

Reflections of Social, Political and Educational Bigotry in “The Chaotic Class (Hababam Sinifi)”: A Comparative Cultural review of the Novel and Its Film Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Modern Turkish Republic emphasizes the values about the young and the new. In the making of the new society, the government employed modern linguistic and cultural exercises such as linguistic simplification, nationalization and modernization. However, military intervention in politics and social life has been one of the major elements in hitching political, social and even literary culture. The novel *The Chaotic Class (Hababam Sinifi)* by Rifat Ilgaz is composed under such a shade of military and traditional censorship, which impacted the main ideas and even the structure of the novel. Ilgaz hoped to transcend the censorship by the aid of other means such as theatre and cinema. That’s why, his work is composed in a much more adaptive style to the visual industry. The novel howls with the cries of traditional and military oppression of conservative and militaristic hegemony over a must-renovate social and political system. Ilgaz conveys his discussion over a barely successful yet extremely talented set of students, young stereotypical characters, under the misconduct of regressive education system implemented harshly by the military dictatorship. In the making of its film, one of the greatest achievements was to transcend military oppression through adaptation of the novel. The director Ertem Egilmez produced the box office success film series, dwelling on a more social criticism over the classroom. In the process of adaptation, even though Ilgaz criticized Egilmez a lot, through the film series, Egilmez was successful in conveying the idea of cultural advancement and linguistic purification which had been a controversy until the new millennium. However, Egilmez employed a more socially and culturally critical reading and adaptation of Ilgaz. Thus, the Turkish film industry, Yesilcam, successfully executed its duty of transforming the society thanks to literary background of Turkish culture. This study elaborates on the connections between the film and the literary work in terms of language, social life and education.

Keywords: Adaptation, Hababam Sinifi, Modern Turkish Culture, The Chaotic class, Yesilcam

INTRODUCTION

The *The Chaotic Class* by Rifat Ilgaz is a novel designated as a “goose that lays golden eggs” (Populer Tarih Dergisi, 2001). Ilgaz’s masterwork has been adapted to cinema and theatre many times as a search of exceeding the barrier of censorship. Indeed, Ilgaz sources his masterwork from his formal education and professional occupation as a Turkish Literature teacher. He fosters a critical approach to the system, which is a crime under the shadow of

military oppression when all the Europe suffered from world wars until human right movements in the 1980s.

The film adaptation series by Yesilcam director Ertem Egilmez are the first works to exceed military censorship barrier in the second half of the 1970s. His adaptation mostly differs from the source text in the sense of what problem it addresses. Still, the film is a success in terms of box office harvest and victory over military censorship.

Accelerated by the foundation of the new republic, Turkish society have suffered a lot in modernizing all its ideology including political and social structure. However, military has had such a considerable impact on social and political life, and even education system, as Europe has been struggling with world wars and age of dictatorship while transition to real democracies. Turkey has not been exempted from the shadow of the terror of World War II despite evading the most destructive war in history of civilization.

Under the shadow of the terror of war and military oppression, Ilgaz has managed to publish his works regardless of his life on exile. The major dissemination of his work “The Chaotic Class” is achieved by Ertem Egilmez by adopting it to the cinema and showcasing the film successfully bypassing censorship barrier. While Egilmez does not address the same themes as in the novel, focusing more on a social criticism of 70s in his adaptation, Ilgaz adopts a literary critic position apart from dealing with social, cultural and educational problems in late 30s and 40s.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 RIFAT ILGAZ

Born as an Ottoman in 1911, Ilgaz became one of the first teachers of the new Turkish Republic. However, he never managed to be in good relations with the system. His critical stance against military oppression resulted in his life either on exile or in prison, which didn’t prevent him from writing what he believed to be true, despite discouragement of his teachers (Skylife, 1993). He got his high school education in a teacher education school in Kastamonu, Turkey in 1930. After that, he enrolled in Gazi Education Institute Literature Department in 1938.

As a realist author, his works are influenced by expressionism. He discusses his literary point of view in his novels and poems from a critical approach. He becomes a realist poet during the years of World War II, which is based on his experience and formal education. His cultural and linguistic view is shaped by the foundation of the new republic and its modernization movements. He grew up as a supporter of the revolutions in the areas of linguistics and culture as well as politics and law.

