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SPACE AND MEMORY IN THE NOVELS OF JAMES

BALDWIN AND DEMİR ÖZLÜ*

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Abstract

*In literary studies, space functions as a basic element in constructing cultural identity and memory, which reflects formations of the characters' elements related to formations of self-awareness. Descriptions of the external environment play a key role in expressing the emotional and mental worlds of the characters. This article offers an analysis of the African American author James Baldwin's novel *Another Country* and the Turkish author Demir Özlü's novel *Amerika 1954*, with a particular emphasis on their representations of space. This study examines the narrative strategies employed by Baldwin and Özlü in their conceptualisation and construction of space and memory, and the function of these concepts in their works. The authors who stand out for their social awareness depict the psychological and sociological phenomena of individuals and societies through their works, in which they portray places of memory and transport these phenomena to an*

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aesthetic realm. Baldwin and Özlü's views on metropolises, which evince an opposition to discrimination and hegemonic values while criticising instruments of power, reveal their anti-capitalist and anti-racist stance. This article aims to draw attention to these authors' reflections on the spatial elements by means of their descriptions of New York. Furthermore, the text highlights the crucial part that space plays in the process of rebuilding memory and identity.

Keywords: *Demir Özlü, James Baldwin, space, memory, comparative literature.*

JAMES BALDWIN VE DEMİR ÖZLÜ'NÜN ROMANLARINDA

MEKÂN VE BELLEK

Öz

Mekân, edebî eserlerde kültürel kimlik ve belleğin inşasında temel bir unsur olarak işlev görür ve karakterlerin öz benliğinin oluşumuna dair unsurları yansıtmaya gücünü taşır. Bu bağlamda dış çevre betimlemeleri karakterlerin duygu ve düşünce dünyalarının dışavurumunda önemli role sahiptir. Bu makalede Baldwin'in Another Country (Bir Başka Ülke) romanı ile Demir Özlü'nün Amerika 1954 romanı, özellikle mekân kurgusuna odaklanarak analiz edilmektedir. Baldwin ve Özlü'nün eserleri mekân ve belleği kavramsallaştırma, kurgulama biçimleri ve bu kavramların işlevleri açısından incelenmektedir. Toplumsal duyarlılıkları ile öne çıkan bu iki yazar bellek mekânlarını resmettikleri eserleriyle psikolojik ve sosyolojik olgularla bireyin ve toplumun varoluş serüvenini estetik düzleme taşır. Ayrımcılığa ve hegemonik değerlere karşı mücadele etmenin yanı sıra iktidar aygıtlarını eleştiren Baldwin ve Özlü'nün metropollere dair görüşleri bu iki yazarın kapitalizm ve ırkçılık karşıtı söylemlerine işaret eder. Bu çalışmada Baldwin ve Özlü'nün özellikle New York'u betimlemelerinden yola çıkarak bu iki yazarın mekânsal unsurlar üzerine düşüncelerine dikkat çekmek amaçlanmaktadır. Ayrıca bellek ve kimliğin yeniden inşasında mekânın kilit rolü vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Demir Özlü, James Baldwin, mekân, bellek, karşılaştırmalı edebiyat.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, space functions as a fundamental element in the construction of cultural identity and memory, reflecting the formations of the characters and the environment they inhabit. As Şahin observes, “Space is the literary and symbolic memory in which human values are embedded” (Şahin, 2023: 76). Pierre Nora emphasizes that memory is rooted in the concrete, spatial, and object-based elements of experience, including movement (Nora, 2022: 22). Places and objects reflect individual and social identity. As in the works of Demir Özlü and James Baldwin, fictional characters interact with space in their search for identity. The flashbacks in their works seek to answer the question of how the characters’ relationships with social identity and memory shape their ways of existence. As the characters reflect on the questions of “who am I” and “who are we”, they reveal the dynamic of how their dilemmas, resistance, loneliness and alienation are expressed through spatial elements.

Henri Lefebvre’s work on space explains that “every society produces a space” that emerges out of historicity and social relations (2000: 43). Within the framework, Lefebvre draws attention to the elements that change according to historical periods. Furthermore, for Lefebvre, epochs, societies, modes of production, relations of production shape the specificity of space. Capitalism and the bourgeois order have their own spatial arrangements and practices (2023: 148). In the works of James Baldwin and Demir Özlü, a critical perspective draws attention to the ways in which these spatial arrangements and practices are reflected in the lives of the characters. As Lefebvre points out, power relations come to the fore in monumentality. The formation of collective identity and memory is directly linked to power relations. Demir Özlü and James Baldwin also evaluate the interaction of spaces with the individual along with

the apparatuses of power. As Klaus Benesch emphasized, modern authors underline the importance of transition from aesthetics of time to aesthetics of space:

“In an influential essay, Joseph Frank famously argued that modern literature followed the plastic arts by shifting from a preoccupation with time to the preoccupation with space. Modern art, according to Frank, sought to escape the tyranny of time by replacing historical depth with a temporal continuum “in which distinctions between past and present are wiped out. [...] past and present are apprehended spatially” (Benesch, 2005: 13).

Spatial elements come to the fore as concepts such as immigration, exile and foreignness which are dealt with within the framework of social relations. While discussing the concepts of origin, beginning, linguistic homeland, home and various images through the process of exile becoming a destiny in the age we live in, Nurdan Gürbilek pointed to the importance of “a field of experience mapped by literature”. Big cities like Paris reflect the different experiences of today’s immigrant subjects when it comes to voluntary or forced exile. Exile transformed to “a rift that is forcibly opened between a person and the place where she/he was born and grew up” (2020: 20). James Baldwin and Demir Özlü are writers who, in the new cities in which they live after fleeing their homelands, carried their memories within them, yearned for their childhoods, and criticised social decay and capitalist order through spatial elements. In their works, protagonists often become the authors’ spokesperson. They both questioned the meaning of homeland in cities and countries through the lives of characters who often travel.

In Baldwin's and Özlü's novels, spatial arrangements and practices are addressed by divisions. Their works emphasise that the practices of the apparatuses of power affect the identity of cities and the authors each faced in

their home countries. According to Sennett, spaces without soul, impersonal structures and “walls built by the differences between people” contribute to the loss of meaning in cities (Sennett, 2022:12-13). Social, cultural, economic and political factors come into play in the process by which modern urban culture constructs internal and external life.

James Baldwin and Demir Özlü argued that the boundaries, divisions and oppression drawn by sovereign powers increase loneliness and alienation in cities. Baldwin focuses on the black-white divide, while Özlü focuses on oppression during periods of intense social and political repression, especially during coup periods. The authors stress that changes in the external space are directly reflected in the internal world of the characters and focus on the relationship between space and different communities, especially low-income groups, African Americans and immigrants, who experience problems in using public and private space due to political pressures.

