



## From Inferiority to Alienation in Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü*

### *Adalet Ağaoğlu'nun Fikrimin İnce Gülü'nde Aşâğılık Duygusundan Yabancılaşmaya*

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**Submitted/Başvuru:** 13.07.2021

**Revision Requested/Revizyon Talebi:** 23.08.2021

**Last Revision Received/Son Revizyon:** 25.08.2021

**Accepted/Kabul:** 22.10.2021

**Citation/Atf:**

Tan, C. (2021). From inferiority to alienation in Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü*. *TUDED*, 61(2), 689-707.

<https://doi.org/10.26650/TUDED2021-971136>

#### ABSTRACT

Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* is one of the most celebrated novels of contemporary Turkish literature. Published in 1976 and dealing with a variety of themes, the novel tells the story of Bayram, a Turkish immigrant worker's journey from the Turkish border gate to his native village. This study aims to analyse Bayram's narrative under two major headings: inferiority and alienation. Specifically, the article argues that the ultimate cause of Bayram's actions is the inferiority complex which, combined with his obsessive commodity fetishism, eventually ends up with his total alienation from society. To this end, the research initially scrutinises the concept of inferiority complex through the window of individual psychology and its founder, Alfred Adler. In addition, the study also examines the notion of alienation with references to several influential thinkers. Thus, the article reveals that Bayram has become the victim of his traumatic childhood, youth experiences and social background, which give rise to his chronic feelings of inferiority. These feelings of inferiority in turn are aggravated by the capitalist system of production, eventually leading to the alienation, extreme disillusionment and isolation of Bayram as an individual. This research concludes that Bayram is an unconscious victim of his alienation and finally completes the cycle to a self-conscious state of mind after being left on his own, desperate and void of meaningful purpose or hope.

**Keywords:** Adalet Ağaoğlu, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü*, inferiority complex, alienation, commodity fetishism

#### ÖZET

Adalet Ağaoğlu'nun *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* çağdaş Türk edebiyatının en ünlü romanlarından biridir. 1976 yılında yayımlanan ve çeşitli temaları ele alan bu roman, göçmen bir Türk işçisi olan Bayram'ın Türk sınır kapısından memleketteki köyüne kadar yaptığı yolculuğu aktarmaktadır. Bu araştırma Bayram'ın anlatısını iki ana başlık altında analiz etmektedir: aşâğılık duygusu ve yabancılaşma. Daha özel anlamda, makale Bayram'ın eylemlerinin temel sebebinin aşâğılık kompleksi olduğunu öne sürmektedir ki bu kompleks, Bayram'ın takıntılı meta fetişizmiyle birleşerek, onun toplumdan tamamen yabancılaşmasıyla sonuçlanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, araştırma öncelikle aşâğılık kompleksi kavramını bireysel psikoloji kuramı ve onun kurucusu olan psikolog Alfred Adler'in penceresinden irdelemektedir. Ek olarak araştırma, yabancılaşma kavramını da birden çok düşünürte yapılan göndermelerle ayrıntılı bir şekilde mercek altına almaktadır. Böylece makale, Bayram'ın kronik aşâğılık duygularına sebep olan çocukluk ve



gençlik dönemlerinde yaşamış olduđu travmaların ve sosyal geçmişinin kurbanı olduğunu ve bunun da kapitalist üretim sistemi tarafından kötüleştirildiğini ve sonunda Bayram'ın birey olarak yabancılaştığını, aşırı derecede hayal kırıklığına uğradığını ve etrafında bulunan herkes ve her şeyden soyutlandığını açığa çıkarmaktadır. Araştırma, Bayram'ın kendi yabancılaşmasının bilinçsiz bir kurbanı olduğunu ve sonunda anlamlı bir amacı ve umudu yitirmiş biçimde kendi başına çaresiz kaldıktan sonra öz bilince vararak döngüyü tamamladığını sonucuna varmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Adalet Ađaođlu, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü*, aşşğılık kompleksi, yabancılaşma, meta fetişizmi

## INTRODUCTION

Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* (1976) is considered to be the very first road novel in contemporary Turkish literature. The novel tells the story of an immigrant worker by the name of Bayram who drives his Mercedes from Germany to Turkey to go on a short vacation. The novel focuses on Bayram's journey from his entrance to the country at the border gate to his arrival in his hometown of Ballıhisar. As one of the most celebrated novels of contemporary Turkish literature, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* was adapted to cinema in 1992 by director Tunç Okan under the title *Mercedes Mon Amour* (*Sarı Mercedes*) with actor İlyas Salman playing the role of Bayram. The successful adaptation has provided the novel greater fame and recognition. Dealing with a wide variety of themes, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* addresses many issues such as love, hate, yearning, ignorance and obsession. However, the themes which stand at the focal position of this study are inferiority and alienation.

A large number of scholarly articles have been published on Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü*. However, the majority of these articles are written in Turkish and are therefore not available to international scholars. To this end, this article is deliberately written in English for the purpose of introducing and promoting this canonical work of contemporary Turkish literature to international scholars, specifically Turkologists around the world. In addition, the study also brings new critical perspectives to the analysis of Ağaoğlu's famous road novel. This article aims to analyse Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* from a psycho-sociological view, in particular from the window of Adlerian individual psychology and the sociological theory of alienation with references to Marx, Heidegger and Adorno. In a much more specific context, the article argues that the ultimate cause of Bayram's irritating and obsessive behaviour towards his Mercedes is due to the inferiority complex that eventually results with the protagonist's total alienation. The inferiority complex is thus the major determining factor in Bayram's actions and behaviour. No matter what he does, he does not manage to break free from his inferiority complex's strong grip on his personality.

