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From Sports Cars to Jeeps: Car in Turkish Novels

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the cars mentioned in Turkish novels, as consumption patterns of their period. The shifts in their choices, as symbols of wealth, identity and social status, and the expectations they represent are compared and historicized in the light of the history of emergence of the automotive sector. Cars have always been a strong indicator of the economic status in Turkey, as it has been in the rest of the world. Furthermore, has been the fetish object, being a symbol of unstoppable power, and an instant of the ideology symbolizing the individuality. In this work, the debate is on the consumption psychology moving from existence to possession and further resemblance; and the main consideration is the choices of the cars and the trends in narrations in defining the economic statuses with the cars.

Keywords: Cars, consumption pattern, Turkish novels, social history



I. Introduction

Cars have always been a strong indicator of the economic status in Turkey, as it has been in the rest of the world. Numerous works on the cars were run to explain the power of that motor vehicle in peoples' self expression, among many other consumption patterns. One reason for that may be, it's being the symbol of motorized movement, inspiring the industrial revolution after the invention of steam engine. Cars have been the fetish object, being a symbol of unstoppable power, and an instant of the ideology symbolizing the individuality, as given in the *Otomobilin Ekolojisi* (Freund and Martin, 1996: 119-124). Other approaches can be summarized as "reflection of the self" by Raban (Raban, 2000: 139-140), an indicator of existence by Pervanchon (Pervanchon, 2000: 141-150). In brief, cars complete the self-image in mind as a complementary object of sexuality, independency and so the individuality.

The commodities have always been the status symbols in the history, but they turned out to be the self definers in the modern consumption society. Guy Debord explains the process in two phases of the hegemony of the economy over the peoples' life: In the first phase the hegemony caused a vulgarization as a shift from self existence to possession. The current phase of this hegemony, in his opinion, is a shift from possession to resemblance (Debord, 1996: 40). That means, the individual typically looks like the commodities he owns, because he chooses them to represent himself among people. Such an individual makes up his image with his choices. The shift would surely result in a speedy shift in the consumption patterns, from the date it started to appear on, and it did.

Seyyit Battal Uğurlu (Uğurlu, 2009: 1427-1462) analyses the links of the cars with the selves in Turkish literature in his impressive essay, concluding that cars mostly reflect the reason of an end up of disappointment and unhappiness. He references to Jale Parla in defining the car as a Western, modern and mechanic commodity. In fact, Parla goes further to see all the feeling of inferiority towards the West in mapping the cars in Turkish literature.

In this work, in fact, I will not be considering the place of the cars in novel characters' identity. Instead the link of cars to the self-building is presumed as given, with a discussion on the consumption psychology moving from existence to possession and further resemblance, in Debordian terms. However, the main consideration is the choices of the cars and the trends in narrations in defining the economic statuses with the cars. In other words, what sorts of cars are chosen to define the belonging and the envy to the upper classes in Turkish literature?

A history of the development of automotive sector in Turkey will be provided, in comparison with the world, presuming that the upper classes lifestyles were more harmonious with their Western coevals, which will be instrumental in understanding the gap in consumption patterns among different classes in Turkey. After that, various novels will be analyzed in terms of the cars they include and emphasize. This work, without the claim to include all the cars in the Turkish literature, covers representative examples works of various periods in Republican history.

II. Automotive Sector: A brief history of cars in the world

Automotive industry was born in Europe pioneered by Germany and France, however reached the limits of its power in United States. Although a car with internal combustion engine was developed by Benz&Daimler in Europe in 1886, the production of such cars started in US



right in 1893 and the production and utilization increased with a considerable acceleration. The number of cars in world was 8 in 1880, 50 in 1885 and 500 in 1890 (Bedir, 2002).

The reason US became the major player in the sector lies in the development of car model T by Henry Ford. The Table 1 reflects how US has ever been major player until 1960s in the world, in terms of production. This information is particularly important for explaining the particularly American cars in Turkish literature.