1.2 SOCIAL REALISM

According to Morson (1979), realism demonstrates writer’s laments missing pre-revolutionary days when they have not been silenced so by government policies. Ilgaz also suggests that he is one of the first liberty generation after the declaration in 1908, which suggested the supremacy of constitution over Ottoman Royal Family. However, for him, the first years of the republican revolutions has not been painless. As the society has inherited obsolete ways from the old culture, Ilgaz perceives these exercises as an obstacle against progress.

Realism also suggests a pure language and description of reality as it is in vulgar and indecent ways (Kesim, 2015). For this reason, Ilgaz constantly refers to Symbolism and his preceding symbolist writers such as Ahmet Hasim in a skeptical way, since both movements contrasts obviously. As Ilgaz employs Realism in order to mirror the reality of social and educational problems under the shade of oppression, Symbolism escapes from reality and

employs extensive usage of metaphors as the movement suggests that the reality has no artistic value (ibid.).

1.3 EXPRESSIONISM

Expressionism and Realism are different movements, yet, they have common grounds on reflection of reality as it is, both employing skepticism, insecurity and cultural unrest (Karaalioglu, 1980, qtd. from Kesim, 2015). Expressionism reflects the values of progressive youth and somehow anarchy since it is the natural result of political or parental oppression (Mitzman, 1977).

The novel *The Chaotic Class* fosters realist and expressionist aspects since it is firstly critical of youth education and military curriculum. Ilgaz aims to address the community resistant to change or, in other words, modernize. Also, teachers and management exercises too much power and authority over students, which is a result of the influence of military over culture and government. Ilgaz writes his novel challenging oppression and supremacy of elders with old thought patterns, resulting in his realist and expressionist work.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparative cultural study between the both media: the novel and the film of Rifat Ilgaz's novel *The Chaotic Class*. The media is investigated through literary and culturally critical approach and the findings are compared in order to examine the process of adaptation and also the cultural reality of their own time.

3 FINDINGS

The novel and the film mainly examine different themes even though they have some similarities. Ilgaz shows his displeasure of the film versions by Egilmez (Populer Tarih, 2001) since Egilmez examines different themes according to his perception due to different time span. Egilmez also suffers from censorship, which makes it agreeable why the changes exist. In other words, Egilmez adapts Ilgaz's novel in his reality of 70s Turkey where military conflicts with people and activists from different world view.

3.1 NOVEL

Ilgaz's masterpiece does not conflict with republican ideas of progress and modernization, yet, he is highly critical of still prevailing traditions that belong to the old understanding of supremacy of elders. In this aspect, Ilgaz agrees with and extends the notion of the new "young" republic where the youth should build the new system and improve the republican values. The school management and teaching staff at Ilgaz's school are regressive and old fashioned. Old teachers favour old imperial tradition of education, and management oppresses the students for the sake of education. The managers fail to supply students who stay in dormitory with the proper material. Moreover, they don't even include students in decision making process inside school.

The students in Ilgaz's universe, on the other hand, are quite extraordinary. Ilgaz depicts the students, who are adapted from his experience at high school (Ozel, 1978), as smart and dexterous young members of society who suffer from oppression of elders and old thought system. He creates the classroom community as such a separate community that all the students individually foster various skill sets combined with the same world view, which Ilgaz suggests his discussion over. The students form such a society that they even have their own anthem in

their own language. The students are fond of literature, theatre and sports, and those individuals support the linguistic purification that occurred with republican revolutions. Ilgaz introduces his social and literary critic position over the classroom community.

Ilgaz also criticizes the militarist curriculum. Students are under strict instruction of militaristic exercises as well as knowledge. The diverse and multi-cultured classroom community suffers from traditional way of education which Ilgaz suggests as exercises from middle ages scholastic thought by militarized curriculum (Ilgaz, 2015). He implies that militarized education agrees with the exercises from medrese background, encouraging students to memorize and even cheat in exams. Moreover, militarized education system is the most considerable threat against multicultural classroom and diversity.