Therefore, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* consists of three major factors: the cause (origin), the agent (mediator) and finally the outcome. The cause or origin is the inferiority complex that Bayram deeply suffers from. The agent is represented by the Mercedes which is also the symbol of commodity fetishism. Finally, the outcome is manifested through Bayram's process of alienation. This study mainly concentrates on the cause and outcome, owing to the widespread published articles on commodity fetishism which is manifested through the Mercedes. The cause of Bayram's inferiority and thus his bizarre behaviour goes back to his traumatic childhood experiences when he lost both of his parents and was raised an orphan by his uncles and aunts. The agent, or Mercedes, is acquired by Bayram at great cost and despite many hardships, for the essential objective of compensating for his inferiority. The outcome, which occurs as the final consequence of these conditions, is manifested towards the end of the novel and is displayed with Bayram's detachment from reality and disconnection from society. At the end, the article concludes that Bayram was a victim of the conditions that he had

been subjected to; in other words, Bayram is a disadvantaged individual who is powerless and impotent against his destiny. It is this destiny that Bayram simply cannot avoid which haunts him throughout his life, no matter how hard he tries. Thus, the study makes use of a psycho-sociological approach to reveal Bayram's true condition and expose the actual reason for his obsessive and paranormal behaviour. Lastly, Adalet Ağaoğlu's renowned novel, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* has only been translated to German, not to English. Therefore, the quotations provided from the original novel are translations from the book which belong to the author of this article.

## The Inferiority Complex: An Overview

Throughout history, human beings have dealt with feelings of incompetence or inferiority and associated these feelings with God, as if they were mostly of religious matter, rather than belonging to the psychological domain (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 35). The first intellectual who openly mentioned and defined the inferiority complex was Montaigne, who wrote that: "he immediately experiences a *malaise*, a feeling of weakness which finds expression in an underestimation of himself and an overestimation of what does not belong to him" (1951, p. 35). It is thus observed that Montaigne aimed to conduct a general evaluation of his own ego. Besides Montaigne, various detailed instances of complexes were portrayed in the works of Shakespeare, Stendhal, Hobbes, Spinoza and Rousseau (1951, pp. 40-42). However, the notion of the inferiority complex in the contemporary era is directly affiliated with the psychology of Alfred Adler.

The term "complex" is mostly substituted for and used in the context of "inferiority complex" (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 103). Despite not being coined by Freud, the concept was put into effect by Freudian psycho-analysis (1951, p. 103). In psychoanalytic theory, the notion was utilised by Carl Gustav Jung as "a simplification of a highly complicated psychological circumstance, and as pointing to certain tendencies characteristic of the person in question or to a group of interdependent ideas charged with affectivity" (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 104). Psychoanalysts later concluded that the evaluation of complexes might be noteworthy for scholarly analysis but was of no actual good use to the analysis of neurotic patients (1951, p. 104). According to Hans Driesch: "The complexes are not in any way innate- for then they would be 'impulses'- but quite definitely acquired, and acquired unconsciously and involuntarily" (1929, p. 108). Hence, the philosopher emphasises that complexes are gained unintentionally without the control and authority of individuals. As a consequence, these uncontrolled complexes that are concealed become apparent when they become too strong and thereby pave the way for a series of illogical actions (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 105). However, complexes are not the sole reason for such illogical actions. In addition, complexes are described as:

A group of memories and ideas bearing a considerable affective charge and cut off from bonds which ought normally to connect it with the unified psychic development of the individual. The complexes do not become integrated in the individual in the course of his life. They remain outside like foreign bodies. But they seek an outlet, and in one way or another break into the patient's life. (Brachfeld, 1951, pp. 105-106)

In this respect, complexes are similar to bacteria, arriving externally and clinging on to our bodies. These complexes do not become unified with the individual but constantly remain on the exterior as a viable threat, seeking the right time and opportunity to penetrate into the individual's life. Moreover, envy, which is defined as "the desire produced by the corroding feeling of having been deprived of something which another person possesses," plays a central role in the formation of an inferiority complex (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 109). Therefore, envy occurs as a result of comparison and from time to time leads to feelings of inferiority (1951, p. 109). It ought to be stressed that the "feeling of inferiority" characterises a condition of mind which subsists prior to any kind of comparison and thus would be more appropriate to call a "feeling of imperfection or feeling of impotence" (1951, p. 110). On the other hand, Alfred Adler contends that feelings of inferiority might be conscious, in the form of knowledge, as well as unconscious (1951, p. 112). Adler used the term "inferiority complex" for the first time in 1926 and identified it as "the abiding consequences of the inferiority feeling and their enforced continuance can be explained by a marked lack of the community feeling" (1951, p. 113). The complex can be connected to chronic suffering caused by the remainder of inferiority feelings (1951, p. 113). Hence, the inferiority complex may have risen to surface as a result of comparison which may not necessarily be conscious and this comparison:

May be made (a) between the present self and the selves of others, (b) between the present self and a superior self such as might have been manifested in the past or could be manifested in the future, (c) between the self and an ideal, a norm or a pattern which the self would like to resemble. (Brachfeld, 1951, p. 115)

Thus, there exists various ways of comparisons that eventually lead to feelings of inferiority. Additionally, feelings of inferiority are commonly observed due to their initial observations as reliant, petty and socially subordinate persons (Sweeney, 2019, p. 14). Another important aspect emphasised by Adler is how people prevail against their feelings of inferiority (2019, p. 166). Harmful endeavour to subjugate feelings of inferiority might result in the formation of complexes which in its turn leads to "safeguarding tendencies" (2019, p. 166). These tendencies bear similarity with Freudian defense mechanisms. Adler coins the following safeguarding tendencies: "*Symptoms, excuses, aggression, distance-seeking, anxiety and exclusion tendency*" (Carlson, Watts, and Maniacci, 2006, pp. 60-61). Moreover, Carlson, Watts and Maniacci profess that there are mainly two types of inferiority complexes: normal inferiority complexes, which put limitations on behaviour in minimal terms and psychopathological inferiority complexes, which impose serious restrictions in the individual's daily life (2006, p. 59). There are crucial differences between these two inferiority complexes. Normal inferiority complexes are of acceptable and tolerable nature whereas psychopathological inferiority complexes are considered abnormal and cause significant problems in the behavioural patterns of individuals.

