

## CHAPTER 2

# YAKUP KADRI KARAOSMANOĞLU AND THE REPUBLICAN IMAGINATION: THE NOVELS *YABAN* AND *ANKARA*

**Mehmet ARISAN\***

\*Assoc. Prof. Dr., Istanbul University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul, Turkey.

e-mail: mehmet.arisan@istanbul.edu.tr

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### **Abstract**

The paper deals with a particular literary representation of the republican transformation in Turkey that mainly focuses on its first decades. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu can be defined as one of the most ardent supporters of Turkish Republicanism, however his literary narrative is by no means in clear support for it. For the most part, it gives away the contradictory and self-negating aspects of Turkish (Kemalist) Republican discourse that claims to be a thoroughly modernist one. In the novels that he wrote about the war of independence and the foundation of the new republic, he surprisingly reflects a sense of radical disappointment rather than a sense of glory. It is a narrative of “complaint, frustration and discontent” rather than a celebration of Turkish republicanism and nationalism. As it can be discerned from a careful analysis of his novels, what marks this frustration and discontent is a strong desire for a somewhat transcendental and all-encompassing power, which he could never define or name properly.

Being accepted as an intellectual and political forerunner of the Turkish Republican transformation as well as being a leading figure of the secular western oriented modernizing elite, his elusiveness in articulating a proper and well-defined modern nationalist identity and a clear republican-revolutionary ideology marks Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu as one of the most significant examples in detecting the internal paradoxes and vague points in the making of a modern nationalist identity. Furthermore his narrative constitutes a very good example of how the western oriented intelligentsia at the time of the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the early republican era was haunted by the fantasy of an imperial glory. This may well be related to a transcendental and all-encompassing perception of political power, which can be defined as the most enduring and effective remains of the Imperial imagination that still continues to haunt the Turkish “Republic” in various ways.

**Keywords:** Kemalism, Turkey, Modernization, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Yaban*, *Ankara*, Alienation, Negation.

## 1. Introduction

Analyzing fiction for historical purposes may seem a vain attempt for many, as it is more likely to be a subjective account of the events and impossible to verify by empirical evidence. However a work of fiction may well be an important account for demonstrating how a series of catastrophic events or a huge socio-political transformation is perceived and reflected by a particular imagination. At this point the identity of the author becomes quite significant.

If the author is accepted as an important representative or a vanguard of a specific political group or movement or of a specific worldview, then a fictional representation of an historical event becomes significant in terms of understanding a particular pattern of perceiving historical reality. Moreover, it becomes more important if the author himself experienced that historical event. In that case, fictional narrative appears as not only a reflection of how historical reality is perceived, but also how it was experienced by a particular mindset.

In this sense what the paper tries to achieve is to point out a particular perception and representation of the transformation period from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic by focusing on two particular novels by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Yaban [Alien<sup>1</sup>]* and *Ankara*. This particular mode of perception and representation belonged to the western oriented modernist elite of the Ottoman Empire, which was holding both the military and civil bureaucracy under their control during World War One. Even after the great defeat and demise of the empire, the cadres who organized and led the War of Independence and founded the Turkish Republic belonged to the same worldview (or better to say *Weltanschauung*) even if there were serious hostilities amongst them.

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu can be said to be one of the important representatives of this *Weltanschauung*. Even though he is mostly known as a fervent advocator of Kemalist Republicanism, his literary narrative also reflects a certain mourning, but more than that, ‘a latent melancholy’ regarding the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Surely such a narrative is uncovering a paradoxical socio-political stance that is stuck between a desperate longing for a world empire and a western European oriented modern nation state.

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1 Although in some translations the title of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu’s novel is translated as “Savage”, this naming may lead to a dichotomy between “savagery” and “civilization”. However the novel goes far beyond this dichotomy and it points out a double-edged alienation, which comprises the intellectual elite of the time (which were mostly the leading figures of the Turkish Republican revolution) on the one hand and the Anatolian people mostly composed of illiterate villagers on the other.

This paradox was certainly not unique to Yakup Kadri's narrative. In fact this was the ordeal of the whole generation who witnessed the loss of the Balkans and subsequently the total collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore that very generation also witnessed the foundation of the Turkish Republic basically on the Anatolian territories, which were once trivialized as the Empire's provinces.

The basis of that paradox lies in the fact that the western oriented elite of the collapsing Empire had to struggle against the western armies during the First World War and the War of Independence. This placed their western oriented worldview on highly problematic ground. In this sense the westernization aspect of both the Committee of Union and Progress in the process of the Empire's collapse and the Kemalist Republicans afterwards appear to be paradoxical from the beginning.

On the other hand this elite's relationship with the Imperial legacy was also very problematic which was particularly manifest in the elusive patriotism of the Committee of Union and Progress just before the demise of the Empire. They perceive the Empire both as a decaying entity, which was something to be improved within a western oriented modernist line while desperately fighting to prevent its total collapse. The Kemalist Republicans on the other hand openly stated their contempt of the Imperial legacy in the name of embracing a homogeneous nation state. However, they were simultaneously alienated in their new homeland - Anatolia - and perceived it as ignorant and even *savage* that it should be radically transformed and integrated into the so-called "civilized" world.

## **2. Yakup Kadri and The Literary Narrative**

Surprisingly, the literary narrative of Yakup Kadri Karaosmaoglu completely fits in this paradoxical emergence of a modern national identity that was extracted from the collapse of a world Empire. In his novels what strikes us is a suffering political mindset that could embrace neither westernization and the emerging nation-state nor the Imperial legacy.

