

Peasantry of Turkey

Sinan Çaya^{[a].*}

^[a]Ph.D., Associate Professor, Istanbul University, Institute of Marine Administration and Sciences, Vefa-Istanbul, Turkey.

*Corresponding author.

Received 29 June 2015; accepted 16 August 2015

Published online 26 October 2015

Abstract

Turkey was considered a traditional agrarian state until recent times on one hand. But on the other hand, the country with her young population and under new influences is undergoing fast transformations in the direction of urbanization. The roots embedded in traditions; in any case; continue to operate, sometimes openly and sometimes implicitly and come to surface whenever the occasion presents itself. The verbal peasant culture is rich. The Peasant origins of the country must be well understood if Turkey is to be understood properly.

Key words: Turkey; Village; Peasantry; Traditional

Çaya, S. (2015). Peasantry of Turkey. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(10), 28-38. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/7670> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7670>

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that Turks are a young nation and therefore prone to very fast social changes. Villages had been diminishing in population ever since decades by literally pouring their inhabitants into urban centers. This continuing process is causing many problems difficult to cope within the very town centers.

This tremendous phenomenon of change by no means, however, reduces the importance of analyzing and understanding the villages and related social dynamics. On the contrary, the undergoing changes render it more necessary to give attention to rural sociology studies.

Quantity—peasants somehow still represent the majority in Turkey—left alone, the quality, the essence of the Turkish people conceal almost all secrets and keys to numerous solutions in provincial areas in general and in villages in specifics. Why is this so?

Because the impact of the countryside upon the urban world is vigorous and manifold. Firstly, the economic effects can never be negated. All raw materials go everywhere from the heart of the countryside: Food is produced on the rural section and delivered to the towns and cities. As Sociology Professor *M.C.Ecevit* puts it, the *lasagnes* devoured at the most luxurious restaurants of the capital are prepared from wheat flours of the sown fields. Many commodities like the leather of the shoes worn by the city-dwellers originate from the peasant's livestock. Carpets covering house floors and hanging on house walls find their way there from the weaving looms of village females. Ornamental furniture decorating and facilitating life in apartment buildings is merely the end results of forestry.

All this account presents us only the material aspect of the game. Now, what about the social dimension? The nation's collective conscience is uprooted in the verbal popular culture "molded" throughout centuries on the steps of Anatolia. Even the most elegant looking man or woman stepping into the elevator in a skyscraper in *Istanbul* preserves incredibly many traits of his/her soil-based origins.

This is what I actually witnessed some years ago in the most urbanized boulevard in Istanbul. The boulevard was all dig up on one side (for laying down tram tracks). The other side was scorching under the July sun. While I was in my own dilemma considering which side I should stick to as I was walking by, two well-dressed youngish ladies looking like bank employees or something were just having an argument before me over the same problem. Finally one said that it was a forty mules or forty

cleavers issue¹ and both began laughing. I immediately got responsive and the words were imbedded in my mind (which has some anthropological propensity).

Wasn't that phrase from long forgotten fairy tales (*Volkmärchen*)? And how could anyone associate those same fairy tales with those purely urban and fairly young ladies? Was this the way to express an either-or-situation in this environment? (Ironically the environment just then looked more like a dusty village street except for the fancy shop window displays).

Using Merton's key word in those two case stories the *latent* peasant in the Turkish soul is at play. In the case of the manifest *peasant* in the Turkish soul, he is everywhere and obvious. Many city-dwellers see only the rude dimension of it but the more human dimension of the villager is also there waiting for recognition. The city-dweller is individualistic and this trait lines closely with egoism whereas the peasant is much more altruistic. The villager is in possession of many more good attributes like a contented state of mind and a practical mentality, which the city-dweller should try to emulate and regain. Even in slums usually only the younger generations, having acquired urban values, try to compete with their city peers though they lack the necessary means. This leads them to severe identity crisis. In the search for some peace of mind and respite; the relatively stable, settled psychological profile of the more aged new-comers gain importance; buffering and guiding the youth energy at least to some extent. The elderly ones, more peasant-like and thus less greedy, are better off even in slum suburbs.

1. WHAT DEFINES A TURKISH VILLAGE?

Referring to the idea of isolation, Vergin (1973, p.87) says that evidently nothing outside his village seems to concern the Turkish peasant. Two years² of compulsory military service and certain tax-payments are the two only contact points where the nation immediately affects his sort. His world is limited to two dimensions. One is the land on which he is born, works and dies. The other is a vague and imprecise image in which exterior and foreign things sort of merge together and the rest of Turkey "freezes".

¹ Old tales usually end up with the good hearted damsel or *Keloğlan* (bald boy, in fact he is bold and bald / courageous) winning and the jealous bad rival loosing. The penalty for the criminal is severe but she / he can at least be given a choice by the pasha or sultan: 40 mules or 40 butcher hatchets. The first mode of execution involves being tied to the tails of the mules and getting drifted away. The other mode of execution involves being chopped up by those 40 cutters simultaneously. In Turkish *katır* and *satır* rhyme and this contributes tremendously to the climax at the end of the tale. Turks love poetry and value poets. This is naturally compatible with their exclusively verbal nomadic original culture. S.Ç.

² In the year of 1973 when Vergin wrote those lines the service was two years. Presently has been incrementally shortened. Now it takes only fifteen months. S.Ç.