2- Space Witnessing the Search for Freedom in the Novels of James Baldwin

James Baldwin explored the meaning of home and homeland through the lives of characters. He emphasized that African-American individuals feel oppression in the realms of identity and space, while white supremacy and racist attitudes imposed on them make their lives difficult. He aimed to view both himself and his homeland from the outside, as he felt that this would provide him with a fresh perspective.

For Baldwin, travel is both an escape and a means of discovery. Travel, which is not just about discovering new cultures and places, has an important function in self-knowledge and understanding. It was on these journeys that James Baldwin realised what he had not previously known about his own talents, art and

realities about his root. He understood well “what being a black man meant” in Europe (Leeming, 1994: 56).

New York, London, Istanbul and St Paul de Vence in France are very important places for the author. His observations and impressions of St Paul de Vence are discussed in the context of the relationship between space and people in several works, including *Giovanni's Room* (Givonni'nin Odası, 2025) *Another Country* (Bir Başka Ülke, 2019) and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (Ne Zaman Gitti Tren, 2019). Professor David Leeming, who travelled with Baldwin between New York and Istanbul and taught literature in Istanbul, emphasises that the perception of space played a central role in Baldwin's construction of identity and memory, which is reflected in many of his works (Leeming, 1994).

James Baldwin questioned the fact of himself being classified as an exile writer and a black writer. Baldwin rejected dichotomies and polarities such as black and white, feminine and masculine, American and exile writer, and stated that these are inadequate and that life is much more complex (Miller, 1999: 338). “Due to his alienation and constant mobility, Baldwin called himself a ‘Transatlantic commuter,’ instead of an exile” (Özbek Akıman, 2024: 308).

While traveling to other countries Baldwin was carrying his own country inside of him. The characters who missed their childhood in New York also criticised the spaces. These are the childhood spaces where the author lived with his family. James Baldwin's family's experience with poverty and the influence of their Christian faith are reflected in his works (Zaborowska, 2009:2-3).

James Baldwin grew up with an awareness about the borders that divide the American landscapes and the self. He confronted and questioned the relationship between “I and the others.” He explored the meaning of being other. James Baldwin's books describe the problems in the lives of characters

who struggle to reach their own voice because of their marginalized and sexual identities.

By analysing life in the ghetto that he experienced and witnessed in different cities, the author questions the networks that the apparatuses of power weave through spaces. "In contemporary America, ghettos are the urban settings where the African Americans live in low-standard living conditions" (Savat, 1993:76) James Baldwin, criticises spatial divisions and limitations through one's skin colour, gender and class. As James Baldwin portrayed in his book *The Fire Next Time* (Bundan Sonrası Ateş) the enlightenment he experienced at the age of fourteen was a major turning point for him. He explained that he would never make his peace with the ghetto. He would not accept the place which was given him by white people (2017: 23). He underlined that the problem of the twentieth century was the colour line as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote (2017: 75). Baldwin questioned how the white world attempted to socially produced him as nigger. He underscored the problem of the structures which stemming from white supremacy.

2.1. Looking For "Another Country" For Suffering Subjects

In Baldwin's novel *Another Country* which was completed on December 10, 1961 in İstanbul, themes of freedom, fragmentation and division of identity, death, love, loneliness, and sexuality are intertwined.¹ In *Another Country*,

¹Magdalena J. Zaborowska emphasized the role of Turkey for *Another Country* as follows: "Consequently my readings of the works he wrote there, especially *Another Country* and *No Name in the Street*, deliberately privilege Turkey as an authorial location and cultural context that explicitly and implicitly shaped the form and content as well as the literary imagination of these works" (2009: xxii) Several books provide important information about James Baldwin's time in Turkey and the friendships he formed there: Baldwin, J. and Cezzar, E. (2007) *Dost Mektupları* Çev. S. Selvi. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları; Oral, Z. Oral (2011) *O Büyülü İnsanlar*, İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları; Fortuny, K. (2017) *Amerikalı Yazarlar İstanbul'da*, Çev. Zeynep Arıkan. İstanbul: Edebi Şeyler. In addition,

these themes are at the centre of the painful life experience of the black musician Rufus in America. Major problems in his relationship with a white Southern woman called Leona turn Rufus' life upside down. The novel "is a commentary on love and the cost of the failure to love, on the relationship between racism and sexuality, on the necessity of honor and the dangers of safety" (Leeming, 1994: 201). While describing the relationship between Rufus and Leona, the narrator underlines racism in the South. In this work with a large cast of characters, the relationships between the characters, including the novelists Richard and Vivaldo, the actor Eric, who lives in Paris and comes to New York for a play on Broadway, and Ida, who is a singer like her brother, are told while drawing attention to cultural, economic and social changes. There is a harmony between the change in the descriptions of space and the inner world of the characters, which is evident in the way in which the settings are depicted and the way in which the characters' emotions are expressed. The narrator constructs the characters by centring on the impact of the past on the present in the novel, exploring how the events of the past can shape individuals and their current experiences. Baldwin claims that people are trapped by history, and that history is trapped by them in his essay titled "Stranger in the Village" (Baldwin, 2021: 192). The novel's descriptions question this state of being confined to the past. The main issue is to truly illuminate characters' past which were filled with regret and pain for the characters.

In the novel Vivaldo remembers his schooldays and regrets the events he witnessed. He was confronted with the past in which his white friends had been violent toward black people (Baldwin, 2019:65). The author gives voice to different characters to draw attention to racism. While walking in Greenwich

the documentary that Sedat Pakay filmed is also quite important. James Baldwin: From Another Place. <https://www.sedatpakay.com/james-baldwin-from-another-place> ; <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/baldwin-turkey>

Village with Vivaldo and Leona, Rufus notices others' reactions to seeing an interracial couple. He stated that it was a problem to walk there with Leona. The author describes different neighbourhoods with realistic details. Walking in the city has a notable role in the novel. The novel begins with the sentence "He was on his way to Seventh Avenue in Times Square" (Baldwin, 2019: 11). When they are filled with inner anguish due to racism, intense loneliness, poverty and a lack of love, the characters take long walks in the streets. Spaces in Harlem and Greenwich mirror the characters' psychology. Jazz and blues play remarkable roles in reflecting psychological and sociological elements outside and also inside the houses. Baldwin stated the function of music in the essay titled "Many Thousands Gone" as follows: "African American could narrate their own stories only by means of music in USA" (Baldwin 2021: 53). As Walton Muyumba also emphasized, jazz music is highly influential in African-American culture as it has a unique power. It is an effective medium for expressing social identity as well as individual identity (2009: 39-40).

Music plays an important role in accompanying the rhythm of the characters' relationships. When Vivaldo expresses his grief for Rufus after he has been on the road for days, he thinks of records and starts listening to James Pete Johnson and Bessie Smith. "Thousands of people, Bessie sang, 'have nowhere to go' and for the first time (...) Rufus began to hear the song speak to his own blackened soul" (Baldwin, 2019: 54).