His representations of the 'subject' usually reflect the loss of a certain spirit or character that is directly associated with moral degeneracy. Thus, social degeneracy is always associated with political concerns, in terms of the lack of an efficient political power. In Yakup Kadri's early novels, there is a clear longing for the 'total destruction' of the corrupted and highly 'defiled' socio-political regime of the late Ottoman Empire and its replacement with a 'pure' and 'brand new' one. In his later novels, written approximately ten years later after the Kemalist Republican Revolution (in the 1930s), however, one can observe a certain disappointment and anxiety over the institutionalization of the 'new' Turkish Republic. This

disappointment is accompanied by idealistic and even utopian projections of a future ‘Republican Turkish Society’ – though they have totalitarian overtones.<sup>2</sup>

Exploring Yakup Kadri’s novels in such a fashion is also an attempt to understand and explain the appearance of the notion of ‘republic’ in Turkey as a unique political imagination and as a unique political mentality. The appearance of Republicanism in Turkey can easily be seen as a specific point in a continuous process of socio-political dislocation. This arises from a gradual and multidimensional shift towards the Western framework, whose perception of the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ is also accepted as ‘universal’. The point, however, is that the process of dislocation by no means resulted in the establishment of ‘universally accepted’ new socio-political structures and institutions. As Niyazi Berkes rightly points out, although the process of Turkish political modernization corresponds to a certain perception of universality, ‘the attitude towards the problems created by it differs in every case. The acceptance of a secular outlook on religious, political, social, and cultural matters is far from universal’ (Berkes 1998, 3). In fact we can say that the Western modernist discourse that was accepted as universal became intermingled with various local elements and created a unique form of modernist transformation, which we can call *Kemalist Republicanism*. However apart from its visible institutional, economic and political aspects, the paper concentrates on its ‘immediate’ internal paradoxes by referring to the literary narrative of one of the most fervent Kemalist Republicans. The more enthusiasm for and belief in a revolutionary cause, the more vulnerable it is in the face of any deviance from its perfect image. The disappointment and frustration emanating from such a vulnerability enables us to see the true nature of the “belief content” inherent in a modern political transformation which becomes quite visible in Yakup Kadri’s literary narrative.

In his novels, he both represents the ‘alienation’ of the idealist, revolutionary intellectual faced with the ignorance and ‘backwardness’ of his own people, and the paradox of the perception of “Westernization” by the upper circles of Turkish society, including the Kemalist

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2 In fact we can talk about such a prospective totalitarian yearning only in the last part of his novel *Ankara*. However, most of his novels consisted of a negative representation of the upper classes and elite of Turkish society as corrupted because of an extreme and formalist perception of a Western oriented modernisation. Except for the last part of *Ankara*, where he describes the perfect unity and solidarity of a nation that becomes one with their leader's will, he fails to present an actual alternative for the cynical and corrupted elite. This failure can be observed both in terms of representing the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and the first decades of the young Turkish republic. The reason lies in his representation of the people - which was largely composed, of peasants at that time - as ignorant, indifferent and uncivilised. In fact this desperation becomes the mark of his whole narrative, which also manifests a certain longing for the certainty of an all-encompassing power. However, he refuses to name such a longing, as it conflicts directly with the cause of the Republican revolution, which is supposed to depend on popular sovereignty and the limitation of an all-encompassing, absolute power by means of this popular sovereignty.

elite, within a mood of hopelessness. In fact, except for one of his novels (*Yaban*, [*The Alien*]) he mostly dealt with the social and moral corruption of the modernizing elite, not because of any attachment with the Ottoman past, but because of ‘extremely Westernized life styles’. So, what we see in his novels is a double-edged negation that leads nowhere in terms of locating an enthusiasm for building a new nation, because both the Ottoman Past and the West are negated as its references.

As a result, instead of elaborating a fair alternative to this paradox, we see an ongoing frustration in his literary writings. The reason for this mood lies in his negation of his own people as ignorant and backward, on the one hand, and on the other his apparent frustration with, and alienation from, Western life styles and manners. Also, in negating the modernizing elite he cannot take recourse to either Ottoman socio-political practice or the Anatolian people. While he sees the former as the root of the Empire’s downfall, he sees the latter as totally irrelevant and indifferent to a modern national revolutionary cause. Within this ultimate paradoxical void, however, we realize a strong belief toward a radically elusive omnipotence, which resides in the form of a powerful political fantasy. That is, a fantasy of an all-encompassing political power, which cannot be named in one way or another and naturally has no tangible existence. In fact, without the belief in such a fantasy there would be no frustration and discontent.

Niyazi Akı, who is the author of one of the very few analyses and commentaries on Yakup Kadri, divides his canon into ‘early’ and ‘late’ Yakup Kadri. Yakup Kadri’s interest in socio-political issues had begun by the early 1920s (Akı, 2001, 30-46).<sup>3</sup> In his works published before the 1920s, he deals mostly with personal issues and stories. The early Yakup Kadri shares a lot of features with his contemporaries, in terms of their pessimism, nihilism, and the hopeless search for a social and even a ‘religious’ spirit. His pessimism and hopelessness had been influenced by the works of Guy de Maupassant, Gustave Flaubert, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Henrik Ibsen and finally Bergsonism. As can be seen both in Hasan Ali Yücel’s analysis of Yakup Kadri<sup>4</sup> and in his own memoir of his youth, *Anamın Kitabı*, [*My Mother’s*

3 Birsen Talay also makes the same distinction within Yakup Kadri’s works by claiming that in his early novels there is a certain pessimism, residing in a vague form of mysticism and in a desperate search for messianic salvation. However, in his later works, he suddenly finds the concrete reflection of his mystical longing in ‘building a new regime and a nation’ which would soon fall into the same mood of a mystical mourning with a very pathological disavowal of the exact source of this mourning. Birsen Talay, ‘Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu’ in Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinil (eds.) op.cit. vol II, *Kemalism*, pp.430-32