Table 1. Annual Motor Vehicle Production in the World (x1000) (AAMA,1998)

	Almanya	Fransa	İtalya	İngiltere	ABD	Japonya	Diğer	Toplam
1900	2	3	0	0	4	0	0	9
1905	16	22	0	0	25	0	0	63
1910	13	38	0	14	187	0	3	255
1915	0	0	15	0	970	0	30	1.015
1920	0	40	21	0	2.227	0	94	2.383
1930	71	230	46	237	3.363	1	186	4.133
1940	72	0	0	134	4.513	51	172	4.942
1950	306	358	128	784	8.006	82	914	10.577
1960	2.055	1.370	645	1.811	7.905	814	1.889	16.488
1970	3.842	2.750	1.854	2.099	8.284	5.289	5.301	29.419
1980	3.879	3.378	1.612	1.313	8.010	11.043	9.330	38.565
1990	4.977	3.769	2.121	1.566	9.783	13.487	12.852	48.554
1991	5.035	3.611	1.878	1.454	8.811	13.245	12.895	46.928
1992	5.194	3.768	1.687	1.540	9.702	12.499	13.699	48.088
1993	4.032	3.156	1.277	1.569	10.898	11.228	14.626	46.785
1994	4.356	3.558	1.535	1.695	12.263	10.554	15.540	49.500
1995	4.667	3.475	1.667	1.765	11.986	10.196	16.227	49.983
1996	4.843	3.589	1.545	1.924	11.799	10.346	17.286	51.332
1997	5.023	2.577	1.815	1.940	12.131	10.975	20.544	55.005
1998	5.727	2.954	1.693	1.981	12.003	10.050	19.191	53.599
1999	5.688	3.180	1.701	1.976	13.019	9.985	20.986	56.535
2000	5.198	3.351	1.738	1.817	12.810	10.145	22.479	57.539
2001	5.692	3.629	1.580	1.685	11.425	9.777	22.602	56.390

Japan succeeded a considerable acceleration in total motor vehicle production increase after 1960s, passed US for a decade from late 1970s to the early 1990s. Today US is hardly the greatest motor vehicle producer. However, Japan is still the greatest exporter in the world. Japan is the leader of car production whereas US is the leader of commercial vehicle production.

The total of car sales was 59 million, 17 of which is the commercial vehicles in the world. The biggest markets are US with total sales of 17 million and EU with 16 million. Turkey is relatively a small market with the sales of almost 600 thousand. It's smaller than Mexico, Brazil, Southern Korea, Spain, etc. but bigger than Argentina. The number of vehicle per 1000 people in Turkey is 111, and the world average is 116, by the year 2002 (Bedir, 2002). The number has risen to 250 per 1000 by 2012 (*Habertürk*, 2012: <http://www.haberturk.com>, accessed at 18.06.2018), and the ratio has been saved by 2017 (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=24596>).



III. The Development of the Automotive Sector in Turkey

Turkish automotive industry was first launched in 1950s and its development was possible with the assembling industry established in late 1960s and early 1970s. The initiation of the industry was for particularly military purposes, with the production of jeeps and pickups by Turkish Willys Overland, in 1954. Later in 1955 a pickup factory by Türk Otomotive Corp. and two other pickup factories by Otosan and Çiftçiler Corp. were opened. In 1963, the montage of first busses (Magirüs) started by İstanbul Otobüs Karoseri San. Corp. First Turkish car Devrim was produced in Eskişehir Devlet Demiryolları Factory, of four prototypes only. The reason to stop the project was the insufficiency of demand, less than 5000, to meet the costs. The production of Anadolu started in 1966, with an annual production of 7200 lasted till 1982, with a total production of 87000.

The development of the assembling industry was accelerated with the Assembly Industry Regulation prepared in line with the automotive industry priority in the first Five Year Development Plan. The regulation aims to decrease the import dependency level so the protection level in import was set as high as possible. The list of parts whose import is banned is set as large as possible too. From these, we understand, the car manufacture, at least in the form of assembly was given priority from the first years of import substitution on. TOFAŞ established in 1968 and Oyak-Renault in 1969, started their production in 1971 and became the pioneering players of the sector. Car manufacturing constituted the 70% of automotive production.