3.1.1 THEMES

3.1.1.1 ELDERS AND MILITARISM

Teachers of the Chaotic Class are old people exercising the methods of “medrese” education. Indeed, time does not favour them because they have been trained in imperial system. However, they find it difficult to keep up with republican system. Moreover, they cannot connect with the new generation. For example, the vice principal Kel Mahmut fails to enforce school rules because his institution fails to meet the need of students to create their own unique identities. Education system then does not glorify diverse community, which reflects early nationalist thought of modern times. The system takes students as students to shape disregarding their background, abilities and needs. Ilgaz supports his stance by referring to banishment of football and other sports in physical education lessons and replacing with military education, march order and military commands. For instance, the teacher Badi Ekrem exercises his power over the classroom not as a teacher but as a commander in order to impress his girlfriend. The class is, indeed, aware of the situation and finds new ways to invent humour out of his situation. The dog, Tekkulak, plays with the students marching to the place of Badi’s girlfriend, Macide, in a disorganized way. When they arrive, Badi commands march in order to attract Macide’s attention, yet, only Tekkulak obeys the command. The class is entertained by this situation. By this way, Ilgaz satirizes the way of military parades and show-offs and mixing social life with militaristic exercises for the sake of creating a soldier nation. In this way, he emphasizes the importance of civil government and social democracy many times in his novel, satirizing elderly and military intervention in culture and politics.

Ilgaz does not separate military and elders when it comes to political interference. That is, the nameless school principals and Kel Mahmut along with teachers do not follow decisions made by students in democratic and systematical ways. He imposes not to put his decisions into voting poll. Palamut Recep, who is a good theatrical performer and speaker, has to retreat from class representation by the force of Kel Mahmut’s arbitrary decision due to misconduct of school infirmary. Also, Ilgaz implies elder’s interference to democracy by pointing out teacher’s inability to manage the classroom and blame the representative every time they fail. The new class representative and the true leader of classroom in every prank and decision they make, Tulum Hayri, concludes elder’s incompetence and hypocrisy when the class prepares a prank to the assistant teacher, Sansar Behcet, who oversteps his position with the relief of being the authority. Sansar steps into the classroom turning out the doorway as a trap for himself, a bucket of water cleansing him very well from top to bottom. Of course, he tries to scoundrel the class representative, Tulum Hayri, trying to find out who is behind this vile. Hayri teaches a better lesson than the assistant “Do you now realize that we have a representative? Sir, I am neither a leader nor a representative when you enter the classroom.”. Ilgaz challenges the idea

of elders as leaders of the community through the mis-exercises of power of teachers and managers, which is an inherited “medrese” tradition.

The classroom also suffers from military traditions along with the old. Ilgaz criticizes the use of military education of the youth by making his characters urinate on the machine gun that military teacher introduces the classroom. In his introduction, the teacher, or commander, prefers to use the old term for coolant in Turkish “muberrit” instead of “sogutucu”, which is highly representative of military and its bigotry in old traditions. The students are intelligent enough to understand the meaning, yet confused by the impracticality of the knowledge. They prefer a more entertaining and useful way to cool down the machine gun by urinating on it instead of proper way of stuffing with the grass, which irritates Inek Saban since grass makes it a funny joke by his classmates referring to cows’ food and his nickname “Inek (cow)”, however, the other way ridicules the seriousness of the commander and military.

Ilgaz criticizes the military not only for its bigotry and old-fashion but also for its disregard of diversity and reality of social life. Indeed, military and social life are different, yet, in modern times especially between 30’s and 50’s after World War II, military interferes with social life because of the security issues and worries. However, its interference stops the progress of culture, diversity and democracy. In the novel, the commander chooses a sergeant parallel to class representative, Colak Hamdi in the shooting range. This order lacking collective decision making fails the commander and his practices. Colak has got a high self-esteem to shoot the target in bulls eye. Yet, the commander misinstructs him to use right hand while Hamdi is left-handed. After failing the first attempt, Hamdi takes permission to realize himself and use his left hand, which results in a perfect score for him. This way Ilgaz shows the superiority of diversity and personal decision making over command chain of military within education system.

