

Communist (2001)

Vedat Türkali (1919 – 2016)

OVERVIEW

Born Abdülkadir Pirhasan, Vedat Türkali grows up in a poor neighborhood along the coastline of Samsun, where he lives until finishing high school. He is introduced to communism through “Communist Memet,” whom he meets at the Gazi Library, and later takes part in organizational activities on behalf of the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) during his university years in Istanbul. Throughout this period, some of the people he comes into contact with are arrested, while others are killed. Although the book recounts the various individuals with whom Türkali interacts, many events are narrated rather superficially, giving the impression that the narrative primarily addresses readers already familiar with the communist circles and personal networks of the period.

His childhood unfolds amid poverty, religious conservatism, and strong forms of neighborhood solidarity. His father, Osman Pirhasan, is a religious and authoritarian man who opposes the Kemalist reforms. He takes his daughters out of school and even reacts angrily when his son says he is “Turkish.” For him, the only meaningful identity is being Muslim. The family frequently experiences economic hardship. During his school years, Vedat studies with incomplete books, walks in worn-out shoes, and observes that, in times of need, neighborhood solidarity matters more than state institutions. Because of this, he comes to understand class not as a personal condition but as a social reality. A major turning point in his life comes when he meets an orphaned student nicknamed Communist Memet in high school. Memet tells him that Turkey, too, is divided between the bourgeoisie and the working class, and that communism is the only solution to this contradiction. This is Vedat’s first encounter with Marxist thought. Soon afterward, Memet is taken into custody. Since Vedat’s name appears in Memet’s diary, he is also called in for police interrogation. In this way, he experiences direct state repression for the first time.

Later, he becomes close to Sefer Aytekin, a village teacher affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party (TKP). Through Sefer, he enters communist circles in Samsun. Because of financial difficulties, he enrolls in the Department of Turkology at Istanbul University in order to become a military teacher. There he encounters both a broad cultural environment and an intense ideological atmosphere. The department is dominated by Turanist, nationalist, and anti-Soviet students. Nevertheless, he forms friendships with figures such as Yusuf Atılgan. As people such as Mihri Belli, Behice Boran, Muzaffer Şerif, Niyazi Berkes, and Pertev Naili Boratav become part of his life, he also begins to recognize the hierarchies, leadership struggles, and bureaucratic attitudes within the TKP itself. He lives under the constant fear of surveillance and arrest. Since he is simultaneously a military teacher and a communist, he is also part of the very state structure he opposes, which deepens his inner conflict. Over time, he establishes more direct relations with Şefik Hüsnü and the leadership of the TKP, and witnesses the founding process of the Socialist Laborers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey. Yet in later years, he increasingly comes to believe that the socialist movement has become bureaucratized over time.

PEOPLE

Basri	A friend affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party (TKP)
Behice Boran	An academic
Boz Mehmet	A friend affiliated with the TKP
Ertuğrul Baykal	Merih’s father
Haig Açıkgöz	An Armenian medical student affiliated with the TKP
Communist Memet	His high-school friend
Melek	Vedat Türkali’s mother
Mihri Belli	A friend affiliated with the TKP and a writer

Medina Berkes	An academic
Merih	Vedat Türkali's wife, a teacher
Muzaffer Şerif	A supporter of the TKP and a social psychologist
Niyazi Berkes	An academic
Osman Pirhasan	Vedat Türkali's father
Pertev Naili Boratav	An academic
Sabiha Sertel	Co-founder of the newspaper <i>Tan</i>
Sebatî Selimoğlu	Secretary of the Istanbul provincial committee of the TKP
Sefer Aytekin	A village teacher affiliated with the TKP
Şefik Hüsnü	One of the leaders of the TKP
Tevfik Dilmen	A friend affiliated with the TKP
Yusuf Atılğan	A military teacher affiliated with the TKP and later a writer
Zekeriya Sertel	Co-founder of the newspaper <i>Tan</i>
Zeki Baştımaz	One of the leading figures of the TKP

SYNOPSIS

Vedat Türkali establishes connections with circles affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party first in Samsun and later during his university years in Istanbul, following a childhood spent in the poor waterfront neighborhoods of Samsun. His introduction to communism through a young man nicknamed "Communist Memet," whom he meets at the Gazi Library, becomes decisive in shaping his political orientation. While taking part in organizational activities on behalf of the TKP in Istanbul and later in Akşehir, where he is appointed as a military teacher, he faces surveillance, detention, and political repression. His narrative traces his early personal and intellectual transformation while also portraying the networks of socialist circles during the Cold War period, as well as the era's anticommunist atmosphere, state repression, fear of denunciation, and clandestine forms of political organizing. The polarization of the period becomes especially visible through university environments, military schools, and the relationships within the TKP itself.