Furthermore, compensation possesses a significant place in inferiority complexes. In a similar manner to inferiority complexes, compensation also occurs in two types. The efforts that were described by Adler as "adequate compensation" are regarded as useful both for the

individual and the social community, labelled as “striving for perfection,” which indicates the useful side of compensation in order to accomplish “a feeling of equality, of equal worth, self-esteem and esteem of others” (Oberst and Stewart, 2012, p. 26). However, in order for disheartened people to overpower inferiority, it is necessary for them to achieve superiority over others (2012, p. 26). This phenomenon is referred to as “overcompensation,” and its major purpose is not to be like anyone else, but to become better than the rest (2012, p. 26). People who engage in overcompensation make use of useless ways not only for themselves but for the social community as well (2012, p. 26). In Adlerian theory, compensation and overcompensation characterise a crucial significance, especially in terms of psychological re-establishment (2012, p. 23). Adler further argued that inferiority complexes “invite us to develop and expand our behavioral repertoire and to utilize creativity and imagination to project how things could be different in the future” (Mosak and Maniacci, 2015, p. 80). According to the scientist, it is a natural aspect of being human that “encourages us to develop realistic *self-concepts* and simultaneously appropriate *self-ideals*” (2015, pp. 80-81).

Delving into the causes of inferiority, Adlerian psychology posits that feelings of inferiority are most commonly observed in three types of children: “(1) in constitutionally weak and sickly children; (2) in children who have been robbed of their courage by a strict, unfair upbringing and not by sickness; and (3) in pampered children who have never developed courage” (Carlson and Maniacci, 2012, p. 123). It is thus obvious that childhood experiences play vital roles in the formation of inferiority complexes. In this respect, inferiority complexes may have come to existence as a result of parental behaviour. Some parents make their children feel small and insignificant, whereas others treat them as precious belongings (Adler and Brett, 2009, p. 63). Furthermore, other parental behaviour may also contribute to the formation of inferiority feelings such as not regarding children worthy of attention or simply ignoring them, making fun of them or telling them frequent lies (2009, p. 63). As a consequence of this type of parental behaviour, children develop feelings of unworthiness, become shy, quiet and diffident (2009, p. 63). In addition, according to Adler, it is possible for both healthy and neurotic individuals to possess feelings of inferiority (Carlson and Maniacci, 2012, p. 140). Nonetheless, feelings of inferiority cause the individual to compensate for his/her inferiority by attempting to achieve superiority (2012, p. 141). Hence, this may in its turn present serious problems for the individual. Adler affirmed that all human beings possess feelings of inferiority which occur in childhood and later function as stimulators for the individuals to accomplish their objectives (Carlson and Slavik, 1997, p. xii). This brings about a constant endeavour to face and master the hardships that life offers (1997, p. 457). Thus, an individual’s anticipation is “a continuous desire to overcome feelings of inferiority, to compensate through striving to achieve. We continuously work from a minus to a plus” (1997, pp. 457-458). The crucial aspect of an inferiority complex, however “is not the sense of inferiority which matters, but the degree and character of it” (Adler, Ansbacher, and Ansbacher, 1956, p. 257). To some extent, every individual incorporates feelings of inferiority but these feelings transform into a pathological state when the deficiency overpowers the individual rather than to motivate him/

her into engaging in a useful activity and placing the individual into a depressing state of mind (1956, p. 258). In short, the inferiority complex could become a useful and effective motivator if it is used positively to overcome deficient feelings with appropriate forms of compensation.

## The Theory of Alienation

In this study, closely related to the notion of inferiority complex is the theory and concept of alienation. One description of alienation states that it signifies:

Indifference and internal division, but also powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions and thereby also—so the fundamental intuition of the theory of alienation—to oneself. (Jaeggi, Neuhausser and Smith, 2014, p. 3).

To an alienated individual, the world is void of meaning, unimportant and trivial and as a consequence of alienation, the person finds him/herself in the position of a passive object under the influence of other determinants (2014, p. 3).

Alienation is a very broad term that has been used by various philosophers and sociologists throughout history. From a sociopolitical perspective, alienation possesses a central place in Marx's philosophy. It represents the very notion that Marx mentions to demonstrate the destructive impact of capitalist production on individuals, in particular on their physical and psychological condition (Ollman, 1977, p. 131). According to Marx, alienation is "a mistake, a defect which ought not to be" and the state of alienation is identified as "a realm of estrangement applied to infected cases" (1977, p. 132). The thinker contemplates that alienation occurs as the result of the disconnection of human beings with their own labour which signifies that humans have been "separated from their work and their own products" (1977, p. 133). To this end, this brings forward a break between the human being and the material realm (1977, p. 133). Thus, alienation is regarded as a negative concept that emerged from within the capitalist system and which causes the individual to break from the products he creates, from other individuals, and finally, from him/herself. As a consequence, the alienated individual has "become an abstraction" which indicates anyone left out and disconnected from the social system (1977, p. 134). In Marxian terms, it is argued that:

Alienated man is an abstraction because he has lost touch with all human specificity. He has been reduced to performing undifferentiated work on humanly indistinguishable objects among people deprived of human variety and compassion. [...] Marx speaks of this life as 'the abstract existence of man as a mere workman who may therefore fall from his filled void into the absolute void.' (Ollman, 1977, p. 134)

In this respect, labourers are mere subjects of the capitalist system of production and within this particular order, humans inevitably find themselves in a sphere of emptiness which comes



into existence as a natural result of the capitalist mode of production. The labour performed by individuals is so insignificant and trivial that after some time, alienation becomes unavoidable. Moreover, for the individual alienation means “losing control and dispossession” where the alienated worker loses all control over the object he/she has produced (Jaeggi, Neuhouser and Smith, 2014, p. 12). In addition to loss of control and dispossession, alienation also causes a sense of helplessness and deprivation of meaning (2014, p. 13).

Marx's theory of alienation later transformed into themes of commodity fetishism and machine labour (Wendling, 2009, p. 13). Within the capitalist mode of production, Marx posits that the world has been transformed into a place where reality is made up of commodities and in this environment the labourer is transformed into a commodity him/herself (2009, p. 50). This is due to the fact that the labourer possesses nothing he/she can sell except their labour. Hence, the labourer sells his/her labour as a commodity and experiences a transformation into a commodity him/herself (Wendling, 2009, p. 50). To that end, commodity fetishism is a natural consequence of alienation. Furthermore, machine fetishism occurs “as a product of technological alienation” (2009, p. 57). “The alienation expressed by commodity fetishism in the sphere of exchange is expressed by machine fetishism in the sphere of production” (2009, p. 57). Thus, it can be expressed that machine fetishism is a more technologically advanced version of commodity fetishism. Furthermore, commodity fetishism is directly related to the concept of “surplus labour,” which is defined as labour produced by workers that provide the factory owners or capitalists the means to make the biggest profit from whatever is being produced (Kaplan, 2006, p. 131). Simply defined, surplus labour signifies the excessive labour produced by the workers. Hence, surplus labour contributes to the commodification of labourers, as “when the surplus labor of a worker is transformed into the profits of the capitalist, the worker is transmogrified into a commodity—a nonliving thing like a shoe or a diamond or a table, a material thing that can be exchanged for other material things, a thing that can be manipulated and controlled” (2006, pp. 131-132). To this end, capitalism not only creates and encourages the commodification of goods and commodity fetishism but also commodifies human beings.

Another prominent philosopher, Martin Heidegger, also provided an original outlook on the theory of alienation. In Heideggerian terms, alienation is understood as “a failure to apprehend what is “ready-to-hand” as “present-at-hand,” along with a failure to apprehend the world as the totality of what is given rather than as a practical context” (Jaeggi, Neuhouser and Smith, 2014, p. 16). In this context, Heidegger describes alienation as the feelings of “powerlessness and nothingness of the self” (Ballard, 1990, p. 123). Heidegger declares on the issue of alienation that:

Alienation in the technological world arises not so much because of individual weakness, but because of the ‘destiny of being’ that lets beings appear only as objects for domination by the human subject. No one can ‘do’ anything about this destiny, any more than an individual can demand that his or her temporality generate itself



in an authentic way. Just as an individual can only prepare himself or herself for the possible advent of anxiety and, hence, a change in temporality, so too modern humanity can only prepare itself for the possibility of a paradigm shift that will enable beings to appear other than mere objects. (Zimmerman, 1984, p. 222)

Thus, according to Heidegger, alienation forces individuals to become mere objects that possess no control over their destinies. People are left powerless in the face of alienation and fall into the grip of anxiety. On these grounds, it can be observed that Heidegger's manifestation bears resemblance to Marx's formulation of alienation. Both philosophers emphasise that when an individual is alienated, he/she is completely cut off from reality and is left powerless against this phenomenon. A significant matter that both philosophers agree on is that capitalism exploits human beings in such ways that they are often unaware (Ballard, 1990, p. 133). This factor is related to both thinkers' joint adherence to Hegelian thought and philosophy (1990, p. 133). Most individuals are unaware of the fact that they have become alienated and continue with their lives as if no vital change took place.

In addition, prevalent thinker Theodor W. Adorno purports that a materialist reading of alienation reveals its omnipresence in late capitalism, as what he refers to as universal guilt rather than alienated labour (Lunt, 2012, p. 486). Adorno thus contends that alienation is a natural outcome of the capitalist system of production and proposes a materialist interpretation of Marx's theory of alienation- a new understanding that is independent from its historical context, and presents human labour as production for the purpose of production (2012, p. 489). The result of Adorno's interpretation is the notion of alienation as "universal guilt", a prerequisite of life that emerges with the late capitalist order (2012, pp. 489-490). Adorno elaborates his description of alienation and adds that the "universal domination of mankind by exchange value—which a priori keeps the subjects from being subjects and degrades subjectivity itself to a mere object—makes an untruth of the general principle that claims to establish the subject's predominance" (Adorno, 2004, p. 178). Hence, Adorno maintained that humans were trying to find their place in the struggle between the predators (late capitalists) and the victims (individuals subjected to the system) (Lunt, 2012, p. 494). Finally, he also upholds that: "alienation is reproduced by anxiety; consciousness—reified in the already constituted society—is not the *constituens* of anxiety" (Adorno, 2004, pp. 190-191). In brief, with his contribution of materialist alienation, Adorno asserted that late capitalism reduces humans to mere objects, submissive slaves of the system. All in all, Marx, Heidegger and Adorno expressed corresponding views concerning the theory of alienation. Due to the broad nature of the alienation concept, the analysis is restricted to the before-mentioned thinkers.