Such definitions are still valid for purposes of study but a village still preserving its purely classical and typical image is perhaps hard to find under today's changing conditions. The actual situation of Turkey is probably closely described as a *société dual* in face of its rapid transformation. The Turkish village itself is changing and getting jointed to urban connections more and more in many aspects of life whether it be economic, social, cultural or psychological.

A village is the smallest place where people live within the country. There the population is less than two thousand. In our country, it came to become customary to specify the number of houses instead of the number of people when it comes to talk about the population of villages. Given in that respect, the biggest village consists of about four hundred houses (Âfetinan, 1969, p.283).

Item number one of the Law of Village inaugurated in 1924 considers settlements with a population less than two thousand at a village. More crowded settlements up to twenty thousand are specified as small towns. If a municipality administration is present than the settlement is legally taken as a small town even if its population is less than two thousand (Tütengil, 1983, p.27).

A classification given by İbrahim Yasa is classifying villages as people's village, *agha* village and mixed village. In the first type big income differences are not encountered among the habitants. West Anatolian and Thracian villages are of this type. In the second typology, one person or family exclusively dominates and in a sense owns the village. In the third type of village the dominant family has another rival family and the rest of the peasants own some or no property (Tütengil, 1983, pp.101-102).

As the head and important person in the village, the headman (*préposé/Dorfvorsteher*) is in possession of the right to speak and issue orders. While in charge of the village affairs, he who attacks or opposes the *préposé* is liable to receive the same penalty as in the case of harassment of a government official. He who violates the herds and property of a village is penalized as in the case of abusing state property. The administration of the villages is regulated through the Law of Villages passed in the era of the republic. While the public and private affairs and the municipal works of towns and cities are handled separately, all duties of a village are considered as one and same administrative topic and function accordingly (Ibid).

As Pierce (1964, p.84) for the case of a central Anatolian village,

Under the Republic it is required by law that the headman be an elective office. From 1923 until the mid-fifties this had little effect, as the villagers simply voted the oldest man back into office at each election. However, in the last election held under Menderes [prime minister between 1950-1960] governments the old headman was voted out of office [only] in favor of the next oldest man in the village. It seems likely that at the very large crop of young people go through the public schools, learn more about democratic processes, and mature to become voters, still

younger men will be elected to this office until finally it will become truly elective.

Villagers wear cheap but strong clothing. Former home-made moccasins are replaced by plastic shoes and more and more of leather shoes. From where comes the euphemistic title “moccasin-wearing staff officer”, since males like to talk politics in coffee shops. In winter the ground being muddy up to ankles — poor infrastructure—plastic boots³ are preferred. While she was a village teacher, my mother used to refer to a boy as the leather-shoed student. Later he killed a rattler sneaking into the classroom and earned the heroic title “snake-killer in our house.

By the way; one constant danger in rural regions is getting bitten by snakes. The average peasant knows a great deal about snakes. Recently in a peripheral coffee house in the city of *Edirne*, I happened to overhear a hot discussion about snakes. The group leader, a middle aged talkative man equivalent to the American “cracker-barrel-philosopher type, was talking about his former adventures with snakes to two obviously fascinated acquaintances, all three originating from villages.

As inferred from the talk, the group leader, *Özcan*, was a shepherd in a village until his military service. Once a snake rolled around his leg and his sister quickly fetched a spade from the tractor. *Özcan* hit the snake with the spade blade at the cost of cutting his plastic boot and injuring his shin bone. Much other information about snakes leaked through the conversation.

Özcan said that an open machine oil can lure snakes. They love the taste of lubricating grease like leeches sucking blood. He said a snake would come from far-flung distances for that delicatessen. His friend from a village of *Edirne* added that milk also attracts snakes. He said certain kinds of snakes suck milk from the udders of cows, usually sparing the cow and getting away after feeding themselves. *Özcan* confirmed: “Yes, grease or milk is what snakes like besides frogs and rats”.

He affirmed that a snake once crept past his thighs while sleeping in a barn. “It gives you a prickly feeling but if you don’t disturb the God-damned creature—*Özcan*’s tongue was prone to swear often like many villager—he wouldn’t bite you. You should just stand still. They bite when they get afraid. After all, they

³ Some village males have large feet. Going barefoot in summer, the feet are not constricted to grow. *Yashar Kemal* in one of his novels depicts an auxiliary character whose feet were so big that in the army service he wore open slippers. Turkish people, compared to Americans, have smaller feet on average. (An athletic girl I knew with feet sized 44 had her shoes exported from America). When I was a boarding student our American housemaster, Mr. Kuniholm, once posted a note on the bulletin board requesting the student with the biggest feet to see him for a present. The brand new sport shoes were too big even for that student! The biggest shoe size was 45 on the market until recent times. Once a shoe seller in *Lüleburgaz* proudly said that Oil-Wrestler *Rizeli Şaban* bought a pair of size 45-shoes at his shop, the only shop where this size was available in town. S.Ç.

carry lives in them as we do” he explained. He named a few kinds of snakes along the course of the conversation. He said some would jump quite a distance, “maybe as long as the distance from that fucking motorbike up to our table here!”

Running water is usually absent and girls and women carry water from the common fountain. Today few villages lack electricity but formerly that was a problem too. Women usually wear colorful dresses and headscarf. Some carry the *charshaf*. Men wear the traditional waistcoat (The name “headman lighter” was also coined for certain press-ignite benzene lighters which never broke down and were in circulation until twenty years).