4 Hasan Ali Yücel was one of the most important Ministers of Education throughout the history of the Turkish Republic. He was in office during the single party era under the presidency of İnönü and was one of the forerunners of the ‘village institutes’, which was a specific education programme for enlightening the large peasant population of Turkey. The institutes were closed because of the pressures coming both from the opposition and from some of the inner circles of the Republican People’s Party, amidst claims of partisanship

*Book*], he always felt alienated from his times. He longed for a fantasmatic, magical place, which can be associated with a certain form of ‘escapism’ rather than a socio-political imaginary perfectionism or any projection in such a sense. (Aki, 2001, 42-43). However, the reason for this nihilism and pessimism lay neither in his intellectual influences nor his personal conditions and affiliations. As with most of the intellectuals of his time, his earlier writings were influenced by living in a collapsing Empire and being trapped between the agony of its passing and his ambivalence over his own attraction toward the West. (Ayvazoğlu, 292). Certainly, this pathology took the form of a hopeless longing for a new spirit, which could be found neither in the rubble of a fallen Empire or simply in the ascendant vision of the West. The characteristic mood of most of the intellectuals in the pre-republican period can be best defined in the words of Claude Lefort, when he defines the mood of the French intellectuals in the French Revolution;

They still lived in the gap between a world that was disappearing and a world that was appearing, and their thought was still haunted by questions which knew no limits - by which I mean that it was not yet restricted by any presuppositions as to how to define objects of knowledge or as to how to define politics, religion, law, economics or culture. (Lefort, 1988, 215)

The distinction between the early and later works of Yakup Kadri is not limited to his shifting toward socio-political themes.<sup>5</sup> It also relates to the appearance of a political enthusiasm for the prospect of establishing a new society, a new ‘nation’, and a new state, which is embedded in the search for the certainty of an absolute power. However, as we will see in detail below, this enthusiasm faded towards a new pessimism and discontent. In that sense the selected narrative of Yakup Kadri constitutes a certain ‘moment’ in the political imaginary of the founding elite of the Turkish republic that stands ‘in between’ the rise of a socio-political hope, cynicism and melancholia.

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and the institutes' leaning towards a Soviet style communism. He also translated many Western and Russian classics into Turkish during the 1930s and 40s. Being one of his closer friends, he wrote a book on Yakup Kadri, which mostly analyses his early works. Yücel did not mention Yakup Kadri's novels written mostly after the foundation of the Republic. The reason may be that, as the Minister of Education of the time, he might not have wanted to dwell on the controversial political position reflected in these novels. See Yücel, (1989). In this work, with a certain sense of sympathy, Yücel claims that Yakup Kadri has always been far from reality with an inclination towards certain utopias both on the personal and social levels. However, Yücel misses the fact that the intellectual support for the Republican Revolution resides in that kind of utopian potential, although it was always kept at a safe distance by the main ruling elite of Kemalist Republicans.

5 According to Aki, ‘late Yakup Kadri’ can be defined by his novels and it is his novels that make him a political writer because his early works are mostly composed of short stories. (Aki, 1988, 97)

### 3. The Novels

#### 3.1. *Yaban* [Alien] (1932)

“*Yaban*’ is a heartrending scream of a malaise of the soul, of a consciousness, of a conscience which suddenly confronts painful and horrible reality’

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1998, 11)

*Yaban* can be seen as the self-deconstruction of Yakup Kadri’s utopian space, the precise utopian object of his political imaginary; ‘the people’, specified as the naïve and ignorant peasant masses of Anatolia, who live, in the novel, in a specific village. The self-destruction and ultimate disenchantment depicted in the novel parallels the same disenchantment experienced by the idealist Kemalist Republican intellectuals when they confronted the precise object of their political desire – the founding of a new nation.

Actually, rather than the story presented in *Yaban*, it is the mode of representation of the story which is full of constant observations and judgments, in the form of a monologue, metaphors, and allegories which contribute to a description of a ‘nowhere’ that is completely out of time or space. In other words, the location where the story takes place (which is in fact a village in central Anatolia) depicts a hell of disenchantment in which we cannot see any positive description of a subject. Except for the protagonist, all the villagers are presented as awkward symbols of a hellish space.

*Yaban* is a story of an Ottoman reserve officer who is raised in a wealthy family (as he is the son of a high-ranking military officer [*pasha*])<sup>6</sup> in a comfortable mansion in İstanbul. As we understand from the novel, this is an idealist and highly intellectual officer. As Atilla Özkırımlı rightly points out, rather than being a protagonist of a fiction, Ahmet Celal is a prototypical Turkish intellectual of the first decades of the twentieth century. (Özkırımlı, 1998, 4) According to Özkırımlı, Ahmet Celal also carries ‘the typical socio-psychological characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman modernist intellectuals.’ (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 21)

The protagonist loses one of his arms in the First World War. After the war ends, he decides to go to his orderly’s (Mehmet Ali) village instead of İstanbul, because İstanbul is occupied by the enemy forces and he has nobody there with whom he can live. So he decides to wait for the developments in a secure place, which is a remote village in central Anatolia. However, after learning of the War of Independence against the occupying forces he becomes distressed, as he cannot join the war. Contrary to most of the other novels, which idealise the

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6 *Pasha* was the Ottoman equivalent of a ‘General’

self-sacrificing intellectual who voluntarily goes to the remote villages of Anatolia, here the protagonist is there mostly through necessity. (Kaplan, 1997, 101)

Throughout the novel we see a double-edged alienation: the peasants' fear and mistrust of Ahmet Celal and his feelings of disgust, despair, distress, and hatred toward them. Although Ahmet Celal stays in the village for a long time, (a couple of years) the gap between him and the villagers remains.