3.1.1.2 EDUCATION SYSTEM

Ilgaz criticizes the early education system of the young republic which inherited from the obsolete, arbitrary and highly traditional Medrese system. In the novel, teachers instruct students to memorize the book, which lacks practical information. For example, Kel Mahmut gives each point to Tulum Hayri every time he mentions about what is covered in the previous class, yet he lacks the critical information about the Siege of Vienna. The vice principal and history teacher, Kel Mahmut, concludes the problem: You didn’t even open the book once. However, the issue is that, the exam is not systematically prepared, time, place and subject arbitrarily chosen by the ultimate authority in the classroom, the teacher. That concludes how the obsolete education system lacks the proper elements of assessment and evaluation, such as exam preparation processes, committees and proper questions that evaluate students’ cognitive process and progress. According to Dogan (2017), the exam questions lacking critical aspect may result in students’ misconception of the exam questions. Moreover, such questions lack clear implementation of what behaviour or knowledge is being assessed. Indeed, the novel, along with the film, is full of scenes that teachers implement exams as a way of punishment, and the expectation is only to conform to teacher’s will in the classroom. As a result, Ilgaz points the gap in education system which lacks the proper system, units and exercises of exam preparation.

Another problem within the system is that the school and the students are divided considerably and the communication among students, parents, teachers and school management does not exist in its healthy form. Ilgaz indicates in the novel that without the fear of inspection, indeed by civil government, especially dormitory students lack proper supplies, uniforms, and classroom materials. Moreover, parents are not introduced in the novel, indicating that they have no participation in the education of the youth. Yet, Ilgaz emphasizes

the faith in civil government and especially its inspection mechanism in order to regulate the workflow at school (Toprakçı & Bozkurt, 2021). That is, Ilgaz blames military intervention in civil government on the issues of education system.

3.1.1.3 LANGUAGE

The new nationalist movement of the republic, supported scholarly by Ilgaz, requires a new pure language in order to form a national identity and the sense of democracy. Pure and simple language is necessary for both politicians and public in order to communicate well in democratic system. That's why, linguistic purification and simplification has been an important policy of young Turkish Republic since it is a newborn unitarian nation state (Yaşar, 2016). Education of the new language with the new alphabet, again, starts with the youth. Ilgaz almost always emphasizes the importance of simple language through his novel. Yet, the irony in his novel is that the teachers are from the old mindset and they do not completely comprehend the necessity of the common, simple language. Teachers prefer old vocabulary and terms when they instruct students in many subjects even though the new terms are introduced. What's more, even literature teachers are more inclined to instruct students with the old language which belongs to the elite of Ottoman Empire.

Ilgaz defends his literary critic position by referring to the contrast between the students and teachers, especially literature teachers Piyale Ihsan and Susak Cafer. The former is fond of symbolism and its representative in literature, Ahmet Hasim, while the latter favours Classical Literature "Divan". Ilgaz as a realist poet and novelist is binary opposite of symbolism, and due to his pure language preference, he is also critical of old literature which is not intelligible for ordinary people. The students, on the other hand, are very well aware of realist literature. By this classroom, Ilgaz introduces his literary criticism on symbolism and impressionism. He defends the position of pure language intelligible for ordinary people and the themes should include everyday problems of ordinary people. Additionally, as he suffers from exile and military oppression, his work fosters realist and expressionist aspects where his discussion is conveyed through referential events to the real life by a simple language. By this way, Ilgaz achieves a pure language and reflects his and society's struggle whereas symbolism and impressionism simply suggest art for art's sake and art as a personal endeavour.

3.1.2 CHARACTERIZATION

The characterization of the novel *The Chaotic Class* by Rifat Ilgaz creates a distinct contrast between old and new or young, democratic and anti-democratic, oppressive and liberitarian, retrogressive and progressive. These matters are the problems of the young Turkish Republic, too. Ilgaz creates a dexterous group of multi coloured students and contrasts them with old minded and one dimensional teaching and administration staff, except from the vice principal Kel Mahmut, who will develop through the plot as the new principal exercises more power over his subordinates.

Kel Mahmut, firstly, is a vice principal who is responsible for students' academic and social development. In the beginning, he is a strict manager who threatens students with disciplinary action all the time. He appears to be an enemy of democracy as he does not acknowledge collective participation of decision making inside and outside the class. He even interferes with students' social life, prohibiting their interaction with ladies outside. Even, he discourages other students to get into an interaction with the chaotic class.