A *casquette* (peaked cap) on the head was like a trademark until recent times. While this hat identified with the village male has its roots in early republican days when the oppression by the gendarmes was a constant fear to reckon with. They adapted the hat and were safe from a threat in that sense as a practical solution. As I remember from *Keyder*’s writings, those were the times when villagers could not walk up the main avenues in Ankara in their typical clothes. A professor at a certain age once said in his graduate class the following: “During my childhood, the gendarmes used to tear off the baggy pants off the villagers’ legs!”. (He did not add “well done!” but the manner in which he said it left no doubt whatsoever as to his *Jacobin*-attitude in that issue). Today the younger villagers had done away with that hat and go around bareheaded as I witnessed in *Çankırı* villages in 1990’s.

Poet *Nâzım Hikmet* pays his own tribute to the peasant-cap in exile when he says “neither my *casquette* made there remain on my head nor the shoes which trod your streets, my country!”.

The villager’s nape aged very early and got wrinkled all over due to exposure to sun rays on the fields. The callus of the hands goes without saying. So, one can read the peasant origin at a single glance.

Education is a constant problem.

Within the agrarian structure children help their families in production. Thus their school attendance is considered a loss from the point of view of parents. Or, parents are reluctant to send them to school with the fear that they will be alienated from the traditional family form through new ideas and knowledge. A female’s place in her home is a fairly common understanding whereas school is an institution not in support of this. One can speak of the fright that educating females might slacken the filial ties and work to the detriment of the village hierarchy. (Tezcan, 1981, p.200)

The coffeehouse is the center of the village. Interestingly, as a German academic travel group from Berlin (*Türkei 1980, Erfahrungen und Berichte Berliner Lehrerstudenten: Eine Exkursion von Studenten und Dozenten nach Westanatolien*, p. 62) observes it correctly it would have been more realistic⁴ to call such places ‘teahouses’ rather than ‘coffeehouses’. Especially in year 1980 when they undertook the research travel, foreign funds being scarce, it was not possible for Turkey to

import coffee. Anyway, the report asserts that even the smallest Anatolian village has at least one coffeehouse. It is found in the very center and serves as the mid point of social life. It pertains to males only. There men talk over all daily happenings, politics, and various problems. The television is on the whole day long. The headman, the official Islamic clergyman and the security official⁵ come in whenever they have an announcement to give. Important decisions are taken. It appears possible that in case more than one coffeehouses are present, political views play a role in the choice.

Indeed it is true. Especially during 1950's when political partisanship between rivaling Democrat and People's Republican parties was paramount, coffeehouses were divided in that basis. Other criteria may also come into play. In Bosphorous University the high society canteen of *Kâzım* was differing from the more proletarian looking other canteen (of *Veli*) in mid 1970's. Similarly, here, too, social standing can be the differing criterion among men. Even the small village is not uniform in this sense. The population is conscious of social status. Moreover, mere income is not the only "ingredient" in determining differences. Other "additives" pertaining to prestige are also there to reckon with. One is education. Another, the perceived intelligence and skillfulness level or credibility. A man exempt from the military service due to bad health can never enjoy a high prestige even if he is rich.

Beside the coffeehouse, the central locations and the streets are also the domain of males. Females are seen

⁴ Sometimes an outsider catches certain details and at first hidden meanings more successfully than an insider. I, personally, never associated the district *Sirkeci* in Istanbul with vinegar until I read it in a foreign book. The district was in fact had been a center of vinegar commerce formerly. Similarly a book on Turkey in German had a subtitle "*gelin— die Kommende*", associating the word bride with the verb "*gelmek*" (to come). In an Education conference which I participated in a famous private school Istanbul, a certain participant from the private sector dealing with educational textbooks carried out an experiment right there, taking advantage of his being the chairman of a session. He directed a question to the whole audience and asked the difference between a one-minaret mosque and a more-than-one-minaret mosque. The well-educated distinguished audience, history teachers included, kept silent. Not a single person came up with the answer. The chairman said that only the Ottoman dynasty had the privilege to erect more than one minaret. Otherwise, even the Grandvizier had to be content with a single minaret. He added that he had learned this knowledge from a foreign book on Ottoman history! S.Ç.

⁵ The German text very properly uses the term "*sheriff*" in quotes or the term "*Dofpolizist*" meaning village police. Village security officials have always been on scene and in all regions of Turkey. They wear thick clothed brown uniforms and uniform-hats and badges on their chests. This is only a semi-official appearance not based on written directions. Rather it became customary along the course of years. They are not on any official payroll but get donations from the village. (Until a symbolic salary issued in relatively recent times, the headman himself had no government salary, either). Nowadays, based on news on media, some cunning village security officials are beginning to sue their villages' legal persons to obtain retirement pensions from the social security fund. S.Ç.

rarely. As a rule of thumb, they depend upon their children's courier service to learn about news and happenings (*Türkei 1980, Erfahrungen und Berichte Berliner Lehrerstudenten: Eine Exkursion von Studenten und Dozenten nach Westanatolien*, p.53).

2. A STRONG TRADITIONAL TON

In sociological terms of Tönnies, a village is a community (*Gemeinschaft*) as opposed to a society (*Gesellschaft*). It is a place where few of any things are in compliance with the written law in every day life aspects. Getting a punctual birth certificate is a problem because the father has to go all the way to the district for this purpose. Sometimes the baby is reported only when he/she attains the age of two or three. Sometimes the baby just takes on the former dead sibling's official identity. As a matter of fact infant mortality⁶ rate is high compared to urban centers and this practice saves a new confrontation with authorities, an unpleasant as well as and monetary expense requiring task.