However, the real increase in car owning trend was not observed until the mid-1980s. The state weakened financial protection of local manufacturers but the sector was supported with new investments and expansions within the 1980s. The custom union opened the path to the imports.



Table 2. Vehicle Production, Demand and Supply in Turkey (Resource: OSD The periodicals of general statistics and monthly statistiscs of Turkish automotive industry)

Yıllar	Talep	Üretim	İhracat	İthalat	İhracat/Üretim İthalat/Talep	
					(%)	(%)
1970	7.060	4.314	654	3.400	15,2	48,2
1975	81.385	68.088	379	13.676	0,6	16,8
1980	31.901	31.529	4.515	4.887	14,3	15,3
1981	23.852	25.306	5.659	4.205	22,4	17,6
1982	30.023	31.195	3.967	2.795	12,7	9,3
1983	42.385	42.509	3.343	3.219	7,9	7,6
1984	59.793	54.832	3.888	8.849	7,1	14,8
1985	69.399	60.353	3.760	12.806	6,2	18,5
1986	84.010	82.032	4.997	6.975	6,1	8,3
1987	107.313	107.185	4.987	5.115	4,7	4,8
1988	118.643	120.796	6.818	4.665	5,6	3,9
1989	116.694	118.314	8.474	6.854	7,2	5,9
1990	233.649	167.556	6.122	72.215	3,7	30,9
1991	222.022	195.574	7.244	33.692	3,7	15,2
1992	316.600	265.245	8.779	60.134	3,3	19,0
1993	441.928	348.095	7.177	101.010	2,1	22,9
1994	227.977	212.651	12.790	28.116	6,0	12,3
1995	222.299	233.412	32.764	21.651	14,0	9,7
Gümrük Birliği						
1996	231.832	207.757	33.404	57.479	16,1	24,8
1997	372.433	242.780	21.051	150.704	8,7	40,5
1998	328.527	239.937	32.377	120.967	13,5	36,8
1999	288.600	222.041	77.459	131.215	34,9	45,5
2000	466.400	297.476	90.026	258.987	30,3	55,5
2001	131.700	175.343	142.288	72.259	81	54,9

The demand to motor vehicles that sharply rose between 1970-75 immediately declined with the mid1970s, due to the foreign currency crisis. But the demand doubled soon after, within 1983-1989 period. The demand to the vehicles constantly increased except for years of acute economic crisis as was in 2001. Another reality the table reflects is the increase in the ratio of import vehicles in meeting the demand, particularly after the customs union contract in 1995.

The statistics reflect a complex relation of the Turkish individual and the cars. The individual car ownership obviously increased with Özal period, however the sector hardly stabilizes struggling with sharp demand falls in all economic crisis. Atila Bedir defines the sector with inadequate and instable internal demand, tendency to imported cars, excess capacity, and high sales taxes (Bedir, 2002: 31-32). (The sectoral information used in this part is also extracted from this report.)

IV. Cars and Status

In fact the cars appeared in Ottoman capital as early as Abdülhamid 2, as Serpil Aygün Cengiz highlighted in her work (Cengiz, 2005: 41-60). Abdülhamid 2 was presented two cars, a Hotchkiss and a Daimler, but he used neither of them. The real date by when the cars appeared was the Young Turk Period (1908). The first cars appeared in the country were the Americans, Ford, Chevrolet and Studebaker and Italian Fiat. The years of occupation after the



World War I, according to Cengiz, witnessed a few distributors and sales points of these Americans to meet the weak demand. There were about 150-200 cars in the country within the 1908 and WW1 period.

The firm Koçzade Vehbi opened a Ford retailer in 1928. The low demand for cars were met by American firms as Chevrolet, Ford and an Italian firm Fiat, until the assembling industries of Renault and Fiat started production in the 1960s. Most of the customers of these were the taxi drivers, according to Cengiz.