EVENTS

A Poor Family

Vedat Türkali's father, Osman Pirhasan, comes from the Ahlat district of Bitlis. He loses his own father during the 1877–1878 Ottoman-Russian War, known as the "93 War," and grows up with his uncle. After working for a while in Batumi, he settles in Samsun and marries Melek, the daughter of a shoemaker named Mirza.

He fights on the Caucasus front during the First World War and returns home four years later. During those years, Vedat's older brother Yusuf dies, and his mother has to sell her diamond earrings and ring just to buy fifteen kilos of corn flour.

He is a religious man who opposes the Kemalist reforms and supports sharia. He takes all three of his daughters out of school. Whenever they want to go outside, he shouts, "What business do they have out there?" and tells them to stay home and read the Quran. After Vedat learns to say "I am Turkish" at school, he repeats it at home, but his father scolds him and tells him to say that he is not Turkish but Muslim.

He works in a flour shop. One day, instead of asking his boss for a raise in cash, he asks for a sack of flour. His boss agrees, and he delivers the flour to a nearby bakery. For a month, the family receives bread from the bakery for free. But later the boss explains that the first sack is only a one-time favor and that they must pay for the next sacks of flour. Since no one else in the family earns money except one daughter who occasionally works as a tobacco laborer in the fields and another daughter who joins Quran recitations during Ramadan, they cannot pay the debt. In the end, they have to ask the middle daughter's fiancé for help.

When a fire breaks out at the house behind theirs, a small shack they rent out in their tiny garden burns down as well. Some time later, another fire destroys nearly twenty shanty-like houses in the neighborhood. But the Turkish Red Crescent, which is supposed to help people in difficult times, never arrives. The neighbors survive by helping one another instead. Vedat Türkali says that the culture of mutual aid shaped by Islam through fitre, zakat, and charity means more to ordinary people than state assistance. He criticizes social democrats who dismiss these relations as obstacles to class conflict.

and argues that they fail to see the human side of this solidarity, while Islamist parties exploit these emotions for political gain.

Throughout his school years, he never has all the books and notebooks he needs. Most of the time, he goes to school with only a notebook and a pencil. He has to walk from his home to a school on the other side of the city, and the soles of his shoes are always worn through. When it snows, his feet get completely soaked. People advise him to ask a wealthy man in Samsun, known as “the father of the poor” because he owns a rakı factory, for help. Eventually, he goes to the man’s workplace to ask for books, but the man throws him out as soon as he hears why he has come.

One day, while he and his friends stand in the schoolyard under the sun, a teacher named Kemal Bey plants flowers with several students. Suddenly, the teacher gets up and starts beating Vedat. Vedat is completely shocked and does not understand what is happening. Later, he learns that one of the running students has knocked down a girl, and the girl has pointed at him by mistake. When his father goes to the school to confront the teacher, the teacher looks down on his appearance with contempt, which makes Vedat feel even worse.

Communist Memet

At high school, there is an orphan boy named Mehmet. Everyone calls him “Communist Memet.” After the hotel where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stays during his arrival in Samsun on May 19, 1919 is turned into a museum, its ground floor becomes a library called Gazi Library. Vedat reads many books there and meets Memet in the library.

One evening, after leaving the library, Vedat walks home with Memet to Kökçüoğlu, a neighborhood by the shore where his family lives. During that walk, he hears for the first time that there are bourgeois and proletarian classes in Turkey as well, and that communism is the only way to overcome this conflict.

The Neighborhood as a Space of Oral Culture

The neighborhood is divided into two parts known as “upper” and “lower.” Kurds live in the upper part. There is a man there called Bandit Kurdish Kerim. He becomes an outlaw after a moneylender takes away the woman he loves. Even though the police search for him, the neighborhood never betrays him. In the end, people hear that his head has been blown apart by a shepherd in the mountains. The authorities distribute photographs of his body to the public. It is also said that his nephew, Kurdish Mecit, dies in a shooting accident while serving in the army.