In primary schools, even two-three decades ago, educational textbooks and magazines used to describe a family as "consisting of father, mother and children". Now, in village societies those nuclear families are difficult to find even today. Instead, we encounter larger families and even polygyny. Many males have common law wives and lack marriage license. Polygamy is getting rare but in some regions it is still a valid practice. (The clergy may have blessed the wedding, which is the case in almost all non-official unions).

Again in primary schools educational literature, a breakfast used to be described as consisting of "cheese, jam or honey, butter and tea" (if not grapefruit juice and caviar). Of course, as time passes, urbanization trends and new developments make those *clichés* more and more valid. But, especially in former times, those were only didactical aspirations/images and would-be-concepts rather than the commonplace reality:

The step-brother of my maternal grandfather had been a prison-guard a city not far from Istanbul. Once he came to visit my grandfather in Thrace. At the time my mother was a ten-year-old girl (The year was 1942). My mother—as she would narrate it to me in my childhood years—was quite astonished in the morning to see this "guard-uncle" seated at the table (!) in expectation of cheese and jam (!) for the breakfast. My mother's own family ate all the meals on a cloth spread on the floor, in accordance

⁶ As Delaney (1991, p.67) notes (for an Ankara village she studied in 1980's) the swaddle is then used as a substitute for the usual shroud in burial. In Islam a dead child is considered a bird of paradise, who will intercede for the good of the parents in the afterworld. Delaney notes "the nonchalance with which parents speak of the death of a baby". Indeed, I remember the half-bitter smile on my grandmother's face when she mentioned my would-have-been uncles and aunts. She claimed she raised the later babies thanks to amulets. S.Ç.

with the traditional provincial Turkish way at the time; and their staple morning food itself was soup, not cheese and jam (Çaya, 1992, p.ix).

[In Turkey] the most desirable actions strengthen the solidarity of the group; consultation and cooperative effort rather than individual initiative are the accepted norms of behavior. The group is variously defined according to the circumstances. Primary emphasis is placed upon the family and kin. It is only with some difficulty that the tradition-oriented villager trusts and cooperates with individuals and groups outside the village context, including the national government. In relationships involving non-kinsmen, a person acts much the same as he does toward different kinds of kinsmen; he respects his elders, advises and reprimands his juniors. (Roberts et al., 1970, pp.168-169)

The daughter-in-law enters the father-in-law's household, where a lot of manual work awaits her! Pierce (1964, p.43) narrates the following through the eyes of a 10-year-old boy (to add flavor and to facilitate the understanding of the matters to the western reader): "[Mahmud's elder brother got married]. The new bride in Mahmud's home was of some interest to him, for she was always on the run. When there was work in the kitchen to be done, he heard his mother's voice snapping out the word *gelin* (bride) almost constantly, always followed by a command to do this or that about the house...Thus she ran from morning till night, trying to satisfy her new family and prove that she was a good housewife. This situation would remain unchanged until Mahmud married and brought a new bride into the house".

Polygamy is forbidden since the grounding of the republic. It is an exceptional practice now and mostly pertains to far-flung eastern regions or else it occurs out of necessity like when the wife is sick or when she can not give birth or when a man's brother dies and the dead man's family needs to be incorporated into his household. Polygamy is also practiced out of prestige considerations. A rich and powerful man displays that he can afford it and that his traditional right is more important than the forbid imposed by the state (Kündig-Steiner, 1974, p.99).

After building the Republic, a law was accepted in 1934 to use family names for the first time in history. Formerly nicknames were commonly employed to differentiate individuals with same names. Some of those nicknames were of ethnical nature like *Albanian, Pomak, Bosnian, Emigrant*. The home-cities were sometimes even part of the official titles throughout the Ottoman History like *Grandvizier Damat İbrahim Paşa from Nevşehir, Ali Paşa from Çorlu, Muhammed Ali Paşa from Kavala and Officer Hakkı Tophane* (commander of Battleship *Nusret* in Gallipoli naval wars).

Some other nicknames, could be very degrading adjectives or could simply refer to some physical deformities. Example is: *Lame, blind or one-eyed, side sighted, cross-eyed, bald, miser/stingy, crazy, short, one-balled*. Many women had nicknames too: *Hazelnut, beautiful, blue-eyed etc*. Sometimes an onomatopoeia, something like *plop plop*, refers to inarticulate speech or plumpness etc..

Kanlı (Bloody) *Şevket* was a construction worker in a Thracian town with a murder history behind him. *Batan* (sinking) *Ârif* was a notorious drinker. *Taşaklı* (with testicles) had been the keeper of a good coffee house many decades ago. As I have been told by my mother, my grandfather used to go to *Taşaklı's* coffee house in his younger days. The owner died and the place got closed before I was born. My grandfather in my childhood was visiting *Bilâl Oğlan's* coffee house as he baptized him furtively in accordance with a Macedonian folk song: "The window blast open, son *Bilal*, and the revolver roared!" ("*Pencere açıldı Bilâl Oğlan, piştov patladı.*" *Bilâl* was a fierce Macedonian with a bushy moustache and with his "archaic" revolver he had registered a few "heroic" incidents. Ironically *Bilâl* had been a gendarmerie corporal and commanded a station for a matter of weeks. He was younger than my grandfather, who had attained the conscription age back in Macedonia. Hating the idea of service in the Greek Army, my grandfather had chosen to post an enormous bail and had received exemption from the service.