In 1970, the demand for car was about 7000, as given in Table 2, and the demand was met with import and export almost at similar percentage. The car owners were obviously a very small portion of the population. Car ownership was itself something only possible for upper classes since Özal period, which was also the beginning of the consumption society.

According to Rifat Bali the people grown up in an environment of cars of domestic production for years met the import cars within the 1980s. The Japanese cars with better designs and more comfortable inner equipment became popular for a while but soon the luxury cars as BMW and Mercedes became the symbol of high status. These brands, perceived as the cars of parvenus, became the “new elites” car with their comfort and speed. Another trend in cars were jeeps, the vehicles also relevant for countryside (Bali, 2002: 156).

These points also make the non-declared consensus between Hulki Aktunç and Ali Akay in defining the relation of Turkish people with their car as “alienation and over-adoption”, as given in Uğurlu’s essay (Uğurlu, 2009: 1433).

V. Cars in Literature

Jale Parla interprets the cars not as a consumption pattern but as a space in that the relation of the car with the conceptual engine and the Turkish modernization takes place. Parla reminds that the term “makine” refers to all kinds of vehicle that moves with engines and it’s also the term that refers to all machines. And therefore the cars may be said to be perceived as a machine above all. Parla defines a term as “Car narrative” and a “subgenre” in Turkish novel writing under the term (Parla, 2003: 535-550). The common theme in these novels is reflecting a relation with Westernization and Modernization (Parla, 2003: 535). Her question is why the Turkish novelists chose the car to represent the psychic responses of their protagonists to the changing times. She seems to imply the influence of the changing social order under modernist waves. Her strongest answer to this question is the cars appeared enough long before the factories that produce them were established (Parla, 2003: 548). That can also be interpreted as follows: the cars appeared as the initial major pieces of modern Western world: They were expensive, functional and unreplaceable. If modernism was to develop a new man / woman, that man / woman should be represented with a car. The houses and others changed with modernization but the cars appeared with it, with their engines to ride towards a new life.

When the “car ownership” is considered as a consumption pattern in Turkish novels, it is obvious that car owning could open to the more middle segments of the society only after the 1980s. This is the time when the ban on import was lifted away and more financial tools were launched to transform into a consumer society. The protagonists in novels also adopted new attitudes towards car owning.



The vehicle in *Araba Sevdası*, a pre-Republican novel, was not a motor vehicle but a coach. But *Ford Mach I* by Sevim Burak describes the status of a sports car in 1973 (Burak, 2003: 8). The legendary Mach I lives in Bağdat Street. It's his "eyes" of "fury" are red, and he is a warrior for a revenge. The novel reflects a number of car brands present around Bağdat Street at the time: There seems to exist so many cars from Renault (probably produced in Turkey) to Mercure, Porsche, Opel, Lotus, Fiat ... They all seem to be fighters. Fighter should be a sports car with its speed and athletic body. The people of high status should be choosing sports cars, in an environment where Ford Mach I is the king. On the other side we see Bedford trucks (junk), Renault station (home in Beşiktaş), Renault to represent lower classes. Actually "maaşallah" is written on the truck, which is a Anatolian habit.

Bağdat Street has always been a settlement of upper class in Republican period. The novel reflects the eagerness of upper classes to represent an athletic, warrior identity. High-quality seems to have been represented by speed and competitiveness. Brand discrimination is visible. The cars of middle classes, on the contrary, are mostly described as commercial vehicles, as taxis and trucks, or cheaper cars produced in Turkey, by assembly industry.

Similarly Nazım in *Peygamberin Son Beş Günü* prefers red Ford Mustang. It is described to be speedy, beautiful and American. The date is late 1970s, just before 12 Eylül Coup. Nazım, here, is some sort of a parvenu, that reached great amounts of money with dirty works. The car of rich is still preferably an American sports car (Yücel, 1992: 105).