The neighbors look after one another. In the evenings, they gather in someone’s house to tell stories, improvise folk verses, and sing ballads. During Ramadan, they paint their faces, wear disguises, and perform comic sketches. During religious holidays, tents are set up in an open field where people normally play football, and the celebrations continue until late at night with swings, Ferris wheels, egg-cracking games, pastry sellers, wrestling matches, and other festivities.

Outside school, Vedat often goes to the coffeehouse near the shop where his father works. There, the owner, Uncle Salih, gives him oral quizzes. Uncle Salih is deeply interested in history and reads constantly. He asks Vedat questions, and Vedat answers them confidently in front of the people in the coffeehouse. In this way, he develops the ability to express himself before crowds.

He moves from this oral culture into written culture through his older sister, who is considered the intellectual of the family because she finishes the second grade of primary school. She reads her novels over and over again, and Vedat begins reading them as well. Yet much of what he learns at school is later contradicted by life itself.

Interrogation

When he meets with Communist Memet, they talk about Marx and Engels. One day, Memet is taken into custody. Because he writes down his conversations with Vedat in his diary, he tells Vedat that the police want to see him as well. Vedat goes to the police station. A plainclothes officer asks what Memet is known as and what his nickname is. Vedat replies, “Literary man.” Thanks to this answer, Memet also avoids trouble, but the two of them rarely see each other again afterward.

Communist Friends

Another person Vedat meets at Gazi Library is Sefer Aytekin, a village teacher from Çırakman. Sefer is a few years older than him, newly married, of Alevi-Bektashi background, and a communist strongly influenced by peasantism. He also knows other communists from the Samsun provincial organization of the Turkish Communist Party. Through Sefer, Vedat meets more communists.

One day, he becomes very excited when he sees workers at the tobacco factory go on strike. The strike ends the next day, but even so, seeing something he has secretly carried inside himself take shape in real life fills him with enthusiasm.

During his final year of high school, two girls join the class. One of them is Merih. Vedat falls in love with her the moment he sees her. They talk about the poets they admire and share the poems they write. Both of them are communists. Although Sefer tells Vedat that a woman from the organization will meet with him, the meeting is postponed for some reason and never takes place.

In 1937, before leaving Samsun to study at university in Istanbul, Vedat attends a farewell dinner with friends at Sefer's house. One of the four communist tobacco workers there is the provincial secretary. He tells them that a prosecutor he knows, who once comes to search his house, jokingly says to him, "So we are the traitorous bourgeoisie, aren't we?" He then teases Vedat, saying that he too will become bourgeois once he gets an education. Vedat is hurt by the remark and replies that he will never forget who he is.

Istanbul

When Vedat arrives in Istanbul on a ferry from Sinop with his older sister, they go to the house of his mother's cousin. Her uncle had once been the sheikh of the Haseki Lodge. After the dervish lodges are closed down and the uncle dies, the small house in the courtyard is left to his daughter and wife. The daughter's husband is an Albanian policeman, but because he is an aggressive man, neither Vedat nor his sister feels comfortable there.

Vedat takes the entrance exam for the Teachers' Training College and ranks fourth among twenty candidates. Since the school accepts only two students, he is not admitted. Around this time, Merih becomes a philosophy student at Istanbul University. One day in Beyazıt, Vedat learns from another student that the Ministry of National Defense sponsors students to train as teachers for military high schools. He immediately applies. When he is asked to provide proof that he is Turkish, Merih's father, Doctor Ertuğrul Baykal, sends a note saying, "He is a Turk's son, so he is a Turk" and Vedat is admitted to the Department of Turkology.

He now spends time alone with Merih, and they go together to cinemas, theaters, exhibitions, and political meetings. Vedat reads writers such as Nâzım Hikmet, Sabahattin Ali, Sabiha and Zekeriya Sertel, and Niyazi Remzi. Even though he thinks of them as "petty bourgeois," he also reads poets like Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, Ahmet Muhip Dıranas, and Orhan Veli Kanık. But one day, several military teacher candidates notice him reading a book called *Imperialism—Dying Capitalism* and try to intimidate him.

The Department of Turkology is highly nationalist and strongly anti-Soviet, especially under the growing influence of Nazi Germany. A student named Ahmet Ateş, who is rumored to have socialist sympathies, gradually transforms into the complete opposite under the pressure of Nazi influence, Germany's early wartime successes, and the atmosphere in the department. One day, he and Vedat get into an argument about the outcome of the war. At one point during their childish exchange, they agree that whoever backs the losing side will give the other ten books.