The tradition still lingers in villages and even other small communities. Most people are referred to by nicknames instead of official last names.

3. CONVENTION VERSUS WRITTEN-LAW

Years ago while I was traveling on a train the ticket controller asked for a wedding certificate from an old, bearded, wrinkled face peasant, who was sitting next to his wife covered in black veils. The old man must have bought a family tariff ticket. He could not produce the document. (One can not even carry it around even if it exists). I immediately hated the over zealous snob, the arrogant *ciitadin*.

In a course I once attended, a classmate from a village in *Kayseri* narrated a case story. A woman from the village, an ex-migrant worker who had been in Germany was a widow. She got the alimony salary of her dead German husband. Upon return she got married to a male in the village unofficially. The head of the village took all the trouble to report her to Germany to get her salary cut off. The informal sanction, he just faced. Even the classroom got furious over that village head. Besides, the money came from a different government. So what of it?

Things put down in written form may assert what is widely different from the actual practices even in small towns, let alone villages. In the Turkish Law, it is stipulated that any contract where deceit is involved, is legally null and void. This statement comprises wedding acts also. Now, in reality, in provincial Turkey many would-be grooms lie about their professional, social and financial situations to the would-be brides; just to win those girls!

A plain officeholder/*fonctionnaire* may pose himself as director of the department or a health-official may pose

himself as a doctor and so on. Years ago, in the a county of a mid-western province, a foreman introduced himself as a technician [a technician had higher status than a foreman in the pulp and paper plant where he worked] to the girl's family. The actual technician and his superior, only collaborated with the foreman at the visit to the girl's family. He seconded his man and said "he is a technician and I work under him".

On rare occasions a woman may resort to deception to win a man. My travel-comrade from a recent Aegean return trip by bus, *Ahmet* the Roll Bread Maker, is very anxious to remarry after the death of his wife. He said a divorced woman from another village was arranged by acquaintances for this matter. The woman proclaimed only one daughter, which was quite acceptable to him. But then it turned out she concealed her two sons. "This would not have worked" he explained to me, putting into words possible conflicts with the boys. He may be unable to mention Oedipus complexes and resulting complications by name in a Freudian approach; but he is fully aware of what they represent. He is a wise man. He said that he does not visit his married daughter so willingly, feeling himself a burden for the son-in-law though he is a polite young man respecting him. But he intends to visit his son's bachelor house readily and frequently, that being different.

Such deception practices also illustrate the pride of the people in question. A rich or high status-person may not need to be boaster but in self-perceived lower roles it is like a necessity to brag about oneself in order to keep one's face. I remember in D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*, the newly-married bride, Mrs. Morel, discovers the next day the bills in the suit pockets of her husband, Mr. Morel, a drinker of a coal miner. She then realizes that the furniture was only bought on credit and the debt must be later paid. Before a wedding is arranged the would-be groom pays a visit with his close circle of acquaintances to the would-be bride's family in his title of *suitor*. I better like the expression *gentleman-caller*, from the mouth of Amanda, the unforgettable heroin in the play *Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. She is a strong resolute woman deserted by her husband, putting up a fight to keep the family going and I always associated her with my own dear mother.

4. A MAINLY SELF-CONTAINED ECONOMICAL STRUCTURE

In this section about the economic aspects of the village some oversimplification is taken and an "ideal" village is considered for facilitating the issue of comparison. However in actuality it is known that almost every mode of production almost everywhere is commercialized at least to some extent and in this respect peasantry's economical activity is also somehow attached to the micro economic dynamics. That is to say, in the words of *M.C.*

Ecevit (1999, p.259) the relationship between the small assets production and the world surrounding it are determined with respect to the capitalistic patterns.

Indeed, as an American scholar expresses it, *a peasant community differs from an isolated Indian tribe, a band of Australian Bushmen, or a former Polynesian island in that it is not self-sufficient. They exist in intimate relationships with crowded centers. Peasants are primarily farmers and sometimes artisans*⁷ as well. *They produce food and material items for clothing and tools. But they depend on town markets to sell surplus produce and buy items they can not fabricate. Kroeber aptly calls them "part-societies" forming a segment of a larger civilization* (abridged from Foster, 1962, p.46).

When my mother, a city girl, got married to my father, then a first lieutenant in the army but originating from a village, she noticed my father's craving for milk, eggs and cheese in breakfast and casually said "how come you devour such food so eagerly? Aren't you a country boy? You must be sick of such food ever since your childhood!" Then he explained to her "that villagers sell milk, eggs, butter and cheese in weekly set up town fair markets to obtain some cash and they are more deprived of such food than poor city-dwellers!"

The self-contained closed nature of the economic system of a village favors exchange of goods rather than a purchase in money. A service is also paid in goods rather than in cash. I remember the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In one episode of the county physician is mentioned to receive a bushel of potatoes etc. from his patients instead of money (The plot evolves in rural Alabama in 1930's). *Elia Kazan* also gives a similar account in a partly biographical novel⁸ of his (1969, p.668) a small American town in Connecticut. The hero of

⁷ Of course only certain artisanship may pertain to peasantry. One can not expect to find a goldsmith in any village. But a craft producing felt from wool is a suitable business for a village. Usually a village tailor and barber is always present. In any case, certain artisans like saddle-makers and horseshoe makers, though stationed in towns, live on villagers' payments almost exclusively. Such crafts are diminishing. They had lost their golden times long ago. S.Ç.