The only character who evokes pity and compassion in him, however, is Emine, with whom he falls in love. The girls' family, however, opposes such an affair because Ahmet Celal is a total 'alien' to them. Instead, her family allow her to marry a man from the village. In the end, the village is occupied by enemy forces and Ahmet Celal decides to escape, taking Emine with him. However, while they are escaping, the girl is wounded and Ahmet Celal leaves her, alone and in pain, as he runs away.

The important point in his description of the village and the villagers is the lack of any sense of time and space. According to the protagonist's description, both the village and the villagers appear motionless, as if they are 'frozen' in time. (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 48-49) Another point is Ahmet Celal's confusion about the peasant's lack of respect or concern for him. To his mind, he is due respect from them because he lost an arm in their defence, however, the peasants show no regard for such things. They are only concerned with their own business – specifically their crops – and show no sense of solidarity. Throughout the novel, Yakup Kadri uses animal references to describe the behaviour and the physical appearance of the villagers, as if they are creatures that behave only according to their instincts. (Moran, 1983, 161) Yakup Kadri expresses his discontent thus:

How can I prove that I am not an alien but from the same blood, same language, same history and territory with them...With time, I understand better that the Turkish intellectual is a strange and lonely creature in this infinite and deserted world that is called Turkey... Imagine a person...who feels more and more separated from his own roots as he moves along to the depths of his own country. Even if it does not happen, *this emptiness, this cold and repulsive atmosphere* makes him feel that he is *a savage and strange plant unravelled from his own soil*...The gap between an educated person of İstanbul and an Anatolian villager is greater than the difference between a British man from London and a Punjabi Indian. (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 53)

Ahmet Celal is also disappointed and angered by the villagers' disregard for the Independence War going on at that time. He is even frustrated with their suspicion of Mustafa Kemal and his army as, according to the villagers, Mustafa Kemal and his army are very



dangerous and oppose the Sultan's will. The Sultan had made peace with the enemy but Kemal had not recognised the Sultan and his peace. There was a Queen called Europe and she had promised the Turkish people to sort out the problem.

In fact the anger and hatred that Ahmet Celal feels toward the villagers also turns out to be guilt because of his alienation and lack of any communication with them. This self-hatred appears in the form of a narrative that swings between sublimation and disgust. At some points he compares the villagers with 'mythological creatures' and at the same time he expresses his hatred and disgust toward them in various ways. Each attempt at sublimation brings a sense of incompleteness and disappointment and he once again goes back to the narrative of contempt. (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 94-121) Emine becomes the metaphor of the ultimate manifestation of Yakup Kadri's orientalist gaze, but it is not a successful orientalist fantasy, as he cannot even fix upon his object of desire consistently.

His paradoxical stance reaches its climax when Ahmet Celal begins to identify himself with Robinson Crusoe and waits to be saved by a ship that he calls 'the Anatolian army' (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 128). Berna Moran points out that, just like *Sodom and Gomorrah*, we can see the influence of the Old and New Testament on his narrative in *Yaban*, especially when his alienation and contempt reaches its peak. The protagonist is always in expectation of the messiah, whom he personifies as Mustafa Kemal, who, just like Jesus, is a shepherd who tries to gather the herd together (Karaosmanoğlu, 128-129)<sup>7</sup>. According to Berna Moran, Yakup Kadri represents the peasants' loyalty to the Sultan and the Caliphate as infidelity and even as betrayal. He describes the peasants as the ones who are denying their own natural existence. On the other hand, he presents Mustafa Kemal as the messiah, as a rising sun over Ankara who will lead the herd on the true path.<sup>8</sup>

What he is not so sure of is whether there is such a 'herd' to be led on the 'true path'. Ahmet Celal cannot see any potential around him for a national consciousness, only the deep ignorance, constant betrayal, and evil of the peasants. Thus, he blames the Turkish intellectual for the situation.

The reason for this is you, Turkish intellectual! What have you done for this miserable country and for the poor masses? After exploiting them for years, for centuries, how can

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7 Zeki Coşkun, who is a journalist and literary critic, also criticises Yakup Kadri for his excessive references to Greek and Latin mythology and to Jewish and Christian religious figures. According to Coşkun, it is quite contradictory for a novelist who is criticising excessive Westernisation to use so many symbolic references to such sources. (Coşkun, 2003,109-113).

8 Berna Moran also takes some quotations from the New Testament and compares some similar points in the narrative in *Yaban*. (Moran, 1983,157)

you dare to feel disgust for them? There was a spirit of the Anatolian people. You could not penetrate it. They had a mind. You could not enlighten it. They had a body. You could not feed it.... So, what do you expect now...? What gives you pain is the result of your own achievement (Karaosmanoglu, 1998, 130).

One of the most significant points in the novel is the radical rejection of difference. The protagonist does not accept the presence of the village nor does he try to understand the peasant's point of view. Once each and every attempt of mythification dissolves into discontent, the village begins to be represented as if it is out of our symbolic world, like a nightmarish planet, a negative metaphor to express the radical longing for both a mystical and mythical glory. In fact, this glory resides in a certain 'logic of the one'. This glory emanates radically from a fantasmatic monolithic structure that is the herd, unified by the shepherd.