In the author's descriptions of Manhattan, "countless suffocating and disturbing images" stand out. The function of music is very important in the space presented as a "merciless metropolis." In fact, it becomes a tool that constructs new meanings and offers consolation for an everyday life that has lost its meaning (Field, 2011: 61).

As Rufus' inner world, which has driven him to suicide, is mirrored, the function of the depicted space comes to the forefront. "The street is silent, most of the bright streetlights are out" and people pass him by (Baldwin 2019: 11). The inner world of the human being, diminished and becoming nothing in the face of the "giant neon lights" of hotels and "giant buildings", is likened to a "starless sky". It is suggested that Rufus, described as "one of the fallen", is in a state of decadence akin to that of the city itself (Baldwin 2019: 12). "Rufus follows in the path of Eugene Worth, Baldwin's friend of the Village days, and leaps off the George Washington Bridge" (Leeming, 1994: 201).

Although the places, especially Harlem and Greenwich Village, are portrayed in terms of their geographical features in the novel they are in fact described in terms of their lifestyles, and values. The areas are inhabited by people who adapt to modern daily life and those who are depicted as "sinful" and marginalized. Baldwin focuses on "loveless spaces" and "tragic lives" in New York (Rosenblatt, 1986: 91).

When Rufus gives up on life, "Some of the lights on the Jersey shore were out, the neon of advertisements glowing here and there, announcing that someone had something for sale" (Baldwin, 2019: 90). The destruction of the identity of the subject and the city through the order that consumer culture builds by destroying the individual is mirrored in the destruction of the identity of the subject and the city. While Rufus calls to account the city he overlooks on the George Washington Bridge with the cry "Am I not your son too?", national identity is also mirrored by place. The emphasis on "He was black, the water was black" is striking. In the scene where Rufus bids farewell to the world, "darkness" is the key word (Baldwin, 2019: 90). There is a burial in the cold and dark waters of the city, which is never supposed to darken with neon lights, billboards, lights and shop windows.

Baldwin said that the streets of New York were his school. My frame of reference was George Washington and John Wayne. He said that, during his childhood and adolescence, his thoughts had been shaped by his experiences of being black in different parts of the city (Baldwin, 2019: 72). According to Baldwin, it is a great shock to discover that the country of your birth “has not developed a place for you in the whole system of reality” (Baldwin, 2019: 45). This displacement is illuminated by the scene of Rufus’ death which is told in the chapter called “Book One”. In the other chapters, after Rufus’ death, different parts of the lives of his family and friends are presented. The streets of New York are described by emphasizing the identity of the other. While “a cold, unheated sun illuminates Manhattan during the day”, Cass, walking on 23rd Street on the West Side, lives in a neighbourhood where many Puerto Ricans have settled. “They said the neighbourhood had deteriorated because of it, but it was hard to tell how decent it used to be.” This statement suggests that other communities in the city, such as African Americans, are being pushed into certain neighbourhoods. “The place is described to Cass as a ramshackle, dilapidated place, full of rough-looking people” (Baldwin, 2019: 105). Cass's husband Richard says he does not understand why she will not move out of the area when one of their children is injured in a street fight at home. The city is found to be dangerous and restless, “as if possessed by the devil” (Baldwin, 2019: 249).

On the way to the funeral home with Vivaldo on the day of Rufus' funeral, Cass questions the relationship between space and people as they move “out of the city centre” (Baldwin, 2019: 110). While this painting sheds light on the life of 'marginalised' communities full of difficulties, it also depicts the stylish people rushing to shop for Thanksgiving and the upcoming Christmas (Baldwin, 2019: 110). On the one hand, communities that are suffering from racism, poverty and marginalisation are finding it difficult to survive. On the other hand,

consumer culture is continuing apace. Gros emphasizes that the crowd is an experience of a future that is being commodified. Those caught up in this future are reduced to products offered to anonymous masses. One is consumed by the streets and boulevards. Signs and shop windows exist solely to facilitate the exchange and circulation of commodities (2023: 155).

After Rufus' death, everyday life in the city moves quickly. When Cass and Vivaldo look at the squares they see in the taxi, Columbus Square is pointed out. The numbers on the big clock in the grey sky keep popping up in Vivaldo's mind with associations (Baldwin, 2019: 126). The buildings around it have created a state of siege that destroys vitality. The phrase "Now, as they rushed past, the walls of the park closed in on them, and behind them the walls of the hotels and apartment buildings among the barren trees" (Baldwin, 2019: 111) expresses being in circled. Vivaldo criticizes the system that prevents him from sharing with Cass his desire to take the bus and explore life in different parts of the city, to go to the cinema, to read new books: "But no. You had to come from wherever you came from, and you had to prove it, you had to prove it every minute" (Baldwin, 2019: 112) In this passage, Vivaldo questions identity and spatial organisation. When they arrive in Harlem, Cass and Vivaldo realise that they are on Lenox Street, and "everywhere they pass is in squalor." In this passage, where the word "ghetto" is used, it is conveyed that space has been an important place in the past.

The words prison, darkness and wall are used frequently in the descriptions. Vivaldo and Cass say that after Rufus dies, the skyline of New York rises and falls "like a crumbling wall". Cass begins to wonder why he "hated the haughty towers and the pestering antennas so much". Vivaldo lowly hums the blues played at Rufus's funeral as he asks, "Why did everything seem so pale and

useless: and why was he so cold, as if nothing and no one could ever warm him again?" (Baldwin, 2019: 127).

In the last part of the novel, Vivaldo and Ida's life in a very cramped house, full of financial problems, is described, pointing to the "aimless, defeated, introverted" bohemian life. They thought they were in a sandstorm, "suffering, trying to live" (Baldwin, 2019: 327). Vivaldo, who argues that they should get out of the village, wants to move to the area known as the East Side. He shares this with Ida, but she refuses, remembering the violence inflicted on them by white men on Mott Street. She underlines the spatial segregation in the city by telling Vivaldo that "we give their streets a bad name" (Baldwin, 2019: 328).

James Baldwin, in his works that question the issue of racial discrimination, emphasises the boundaries between black and white individuals and the way in which conflicts are reflected in spatial elements. The act of moving from one place to another is philosophically questioned by the author. "Baldwin's intensely psychological novel, which is a distinctly postmodern work, reveals the difficulties of self-love by disrupting and challenging America's sexual and racial norms. Baldwin depicts Another Country as an individually created place, free from time and space constraints and socially constructed identities" (Berberoğlu, 2022: 52).

The journeys in James Baldwin's works also express the adventure of the characters to regain their own selves. By analysing the change of place and identity, the author tells the sad stories of characters who reflect their own identities in their relationships with others. The anger and resistance of the suffering subjects are conveyed through descriptions of different cities.