Leather-processing survived in the city Afyon. Traveler Evliya Çelebi reports a hundred such shops in the city in his day. Those shops need much water and are situated near public baths. They provide clean leather for further use by saddlers, and light leather shoe makers. Goat hair spinners are also putting up a fight to live on as inferred from Arsoy (2004, p.383).

⁸ The novel is about *Eddie Arness*, the son of a Greek emigrant, Seraphim. The father, originally from *Kayseri* in Anatolia, a dealer of oriental carpets, loses his capital in the depression years. His son gets a university education despite the father's discouragement and becomes an important employee in an advertisement firm. He is married to a dean's daughter. He is a well-to-do figure in Los Angeles. An affair with a frivolous woman, Gwen, upon disclosure, changes everything. His renunciation of his mistress renders him unhappy deep inside despite the best appearance (the now so-called golden couple). He eventually attempts suicide twice, donates all his wealth to his wife and ends up in an asylum. After recovery he joins the problematic mistress again and restarts as a salesclerk in a small town. He chooses to be free from all his former urban engagements and burdens. S.Ç.

the novel settles down in this town and begins to work for a spirit-shop, serving the drinks. In a sense he becomes the spiritual counselor of his clients, who get to like him and bring him gifts: The surplus of the vegetable products, eggs, chickens. The rumor goes that the counter-attendant likes strawberries, a flood of strawberry delivery follows. Conserved jam and vegetables, winter apples, pears do not lack. A drunken woman knits a woolen pullover for him. People offer the books and magazines for a few days in retard to him after reading them. He finds himself the receiver of communal subsidies.

In a village shopping occurs through barter rather than cash. Somebody gives what he owns to get what he needs. He gives plums in return for barley or he gives eggs in return for onions. This solidarity extends to an exchange of work as well. Somebody whose tobacco field needs to be hoed fetches a neighbor and works the field with his aid. Some other day he pays his work debt to his neighbor by helping him out in his toil (Sunar, 1961, p.7). Even the small village shop's owner engages in barter. He gives straw and gets oat; he gives barley and receives beans (Ibid., p.47).

[Anyway] the peasant does not always have money⁹ at hand. He gets his income from his fields and livestock; so, he obtains money after the harvest when he sells his produce or incrementally as he makes excursions to weekly fair markets in towns to sell smaller items (Ibid., p.34).

Those smaller items could be eggs, hens, yoghurt, vegetables. He may also consign them to a friend to sell and bring the money back. If there is a grocery shop in the village the customers buy in credit to pay back in harvest time. Peasants love credit since it is a way of life. During my former tailor shop apprentice days—the shop was always bursting with customers during the harvest season—a peasant customer once said “if you accept credit, then you might as well bring shit to our village from that public toilet yonder and expect to sell it!”.

For the peasant who earns the money through hard work coping with the soil under the hot sunrays, money means more compared to a town or city dweller. He tends to hide the money for wedding and circumcision festivities, taxes, and illness (Sunar, 1961, p.43).

Sunar (1961, pp.42-43) narrates that in a village there was a problem about provision of stationary material like

⁹ Indeed, for the typical villager, money is too precious to spend readily. When I was a child, on a winter weekend my mother chose the train to reach her parents' home. We arrived at the station early. A middle-aged peasant man in rough puffy clothing was among the waiting travelers. He was clinging the coins in his palm while squinting at his hand. Obviously it was a challenge for him to part with his valuable money. Finally at the last minute he walked to the ticket-window and bought his ticket. My brother must have noticed him also. He whispered to me with a solemn face: “That man kept looking at his coins!”. I gave him a nod and hushed him to silence. (Even though a bus trip is more practical in many respects, villagers usually prefer the cheaper train travel. Recently I took the train from *Edirne* to Istanbul and witnessed that most former village stations had been abolished, with the station buildings already fallen into half-ruins). S.Ç.

pencils, erasers, notebooks for the students and there existed no shop in the village. He suggested establishing a school cooperation to the parents. They replied they had no money. He asked if they got eggs and the answer was yes. Then he required each student to bring a single egg and this way they accumulated the necessary small capital to establish the school cooperation.

As *Tütengil* (1955-1956, p.38) notes in *Keçiller* village of *Altıntaş-Kütahya* the fee of the village barber is paid annually in terms of cereals as agreed upon unanimously by all villagers beforehand.

Though the overwhelming majority of villages rely on agriculture as subsistence; coastal villages engage in fishing. Forest villagers collect permitted timber. In *Aydın-Bergama* villages they go collect cones from peanut pines, which are tall trees. Peasants climb trees and poke cones with long sticks for that purpose. (When pruning the trees stumps are left out to facilitate climb). The fallen cones are collected and peanuts sorted out from among the blades. They still have a hard shell. The rest is factory work. Pine peanuts add flavor to rice and some sweet food. Forestry administration promotes pine peanut growing around *Istanbul* and *Dardanelles* regions too. There being almost no input like fertilizers, seeds and gasoline for plough with a tractor it is very profitable.

