları*. Ankara: 1934.
- Kudret, Cevdet. *Türk Edebiyatında Hikaye ve Roman 3*. Ankara: İnkılap Yayınları, 1999.
- McClintock, Anne. "The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism". In *Imperial Leather*, 21-74. New York & London: Routledge, 1995.
- Moran, Berna. "Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde Köylü Şehirli Çatışması". In *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 2*, 36-57. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994.
- Mustafa Nazmi. "Bir Mukâyese: İstanbul, Taşra", *Sebilürreşad* 16, no.412-413 (1919): 215-216.
- Naci, Fethi. "Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde". Cumhuriyet Kitap, 06.06.2002.
- Özbek, Meral. "Arabesk Kültür: Bir Modernleşme ve Popüler Kimlik Örneği". In *Türkiye'de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik*. Edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, 168-187. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998.
- Özel, İsmet. "Mataramda Tuzlu Su". In *Erbain Kırk Yılın Şiirleri*, 116-117. İstanbul: Şule Yayınları, 2005.
- Saffet, Mehmet. "Köycülük Nedir?". *Ülkü* 1 (Temmuz 1933): 422-430.

- Simmel Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life". In *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 409-424. New York: Free Press, 1950.
- Simmel, Georg. "Metropol ve Tinsel Hayat". In *Modern Kültürde Çatışma*, 85-102. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003.
- Suner, Asuman. "Oyun/Bozgun: Nuri Bilge Ceylan Filmleri". In *Hayalet Ev: Yeni Türk Sinemasında Aidiyet, Kimlik ve Bellek*, 105-165. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2006.
- Türkeş, A.Ömer. "Orda Bir Taşra Var Uzakta". In *Taşraya Bakmak*. Ed. Tanıl Bora, 158-211. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006.
- Tütengil, Cahit Orhan. "Köycülük Üzerine". In *75 Yılda Köylerden Şehirlere*, 199-212. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999.
- Tütengil, Cahit Orhan. "Türkiye'de Köy ve Aydınların Tutumu". In *Türkiye'de Köy Sorunu*, 83-98. İstanbul: Kıtış Yayınları, 1969.