There are also students in the department who openly oppose Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. On the day of Atatürk's death, a student named Cahit Okurer raises a glass in the cafeteria and says, "To the health of our ancestor." A Kemalist student, Cahit Erencan (later known as Külebi), attacks him. Vedat becomes friends with Cahit Erencan without hiding the fact that he is a communist. Since both love poetry, they get along well. Aside from Kenan Uluğ from the Faculty of Science, Cabir Sarıoğlu from Geography, and Yusuf Atılgan, who later joins their department, Vedat finds almost no other students with whom he can build political solidarity.

Haig

Another person Vedat reconnects with from Samsun is Haig Açıkgöz, a medical student. Haig becomes someone he can collaborate with politically. His father is a merchant. Back in high school,

when Vedat talks to him about Marx and Engels, Haig says that he believes everyone must find their own path through lived experience.

When Haig comes to Istanbul to study medicine, his father goes bankrupt. Because he is Armenian, he cannot benefit from the opportunities the Ministry of Health provides for Turkish students. He survives on a small scholarship from the Armenian community.

One day, he introduces Vedat to several Armenian communist youths. Together they go swimming in Kartal, but Vedat feels deeply isolated among them, because all of them dislike Turks due to relatives who had been killed by Turks in the past.

Samsun

When Vedat returns to Samsun during the summer break, he meets with Sefer again. Without openly saying that the party has distanced itself from Moscow following the decentralization decision, Sefer implies that it is moving closer to Kemalism, which they see as the strongest force against religious fanaticism. They are trying to cooperate openly with state institutions. Vedat, still committed to a strict revolutionary line, cannot fully agree with him, but Sefer, as a village teacher, approaches things more realistically.

Vedat Türkali later notes that during those years many progressive ideas introduced to Kemalist administrators by communists acting under a Kemalist appearance were ultimately credited to the Kemalists themselves, while communists continued to be openly denigrated.

Communist Memet Again

One day, while Vedat is walking with Merih in Sultanahmet, they run into Communist Memet on the street. Because of his clothes, he looks almost like a beggar. Since he has no family or support, he has been left completely on his own. Vedat and Merih buy him shoes and new clothes. But Memet refuses to give up his old cap. Embarrassed by the attention a man in such a shabby cap might attract beside someone in uniform, Vedat suddenly grabs it one day and throws it onto the top of an old fountain.

Around that time, Memet rents a room in the house of an Armenian family together with Haig, who is also looking for a place to stay. Later, through Seyfettin Kutay –their former high school history teacher, working as a lawyer in Istanbul– he finds a job at the State Railways. He starts working at the ticket office in Sirkeci.

The Media

Almost all newspapers try to adapt themselves to the six principles of Kemalism. The only paper that consistently publishes antifascist content is *Tan*. Its strongest fascist rival is *Cumhuriyet*. By defending a nationalist form of statism, it effectively turns into a pro-Nazi publication during the war years. Later, some claim that its owner, Yunus Nadi, receives support from the Germans.

Sefer sends Vedat an article he has written about the social position of women and asks him to deliver it personally to Sabiha Sertel, one of the owners of the newspaper *Tan*. Even though Vedat knows it is risky for someone in uniform to go there, he still delivers the article. Sabiha Sertel does not publish it, but she sends Sefer a letter explaining her criticisms.

Afterward, Sefer starts a magazine called *Toprak* in Samsun, but he cannot keep it going. Later, he publishes another magazine in Istanbul called *Küllük*, yet it also ends after a single issue. The journal published by the Turkish Communist Party is *Yeni Edebiyat*, though it has little influence.

With Sefer

Sefer receives his high school diploma and begins studying Russian philology in Ankara. He also starts working for *Ülkü*, a magazine published by the Republican People's Party. At one point, he comes to Istanbul with an address in hand but cannot find the people he is looking for. Since Vedat's older sister has by then settled in Istanbul, they go to her house instead. Vedat is disturbed by the party's passivity, yet apart from the discussions they previously had in Samsun, they speak about little else.

At another time, Sefer comes from Ankara to Istanbul hoping to meet Abidin Dino. Together they visit his attic studio in Galata. They talk about painting, literature, and current politics. Later they meet again, and Abidin Dino says that the only urgent task is to restrain the Turanists who want Turkey to enter the war on Germany's side.