However, the ultimate disenchantment and the sense of guilt that Ahmet Celal feels toward the peasants emanates from the reflection of himself that he sees in their faces. It is not their gaze on him, with which they perceive him as a totally strange creature belonging to an alien place, but the similarity between him and the peasants. The actual monolithic structure, the social unity is, in fact, there. It resides in the heart of the peasants' existence. Their utter loyalty towards and belief in the Sultan and the Caliphate is both the source of envy and hatred that Ahmet Celal feels towards the villagers because, in the last instance, he was a soldier of the Ottoman army fighting against the 'infidels' and as an idealistic soldier he felt a certain loyalty toward an entity called the 'Ottoman Empire' which was once the most powerful empire of the world. This is valid for all the former soldier officers of the Ottoman army who founded the modern Turkish Republic. This loyalty made them the furious and idealistic fighters of the empire to save its last remnants. However the same loyalty also led them to establish the modern Turkish Republic which appears more as a necessity than a revolutionary-idealistic appeal toward the idea of "Republic". It is this paradoxical loyalty that unites Ahmet Celal and the peasants which is quite a disturbing situation for him because apparently nobody feels comfortable when facing his/her paradoxes in such a way. Moreover, it can also be claimed that this is one of the main paradoxes of the founding elite of the Republic, of which most of them were formerly military officers both in World War One and the Balkan War in 1912, fighting to save the "Empire".

*Yaban* is generally defined as one of the first literary narratives that problematizes the issue of peasantry in modern Turkey. Generally peasantry has been presented as one of the precious bases of Kemalist republican discourse, especially in the literary narratives appearing

by the 1950s, and continued to be one of the basic themes of the Turkish novel up to the 1970s. In these narratives, the peasantry is either romanticised or located as the victims of landowners which was also the part of the socialist discourse which began to be widespread by the 1960s.

However, the Kemalist republican themes and references have always been present in these narratives. According to Asım Karaömerlioğlu, ‘the cult of peasantry’ plays an important role in the Kemalist Republicans’ endeavours to provide a certain mobilisation for the intellectuals who began to lose their enthusiasm for the Republican Revolution in the early 1930s (Karaömerlioğlu, 1999, 69). In furtherance of this, in 1932, ‘The People’s Houses’ were founded ‘as places where intellectuals and ordinary people should meet and bridge the gap that had widened between them, and between the urban and rural population’. (Çeçen, 1990, 123 cited in Karaömerlioğlu, 1999, 70). However, Karaömerlioğlu points to the rise, by the mid-30s, of a certain abstention, for a couple of reasons, among the Kemalist Republican rulers in their attempts at transforming the rural structure and ‘enlightening’ the peasants. This abstention was not only motivated by some structural and technical difficulties, but was a deliberate choice. In describing the official journal of the People’s Houses, called *Ülkü*, Karaömerlioğlu emphasises that it was not an ideologically strict and theoretically monolithic journal and that this is because Kemalism as an ideology was not monolithic, nor had any intention of being so. However, the peasantist romanticism of some intellectuals began to disturb a regime that showed a deliberate abstention from becoming a monolithic ideology. The aims of the Kemalist Republicans were limited to ‘administrative purposes’, that is to sustain a certain control by keeping the peasantry as a constant unit of control.<sup>9</sup> What Kemalist republicans tried to avoid, in fact, was a genuine enlightenment of the peasants, which would lead to a massive migration to the cities and the possibility of an emancipatory uprising against the regime. The Kemalists did not want the peasantry to appear as a class or a particular political group.

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9 We should also mention the importance of the, "Village Institutes", which had an important role in the discussions of the ‘single-party regime’ in Turkey. The ‘Village Institutes’, which were an extension of the ‘peasantist ideology’ of the 1930s, were active – especially between 1940-46 – in most of the provinces of Turkey. Contrary to most of the literature written in the 1960s and 70s, which romanticises and mythifies the experience of the ‘Village Institutes’ they were formed by the Kemalists to ‘control’ the countryside (and raise agricultural productivity) rather than to transform the socio-political structure of it. However, the ‘village institutes’ began to conflict with the aims of the Kemalist Republican elite and threatened the traditional socio-political structure of the countryside, by increasing the social mobility of peasants and the rise of a collectivist mentality amongst the peasants. On the other hand, those institutions led the accusations of raising ‘socialist and communist oriented generations’ voiced by some of the groups within the Kemalist Republican elite. So, by the second half of the 1940s, their scope was reduced by the Kemalist Republicans and, after the Democratic Party came to power in 1950, ‘the village institutions’ were closed completely. See Karaömerlioğlu, (2001b).

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *Yaban* manifests the Kemalist approach to peasantry. It is something alien and even an *uncanny* entity in relation to the Kemalist conceptualization of Republic. It is something that is either to be transformed according to the Kemalist republican ideals or to be contained as it is. The Kemalist Republican elite feared the rise of an independent peasantist intellectual movement, with close ties to the peasant masses, separate from the will of the state and the Party (i.e. Republican People's Party). On the other hand, they also wanted to maintain a partly peasantist approach, as they also feared the horrible consequences of all-encompassing industrialisation. They wanted to maintain an image of the peasant as belonging only to the village as part of the idealization of a loyal and uncorrupted citizen.

Thus, the Kemalist Republican elite took an ambiguous and eclectic approach to most of the important issues of the time, in order not to cause any serious polarisation. Through this ambiguity and eclecticism they succeeded in maintaining the traditional fabric of the country, by preserving the traditional perceptions of political power. (Karaömerlioğlu, 1999, 84-85) This policy directly coincides with the mood or the logic that is presented in the novel *Yaban*, which keeps the double-edged alienation, contempt and dissatisfaction intact. On the side of the idealism inherent in the Kemalist Republicans, the very mood and logic characterised in *Yaban* functions by keeping the village and the peasant as an ongoing object of desire.

However, its actuality, its historical and particular presence, should be denied in order to sustain the fantasmatic conceptualisation of the peasant, as something 'to come' that should never actually be realised. In that sense, the Kemalist Republican logic of political legitimacy neither totally repressed a certain potential drive toward an 'enlightened despotism' that involves an ongoing tendency toward totalitarianism nor paved the way for its realisation. The Kemalist republican ultra-elite control and manipulate the jacobinist tendencies within the ruling elite by a deliberate or unintentional reflex of continuously keeping their 'object of desire', i.e. 'the people', 'the peasant'<sup>10</sup> away from the elite.