3- The Function of Space for Demir Özlü as An Exile Author

Demir Özlü is among the writers of the 1950s generation “who followed the latest artistic and philosophical trends in Europe” (Aksoy, 2013: 225). His works show the influence of the existentialist movement and often deal with themes related to depression, loneliness, alienation, boredom, and the quest for freedom. Those themes are consistent with the tendency that is referred to as "Depression Literature". (Kurt, 2007: 211) Demir Özlü narrates the fundamental issues of existentialism in his first story books in particular. The author's view, as expressed in his book *Soluma*, is that certain themes are inherently closed and can be conveyed through images. (Bezirci, 1994: 240) The existential anxieties of the individual are central to his stories. Existentialism “which began to gain recognition in Turkey with Sartre” reflected the central focus of characters in his stories (Dirlikyapan, 2010: 113).

Özlü is one of the most significant pioneers of the 1950s generation alongside names such as Ferit Edgü, Bilge Karasu, Vüs'at O. Bener, Leyla Erbil, Orhan Duru, and Onat Kutlar. The “urban literature” was formed by the storytellers of the 1950s generation (Dirlikyapan, 2010: 176).

According to Ferit Edgü, innovation in Turkish literature began with Sait Faik's final stories and the debut works of the 1950 generation, following the Garip poetry movement. The 'rebellion' that united the representatives of this generation spread to all areas. Artists who embraced rebellion as a guiding principle in the political, ethical and aesthetic realms sought to effect change in both the individual and society. Edgü emphasises that Demir Özlü, one of these pioneering writers, wrote his works “to realise the act of being an individual”. Readers accompany the author on his quest for freedom as he travels to different cities. (Özlü, 2003a: 15). Demir Özlü focuses on the relationship between urban identity and subjects in his fictional and non-fictional works.

While Demir Özlü includes the city as a notable image in his works, he places this concept at the centre of his literary life (Küçükakal, 2019: 109).

Demir Özlü, who is known for his intellectual sensitivity to social issues, does not turn his work into a tool for a political cause while being critical of systems of power (Önder, 2024: 189). The social atmosphere depicted by the author is more than just the setting. The characters' inner worlds are also shaped by the political climate. *A Summer Season Romance* (Bir Yaz Mevsimi Romansı) is a novel that provides street descriptions to demonstrate the oppressive atmosphere during the coup. As a protagonist Selim remembers the days of military coup, the novel presents his chains of memories. Although the main setting in the novel is Stockholm, the protagonist frequently describes İstanbul and his childhood years. In the novel, the protagonist's dreams abroad include empty streets, empty Beyoğlu, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Gregorian churches, abandoned streets of Tarlabası, and a city without people (Özlü, 2022b: 298).

Due to the prevailing climate of political repression in Turkey, Demir Özlü was forced to leave his academic position at Istanbul University and lived in exile in Sweden between 1979 and 1989. As a result of military coups, he was forced to live in exile for a long time. In cities such as Stockholm, Paris, New York and Berlin the author describes İstanbul with longing. Demir Özlü often considers the meaning of the concepts of exile and travel. In a letter written in Sweden in 1988, he describes the word "exile" as "heavy". "All our lives, both there and here, we were in exile. Let us now be 'travellers' " he wrote (Özlü, 2017: 149).

When the reasons for Demir Özlü's being awarded the 2013 Mersin Edebiyat Ödülü (Mersin City Literature Award) were listed, it was emphasised that he held up a mirror to the suffering consciousness of the individual with an urban

sensibility. Cities bear witness to the changes experienced by individuals and society, impacting the formation of characters' identities.

New York was one of the most important cities that left a mark in Demir Özlü's life. According to Özlü, New York, as "a different city, not like European cities" and is "the revolutionary centre of a new world" (Özlü, 2033b:41). During his trip with his family to welcome the New Year in New York, he liked the city very much because of its dynamism. In his book *Here is Your Life* (İşte Senin Hayatın), he describes New York as a city of freedom and comfort. Although he admires the city's identity as a developed metropolis, he also shows a critical attitude by mentioning some incidents of racism. He states that his son wanted to visit Staten Island because of his admiration for African-American rap groups. In this context, Demir Özlü describes the racist murder of a rap artist called The Notorious B.I.G. and mentions the issue of discrimination in USA which he sees as a land of freedom (Özlü, 2022a: 61-62).

Demir Özlü's son, Milko, went to Brooklyn in the United States to study at university. While visiting New York with his family, the author wrote to Ferit Edgü on 22 January 1996 to share his feelings about the city. He wrote, "I felt true happiness there. I understood what happiness is." In the same letter, he also mentions how these feelings might change if he were to stay in New York for a long time. It is the atmosphere filled with "a free spirit" that affects him (Özlü, 2017: 206).

In his diary, *Kanal Kentlerinde*, Özlü provides important information about his writing process for the novel. He mentions that the book he is going to write about America will be either "a novel of happiness" or "a subtle attempt at mocking the world". (Özlü, 2010: 37). He states that he plans to portray Penelope and her friends as kind and simple people and that he will lean towards parody rather than a classic narrative. The author asserts that he will

refrain from employing psychological analysis in his depiction of the subjects. (Özlü, 2010: 55). This approach could be regarded as efficacious in eliciting descriptions of the external environment. The discourse of a learned and perceptive collective concerning history, politics and identity unveils their engagement with the environment. The content of the diary also includes a robust critique of social events, thereby illustrating how the United States of America has lost its democratic and humane qualities. The author employs a critical lens to evaluate American foreign policy, drawing parallels with the perspectives articulated by Turkish writers in response to war, inequality, and injustice. (Özlü, 2010: 15). In the novel, New York is depicted as a city of freedom, yet it is also a locale where marginalised groups grapple with survival.

3.1. Identity and Memory of the City in Amerika 1954

Amerika 1954 was published in 2004 and received “Sedat Simavi Novel Award” which is given by the Turkish Journalists Association. The novel reflects the author’s real impressions and observations of New York. The novel narrates the experiences of Harun who relocates to New York and initiates a new phase of his life. After the dissolution of his relationship with Demet he was upset in İstanbul. He moved to New York. The cities of İstanbul and New York are depicted in the novel as being intertwined as a result of the protagonist Harun’s memories (Önder, 2025: 178). New York is described with a multiplicity of faces. Özlü’s book depicts individual history intertwined with social history, portraying the interconnectivity of personal and collective experiences (Önder, 2025: 178). While Harun’s internal conflicts are expressed, the social framework also plays a significant role. Demir Özlü emphasises that he conveys social issues through his own subjectivity. By reflecting on the individual's history, which is shaped by social conditions, he highlights his focus on individuals who are separated from and alienated by their environment (Bezirci, 1994: 241).