The Search

One day, when Vedat arrives at school, he learns that his locker and those of two friends have been searched. A book by Hikmet Kivılcımlı found in Cabir's locker has been torn apart. In the end, nothing incriminating is discovered, but they learn that someone has anonymously informed on them. The report claims that they gave flowers to a Soviet diplomatic representative arriving by ferry in Galata.

Organizing

Tahsin Berkem, Asaf Ertekin, Osman Paçalı, Yusuf Atılgan, Haig Açıkgöz, Merih, and Vedat decide to form a clandestine organization. They gather upstairs in the house where Tahsin lives with his mother in Sarıyer and read Hikmet Kivılcımlı's books while discussing solutions to the country's problems. Once workers and peasants unite and carry out a revolution, they believe, everything will change. Their task is to create the conditions that can make this possible.

After a while, Tahsin's classmate Mustafa Göksu joins them, bringing another financially comfortable member into the group. To support the organization, Merih gives them jewelry she has received from her family; her necklaces, rings, earrings. But one of their friends takes one of the necklaces and gives it as a gift to his Greek girlfriend. Since typewriters are difficult to find during the war years, Merih asks her father for one, saying she needs it for schoolwork, and a Hermes Baby typewriter is sent from Samsun. They intend eventually to hand over everything they acquire to the Turkish Communist Party, but they never manage to meet the person who can connect them with the party.

One day, Osman arranges for Vedat to meet Boz Mehmet at his house. Vedat thinks he may finally be the contact they have been searching for. But late that night, while the two walk together after leaving the house, Mehmet tells him that Moscow Radio is looking for recruits. Vedat is offended that, after all his efforts to do something inside Turkey, Mehmet offers him a position abroad instead. He refuses the offer.

After Merih types out Nâzım Hikmet's *The Turkish Peasant*, *Surahs of Doom*, and *The Epic of the War of Independence*, they distribute the poems among students. When Asaf Ertekin transfers to the Faculty of Language, History and Geography in Ankara, *The Epic of the War of Independence* also begins circulating among leftist circles there.

One day, while Vedat is at school, General Hüsni Kılınç orders a search of his belongings. Nothing is found except a photograph of Merih. The general shouts at him, "You are always running around with girls!"

Despite everything, they decide to take action. For printing leaflets, they need a mimeograph machine, but the identities of buyers are officially recorded. Basri contacts an old friend, Tefik Dilmen, gives him the money, and asks him to purchase the machine instead. Everything is then hidden in Haig's house.

Basri

Basri becomes a sergeant. Since he knows Mihri Belli as a capable communist who has returned from America, he wears a suit Mihri gives him. It is the first time Vedat sees trousers with a zipper instead of buttons. Basri is assigned as a clerk in a regiment in Thrace. Almost every week, he visits his wife and children in Istanbul, where his wife works as a teacher.

New Names

Vedat and Merih marry in Samsun. According to military regulations, Vedat is not allowed to marry unless he is either twenty-five years old or a lieutenant. Merih has completed her degree, but Vedat has not taken his final exams so that he can remain in Istanbul. Since Basri returns to Istanbul after finishing his military service and begins looking for work, he advises Vedat to meet Mihri Belli. Vedat visits him at Sümerbank, where he works, and finds him sincere, modest, and friendly.

After graduating, Vedat has to complete six months of training at the Reserve Officers' School and goes to Ankara. The intellectual atmosphere there is shaped by progressive academics such as Niyazi Berkes, Medina Berkes, Pertev Naili Boratav, and, from outside the faculty, Adnan Cemgil. They all gather around the Marxist journal *Yurt ve Dünya*. But Behice Boran and Muzaffer Şerif break away and decide to launch another journal called *Adımlar*. Both adopt a more militant stance.

Muzaffer Şerif shares his ideas for establishing a social psychology department with Merih, and it is decided that she will become his assistant. She is also expected to study English with Behice Boran. They gather at Behice Boran's house and read the manifesto that will appear in the first issue of the journal. Behice Boran explains that after returning from America, she begins thinking seriously about what she can do as a communist. Vedat says that he has felt the same way for years.

When the first issue of the journal is published, they go out to celebrate. But Mihri arrives from Istanbul and says that starting a separate journal is not a good idea. He even says that they are planning to launch another journal under the leadership of Zeki Başımar. Since Başımar is considered the "biggest" figure in Ankara, everyone falls silent.