Tulum Hayri appears to be the main character of the novel. He is a good rhetorician, a good poem reciter, physically and theatrically skilled student who becomes a representative of class. As he assists Ilgaz to convey his ideas on linguistic simplification, Tulum, in this aspect,

also shares the same values with the rest of the class. He is, moreover, a dexterous person and a good plan-maker. He shines with his ability with words and humour.

Ilgaz creates Colak Hamdi and Karga Bekir in order to emphasize cultural diversity in the class. However, these characters, especially Karga Bekir, resists to participate in the larger community and they preserve their local identity too much by referring their birthplaces and the superiority of culture they bring. They are representative of Anatolian people who resists to the making of an umbrella identity (Sezer, 1993). Colak, in this aspect, is more outgoing than Karga. Colak ridicules the new fashion style of “Istanbul” which represents the new yet he is eager to attend in decision making process in the class. Karga, on the other hand, forms a subgroup in the class with his fellow people from the city of Sivas and they separately make decisions among themselves. By these characters, Ilgaz criticizes cultural regression and social exclusion to the new republic values and the new nation.

3.2 FILM ADAPTATIONS BY EGILMEZ

Egilmez firstly aims to exceed the censorship barrier which Ilgaz suffered a lot and resulted in publishing the novel with another pen name “Stepne” in the magazine “Dolmus” (Peksen, 1989). The fear of military intervention especially in 70’s worries Egilmez so much that he does not only adapt plot and characters into cinema but also politics. That’s why, Egilmez’s work also fosters highly cultural value since he examines power dynamics among state, military and society.

3.2.1 THEMES

3.2.1.1 LIBERALIZATION AND SECTORIZATION OF EDUCATION

Egilmez criticizes liberalization as it brings economic worries inside education system turning it into a sector. The investment of school managers should bring income by restricting quality of education of the youth and also reducing the expenses of personnel salaries. The students of the Chaos Class by Egilmez are wealthy or well-off students whose parents are irresponsible. On the other hand, the teachers are struggling in big city life of Istanbul. Egilmez sounds the complaints of teachers losing their respectability due to liberal policies (Yıldız, et al., 2013). So, the teachers old in age and mindset fail to meet academic success of the students who are adults in high school. Thus, the sectorization of education system results in underperformance of students and teachers.

Egilmez reflects the failure of liberalization through knowledge competitions, too. He creates the students cheating not only in exams, but also in competitions with the other “competitor” schools. However, unlike Ilgaz’s classroom community, Egilmez creates literary incompetent students who loses against public schools. In this way, Egilmez emphasizes the importance of public schools for everyone and equal opportunity by glorifying his own social and political world view.

All in all, Egilmez points out the failure of students due to sectorization of education system. As a wiser educator than his novel counterpart, Kel Mahmut warns the principal many times against his greed for money as the principal refers to the school as “the shop”. Kel Mahmut is an idealist teacher grown with republican values. He concludes his view of education “I am not a merchant”.

3.2.2 CHARACTERIZATION

Unlike Ilgaz's characters, Egilmez uses the characters with the same names and nicknames yet lacking the depth contrary to novel counterparts. The students are not individuals, but they are stereotypical characters who refer to the community in urban context. Still, the search for privilege by nicknames and titles continue during 70's yet starting to lose its importance in the metropolitan city of Istanbul which is a melting pot for indigenous Anatolian sub-cultures. That's why, Egilmez adapts characters and their names with nicknames in order to reflect the social reality of modernizing society in Istanbul.

The students make fun of Inek Saban's accent since he does not employ Istanbul accent. Inek is the representative of average Anatolian villager, thus others make fun of him with jokes and pranks generally lacking humour. This shows the hegemony of metropolitan culture over outbacks of Turkey. Egilmez does not examine his character trait as inferior one, on the contrary, he creates the legendary Inek Saban who is empathetical character who will mark his name and character in Yesilcam history. That is, as an industrial standard, Egilmez empathizes with Anatolian people and their struggle in big city life.

Since the worry is to reach everyone in the back corners of Turkey, Egilmez utilizes a simple and comprehensible language for ordinary people. That's why, the students also employ a pure language. Also, their names and nicknames perfectly reflect the Turkish society and personality of the time. The students, who are the representatives of the whole society, are still struggling with modernization.