While Özlü's texts convey the inner turmoil that individuals experience in labyrinthine spaces, this novel "differs from the author's other novels in that it ends with a happy ending and the plot has a distinct quality" (Geçen, 2022: 76). Not only does the novel differ in terms of its content, but it also differs in terms of its formal characteristics. It reflects Özlü's "interest in American novels and novelistic techniques" (Aksoy, 2013: 235). As the protagonist's walks in New York are described, it becomes clear that his thoughts intertwine the past with the present. Harun feels peaceful as he walks along wide streets filled with big trees in Manhattan. Harun's walks through the streets and parks of New York influence his inner world. In this context, the relationship between "the rediscovery of simple pleasures" and "the freedom that comes with renunciation" is directly linked to the act of walking. In the novel, Harun is filled with the desire to move away from the history of his body and live in the moment (Gros, 2023: 15). He often reflects on "the eternal present of coexistence, equally indifferent to the past and the future" (Gros, 2023: 16).

The novel's settings, particularly Manhattan and Greenwich Village, are depicted with remarkable details. Through Harun's observations and experiences as a writer journeying from İstanbul to America, the reader gains insight into the character's past. In this autobiographical work, the use of flashbacks reflects the character's past experiences in old İstanbul. Harun observed that İstanbul had changed and he lost the old city where he missed his childhood. Political turmoil, chaos, social norms, the problems stemming from migration from rural to urban setting caused trouble in the city. Harun came to New York to write his fiction in a peaceful and free city as a writer. Reflected are the subject's observations, impressions and mental associations as it rebuilds itself. While walking on the street he was glad that he saw foreign people in different neighbourhoods. It drew attention to the importance of living in a city with a multicultural, plural and polyphonic atmosphere (Önder, 2025: 181).

In the novel *Amerika* 1954, the positive features of New York are conveyed, making Harun feel “a comfort he doesn't know where it comes from” (Özlü, 2023:34). The city’s architectural features, artistic strength and cultural identity, as well as its ease of transportation, are emphasised. Standing on the terrace of his Brooklyn hotel with Penelope, Harun watches Manhattan and states that the city's aesthetic is dreamlike to him. He thinks that “it was necessary to cross seas and oceans to encounter the dreamlike” (Özlü, 2023: 111). Harun perceives his new life in New York as a dream come true.

In the first chapter titled “A Young Man on 59th Street”, spatial elements are especially emphasized (Özlü, 2023: 9). Important places mentioned such as Central Park, the Plaza Hotel, 5th Avenue, 72nd Street, Columbus Circle, Broadway Avenue, 69th Street, Greenwich Village, “where the new art was born” are conveyed by drawing attention to their architectural features. The spaces created by the architectural features actually become mirrors, reflecting the protagonist’s inner world. The life Harun desired was one of minimal modern possessions and serenity (Özlü, 2023: 45).

Harun states the historical significance and the architectural features of the buildings in detail. While he is walking on 86th Street and rings the doorbell of Femi’s house near the Hudson River, it is emphasized that it is a large apartment building in the “art-nouveau” style. As he describes the road leading down to the Hudson River and the street lined with apartment buildings, he also draws attention to an educational centre for Jewish children. (Özlü, 2023: 44) While he is visiting Larry’s house, the Majestic Apartments are also described in architectural detail. Designed by René Chabellan, they are said to be one of the first examples of the futurist trend of the 1930s. As Harun listens to Larry telling him about the building's history, he feels a wave of happiness wash over him. According to Harun, this happiness stems from the following:

“The aesthetics of the large buildings, the sense of height created by the manpower that built them, the city's vitality, and the ocean a little further away” (Özlü, 2023: 71) In the novel “large” used many times to underline the meaning of metropolis. The authors points out the term “metropolis” is used in “reference to large urban settlements” (Rodger, 2012: 85). In the novel, as Harun looks at the city's wide roads and boulevards, he sees it as a vast place where people of different ethnicities and religions live. Greenwich Village stands out in the novel as a space of memory that hosted various ethnic identities. While remarkable cultural developments, especially the Harlem Renaissance, are recalled, the role of places in the construction of social memory is emphasized (Önder, 2025: 181). While mentioning places such as the Cotton Club², Savoy Ballroom, and Small's Paradise, which are among the old and famous places, the years when important artists of the period, especially Langston Hughes, “became conscious of their African-Americanness” (Özlü, 2023: 46) are described with a focus on the spaces of memory. The narrator emphasized the name of the boulevard as Frederick Douglass. The section titled 'McCarthy Emerges' provides information about Junius Scales and the activities of the American Communist Party. It also highlights key figures in the pursuit of social equality. It emphasises the struggle for "economic, political and social equality" for African Americans (Özlü, 2023: 50).

Harun, Penelope and their friends met in Cafe Le Metro before going to jazz concert. They bought ticket for jazz concert in a club located in East Village. It highlights that anti-war groups who were angry about the McCarthy

² In his book *Şeytanı Gördüm* (I Saw the Devil) James Baldwin provides information about the Cotton Club and Lincoln, emphasising their significant contribution to the emancipation of slaves. The following note from the translator about the place in the book is noteworthy: “A black nightclub that operated in New York between 1923 and 1940. Due to the Jim Crow laws, black customers were not permitted to enter the club until 1935” (Baldwin, 2023: 16).

commissions lived in areas of New York described as “radical neighbourhoods”. It provides details about locations such as Bleecker Street, situated between the 7th and 2nd neighbourhoods (Özlü, 2023: 93).

They listened famous musicians such as Don Cherry³, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday and Charles Mingus. Intellectual group had spoken about danger stem from Ku Klux Klan, McCarthy commissions’ wrong and unfair decisions in the history.⁴ At this point narrator points out the power of music while describing jazz concert (Özlü, 2023: 92). Harun describes the jazz concert as exquisite, praising both the captivating sound of the saxophone and the intensity with which the artists performed (Özlü, 2023: 95).

It is emphasized that New York is the city of the history of African-Americans’ struggle for identity. The existential impact of art is illuminated by Özlü, “Jazz was springing from a deep, broad desire for freedom. From the desire for freedom that accumulated in the hearts of black people working in the cotton fields in New Orleans (...) The madness that spilled onto the streets of New York and was reflected on these musical instruments until daybreak... The slavery that black people spat on the sidewalks of the big city” (Özlü, 2023: 74). As he leaves the club and walks home with Penelope, Harun remembers the jazz record in his room in Istanbul. He tells her that the singer is Peggy Lee and that Benny Goodman plays on the record. He says that he listens to it constantly and never tires of it (Özlü, 2023: 74). “How fortunate we are to live in the swing era” says Harun, his gaze fixed on the horse-drawn carriages in the street. He

³ Baldwin brings Herbert's play "Fortune and Men's Eyes" (Düşenin Dostu) to the stage in İstanbul. The music for the play was composed by the jazz musician Don Cherry, whom he met by chance in İstanbul (Özbek Akıman, 2024: 319).