On May 1, 1943, they celebrate at the Gazi Forest Farm. On the train ride back, Behice and Merih sing folk songs. Later, Vedat notes that he can never fully understand how Muzaffer Şerif eventually becomes such a different person in America. He wonders whether being detained once is what "Americanizes" him.

Over time, their relationship with Behice Boran also changes. Vedat thinks that after she takes leadership of the organization, she begins looking down on others. Years later, when his novel *Bir Gün Tek Başına* receives the Orhan Kemal Award, they meet again at the ceremony. Behice Boran complains that he never calls or checks in on her and says, "Isn't that shameful?" Vedat replies, "Yes, it is shameful." They later meet again at an October Revolution cocktail reception organized by the Soviet Consulate, and after the September 12 coup they never see each other again. When Vedat Türkali receives news of Behice Boran's death while giving a speech in Germany, he invites everyone present to stand in silence in her memory.

The Decision to Join the Turkish Communist Party

Vedat wants to repay his debt to the Ministry of National Defense and leave military teaching, but he cannot raise the required amount. Merih's dream of working at the university also never comes true. Vedat is assigned to Maltepe Military High School in Akşehir.

At one point, Haig secretly visits them and shares the party's current agenda. Sebati Selimoğlu, whom Basri knows from Sivas, has become secretary of the Istanbul provincial committee. They secretly travel to Istanbul and gather at Merih's family home in Nişantaşı, where they decide to dissolve their own organization and join the Turkish Communist Party. All of their equipment and savings will be handed over to the party.

Before returning, Vedat visits Sebati Selimoğlu at his home. They exchange mailing addresses. One day, a bulletin titled *The Party's Views and Demands* arrives. It explains that a new period has begun against the Kemalist ruling party and outlines the tasks ahead. As Vedat reads it, he feels that it grounds idealistic revolutionaries like himself in political reality. But one day his mail arrives with the envelope already opened. While he is still suspicious of the postman, he learns that his friends have been arrested.

When the summer break of 1944 begins, they start gathering at Mihri Belli's house in the Fatih district of Çarşamba. Mihri says it would be useful for Boz Mehmet, who is living in exile in Mucur, to come to Istanbul. Vedat and Sefer Aytekin, who is from Hacıbektaş, set off on the journey. Since Sefer knows village teachers in Mucur, they tell them the lie that Vedat is conducting research on Hacıbektaş.

In Mucur, they are hosted in a school and sleep on mattresses laid out on the floor. Wanting to hide the papers they have brought for Mehmet, they stuff them into a hole for safety. But the moment they turn off the light, they hear rats moving inside the wooden walls and panic at the thought that the papers might be eaten. Eventually, they decide to keep them under a pillow instead.

The next day, they spot Mehmet in the marketplace, where the weekly bazaar has been set up. But he does not recognize them. He goes into a coffeehouse, and they follow him. They try speaking in coded language loudly enough for him to hear, yet Mehmet ignores them. When he leaves the coffeehouse, they leave too. Finally, in the marketplace, Sefer quietly approaches him and slips him the papers, and they arrange a meeting. Later they meet and talk in an open field outside the town. Mehmet says he is overjoyed to see them because he feels forgotten.

On the way back, they have to pass through Hacıbektaş and walk across fields when an old man appears before them. As the conversation turns to the war, Vedat says that the Germans will defeat the Russians. The old man replies that the Bolsheviks will not be defeated easily and that the Mensheviks are weak. Vedat and Sefer begin wondering whether the man is trying to test them. But they relax after he explains that he was captured by the Russians during the war and first joined the Mensheviks and later the Bolsheviks.

Basri's Request

When they return, Basri's wife Şükriye comes to the house in Nişantaşı and tells Vedat that Basri, who is hiding from the police, wants to see him. They leave the house separately and begin walking. Basri is hiding in a house in Kasımpaşa. Whenever Şükriye bends down in front of a door, Vedat will understand that it is the place where Basri is hiding. Vedat notices the door where Şükriye pretends to tie her shoe, but when he knocks on the gate opening into a garden, nobody answers. This time he begins pounding on it loudly. Eventually a stranger opens the door. Vedat says he has come to see Basri. Basri is staying in the basement of the building behind the garden. They talk until late at night. Basri tells Vedat that if anything happens to him, he wants him to look after his children. Vedat leaves without knowing that this will be the last time he ever sees him. Although he feels proud that Basri entrusts his children to him, he carries the pain of not being able to keep that promise for the rest of his life.