Teachers in the film fits precisely with the ones in the novel. They are backward people with old mindset. They prefer to use old terms and instruction of old literature which results in miscommunication with students and their academic failure. They are not only professionally incompetent, but also physically incompetent just like their novel counterparts. Egilmez extends the discussion over teacher education views with obsolete methodology in the novel to his time and introduces the idea of incompetent salaries, too.

Lastly, Kel Mahmut differs from every character in film and even in novel in order to convey Egilmez's thesis. He is an idealist teacher full of republican values (Yıldız, et al., 2013). He is just and he even sacrifices his students' success to the fairness. The principal decides to attend to knowledge competition with Chaos Class again since they are the winners of last year. The principal is not clear to be aware of whether he is aware of their cheating in the last competition, yet, it is clear that principal only wants to win to advertise and highlight his "shop". Kel Mahmut shows a wise and just attitude in the second knowledge competition.

4 CONCLUSION

Both Ilgaz and Egilmez reflect the reality of their time including social struggles. Both media suffer from military oppression for different reasons. They both value the civil government, and they actually suggest their solutions with civil government. The film utilizes the minister of education to make a social change inside classroom whereas the novel emphasizes the importance of civil government by the aid of inspectors from the ministry solving students' problems and ensuring their welfare.

Both media are critical of education system. Ilgaz focuses more on regression and oppression while Egilmez addresses the problem as the sectorization of education system and thus degeneration. Indeed, 70's still suffers from obsolete techniques and traditions. In this way, Egilmez supports the cultural views of Ilgaz on youth, youth education and getting rid of the old medrese understanding in education system. Both puts their hopes on the same idea, the civil government and its revolutionary values.

While the novel criticizes the military oppression and its effects on education system, the film avoids such a topic because of the fear of military during 70's. Luckily, such abstention

helps the film evade censorship and finally show the social reality in big cities as well as in outbacks of Turkey, proving a box office success.

Egilmez dilates Ilgaz's linguistic stance only vaguely as he is primarily worried about the censorship. The students from the film do not comprehend thoroughly the obsolete terms and vocabulary, even making fun of old literature, however, Egilmez is not as to-the-point as Ilgaz in this subject. Ilgaz's characters are linguistically competent students who want change. It is even more understandable when comparing their time and reality respectively, since the utilization of pure language was a government policy in Ilgaz's time, yet, the opposite was Egilmez's reality. Still, Egilmez agrees with Ilgaz in the usage of pure and simple language as the whole film industry depends itself on the values, themes and stories of Anatolian people. So, the film utilizes a simple language and builds its sense of humour on it like Ilgaz.

The novel makes it possible to employ nicknames. Actually, in Turkish Culture, nicknames and birthplaces define one's identity, or that is how people identify one another. In Ilgaz's work, the setting of time coincides with late 30's when people start to use surnames after the banishment of nicknames and titles in order to establish equalitarian citizenship idea. However, the public is slowly adapting to the new law, hence, preferring nicknames in most cases in social interaction whereas surnames are utilized in a formal atmosphere such as exam papers and introducing to the government officials. Since the film adapts the names and nicknames of characters as they are, it is highly indicative that Anatolian people do not change much in time until 70's in terms of the use of nicknames and titles. Also, the use of nicknames, titles and pronouns demonstrate that people from Anatolian outbacks still search for privilege and they fail to adapt to modern, urbanized city life and metropolitan culture. This matter is apparent almost every Yesilcam production.

As Egilmez differs in characterization from Ilgaz because of the nature of a social critical work, Egilmez takes classroom as a backward society in order to reflect the problems emerging with the new liberal movement and its heavy load on proletarian ordinary people who includes mostly villagers from Anatolian outbacks in the metropolitan city of Istanbul. The novel introduces a communitarian classroom where all the members are unique and talented individuals with their own identities, but the film provides a collectivist community where the students are all from the same background and socio-economical status. In this way, Egilmez criticizes the emerging problems with westernization, degeneration and liberalization and takes a leftist stance. Thus, it is obvious that Ilgaz is critical of education system and obsolete ways whereas Egilmez points out the social and political problems of 70's Turkey. Lastly and most importantly, Ilgaz's class is made of talented set of diverse students while Egilmez's includes rich, lazy, irresponsible and one dimensional adults as students.

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