### ***Fikrimin İnce Gülü: A Tale of Inferiority and Alienation***

Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* is the preliminary road novel of contemporary Turkish literature. This novel deals with a great many themes, however, this study mainly focuses on the cause and effect of Bayram's condition. First and foremost, the cause (origin) of Bayram's

pathological state is exposed with specific references to the novel. Bayram is a Turkish labourer who immigrates to Germany in hopes of better working conditions and life standards. After living in Germany for three years, working at the BMW factory and saving his money, Bayram buys a Mercedes. Buying this Mercedes has become such a priority for him that he does not refrain from engaging in unethical conduct. He acts in such a selfish manner that he forgets and ignores everything and everyone around him and puts all his energy and time into buying the Mercedes. Thus, Bayram's ultimate dream is to return to his native village of Ballıhisar with his Mercedes, creating an image of "the new Bayram", a success story of the man who has made it.

Bayram is a person who is suffering deeply from an inferiority complex. As an orphan, he was raised in a small village by his uncles and aunts. Coming from a relatively impoverished background, Bayram fits the profile of a disadvantaged individual who carries this misfortune with him throughout his life. Lacking the means to get a proper education, Bayram has not had the opportunity to develop his skills and to change his destiny. Bayram's inferiority is acquired unconsciously and involuntarily. Hence, the determinant origin of Bayram's inferiority feelings is his childhood and childhood experiences. As a disadvantaged child, Bayram was deprived of the various basic needs that many children had taken for granted:

Why would you believe your uncle? He could never buy the dyed candies at the grocery store for his children and Bayram. He could never get on an oxcart and go to Sivrihisar. On the way back, he did not bring peaches and roasted chickpeas in his bag. Osman Efendi's children are playing with their yo-yos in front of their houses. Bayram has never played with a yo-yo. (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 87)

Bayram's unfulfilled childhood desires mark the beginning of an inferiority complex that would last for the remainder of his life. It is in this particular period that Bayram begins to develop stark feelings of impotence and starts to realise that he actually belongs to the "have-nots". He also begins to develop a strong envy towards those who possess what he lacks. In the novel, there are many instances where Bayram reminisces and dwells on thoughts about his past. It seems that he is haunted by his past and cannot accept or get over the experiences he has gone through. His sociological profile as a poor Anatolian villager further aggravates Bayram's condition. Pelin Aslan Ayar argues that: "Bayram considered his uncle to be "incompetent" and felt inadequate because of being a poor Anatolian villager in the face of impossibilities, and to overcome this he always identified with power" (2020, p. 40). Bayram leads a monotonous, unchanging life and though he does not like it, it is the only lifestyle he is familiar with and when this life is disrupted by external intervention, he is totally devastated (Çağlayan, 2018, pp. 28-29). Bayram's abandoning his village and going to Germany marks the first step of the immense transformation he will experience through the process of alienation.

Bayram saw an automobile for the very first time in his village of Ballıhisar when he was a little child. As he could not forget this significant event, he always remembered the day that

the Blue Ford, a vehicle of the Democratic Party, came to visit his village. At his first sight of the car, Bayram was left speechless: “Bayram’s trembling had increased. He understood why he wet his pants. [...] Never taking his eyes off the dust-smearred devil’s vehicle... He sensed the dignity that such a vehicle gave to the person he was carrying” (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 157). The man who came out of the car was welcomed with the utmost respect as everyone stood up and shook the man’s hand. Being impressed by this event, Bayram immediately associated dignity and respect with the automobile. This event would have a long lasting impact on Bayram’s subconsciousness: as he perceived it, one becomes respectable and honourable through the ownership of an automobile. The man who stepped out of the car was, according to Bayram, a true gentleman, not some impoverished, lame outcast like his uncle (Çağlayan, 2018, p. 29). This was the moment that Bayram started to yearn for the respect that a car would bring him, a yearning that persisted even after twenty-five years (2018, p. 29). Bayram’s childhood experiences mark the beginning of his traumatic character development. In the upcoming years, Bayram’s inferiority consolidates even more as he develops a meek, submissive mentality. Kamuran Eronat maintains that Bayram possesses:

A personality that displays the social deficiencies in our rural areas with all its purity. While he represents economic inadequacy, desolation and ignorance, he also symbolises the inadequacy of knowledge and courtesy in using technology with the unity he has established with the modern car and his inability to convert this into a positive direction (2005, p. 106).

As he grows up, he witnesses several events that have traumatic effects on his personality. The most memorable of his traumatic experiences as a young man happened during his military service. Bayram conducted his military service as a chauffeur in a station of the gendarmerie in the eastern part of Turkey, in Gevaş, Van. During this period, Bayram was oppressed, humiliated and ridiculed many times:

Stop showing off, you piece of shit! You didn’t bring me to life. I’ll transfer you to infantry! I swear it, I’ll do it, you bet! And he would poke Bayram aggressively with his Mauser rifle. [...] The commander’s sweetest words when he didn’t beat Bayram were: You animal! You animal! You dumbass! (Ağaoğlu, 1977, pp. 10-11)

This proved to cause long-term suffering that he would not be able to forget or get over in the coming years. This suffering would eventually create such a trauma that it would haunt Bayram for the remainder of his life. Whenever, Bayram saw a soldier or even a government officer, his bad memories would revive and he would relive those days once again. Therefore, the novel is full of flashbacks of Bayram’s earlier memories, most of which are related to painful, traumatic events. This happens once again when he enters the country from the border of Edirne, Kapıkule. His short-lived interaction with the customs officers resembles the relationships he had with his commanders during his military service. The customs officers treat him in a similarly condescending way as his commanders did: “This way, you animal!