### 3.2. Ankara (1934)

After a frustrating disappointment depicted in *Yaban*, arising from the painful experience of confronting the very object of the idealist Revolutionary dream – 'the people' – Yakup

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10 Karaömerlioğlu points out that the Kemalist Republican conceptualisation of the people is influenced by the Rousseauist understanding of political democracy and *solidarism* which makes such concepts as 'the people', 'the nation' and 'the peasant' interchangeable. It contributes to a tendency for defining an ambiguous group of people that is the 'unit of governance and control' as abstractly as possible and as deprived of its concrete historical dynamics and practices. The aim is simply to construct a sense of unity, that can be sustained ironically only through ambiguity. See, Karaömerlioğlu, (2001a).

Kadri closes the scene in *Yaban* by affirming that ‘the people’ have to be emancipated from themselves. To achieve this, the people had to be created anew. Certainly, such a totalitarian appeal from Yakup Kadri drags him to a specific centre, from which all the necessary arrangements for the radical re-construction, even the creation of a nation and a people, can be accomplished. Towards the end of *Yaban*, he points toward such a centre, which he describes as ‘a new soul’, ‘a new beginning’, immune from attack. It would be a symbol of ultimate sublimation and the ‘name’ of it would create fear and defeat both in the hearts of the enemy and of those who do not believe in the national, revolutionary cause (Karaosmanoğlu, 1998, 185). This is definitely ‘Ankara’.

However, contrary to the messianic sublimation of it in the end of *Yaban*, we see disappointment and discontent with the rising Republican intelligentsia in *Ankara*, whose characters are quite cynical about the revolutionary cause and only pursue their own privileges. The novel is composed of three separate chapters. In the first chapter we see a family in Ankara in 1920, just moved from İstanbul, for the idealist purpose of helping found a new Republic with a new capital, as well as to help the War of Independence, which was directed from Ankara. Towards the end of the chapter, news is heard of enemy forces approaching Ankara. The husband decides to escape eastward but his wife tries to prevent him. Disgusted with her husband’s cowardice and lack of strength, his wife, Selma (who becomes the protagonist of the novel) loses all her faith in her husband and falls in love with a young lieutenant who firmly believes in the victory of the Turkish forces. In this first chapter, Ankara is represented as an ultimate purity and as the name of a new beginning where there is no trace of any tendency toward ‘personal interest and selfish pleasures’. (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 36). However, the lower classes and/or the local people of Anatolia are again represented as a ‘threat’ to the national cause (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 38, 51-52). The new inhabitants of *Ankara* are defined once again as *yaban* (alien) by the local people of Ankara because they are seriously disturbed by the lifestyles of the İstanbul-oriented people who have an utter disregard for the reasons why they are in Ankara. Yet, paradoxically, Yakup Kadri continues the romantic and mythical representation of the peasant figures around Ankara at various points in the novel (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 87).

The second chapter picks up in 1926, three years after the first one ends. The Turks have won the war, Kemal Atatürk has taken power and Ankara is the official capital, following the abolition of the Sultanate and the Caliphate. Now we see *Selma* as the wife of the young lieutenant. However, the young lieutenant has lost all his enthusiasm towards the ‘national goal’ and has become (in Yakup Kadri’s words) a clownish imitation of an elegant and modern

Western saloon gentleman, while losing his idealistic stance towards the Kemalist Republican Revolution. In this chapter, we see the corruption of all the former high-ranking soldiers and politicians (including some of the religious leaders), as they are involved mostly in taking back-handers from shady business contracts and earning enormous sums from speculative real estate deals. Here we see the flourishing of a highly modern and rich neighbourhood on the outskirts of Ankara, while the old city is still in misery. Here Yakup Kadri emphasises one of the main paradoxes of the Republican revolution, from which he could not save himself either: ‘mimicking the enemy’ after defeating it. However the internal distress emanating from this situation amongst the Kemalist republican elite is represented by the internal conflicts of the female protagonist *Selma*. Although she gets a strange pleasure from the tea parties, evening balls, and the life-style redolent of West European ‘high society’, she feels a constant disturbance and a sense of guilt, which can be seen in her feelings for her husband. Once the lieutenant was the symbol of national heroism and power to her, now he has become a clownish dandy (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 146-148). In Yakup Kadri’s representation, the lieutenant, Hakkı, becomes an awkward embodiment of the ‘enemy’ and ‘Ankara’ is ‘colonised’ by those awkward and degenerate people.

In this chapter we see a young, romantic and idealist writer figure, Neşet Sabit (such a figure is present in almost all the novels of Yakup Kadri), who befriends Selma. However, he always stands at a distance from the other friends of Selma, whom he openly dislikes; while Selma becomes an object of desire, for him as if she is something/someone to be emancipated from a meaningless life. He constantly complains about Selma’s and her friend’s corrupted and extremely luxurious life style by reminding her of the ideals of the Kemalist Revolution and the misery of the country at that time. By losing the ideal of Revolution and being constantly involved in tea parties and evening balls Selma feels that her life lacks purpose. She begins to be swayed by the criticisms of Neşet Sabit and feels an accompanying disappointment in her new husband; thinking that he has lost all his strength since the end of the war. In this chapter Yakup Kadri’s critical representation of the corrupted lives of the Kemalist Republican elite directly resembles his representation of the life of the upper class of İstanbul in *Mansion for Rent* and *Sodom and Gomorrah*. The same resemblance can be found in *Nur Baba (Father Nur)*, where he intends to demonstrate the corruption of the Islamic sects at that time.