In Istanbul

As Vedat returns to Akşehir, Mihri tells him that he plans to send someone to the Adana region to establish contacts and organize people there. Vedat leaves Merih, who is about to give birth to their daughter Deniz, in Istanbul and waits at the designated place at the appointed time, but nobody comes. Out of this disappointment, he writes the poem "Istanbul."

When he returns to Istanbul during the holiday break, he learns that Mihri Belli has been arrested. Mihri is seen as a "political star" who has come from Roosevelt's America. He is nothing like the "crushed, exhausted, narrow-minded" party members Vedat knows. Even if some people think he looks down on others, Vedat sees him as frank and self-sacrificing.

The address Mihri gives Vedat in case of his arrest belongs to Emin Sekun. Vedat goes there from memory, but Emin treats him coldly, suspecting he may be a policeman. When Vedat returns two days later, Emin embraces him and says that Doctor Şefik Hüsnü wants to meet him.

When Vedat is finally alone with Şefik Hüsnü, he tells him that he can travel from Akşehir to Istanbul whenever necessary for underground work. Şefik Hüsnü replies that there is no need for that. As he leaves, Vedat says that if he ever calls by telephone, he will introduce himself as "Ferdi," inspired by the pseudonym Ferdi Nusret that he once used in high school. Şefik Hüsnü smiles when he hears this. Much later, Vedat learns that Şefik Hüsnü's own code name is Ferdi, and he remembers that smile.

Yusuf Atılğan

Yusuf Atılğan is assigned to Maltepe Military High School together with Celal Savaş. Vedat gets along very well with Celal, but Yusuf does not want to become involved with them. He spends his time playing cards with nationalist-leaning teachers in the residence where unmarried teachers stay. After a while, Yusuf is detained. Since someone else gives the authorities Vedat's name, they question Yusuf about him as well, but Yusuf refuses to inform on anyone. After receiving a six-month sentence, he is expelled from the army. Vedat cannot reach him for years afterward. Eventually Yusuf explains that he stayed away from them because he feared he might not be able to endure interrogation and could end up naming someone.

Basri's Death

Vedat falls into a coma after a doctor mistakenly injects medication intended for the muscles directly into a vein while treating a throat infection. He is then given two months of medical leave to recover, and Merih also obtains a false medical report so they can travel together to Istanbul. On the very day they arrive, they are devastated by the news of Basri's death. Basri has been thrown from a window by police officers while detained in the First Branch on the top floor of Sansaryan Han. He becomes the second person after the tobacco worker Abbas to be killed in this way.

Boz Mehmet

When Vedat goes to see Şefik Hüsnü, he is given the address of Ahmet Fırıncı. Vedat visits him, and Ahmet says that Boz Mehmet will be waiting behind the Fatih Mosque. Vedat goes there, and Boz Mehmet suddenly emerges from the darkness. Throughout their entire conversation, there is barely any genuine dialogue between them. As the organization's secretary, Mehmet speaks almost as if he is delivering propaganda to him. Vedat later adds that although some people claim Mehmet is a police or intelligence agent, Mihri Belli insists that he is an honorable revolutionary.

The Socialist Laborers' and Peasants' Party of Turkey

In the summer of 1946, Şefik Hüsnü establishes the Socialist Laborers' and Peasants' Party of Turkey. Vedat now begins visiting his house openly during the daytime without fear. Around this time, some suggest joining the Democrat Party and forming a left wing within it, but Şefik Hüsnü laughs at the idea when recounting it. Because anti-communist publications are spreading everywhere, Vedat expects a police raid, yet Şefik Hüsnü insists that nothing of the sort will happen. Still, this optimism seems unrealistic in a climate where even Fevzi Çakmak, well known for his anti-communism, is attacked as a "communist" merely for attempting to establish a Human Rights Association.

Cami Baykurt

Through his father-in-law, Vedat meets Cami Baykurt. Cami Bey dislikes the Kemalists because he has heard that some of the figures gathered around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk freely take money from a Jewish banker in Galata. Since he is an old friend of Fevzi Çakmak, he believes that Çakmak is the only person capable of freeing the country from the Republican People's Party.

Trying to Be Expelled

After returning to Akşehir, Vedat deliberately begins reading banned publications openly in places where everyone gathers, hoping to be expelled from military service. For four full days he tries to make sure people notice what he is reading, but nobody pays attention. Then he reads in the newspaper that arrests have taken place in Istanbul and that Şefik Hüsnü is among those detained. He gathers up all the banned publications, rushes home, and destroys them. For days he waits to be arrested, but nobody comes.