⁴ Baldwin describes the McCarthy era in his essay collection *Şeytanı Gördüm*. Pointing to events he witnessed and heard about in America in 1952, Baldwin underlines the intense repression, saying, “I have never seen anything like it” (2023: 78).

considers jazz as the heart of this liveliness and a “brand new, completely different décor” (Özlü, 2023: 75). in his life. It becomes clear that music is a valuable tool for navigating transitions between different times and places. After the jazz concert, Harun dreams of his uncle Hidayet and migrants in distress. He draws attention to the poverty of the 1890s and the class conflict that took place in New York in 1929.

The city, which is seen as the heart of art and culture, is also depicted as a place where different communities suffer and struggle to survive in terms of income distribution and freedom. The city reflects the historical traces of the struggle against capitalism and racism as a place where oppressed and ignored groups live (Önder, 2025: 184).

In a letter to Ferit Edgü dated 23 January 1985, Demir Özlü harshly criticises communities that treat money as a sacred object and the capitalist system. He discusses the necessity of living in “exile of consciousness” in regions where there is no intellectual development and life is solely profit-oriented. (2017: 34) Demir Özlü also claims that despair has "great rebellious power" because it is the opposite of hope. (Bezirci, 1994: 242). In this regard, the author describes the crises of the characters and also reveals how they struggle against the system.

In the novel, the story of Harun’s uncle Hidayet’s arrival in America is told, and the difficulties he experienced during his stay at Ellis Island are expressed. While the challenges of the process in which eight people had to live in a small area are revealed, influences of the economic depression of 1929 were remembered. It is pointed out that the crises that left significant marks in America changed the lives of low-income groups, especially immigrants and African Americans. It is emphasised that the daily lives of groups positioned as second-class in a money-dominated social structure are full of tragedy (Önder,

2025:185). Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut are described as “the hook where tragedies continue” (Özlü, 2023: 83) Harun states that his family is composed of “a group of immigrants”. His father migrated from the Aleppo area in 1913. His aunt Azize migrated from Antakya to Istanbul many years ago. The capital of the Ottoman Empire is emphasised as a “migration centre”. Certain places, particularly the Fatih district, are highlighted as the “first homes of migrants” (Özlü, 2023: 64)

In his article titled “Changing Istanbul”, Demir Özlü gives information about his family roots and mentions that he lived in different places such as İstanbul, Burdur, and Ödemiş. He describes İstanbul as a ‘magical’ city and states that his father most probably came to Istanbul from Antakya during the Balkan War, and that his grandfather, who was from Aleppo, went missing during World War I. Examining his father's assertion that “İstanbul is a city of culture”, Özlü emphasises that the city is a centre for culture not only due to its schools and libraries, but also because of its architecture and trams, and its role as a meeting place for intellectuals. (Özlü, 1991: 86). In the same article, he refers to Kavafis’ poem “Şehir” (The City) and states that it holds great significance for him. He explores the profound significance of the phrase, “This city will follow you.” (Özlü, 1991: 91). In his own works, Özlü highlights how the characters in Istanbul follow one another, carrying the city within them.

In the novel *Amerika 1954*, Harun’s subjective experiences in a new geography were conveyed, while the process of constructing social identity and memory was shed light on. In the work, where places were described with their spiritual characteristics as well as their physical characteristics, psychological and sociological elements are intertwined. “In Demir Özlü's work, the city is not just a spatial form; it is an object of existence that has a formative and constitutive effect on personality” (Geçen, 2022: 414). Streets, roads, bridges and other

places function as witnesses to social history. The values of the past are reflected in places which refer to social memory. The values attributed importance in social history are embodied in the place and carried to the fictional world. The author sheds light on the soul of places by focusing on the individual-society dialectic (Şimşek, 2019: 11).

While the relationship between the place, which appears as an important actor, and the subject is expressed in the work with Harun's writing adventure, the images of Istanbul and New York allow the common points of human history to be seen. In a city full of skyscrapers, the character who admires scientific and technological developments, artistic activities and places of freedom that embrace diversity reminds us of the dark chapters in history and sheds light on the city's darker side. Harun thinks of Istanbul and New York simultaneously, with his mind keeping his memories alive. Places play a notable role in this comparison, as they carry traces of the history of both the individuals and the societies (Önder, 2025: 187). Those traces are visible through the spaces in New York. This metropolis in which political climate has changed significantly since the 1960s and 1970s, sheds light on the history of slavery and racial discrimination through its museums, associations, and memorial sites (Hulser, 2012: 284). In Demir Özlü's novel, the issue of confronting history, illuminated by places of memory, is consciously highlighted in the characters' conversations about New York. In the conversations with his friends, the issue of confronting the city's identity and soul stands out.

Doctor N. who made it possible for Harun to travel to America, warns him about the American Dream. From the terrace, he points out important landmarks, including Battery Park, the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building. "Don't forget that you are a foreigner. Then you won't experience the turmoil of

trying to fit into society. Since you want to be a writer, just live the poetry you feel inside and try to hear its voice comfortably,” doctor advised.

Özlü wrote his works based on the belief that “the world can be built by writing, only by writing” (1999: 79). He created a protagonist who rebuilds his identity and memory through the power he derives from writing. *America 1954* is not just a novel in which Harun confronts himself; it has meanings that extend beyond that.

Between 1950 and 1960, intellectuals were overwhelmed by social pressure yet filled with a desire to change their lives, according to Demir Özlü. He describes this as “unused internal energy”, which causes a breakdown in the lives of subjects (Bezirci, 1994: 242). In the novel, Harun starts writing texts that reflect his creativity. He clings to life with a new love in a foreign city, far from the constraints of society. Despite experiencing flashbacks of the problems he encountered in the past, he starts to look to the future with hope. By the end of the novel, Harun is dreaming of a hopeful future in America and discussing plans with Penelope to visit Coney Island the following summer. Meanwhile, jazz music could be heard at the intersection of 5th Avenue and 52nd Street. Penelope informs Harun that Count Basie is performing and mentions that the song is called “One O’Clock Jump” (Özlü, 2023: 131). The novel ends on a hopeful note, with the sound of jazz in the background. The sense of freedom provided by the city, coupled with the excitement of a new relationship, effectively dispels the oppression that is prevalent in Özlü’s earlier works.

4. CONCLUSION

Both James Baldwin and Demir Özlü highlight the importance of socio-cultural and socio-economic factors in depicting spaces in their novels. Urban identity is portrayed in the light of class conflict. James Baldwin, who often uses the

adjectives “dark” and “cold”, emphasises the conditions that lead individuals to build prisons in their inner worlds. Spaces and objects play a significant role in the subjects' processes of understanding and recognising themselves and their nations. As in the case of Harlem, the author’s works focus on the memory of places known from the past. In Demir Özlü’s works, the autobiographical narrator frequently describes his childhood memories. Özlü, who was in different cities during his exile years, remembers the places of his childhood, especially the house in Fatih. He longs for the old days and the places that reflect the polyphonic structure of Istanbul.