Stock raising was more of a nomadic occupation. In villages it is done but finding pastures is more and more difficult. French researcher de Planhol (1958, p.165) in his work on rural Turkish life around the lakes region near *Burdur* talks about the sheep raising. *Flat tailed sheep are good for meat; sheep with S-shaped tails are good for milk. They are cropped once a year (in Tefenni twice a year). Goat keeping is also common. Where the landscape permits (like in certain villages) on the day of washing (to improve the quality of the wool before cropping) they block a stream in a manner to let form a pool of water. Then the shepherds dip themselves in water up to the neck and drive the herd forward. The sheep must swim. This is a day of festivities.*

Villagers are frugal and pragmatic. They make much of anything at hand. They don't throw away old fashioned house commodities and replace them by new ones as city families tend to do. For this reason, many objects considered antiquated in cities are in full service in villages. A villager, even if well-to-do in his own measures, would hate to pay for a high bill in a luxury restaurant or café. He would regard this as being ripped off by scrupulous city shop owners. (I just remembered a scene from a movie by Kirk Douglas which I watched in my childhood under a Turkish title. He plays an army general and one night after treating his girl friend to dinner he can't help saying “with this price a whole platoon of soldiers could be fed”. (As checked from internet, the original title is “Top Secret Affair”. The movie was released in 1957. The girl, a wealthy journalist, Dorothy, was acted by Susan Hayward).

The frugal habit of the villager gets transformed into the so-called culture of poverty when he moves to the urban slums. *Türkdoğan* (January-February, 2006, pp.15-16) rightly claims that *when closely examined, the poverty culture is seen to possess a socio-psychological quality besides depending on economical grounds. He says it is easy to overcome poverty but it is not so easy to overcome the culture of poverty.* I remember that journalist *Engin Ardiç* years ago mentioned on the TV screen about the frugality of the older generation who had experience (*Erlebnis*) of scarcity in war time. When his father had died they had found an old agenda in his drawer with pages all plain. The man could not bring himself to use and consume it.

The small family farm in market terms is not of significance since it does not run on business lines. It aims to reproduce its occupants rather than gain wealth. But even that enterprise represents considerable disguised and mostly unrecorded labor reservoir, especially female labor as Cornwall remarks (paraphrased from Cater and Jones, 1992, p.218).

The importance of land for the peasantry is to be seen in the following case history narrated by a school teacher at the teacher club in *Edirne*. This teacher had encountered a practically “forceful” land transaction. He had left his village for a boarding school at the age of twelve and had few relations left, one being a childhood friend he kept in touch with. At the age of thirty five he lost his father and inherited his share of the land. He rented it to his former friend.

The friend got to like tilling this prosperous field. He got to like it too much. (A newly-coined and very meaningful Turkish verb is “*yerimsemek*”; it originates from the noun “*yer*”, place, and is a verb. One gets to like an entrusted or somehow temporarily appropriated position, place or an object and eventually begins to consider his informal privilege as a rightful ownership). Then the peasant friend began circling around the teacher to arrange a purchase of the field. The teacher, to appease his lust, changed tactics and renounced over the rent.

He said: “Use the land as you wish and pay no rent! But never expect to get the *titres des propriétés*. The bottom line is hereby thus drawn and that’s it!” But one day the friend found him in the city. He had a lump sum of money. He explained that half of it came from the selling of his wife’s gold necklaces and the other from the selling of his sister-in-law’s bracelets. He said:

If you ever refuse to sell your field; I can not go back to the goldsmith and recuperate those gold objects without a considerable loss. I know that you are a good-hearted man fond of your comrade. An equal some of money is on the way as my seniority payment from the job I lost in the town. You are a man of the city now and do not need to land. We will head for the notary. No, right away!

This they did. It was a *de facto* situation hard to beat. A month later the promised seniority payment also arrived on the table of the teacher. Two years later the friend took

the teacher for a visit to his former land. A marvelous two-storey house was towering over in a corner. The household was supposedly praying for the teacher’s benediction.

CONCLUSION

The Turkish village, even though in swift change is still the bulk of the country and is there to reckon with when attempting any social improvement and introducing any novelty, whether it be political or of material nature. The peasant mentality as enriched by a long line of verbal culture, is present in the mentality of the Turkish city-dweller, as well, if only disguised and at first sight far below the “surface”.

REFERENCES

- Âfetinan, A. (1969). *Medeni bilgiler ve M. Kemâl Atatürk’ün el Yazıları [Pieces of civil knowledge and the hand-written notes of Atatürk]*. Ankara: Publications of Turkish Institute of Historiography.
- Arsoy, N. (2004). Afyon El San’atları [Hand works of the Aegean city Afyon]. In M. Uyan (Ed.), *Anadolu’nun Kilidi Afyon [The city of Afyon: The lock of Anatolian Peninsula]* (pp.382-394). Afyon: Semih Printing House.
- Cater, J., & Jones, T. (1992). *Social geography: An introduction to contemporary issues*. London & New York: Edward Arnold.
- Çaya, S. (1992). *Job satisfaction among prison guards in an Anatolian city* (Unpublished master dissertation). İstanbul: Marmara University institute of social sciences.
- Delaney, C. (1991). *The seed and the soil: Gender and cosmology in Turkish village society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- de Planhol, X. (1964). *de la Plaine Pamphyltienne aux lacs pisidiens: Nomadisme et vie paysanne*. Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve.
- Ecevit, M. C. (1999). *Kırsal Türkiye’nin Değişim Dinamikleri: Gökçeada Köyü Monografisi [The changing dynamics of rural Turkey: A monography of the village of T Gökçeada]*. Ankara: Publication of the Ministry of Culture of the Republican Turkey.
- Ecevit, M. C. (1999). *Kırsal Türkiye’nin Değişim Dinamikleri: Gökçeada Köyü Monografisi [The changing dynamics of rural Turkey: A monography of the village of T Gökçeada]*. Ankara: Publication of the Ministry of Culture of the Republican Turkey.
- Foster, G. M. (1962). *Traditional cultures and the impact of technological change*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Kazan, E. (1969). *l’arrangement [The arrangement], traduit de l’américain par France-Marie Watkins*. Paris: Éditions Stock.
- Kündig-Steiner, W. (1974). *Die Türkei: Raum und mensch, kultur und wirtschaft in Gegenwart und Verangenheit*. Tübingen & Basel: Horst Erdmann Verlag.