With Zeki Baştımar

For a short time, Vedat goes to Ankara and meets Zeki Baştımar through Asaf Ertekin. Zeki is surprised to learn that Vedat has directed people seeking contact with the party to an assistant doctor working in Cerrahpaşa. Vedat cannot understand why this matters. When he says they are prepared to undertake activities on behalf of the TKP, Zeki advises patience.

Istanbul Again

When Maltepe Military High School is moved to Istanbul, Vedat rents a house in Üsküdar. But despite working as a Turkish teacher in a middle school, Merih cannot get transferred there. Later they discover that the reason is Vedat himself.

Once the party resumes underground activity, Vedat also begins meeting with Basri's friend Tevfik Dilmen. During the 1951 arrests, after Vedat's landlord sees him leaving the house one night, Tevfik Dilmen becomes an informant. Even so, he withholds much of what he knows and refuses to give many names.

Finally

Vedat Türkali argues that socialist movements, especially within the Stalinist model, gradually become bureaucratized, lose touch with the working class, and forfeit their revolutionary dynamism. He recalls being invited to Moscow as a speaker and hearing an official complain that workers have become depoliticized. Vedat interprets this as the result of socialism ceasing to be a living political process

based on direct popular participation and instead turning into a routinized structure identified with the state.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Class As the child of a poor family, Vedat Türkali comes to understand the concept of “class” through direct lived experience. He witnesses how much of what he learns from schoolbooks is contradicted by life itself. For example, he is taught that the Turkish Red Crescent exists to help people in difficult times, yet during hardship it is not the Red Crescent but ordinary poor people living according to Islamic values who support one another. For this reason, the concept of “class” becomes, for him, the most convincing idea he encounters in leftist literature because it is repeatedly confirmed by reality. Society is divided between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the working class, and communism appears to him as the only possible solution to this conflict. In this sense, Vedat Türkali interprets the poverty he personally experiences not as an individual problem but as a social one.

POLITICS

Conflict As a communist military teacher, Vedat Türkali spends his life in conflict both with the state and with people who defend state-supported identities and ideologies. During this process, many are arrested, and some, like Basri, are even killed. He is forced to conduct all of his relationships in secrecy, within an atmosphere that often borders on paranoia. For example, while traveling to Hacıbektaş, he and his friends question whether the villager they encounter is an agent or simply an ordinary peasant, and they even wonder whether their comrade Boz Mehmet may be working with the police. This pervasive sense of conflict becomes so central to Vedat Türkali’s life that while his wife Merih is giving birth to their daughter Deniz, he leaves her alone in order to travel elsewhere for organizational work. In this context, his admiration for the flexibility of Mihri Belli, who returns from America with leftist ideas yet differs from the others, and his disappointment in Muzafer Şerif for becoming “someone else” in America both seem tied to his determination to sustain this political struggle in an uncompromising way.

Polarization While studying in the Department of Turkology at Istanbul University, Vedat Türkali feels deeply uncomfortable because most of the students he spends time with have fascist tendencies. This division, which he experiences during the years of the Second World War, is largely shaped by the perceived need to choose between the Soviets and the Germans. For example, a student named Ahmet Ateş, around whom rumors of socialism once circulate, is suddenly transformed into a Nazi sympathizer under the influence of Germany’s military successes. The arguments between him and Vedat revolve less around ideological theory than around the expected outcome of the war itself. At one point, they even make a bet that whoever supports the losing side will have to buy books for the other. Later, after becoming a teacher, Vedat Türkali attempts to use this polarized atmosphere to get himself expelled from the military by openly reading banned publications, but his efforts lead nowhere.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The ideas we read in books and later see confirmed in real life help us recognize that many of our experiences can be filtered through broader concepts. Yet conceptual thinking can sometimes turn into ideological obsession. At what point do you think actions carried out in the name of an ideology become an obsession?
2. Vedat Türkali feels cornered during the Cold War because he studies alongside people with fascist tendencies in the Department of Turkology and later works as a military teacher among uniformed men who never question state-supported identities and ideologies. In this sense, if social and political environments allowed different ideologies to be expressed and represented institutionally, would individuals be less likely to develop rigid or uncompromising ideological positions?