The function of music is very important in both authors’ novels, in which New York jazz bars are often depicted. In the chapters on gospel, jazz and blues, Baldwin points to the power of places and objects in the construction of cultural identity. Music shapes the characters' relationships with themselves and others. Jazz and blues songs play a central role in the portrayal of suffering subjects and represent cultural memory. The harmony with the moods of the characters in the works is remarkable in this context.

Baldwin, who argues that the meanings of passports and borders should be rethought, focuses on the relationship between self and other. He underlines the inequalities in social relations and the problem of justice while dealing with love, sexuality, contrast between the life-death, and journeys. He sheds light on the interaction between space and people while holding a mirror to the violent streets. His characters frequently remember their childhood days. The past is both a shelter and a necessary process that will enable the characters to understand the importance of change.

For Demir Özlü, the concept of travel does not only mean a spatial change. As geography changes, the transformation experienced in the writer’s inner world affects his literary creative adventure. While the identity of places undergo

great changes with the events experienced after the wars, the migration from the village to the city, and the transition to multi-party life changes, he problematizes how this change is reflected on the subjects. In Özlü's works, witnessing the turbulent days of his homeland, the main character shaped his identity based on his memories associated to these places.

James Baldwin and Demir Özlü are both writers who deal with individual themes, especially love and sexuality, while addressing social issues in their works. The depictions of interior and exterior spaces are in harmony with the changing moods of the subjects. Human-space interaction is the focus of the writers' works. Baldwin and Özlü oppose discrimination, social oppression and war. Their leading roles in the society they live in with their intellectual identities advocating equality, freedom and social justice are reflected in their works. In their works, they reflect their own experiences and the process of constructing their own selves in the context of the relationship they establish with spaces. Their interest in the inner reality of the individual as well as social history comes to the fore. Suffering characters criticize the system in which the apparatuses of power oppress, suppress and render the individual second-class. Writers who criticize hegemonic values oppose the social structures and capitalist order that keep subjects under surveillance. The concept of home and homeland is questioned by characters who embark on journeys, while consumer culture is criticised. Memory spaces are highlighted in their search for meaning. The body's memory is important for Baldwin and Özlü. Characters record everything they witness and experience through their bodies. The characters' walking action has a philosophical meaning.

Demir Özlü and James Baldwin are writers who lived abroad and gained outsiders' perspective on their home countries. Drawing heavily on their personal experiences, their works are rich in autobiographical elements. Both

authors embedded their critiques of imperialism and capitalism within their literary texts, maintaining a careful balance between political engagement and aesthetic value. By foregrounding their identities as authors, they avoided turning their works into political propaganda. In critiquing modernism and capitalism, they drew attention to pressing social issues while also exploring the relationships between the self and the other in the portrayals of spaces and places.

Conflict of interest:

There is no potential conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu çalışma Demir Özlü ve James Baldwin'ın bellek ve mekân kavramlarını ele alış biçimlerini Baldwin'in *Another Country* romanı ile Özlü'nün *Amerika 1954* romanının analizinden yola çıkarak karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşımla incelemektedir. Baldwin ve Özlü'nün eserlerinde belleğin kurgulanma biçimlerini kentsel mekân temsilleri üzerinden irdelemektedir. Hatırlama ve unutma eyleminin kurgu dünyasında ele alınışı mekân-insan etkileşimi odağında değerlendirilmektedir. Baldwin ve Özlü'nün özellikle New York betimlemelerinden yola çıkarak iki yazarın mekânsal unsurlara verdiği öneme dikkat çekmek amaçlanmaktadır.

Mekân, edebî eserlerde bireysel ve toplumsal kimlik ve belleğin inşasında başat rolü ile öne çıkmaktadır. Öznel deneyimlerin mekânsal unsurlarla bağı ve öznelerin mekânla etkileşimlerine dair görüşler ortaya koyan mekân ve bellek kuramcılarının çalışmalarından faydalanarak hazırlanan bu makalede mekân ve nesnelerin bireyin ve toplumun kimlik inşasındaki gücüne dikkat çekilmektedir. Kentlerin değişim dinamikleri ve karmaşık yapıları karakterlerin kendi benliklerini algılama ve toplumsal aidiyetlerin oluşum sürecine etki eder. Roman ve öykülerde dış çevreye dair betimlemeler kahramanların iç dünyalarının dışavurumunda önemli role sahiptir. Demir Özlü ve James Baldwin'in eserlerinde olduğu gibi, kurgusal karakterlerin mekânla etkileşimi özbenlik oluşumunu belirler. Geriye dönüşlerin yoğun olduğu metinlerde geçmiş, şimdi ve gelecek tasarımının "Ben kimim?" ve "Biz kimiz?" sorularıyla bağlantılı kurgulandığı anlaşılır. Karakterlerin varoluşsal kaygıları kentle kurdukları ilişkide belirleyici olurken yalnızlık ve yabancılaşma temaları öne çıkar. James Baldwin ve Demir Özlü'nün kentlere dair betimlemelerinden yola çıkarak mekânları tarihsel ve sosyal ilişkilerin üretimi olarak değerlendirdikleri söylenebilir. Baldwin ve Özlü, kapitalist düzenin şekillendirdiği mekânsal örgütlenmeler ve pratiklere eleştirel yaklaşır.

Göç, sürgün ve yabancılaşma gibi kavramları sorgulayan James Baldwin ve Demir Özlü, anavatanlarından uzaklaşmak zorunda kalarak gittikleri yeni şehirlerde mekânsal unsurlar aracılığıyla kapitalist düzeni eleştiren yazarlardır. Toplumsal çürümeye işaret ederken mekânların kimliğinde ve ruhunda yaşanan tahribata ışık tutarlar. Yeni kentlere giderek yaşamlarında yeni sayfalar açmaya çalışan karakterlerin gözünden evin/yurdun anlamı sorgulanır. Modern kent kültürünü farklı boyutlarıyla eleştiren Baldwin ve Özlü, kentlerde çizilen sınırlar ve inşa edilen duvarların dayattığı ayrımlara karşı çıkarlar. Sosyal, tarihsel, kültürel, siyasi ve ekonomik faktörler iki yazar için de önemlidir. Eşitliği savunan James Baldwin siyah-beyaz ayrımına odaklanırken, Özlü politik baskı dönemlerinde, özellikle de darbe dönemlerinde bireyleri boğan atmosfere odaklanır. Baldwin ve Özlü, dış mekândaki değişikliklerin karakterlerin ruh hâllerine doğrudan yansıdığına işaret ederler. Bu bağlamda kuramsal çerçeve

belirlenirken mekânın fiziksel coğrafi koordinat veya lokasyonla ilişkisinin ötesine geçen derin anlamını işaret eden araştırmacıların görüşlerine başvurulmaktadır.