The car in *Masumiyet Müzesi* (Pamuk, 2012) of late 1970s is also a classical American: Plymouth. It should be in Bağdat Street where Mach 1 also lived. However, *Fındık Sekiz* (Kaçan, 1997) and *Buzdan Kılıçlar* (Tekin, 1989) explain what happened to these cars later, in the 1980s and 1990s: Their engines were changed to a smaller one to prevent high oil consuming and were sold to middle class people to make their dreams come true. This new engine is called "findık sekiz". The car in *Fındık Sekiz* is a white Malibu with a "findık sekiz" motor and the car loses some performance but consumed much less oil as an economic car. White Malibu is a common car of Meto and Fahri abi. Meto is a film maker but not popular yet, therefore he doesn't seem to receive a regular income.

Fahri abi considers purchasing another car, and that's Chevrolet Impala of 1956 model. Poor Gogi in Latife Tekin's *Buzdan Kılıçlar*, not surprisingly has a red Volvo of "findık sekiz" engine. This red Volvo is also something providing its owner a status of "car owner" in the neighborhood. The environment is poor, with low status and people soon discover that the car goes to its natural environments, to night club for instance. The car likes beautiful, blonde women. Blonde women are one of the symbols of wealth, particularly modern, wealthy women according to Bali, particularly 1980s (Bali, 2002: 50-51). Similarly Meto in *Fındık Sekiz* falls in love with a very wealthy, prodigal woman.

Both of these are the novels about the mid-1980s. Both are the stories of lower classes. Both reflect the class differences. They preferred buying an old American, instead of more modest second hand cars in their period. The old Americans were probably not very expensive, as they have been once. In fact, the nostalgic cars became fashionable in the following decade. However, as the car production and import increased drastically in the 1980s, and in that period the admired choice was modern and comfortable, new cars.

The 1980s, marked as the "Özal period," by the name of the Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who initiated the integration of the country to the global markets. His economic policies, resulted in a quick economic and social transformation, highlighted the unexpected opportunities to



become rich. The choice of old Americans within the poorer segments may be related to a hope to become rich by a sudden opportunity.

The 1970s and 1980s were also marked by migrant workers who went to Europe from the 1960s on, and their return after retirement with a new economic and social status, thanks to a financial accumulation they were able to make abroad. Most came with a new car, as well. Such a protagonist Bayram in *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* buys a yellow Mercedes, after working for three years in Germany (Ağaoğlu, 1976, 2011). The car is second hand but only one year old, a model of 1974. Bayram, grown up in a small town, does nothing for pleasure or for himself in Germany, except for saving money to buy it. A yellow Mercedes is a direct symbol of status for him, far different from “any Taunus, a Ford or a Volkswagen of 3-5 years ago, a domestic assembly Anadol” and he expects a more respectful attitude from customs officer (Ağaoğlu, 1976, 2011: 10). The choice of a migrant worker as a consumption good is given as a Mercedes of 1974. As depicted by Bali above, the choice of a parvenue could also be a Mercedes in the 1970s.

Each of these cars had an attributed personality by their owners, like a wealthy friend by them to constitute a reference of themselves. The characters speak to the car, or imagine them speaking, etc.

The literary works particularly published after the year 2000 introduce a new type of car as an indicator of wealth: Jeeps. The four-wheel drives enter our narratives as the symbol of power, as themselves with big motors. They are no longer specific identities, but just a sentence in the texts as it was in Selçuk Altun’s last novel: “The jeep with a license plate of Bursa must be belonging to the two spooning with the whores, probably at the age of their granddaughters in the lobby.” (Altun, 2011). The sentence does not only reflect the economic status but also a negation to the owner of the car in moral terms. A gain in İdil Önemli’s work the owner of Cayenne jeep is identified with his betrayal to his wife with almost a perfect planning. The owner of Cayenne is a well-known businessman and he believes that his choices (his car included) identify him. He says this but does not mention the brand and the type of his car; he describes himself on the contrary. The car in this scene is no longer a fetish thing; it’s just in a position of a consumer good (Önemli, 2008).