The third chapter describes an imaginary future time, ten years after the second chapter ends. If we consider the date that the novel was written, this episode is related to a near future that is about five years ahead of the time of writing. This chapter is the one and only ‘positive

fantasy' (in fact the only 'utopia' within his whole 'dystopian' narrative) throughout Yakup Kadri's narrative where the 'true and ideal' Republican revolution is finally realised under the ultimate leadership of the 'national chief' Kemal Atatürk. Here we see Selma as the wife of the young, romantic writer, Neşet Sabit. In the second chapter, Neşet Sabit is depicted as a poor and unknown intellectual writer. However, in the last chapter he has become one of the most prominent propagandist-writers of the ideal Kemalist Republic. The last chapter opens with a scene in a stadium where the 'National Chief' is giving a speech while Selma is listening in tears and her enthusiasm brings her to the point of passing out. In that scene Yakup Kadri describes the 'leader' in terms resembling the statues of ancient Greek gods. He also describes a socio-political atmosphere where each and every citizen of the nation is motivated by a great enthusiasm for creating a new nation, so everyone is very busy with their work as a part of a great 'becoming'. Here we once again see a reference to the 'Old Testament' as Yakup Kadri describes the situation as 'the second creation' in the Old Testament (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 178).

In this chapter, Selma is represented as if she is a repentant nun, devoting her existence to the creation of the new nation, to the new 'becoming' but she is also a faithful and loving wife to her new husband Neşet Sabit. Although not very crowded, Ankara is turning out to be a modern metropolis with large avenues and glorious buildings. Its industry is beginning to rival the output of Europe. At this point Yakup Kadri also makes a distinction between İstanbul and Ankara. While İstanbul remains as a city of mere pleasure, cosmopolitanism and the centre of Western music and culture, Ankara is rising as a centre of a new art of culture, which harmonises Turkish folk culture with the 'universalistic' form of art and culture. Additionally, Ankara is the ultimate representation of 'work', 'reason' and the 'revolutionary will' of the new Republic.

There is a perfect harmony in all aspects of life. The country begins to industrialise and agricultural goods are produced to serve this process. Additionally, there are no distinctions along the lines of 'worker', 'boss', 'blue collar' or 'white collar' Everyone has the ultimate national awareness that they are the proud servants of their state. The poorer neighbourhoods of the city become clean, tidy and well-organised wards. The gap between the cities and villages reduces to a greater degree by a perfect system of transformation and by a systematic deployment of education and health services in the villages, as well as through the establishment of co-operatives.

Here, the 'new men' of the revolution are created; who have control over their weaknesses, such as egoist passions and uncontrollable desires. They are able to work for great ideals;



everything depends on the power of man's will and reason, he creates his own fate (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 194). However, this will and reason of Yakup Kadri's 'new men' depends completely on the mythical figure of the 'leader', 'the national chief' who is described as if he has something that mortal people lack and transcends the bonds of time and space (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 200).

Toward the end of the novel Yakup Kadri describes a girl who is supposed to be a perfect exemplification of the modern republican new generation. She is an actress in Neşet Sabit's play in the State Theatre and also an athlete – representing the dynamism of the republic's new generation. The description of the girl can also be interpreted as the 'New Woman' of the republic, who is completely desexualised, so that, with her athletic physique and short hair, one cannot even tell whether she is girl or a boy from a certain distance. Yakup Kadri describes her by comparing her with the hermaphroditic figures in the ancient Greek frescoes (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 215). Also, in her daily life she never uses any make-up. In the words of Neşet Sabit, Yakup Kadri praises her as a perfect example of the Republican, new generation, as she remembers nothing about the humble times of the Ottoman Empire. For her, names such as 'Sultan' or 'Caliphate' are figures from some fairy tales that belong to a totally alien time and place (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 223).

In this last Chapter, Anatolia has finally ceased to be an object of ignorance and disgust. Neşet Sabit and Selma like to tour the Anatolian villages and are pleased to see the civilised villagers who are enjoying the advantages of developed agricultural techniques in a countryside no different from that of France (Karaosmanoğlu, 1983, 230).

The novel ends in 1943, with the ceremonies of the twentieth anniversary of the Republican revolution. Thousands of people march along the large streets of the capital toward *Çankaya* – where the great leader resides – with chants and slogans praising the Republic and the nation. Neşet Sabit takes great pleasure from being a small part within the large crowd. In front of the leader's palace the crowd stops and waits for the appearance of the leader at the palace balcony. Finally he appears and hails the crowd. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stands there with his closest company, İsmet İnönü, who Neşet Sabit describes in poetic fashion. While returning from the ceremony Neşet Sabit and his wife Selma feel tired and old and they watch, with pride, honour and great spiritual satisfaction, the cheering and singing groups of young people.

Most literary critics accept that the last episode of *Ankara* in particular is a manifestation of Yakup Kadri's *Kadroist* outlook (Naci, 1980). In fact, the internal conflicts in the narrative



also reflect the internal conflicts and utopian stance of the *Kadro* movement. However, in 1964, in the foreword of the third edition of the novel, Yakup Kadri confesses that while writing the novel he thought that the country he described in the third episode could be realised in twenty years. However, he says that another twenty years has passed but Ankara is still the Ankara he described in the second episode, with the corruption and disregard of the principles and proposals of the republican revolution. Thus, in *Panorama* (which he wrote in the 1950s) he would describe his discontent with the Republican revolution and, even more completely, with the political regime of the time, in an ultimately pessimistic sense.