- Pierce, J. E. (1964). *Life in a Turkish village*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Roberts, T. D. (1970). *Area handbook for the republic of Turkey*. Washington D.C.: Publication of the American University.
- Sunar, Ş. (1961). *Köyde okul [Schooling in villages]*. İstanbul: Alp Printing House.
- Tezcan, M. (1981). *Eğitim sosyolojisine giriş [Introduction to the sociology of education]*. Ankara: Publication of Ankara University Faculty of Education.
- Türkei. (1980). *Erfahrungen und berichte berliner lehrerstudenten: Eine exkursion von studenten und dozenten nach westanatolien*. Berlin: Zentrale Universitäts-Druckerei.

- Tütengil, C. O. (1955-1956). Keçiler köyü İncelemesi [Investigation of the village of Keçiler] in *Sosyoloji Dergisi [Journal of Sociology] Combined Volumes 10-11*. İstanbul: Printing House of Faculties.
- Tütengil, C. O. (1983). *Yüz soruda kırsal Türkiye'nin yapısı ve sorunları [The structure and the problems of rural Turkey comprised in one hundred questions]*. Çağaloğlu-İstanbul: Gerçek Printing House.
- Vergin, N. (1973). *L'industrialisation et changement social: Etude comparative dans trois villages d'Eregli [Getting industrialized and the accompanying social change: A comparative study in three village of the town of Eregli]*. İstanbul: İstanbul University publication numbered 2422.

Appendix: Some Visual Material

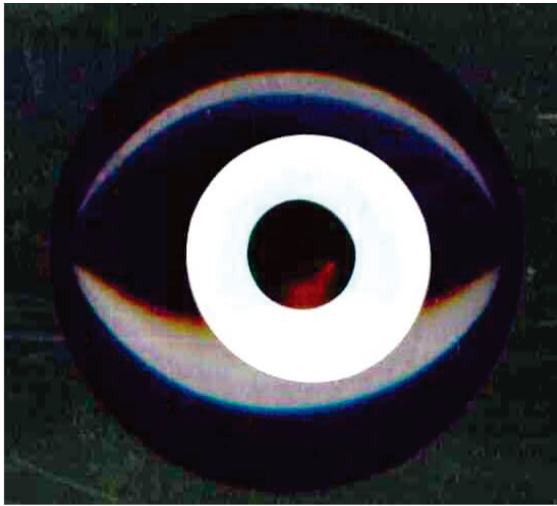


Figure 1
A Talisman Allegedly Good for Expelling the Harmful Effects of Evil Eyes (Scanned by the Author—S.Ç.)



Figure 2
Traditional Kitchen Utensils (Scanned by the Author—S.Ç.)



Figure 3
A Common Market Deception Had Been “Cutting” Genuine Coffee by Powdered Chickpeas (*Nohutlu Kahve*). Thus, Many Coffee-Addicts Used to Grind Their Own Coffee Beans in Hand Mills, to Escape the Possibility of Drinking Impure Coffee. Even Though Such Hand Mills Had Long Ago Fallen Into Oblivion in City Centers, They Are Still Available in Some Village Houses, in Accordance With the Traditional Principle of a Frugal Life Style, Which Is Almost Totally Indifferent to and Even Frightful of New Consumption Modes. Moreover; “Rituals” Pertaining to Coffee Are so Important That Even the Family of a Suitor (Gentleman-Caller) Initially Judges a Would-Be Bride’S Worth as a Housewife, From Her Sheer Coffee-Making Talent (Scanned by the Author— S.Ç.)



Figure 4
Relativity in Evaluation: Today's Turkey May Appear Quite Modern When Viewed From the Angle of Many Peripheral Countries. However, the Same Turkey May Still Be Perceived as a Basically Peasant-Like Land By Some Circles in Western Europe, for Instance (Drawn by the Author—S.Ç.)



Figure 5
An Elderly Aegean Woman Getting Off the Train at a Village Station (Photo: Author—S.Ç.)



Figure 6
Peasant Men at *Kırkpınar* Oil-Wrestling Festivities (July 2011). Peasants Love Watching Wrestlers, Their Heroes (Photo: Author—S.Ç.)



Figure 7
A Thresher (*Bateur*) Now Used Only as a Decoration in a Café (Photo: Author—S.Ç)



Figure 8
A Sheep-Herd Shepherd From a Village of the Town of *Meriç* (Photo: Author—S.Ç)