This way!" (Ađaođlu, 1977, p. 13). Bayram has gotten so used to this type of behaviour that he takes it for granted and pretends to ignore it. It is therefore obvious that feelings of inferiority in Bayram's personality have reached a chronic state. These strong feelings of inferiority constantly force Bayram to prove himself against everyone around him. Bayram's humiliation and subordination continues in a consistent style after his military service when he works for master Rıfat's repair shop.

Furthermore, Bayram does not seem to be conscious of his inferiority complex. He is unaware of the chronic feelings of inferiority he is suffering from and therefore is desperate and powerless against this. It is almost as if Bayram has become an unconscious subject, a slave of inferiority feelings. Therefore, Bayram's inferiority is a typical example of a psychopathological inferiority complex. Unlike the normal feelings of inferiority which push and motivate people to become better, Bayram's inferiority is a pathological, chronic illness that affects his personality and actions in the utmost negative manner. Due to this reason, Bayram constantly feels obliged to compensate for his weaknesses and lives his life with the sole ambition of compensating for his inferiority complex. However, this compensation is not a normal compensation as it seriously disrupts his daily routine. Bayram's purchase the Mercedes is the ultimate act of overcompensation as he makes serious sacrifices in order to fulfil this essential objective:

In addition to the discount he was provided with at the BMW automobile factory where he works, Bayram must not miss anything on the discount conditions to be able to obtain more discounts and for a good Mercedes, to be able to pay 5500 marks of the 6450 marks he has already got in his pocket. (Ađaođlu, 1977, pp. 21-22)

To that end, Bayram does everything in his power to buy this Mercedes. He does not send his uncle money, he stops visiting his friends in Germany and lives his life in an extremely selfish manner. The actual reason why obtaining this Mercedes is so essential for Bayram is because it provides him the chance to compensate for his inferiority. Thus, the Mercedes acts as the ultimate tool of compensation for Bayram. That is why he ascribes extraordinary meaning to it by personifying it as a woman and calling it "Balkız" (honey girl). The act of compensating for his inferiority is so strong that Bayram prioritises and prefers the Mercedes over his former fiancé, Kezban. In various instances, Bayram admits that Balkız is like a wife to him: "This is my wedded wife! My wedded! Everyone should know this! If she is your wedded wife, this is my Mercedes! She is more important than anything else. I won't let you hit her!" (Ađaođlu, 1977, p. 27). Bayram strongly believes that he will be able to compensate for his inferiority by acquiring a Mercedes and thus becoming a respectable gentleman.

Despite being an ordinary commodity, the Mercedes possesses several values for Bayram. Honey girl is his wife, lover, his precious and his ticket back home. It is of the utmost importance for Bayram to return home and enter his village driving the Mercedes. This way, he will have earned the respect that he had been missing throughout his life. Therefore, Bayram thinks that

the Mercedes grants him the opportunity to become a respectable and honourable gentleman. As a result, the Mercedes as a simple commodity becomes an agent of commodity fetishism for Bayram. He fetishises day and night over his car, personifying it as if it were an actual human being. The commodity fetishism in *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* occurs due to Bayram's urgent need for compensation for his inferiority. However, Bayram engages in overcompensation rather than compensation and aims to achieve superiority over others. This becomes apparent during his journey when he wants to pass other vehicles he meets on the road and thereby demonstrate his superiority over others. When he steps on the gas pedal, he takes pleasure in overtaking other vehicles: "Bayram never misses an opportunity. In fact, every such opportunity fuels his self-gratification. He is mending his wasted, hurt self-esteem. If only he could pass that juggernaut. He's overtaking" (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 92). On the road to his village, Bayram gets involved in several conflicts with other drivers, which are all symbolic of his efforts to maintain overcompensation over his inferiority complex. One of these is a meaningless conflict with a car named Güldenhouse: "I'm not going to pass! I will stop, I will not pass again. Go away. Are you trouble? Where did you come from again? What does this trickster want from us, honey girl? What does he want?" (1977, p. 101). It could be asserted that Bayram uses these confrontations to claim superiority over other people and to be able to prove himself. Bayram deeply longs for the values he has been deprived of: attention, recognition and respect. Deep inside, Bayram also longs to get revenge on all the people who harmed him. Bayram's continuous desire to overcome his inferiority complex manifests itself in the persistent commodity fetishism of the Mercedes and finally concludes with Bayram's alienation.

Hence, Bayram's inferiority ultimately leads to his alienation. Bayram is alienated from himself and from all other people. His alienation can be interpreted as powerlessness and indifference towards himself and all others. Bayram's ownership of the Mercedes and his irresistible urge to exhibit this to everyone else becomes his utmost priority, which ultimately causes his alienation. Right from the early pages of the novel "Mercedes is at the center of the text, not Bayram or any other character. Bayram's passion for his car exceeds the happiness of owning an object that makes life easier; it becomes the sole meaning of his life" (Akgül, 2016, p. 152). For Bayram, the Mercedes is not a vehicle used for the purpose of transportation but the ultimate objective that ascribes meaning to life. Alienation deprives humans of actual meaning and Bayram as an alienated individual has lost his actual purpose in life. According to Mert Öksüz, Bayram is a narcissistic person who is desperate for recognition and praise but nevertheless, his endeavour to build up these sentiments could be considered as a sign of uncouthness (2014, p. 62). Bayram does not like people who do not show him respect or who are not interested in his vehicle, because his Mercedes is much more than a car; it serves as the proof of Bayram's getting rid of the peasant identity (Öksüz, 2014, p. 62). For him, the Mercedes is a symbol of social status that proves and openly displays his success.