Murathan Mungan’s *Yüksek Topuklar* (Mungan, 2002) and Barış Bıçakçı’s *Aramızdaki En Kısa Mesafe* (Bıçakçı, 2003) bring a new attitude towards the cars own, which is in fact becoming more typical in recent works of new generation. These cars no longer have even a particular name nor an attributed personality. The protagonist of *Yüksek Topuklar*, Nermin, owes a “magnificent”, “red” car, however the reader does not learn its brand and model till the end of the book. It’s not that she does not care for her car. But she just does not mystify it, and protagonists no longer attribute a personality to their cars in Turkish novels. The cars may be some complementary good, some support to build a personal image (Nermin’s car is red and magnificent, the businessman’s Cayenne is reflecting his choice) but they no longer have an identity independent from their owners.

In other words, jeeps and luxury cars enter to the novels as the indicators of status but they lose their power and identity too. Erhan Bener’s book *Arabalarım* (Bener, 2003) tells the stories of his cars, changed almost about every two years from 1958 on, in his terms. He had 22 cars, but the desire to go up into a higher class appeared too late, in the year of 1999, and he purchased a BMW to do it. He ends up with a Fiat Tempra of 1995, which is considerably



modest car. Tempra seems to have an identity, actually, but Bener, born in 1929, is obviously an author of an older generation, who mostly adopt their cars as their roadmates.

One other car deserves to be considered is the Jaguar in Peride Celal's impressive novella *Jaguar*. However, this Jaguar is in consumer terms not far different from yellow Mercedes Balkız or the other cars; a very strong indicator of high status, so strong that it gives a love affair its name.

VI. Conclusion

Car ownership has been very important in Turkish society, being a subject to numerous social studies and literary works. Uğurlu links the theme with the traditional three possessions said to be vital in old Turkish tradition: "horse, woman, and weapon." Uğurlu goes further to claim a car represents all in one. However, we see the novels, actually car serves as an efficient tool to guarantee a woman, too. So a car really plays an important role in novel protagonists' lives as something admired, something costly and something to guarantee a higher status.

Only wealthy protagonists appear with mostly American cars up to 1980s in novels. A car owner therefore is either rich, or driver. The more wealthy farmers appear as a tractor owner, too. However, we see more modest people as car owners after 1980s. Further, these people have the chance to choose at this moment and are inclined to have rich looking cars as old luxury cars with implanted smaller engines. The tendency is quite harmonious with post 1980s neoliberal tendency to become a consumer rather than need utilizer (Bali, 2002: 27-35).

The 1980s also create a diversion among wealthy people: Some prefer modern, speedy sports cars, whereas some tend to possess jeeps as safe, big vehicles, appropriate for also driving in the countryside. In that point we see jeeps as an indicator of status. Jeeps also symbolize power (four wheel drive) with their huge body and strong engine. In the narratives particularly after 2000 the four wheel drives became the perfect indicators of wealth. This also is consistent with the sociological evidence that Rıfat Bali provide in his work in defining the new elites. Therefore, according to Turkish novels, upper classes' choice for cars shifted from sports cars to the jeeps after the 1980s. Lower classes reflect tendency to the second hand old American cars after changing their motors to smaller ones for cost reduction, after the 1980s.

There is one last point that should be made here is that, the cars started to appear more as a consumption pattern than being a protagonist themselves in recent works. In Mungan, Önemli and even Kaçan's works, the cars start to lose their individual independent vitality and became more a part that fulfills their owner's identity. We no longer see fighter Mach 1's, Mercedes's with name "Balkız", now we see people having a "jeep", or "driving his jeep", that is the cars' consumption pattern identity have been strengthened. And sometimes the cars' model is not even mentioned as it is in *Yüksek Topuklar* of Murathan Mungan and Barış Bıçakçı's *Aramızdaki En Kısa Mesafe*. And normally its links with modernization was loosened. Therefore a car is no longer a sole reason of failure as Uğurlu suggested in his work. So it may be said that cars have been a part of the consumer society and adapted to being a consumption good, as the society's adoption of neoliberal economy and became a perfect consumption society is internalized by the 21st century.



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