James Baldwin, Afro-Amerikalı bireylerin kentlerde yaşadıkları baskıyı, yoksulluğu, dışlanmayı, beyaz üstünlüğünü ve ırkçı tutumları kurguya dünyasına taşırken mekân sadece fiziksel yönleriyle aktarılmaz. Mekânların kimliği ve çok boyutluluğu vurgulanır. Türkiye’de ve Fransa’da gönüllü sürgün yıllarını geçiren James Baldwin için seyahat hem bir kaçış hem de bir keşif aracıdır. Yazar, zihinsel ve fiziksel yolculukların kendi benliğiyle yüzleşme hususunda önemli bir işleve sahip olduğunu sıkça ifade etmiştir. Baldwin, bu seyahatlerinde Afro-Amerikalı kimliğe sahip bir sanatçı olmanın anlamını daha iyi idrak ettiğini belirtir. Onun karakterleri farklı mekânlara yolculuk ederken kendi kimliklerini “öteki” üzerinden anlamlandırır. Ben-öteki ilişkisi Demir Özlü için de oldukça önemlidir. Baldwin ve Özlü’nün eserlerinde özgürlük arayışlarıyla öne çıkan kişilerin iç dünyasına ayna tutulurken bireyin tarihi toplumsal tarihle birlikte ele alınır.

James Baldwin'in 1961'de İstanbul'da tamamladığı *Another Country (Bir Başka Ülke)* romanında özgürlük, kimlik, aşk, yalnızlık, ölüm ve cinsellik temaları iç içedir. Amerika'da yaşayan Afro-Amerikalı müzisyen Rufus'un acı dolu yaşam deneyimi anlatılır. Leona adında beyaz bir güneşli kadınla yaşadığı aşk betimlenirken mekânsal unsurlar öne çıkarılır. Eserde, romancı kimliğine sahip Richard ve Vivaldo, Paris'te yaşayan ve iş için New York'a gelen aktör Eric ve kardeşi Rufus gibi şarkıcı olan Ida dahil olmak üzere karakterler arasındaki ilişkiler kültürel, ekonomik ve sosyal değişimlere dikkat çekilerek kurgulanır. Mekânların betimlenişi ile karakterlerin iç dünyası arasındaki uyum öne çıkar. Geçmişin şimdiki zaman üzerindeki etkisine odaklanan yazar bireylerin an'daki/şimdiki deneyimlerini şekillendirdiğini vurgular. Baldwin acı dolu yaşamlardan kesitler sunarken ırk ayrımcılığının mekânlara yansıma biçimlerinin altını çizer. Toplumsal ve politik baskılar nedeniyle yalnızlaşıp mutsuzluğa sürüklenen huzursuz bireyler Demir Özlü'nün eserlerinde de mekân-insan etkileşimine ışık tutularak ele alınmaktadır.

1950 kuşağının önemli yazarları arasında yer alan Demir Özlü, özellikle ilk kitaplarında varoluşçu felsefenin etkilerini yansıtan metinler kaleme alır. Yabancılaşma, bunaltı, ölüm, cinsellik, yalnızlık ve benlik arayışı gibi varoluşçu temalar öne çıkar. Özneleri kuşatan toplumsal unsurları ve onların sebep olduğu ruhsal açmazları kurmaca dünyasında ele alan yazar imgelere başvurur. Bu eserlerde çağrışımlar ve izlenimler aktarılırken geriye dönüşler dikkat çeker. Geçmişini hatırlayan öykü ve roman kişilerinin dış yolculuklarının yanı sıra içsel yolculukları betimlenir. Özellikle sürgün yıllarında kendi yolculuklarına dair

birikimlerini metinlerinde yansıtan Özlü, kentsel kimlik ve özne arasındaki ilişkiye ışık tutar.

Sosyal konulara duyarlılığıyla tanınan Demir Özlü, aydın kimliğini eserlerine yansıtır. Siyasi propagandaya dönüşmeyen fakat iktidar aygıtlarına eleştirel yaklaşan bir tutum söz konusudur. Darbe dönemleri başta olmak üzere bireyi boğan siyasi iklimi betimleyen yazar siyasi, kültürel ve ekonomik gelişmelerin bireysel ve toplumsal tarihe nasıl şekil verdiğine dikkat çeker. Sosyal atmosferin betimlendiği eserlerde anı ve çağrışım zincirleri önemli işleve sahiptir. Kendi çocukluk yıllarının İstanbul'u başta olmak üzere otobiyografik unsurlara yoğun şekilde yer verir. *Amerika 1954* romanında New York'u odak kılan bir anlatım söz konusu olsa da İstanbul da geniş yer tutar. New York'a taşınan Harun'un deneyimlerini aktaran metinde onun yazarlık serüveni ve yeni bir kente dair gözlemleri kurgulanırken İstanbul hatıralar aracılığıyla öne çıkar. 2004 yılında yayınlanan *Amerika 1954* romanında gökdelenlerle dolu kentin betimlemeleri mekânın öznelere sunduğu özgürlüğün yanı sıra sebep olduğu sorunlara da ayna tutar. Başta Afro-Amerikalılar ve göçmenler olmak üzere farklı toplulukların zorlu yaşamlarına ışık tutulur. İstanbul ve New York'un tarihinden söz edilirken kentlerin değişen kimliği merkeze alınır. New York caz barları James Baldwin ve Demir Özlü'nün romanlarında sıkça betimlenir ve bellek mekânlarının kültürel kimlik için önemini altı çizilir. Bu bağlamda çalışmada müziğin işlevine dikkat çekilmektedir. Varoluşsal mücadelede önemli bir araca dönüşen müzik, karakterlerin kendi benlikleri ve toplumla bağlarını şekillendirir. Kimlik ve aidiyet meselesine ışık tutan caz ve blues şarkıları, özgürlük arayışında acı çeken öznelerin tasvirinde merkezi bir rol oynar.

Sonuç olarak James Baldwin ve Demir Özlü mekân-insan etkileşimine ışık tutan eserleriyle dikkat çeken yazarlardır. Hegemonik değerlere karşı mücadele eden Baldwin ve Özlü, savaş ve ırkçılık karşıtı görüşlerini metinlerine yansıtır. Metropollere dair eleştirel yaklaşımlarını kurgu dünyasına taşıyan sanatçılar, karakterlerin kendini gerçekleştirme çabasını kentlerin tarihi ve mimarisine ışık tutarak anlatırlar. Bu çalışmada tahlil edilen romanların başkışilerinin metropolde kendilerini ve kenti tanıma ve anlamlandırma gayreti içinde oldukları anlaşılmaktadır.