At this point, it is better to point out the two important nodal points in Yakup Kadri's narrative, which contribute to the political logic and practice of the modern Republic, especially in terms of the strict relation of the 'political imagination/projection' and 'subjectivity'. One nodal point is the 'peasant' (especially in his novel *Yaban*); the political signifier whose controversial points were pointed out above. The second is certainly 'the woman', which permeates his whole narrative as the main symptom of the entire Turkish socio-political modernisation process. As we see in all of his novels 'the woman' is associated closely with all kinds of otherness that Yakup Kadri draws together in order to demarcate a Republican and national spirit and uniqueness, which has no relation to the historical social and political practice of the Turkish people.

In fact the appearance of 'woman' in Yakup Kadri's narrative can be defined as the 'negation of the desire' that always contaminates a supposedly revolutionary and truly nationalist will. This 'desire' is the concealed and even disavowed desire toward the West (*Mansion for Rent, Sodom and Gomorrah, Ankara*) and toward the Ottoman Sultanate (*Nur Baba*), which overlap; as they are both perceived as the negated source of the desire for an imaginary absolute and omnipotent power.

Thus the metaphor of woman lifts the barrier between the supposedly different socio-political conceptualisations, i.e. the West and the Sultan (the Ottoman Past). In that sense, 'the woman' as an object of desire becomes the object of negation. It appears as a sign of both 'excessive/formal westernisation' as the cause of social corruption, and a sign of 'Oriental Despotism', which contributes to the orientalist imagination of an all-powerful, lustful Dark Sultan possessing 'all' – including the 'sexual joy' that the woman represents. In both case 'woman's femininity/sexuality' is presented as something related to the 'other's' realm, which is penetrated with pure and perverse pleasure, egoism and indecency, that is of 'the West' and 'the - supposed - Orient: the Ottoman Sultanate.

On the other hand, as the utopian representation of a future Ankara in the last episode shows; the ‘perfect Republican woman-subject’ is totally desexualised and her reason for existence revolves around the sublime socio-political cause of creating a ‘new’ nation. The sexuality of the woman is totally sacrificed to the cause of the Republican nation. The interesting point is that, in terms of representing sexuality, Yakup Kadri is in accord with some novelists of the time who are quite critical about the mode of Westernisation which the Kemalist republicanism entails, and propose a certain socio-political mysticism that overcomes the priority of ‘body’ and ‘bodily pleasures’.<sup>11</sup> In fact, what resides in the ambiguity of sexual identification or in the total desexualisation of woman is the disavowal of the ‘desire content’ that is parallel with the disavowed desire for an *absolute and omnipotent political power*, which he relates to ‘the West’ and to the ‘Ottoman Past’. However he betrays himself through his own literary representation. In ‘*Mansion for Rent*’ what led the idealist, romantic writer to join the First World War is in fact the (sexual) desire he felt for the excessively westernised, ‘corrupted’ and seductive female protagonist who constantly ignored him. In *Sodom and Gomorrah* the enthusiasm that the male protagonist (again an idealist and romantic writer) felt toward the Independence Movement in Anatolia overlaps with the frustration he felt because of his Western-oriented and supremely feminine fiancée’s disregard for him. Also, in the novel *Ankara*, we should question why the idealist and enthusiastic Republican play-writer Neşet Sabit desires Selma when, in the second episode, she becomes the centre of attraction amongst the Western-oriented, ‘corrupted’ new elite of Ankara.

At this point we can define the last episode of the novel *Ankara* as the narrative/fantasy of pure disavowal, the negation and repression of the ‘true source of political motivation’ that gives itself away in the paradoxical literary representation of Yakup Kadri. In fact it is the ultimate indication of the concealed ‘desire content’ inherent in the Kemalist Republican imaginary, which demarcates the very *cynicism* toward the positive and visible socio-political features that it praises such as the separation of powers, popular will etc.

So far, it is with this *cynicism* that the modern Republic constructs its socio-political legitimacy. It is only through this cynical stance that the Kemalist Republic sustains a certain

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11 The most important example of those writers who are critical about the Kemalist Republican Revolution is Peyami Safa, who claims that Westernisation, which reached its climax during the Revolution, seriously dislocated the moral fabric of Turkish society, by encouraging Turkish woman towards indecency in the name of modernisation. His whole literary narrative depends on the binary opposition between the indecent, abominable, diabolical women who reject their traditional roles and become unhappy and frustrated in the end, and the compassionate, self-sacrificing mothers and wives who are the basis of the nation. In his last novels he tended toward spiritualism and metaphysics which depends on the idea of overcoming the ‘material body’. See Berktaş (2002).

socio-political stability and a certain attachment to modern political practice, which fosters an ongoing sense of dissatisfaction and incompleteness.

#### 4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that Turkish Republican transformation was a multi-layered process which cannot be explained by referring to a couple of novels. Not even the whole literary works of that era would be able to reflect the multi-layered and complicated aspects of the Turkish Republican transformation. However, one should note that the notion of “Republic” that both the Anatolian people and the Kemalist founders experienced and perceived was quite different from the one it was experienced and perceived in western Europe. As mentioned before, Yakup Kadri’s particular literary representation can be accepted as one of the good examples of the paradoxical perception of the notion of Republic that the Kemalist founding elite had especially in the first couple of decades of the modern Republic. It may be difficult to relate the paradoxes that is apparent in his narrative with the socio-political practice. However the paradoxes his narrative contains may well constitute a basis to think about why the Kemalist founders of the Republic abstained from formulating a well-structured doctrine that could outline the unique features of Kemalist republicanism that made it distinct from its European practices. Although there was a well-defined and clear institutional and legal structure, it is quite difficult to claim that this institutional and legal structure has been consistent with political understandings, beliefs and practices. There has always been a disregard and cynical approach toward legal and institutional procedures, not only on the side of politicians or state elites but also on the side of people.

In dealing with such a problem, literature may seem a marginal field. However, in some particular cases, literature may provide quite important material to think about, conceive and evaluate some complicated socio-political issues that are not visible at the first glance.

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