Within the capitalist system of production, it can be concluded that Bayram's condition exposes the destructive effects of capitalist production. Bayram, as an individual has become a product of the products he works to manufacture. He has become an object of capitalist

production as obtaining one of these products has become his foremost priority, ignoring his real necessities and actual conditions in life. In this case, Bayram's deep inferiority complex is further aggravated with the working conditions of the capitalist line of production. In this line of production, Bayram works long shifts and loses his touch with reality. A robotic life, coupled with chronic feelings of inferiority cause Bayram to become alienated from the outside world. To use Marx's terms, Bayram has become an abstraction, has lost his connection with human feelings and thus has fallen into an absolute void. After acquiring the Mercedes, Bayram's behaviour is shaped by the commodity. This transformation eventually turns himself into a commodity. He is now a helpless individual who has lost control over himself. The Mercedes is a symbol of Bayram's psychopathological inferiority complex. In an ironic way, Bayram makes an extraordinary effort to buy the Mercedes in order to compensate for his inferiority but in the end becomes completely alienated instead. Additionally, from a Marxian point of view, Bayram's commodity fetishism could also be interpreted as machine fetishism as it is directly related to technological innovation and the condition of becoming a product of technological alienation. In addition, the setting of the novel captures the period when Turkey goes through a major industrial development. To this end, the purpose of the author is to expose this development to the readers and to question its repercussions upon individuals by revealing such societal transformations (Ayar, 2020, p. 45).

Furthermore, surplus labour is directly visible in *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* as Bayram works overtime shifts to be able to buy the Mercedes. Bayram is obsessed with buying this vehicle as it has become his sole, ultimate objective and he does not rest until he does so:

He put every spare minute of his spare time into buying this Mercedes. He is constantly calculating his working hours. Now he has 2900 marks. After working twenty more hours a week. He will earn 3400 marks... His mind is always on the latest model Mercedes. But how can he obtain even the 200 model of one year ago at the biggest discount, without a single mark being overcharged? (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 21)

Due to surplus labour, Bayram not only makes the capitalists more profit, but he also facilitates and accelerates his own transformation into a simple commodity. From this viewpoint, Bayram is no different than a slave or a mere object that can be used for various purposes. His metamorphosis into a commodity facilitates his obsessive commodity fetishism. In this respect, there is a substantial interconnection between Bayram's commodity fetishism and the process of alienation.

From a Heideggerian perspective, it can be interpreted that Bayram is left powerless and is forced to deal with feelings of nothingness, as he is totally unable to comprehend his actual mental state. In Heidegger's terms, Bayram feels powerless against his destiny and lacks the will power or the awareness to take action against it and to overcome it. Bayram experiences anxiety and is not at peace with his inner self. He is now a desperate individual who has become a possessed object of his destiny. Bayram's despair and powerlessness become more



apparent toward the end of the novel when Bayram has an accident with his Mercedes: “he turns his eyes to the Mercedes, which is lying lifeless on the edge of the crops. His gaze rests on her for three, five, maybe ten minutes. He begins to cry as an orphan child, shattered and collapsed” (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 275). Bayram’s accident represents the latter stages of the symbolic manifestation of Bayram’s alienation. Though aware of the misfortune that befalls him, Bayram is still unconscious of his own alienation. As an exploited individual, he has completely lost his connection with the realities of the world. In the aftermath of his alienation, Bayram appears to have become a lost character. “The rewarding object that Bayram won has brought innovation neither to himself nor to his world. At the end of his journey, Bayram appears to have lost his previous possessions while aiming to gain a respectable identity” (Çağlayan, 2018, p. 37).

Considering Adorno’s views on materialist alienation, Bayram’s alienation is a natural consequence of the circumstances of late capitalism. Bayram’s working conditions at the factory intensify and inflame the dominant feelings of inferiority that were present in his subconscious since childhood. To this end, the mechanical lifestyle with constant overtime labour ensures his transformation into a soulless mechanical object, another commodity of capitalist production. Moreover, it is Bayram who decides to leave everything behind and go to Germany to work at the factory. Therefore, Bayram is not only the victim of his own disadvantaged personal background, but also the victim of the decisions that he has made. However, these decisions are not conscious decisions, but rather unconscious judgments fuelled by deep feelings of inferiority. In addition, the late 1970s were characterised as an era when capitalist production experienced a tremendous boost in the western part of the world. Along with this boost, maximum production became an unprecedented priority. Thus, capital holders and their representatives generated new arguments as to why workers should keep up with the maximisation of productivity. As an immigrant worker of the German capitalist production system, Bayram draws the profile of an ideal labourer who lives up to the system’s standards of maximising productivity. He entirely isolates himself from others to finally become entrapped in alienation. Merve Esra Polat contends that the car becomes Bayram’s armour in which he takes refuge, leading to his alienation and finally absolute solitude (2016, p. 235). Polat also argues that as human values are replaced by commodities, the degenerated culture becomes ineffective in the process of compensating for the deformed achievements, causing the ultimate disillusionment of individuals (2016, p. 236). Bayram does not deviate from his alienation and his ultimate objective of displaying the car to his fellow villagers. After the accident, he talks to himself to cheer his mood up:

Get up. What are you going to fix with a squeaky cry like a bitch, you idiot! Pull yourself together. How are you going to pick up and pull this shit out of the way? There is no turning back anymore. Now, right under the nose of Sivrihisar, you and your car can’t be spread out like cows out to graze in a crop field. People seeing you like this is a thousand times worse than seeing Balkız damaged in Ballıhisar. (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 279)



Even though Bayram is aware of his own weaknesses, he makes the effort to pull himself together and put himself back on what he deems to be the right track. His self-motivation is a forced effort to concentrate on the objective he considers so essential. However, upon his arrival in the village, Bayram comes to the realisation that all his efforts and toil were meaningless and in vain as there is nobody left to welcome him. At this moment, Bayram comes to a state of self-consciousness and completes the cycle of a long and symbolic journey from unconscious inferiority and alienation to conscious awareness of his futile actions. Bayram finally faces the consequences of being a pragmatic person. His disappointment and frustration have proven to him the extent of his wrong deeds. Finally, he has come to an understanding and questioning of his mistakes. However, due to the frustration and shock he experiences, Bayram concludes the novel with a perplexed and indecisive state of mind. Although he has attained self-consciousness, he seems to be lost in the void he helped to create for himself. After living and working as a stranger in Germany, Bayram becomes a stranger in his hometown too: "A feeling of strangeness that is a thousand times worse than in Germany scares Bayram the most" (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 324). The feelings of foreignness he suffers from so much in Munich, now recur to him in his hometown: "He finds himself more exhausted and horrified than the first evening he came to Munich's bahnhof. He now stands alone and foreign to his own village" (1977, p. 324).

Lastly, Tunç Okan's adaptation of *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* with the name *Mercedes Mon Amour* (*Sarı Mercedes*) was harshly criticised by the author for being deprived of aesthetics and for reducing the novel's plot to the road trip of a Turkish worker from Germany (Durmaz, 2013, p. 62). The film differs seriously from the novel and it has been argued that the director used the scenes he liked in order to exclude the anti-militarist messages presented in the novel. Ağaoğlu, on the other hand, stated that this understanding of cinema adaptation, which attempts to change the focus of the original work, ought to stay away from literature (2013, p. 62). Overall, the film portrays a compact selection from Ağaoğlu's original novel. For this reason, lots of details concerning Bayram's past are simply left out in the film. In this respect, much critical study focuses more on the film than on the source material of the novel. One of these is Selin Akyüz and Burcu Dabak's study of masculinity in *Mercedes Mon Amour*. The authors proclaim that Bayram's masculinity is broken by his subaltern and set into a state of crisis (2017, p. 87). However, Bayram uses the Mercedes to compensate for his crisis which ultimately shares a similar fate: the Mercedes is broken, muddied, scratched and finally wrecked, similar to Bayram's subaltern (2017, p. 87). Akyüz and Dabak argue that the Mercedes acts as a compensation for Bayram's broken masculinity and as a rationalisation for his wrongdoings (2017, pp. 87-88). This article provides valuable perspectives on the film version and interprets Bayram's quest through the window of masculinity. Thus, it can be maintained that the Mercedes serves as a compensation for Bayram's inferiority, as well as his broken masculinity.

## CONCLUSION

As the first road novel of Turkish literature, Adalet Ağaoğlu's *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* is a work of fiction that successfully reflects the sociological realities of Turkey during the late

1970s. It has been demonstrated through this article that *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* incorporates three major factors: the cause (origin), the agent (mediator) and the final outcome. To that end, it has been concluded that the ultimate cause of Bayram's behaviour and actions are due to the inferiority complex which is intensified through his obsessive commodity fetishism, eventually leading to the character's alienation. Being unconscious of his alienated condition, Bayram aims to fulfil his quest to compensate for his inferiority and earn the respect that he never truly possessed. This study thus demonstrates that Bayram's inferiority goes back to his childhood and youth experiences and that he has become a victim of his disadvantaged childhood and social background, as well as a victim of the system of capitalist production. In addition, his unconsciousness further aggravates his chronic inferiority and its consequence of alienation.

The novel concludes with Bayram's making his way to his native village of Ballıhisar. Earlier on his journey, Bayram had imagined that he would be welcomed by his fellow villagers with tremendous enthusiasm and excitement. He thought that children would run after his Mercedes and that the townspeople would show him the respect that he had yearned for all these years. However, none of Bayram's dreams and wishes become reality. After having the accident, Bayram's honey girl is nearly wrecked and he is barely able to drive it to his village. Extremely demoralised by this, he enters the village to find out from a shepherd that his former lover Kezban married a fisherman and that his uncle passed away. There is simply nobody left to welcome Bayram. This comes as a major blow to him, and after the accident witnesses the second major shock of his life. Bayram realises that all the years he toiled at the factory to buy the Mercedes and all the sacrifices he made during all those years were actually in vain and for nothing. All the effort, the long working hours, the isolation he put himself through, the challenging journey back home, all was for nothing. Thus, the novel ends with the alienated individual's disillusionment against the face of reality: "Bayram is at a crossroads, not knowing which direction to choose. Simply waiting. He doesn't go in any direction, he doesn't get bored. No one is awaiting Bayram at the end of any road" (Ağaoğlu, 1977, p. 325). The novel's open ending contributes to Bayram's alienation in a symbolically ambiguous manner. In conclusion, Bayram is not only alienated but also disillusioned due to his failure to accomplish his ultimate ambition. Although Bayram completes the cycle from unconscious inferiority and alienation to a state of self-consciousness; he is still not at peace with his inner-self. All in all, Bayram has arrived home with no meaningful purpose left and stands home all alone, unsure of what to do next and where to go. As the victim of his own selfish quest, Bayram finally comes to the realisation of the futility of his actions.

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**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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