



An Allegory of Unthinking Slave: Chinghiz Aytmatov's *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*

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Abstract

One of the main characters of Chinghiz Aytmatov's novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, Mankurt, is a Kyrgyz who is captured by the enemy, who thereafter erases his memory as a means of enslavement. Aytmatov portrays Mankurt as the embodiment of the effects of Soviet cultural dominance over Eurasian communities. Subsequently, the word *mankurt* entered the terminology of psychology and became tantamount to the word "assimilated." Therefore, Aytmatov's allegory should not be considered as a quilted point of an ideology for the sustenance of a certain identity; rather, it should be treated as the potential for the rejection of learning to live for the other; and the author must not be underrated and underappreciated by degrading this universal message. It should not be forgotten that the possessiveness of a certain group towards an author brings along the distance that others will keep, which renders him the other for them.

Key Words: Mankurt, Other, Aytmatov, Assimilation, Power, Criticism

Mankurt, who is one of the characters of Chinghiz Aytmatov's work *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, is a Kazakh captured and enslaved. Enemy erases his memory so that he can enslave him. He will not remember who he is or where he is from; he will no longer recognize his full mother and (be able to) kill her. Aytmatov makes use of "Mankurt" as a symbol of the effects of Soviet's cultural domination over the Eurasian societies. Moreover, in one of his interviews, Aytmatov argues that if people do not know why they are doing something and for what purposes they are doing it and if they are fulfilling the orders given to them without any necessity to question the nature of the orders, they are *mankurt*, as well (Kolcu, 2008, p.75). As opposed to this, the name *Mankurt* has been conceptualized over time and it has been used as a comprehensive term, some aspects of which is used to define USSR's policies of *Russification*.

French word "assimilé" is the closest word for the term "mankurt" which is used extensively. Indeed, some of the members of those societies who have been Russianized,

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Christianized, those picked up for a particular purpose, nationalized, Westernized and modernized are always “mankurt.” Because none of these transformations emerges spontaneously or occurs as a consequence of the demands of all those who participate to the process. In all of these transformation processes, breaking of the ties with traditional culture is at stake. Mehmonsho Sharifov (2006-2007, p.315) defines the loss of identities of Tajiks during the Communist period as Mankurtisation. According to him, Tajiks has lost the traditional ways of re-constructing themselves. Zelimhan Yakub, states in his work *Prophet* that those who has forgotten their race and culture are mankurts (Qasimov, 2010, p.150). Ana Barfield (2004, p.37) employs the term “mankurt” for Russified Kazakhs who have been assimilated. Dilyara Suleymanova clarifies that the term is used for the people who have lost touch with their culture in the former USSR’s countries and exemplifies Tatars who do not know Tatar language (2013, p.7). The term applies to Russified urbanized Kazakhs (Doğansoy, 2008; Debuissou, 2009). This group of people who are living in cities, taking higher level of Russian education with no relationship to Kazakh language, who can also be named as “colonized intellectuals”, ascend up to higher positions like those who are picked up for a particular purpose (Doğansoy, 2008, p.88). During the Westernization process in Turkey, intellectuals who have lost ties with their culture are claimed to be mankurts (Çetin, 2011, p. 18-19)ⁱ. Accordingly, the meaning spectrum of “mankurt” after Aitmatov is observed to have broadened and begun to be used for the sense of “assimilated”.

“Mankurt” roughly means the assimilated and the dominated one. Indeed, he cannot be defined as “other” anymore as he has already been dominated. Nevertheless, he is no longer a “self” since he- either voluntarily or by force- resembles to “self” who regards himself as “other” at the beginning or he cannot be considered as a “self” for he is of no importance in the affirmation of his identity. He can only be recognized on basis of the relationship with the “self” who at the very beginning marginalized him. Moreover, self should be emphasized to have affiliations with the appropriation of the former mankurt identity: Basically, it is out of question to mention any kind of identity in history that is formed out of the process of becoming mankurt. Every perspective resisting becoming mankurt indeed comes to mean the appropriation of one’s identity, which the identity or “self” in question is “fancy” in the sense that Benedict Anderson employs the term; it is nothing more than a self-perception constructed out together with the assimilation policies and “technologies of self” by the terminology of Michel Foucault. This perception of self should not be ignored that it may have relations with the death drive/impulse in terms of Sigmund Freud’s perspective.

Many of the intellectual figures sanctified in the history, for instance Sumerian Ludingirra and Firdevsî, tried to resist assimilation and by the works they produced, they endeavored to protect their identities, which had already been the result of another asimilation in the past. Accordingly, the resistance against to become mankurt can be claimed to stand out as a loyalty to the existing identity; therefore it is a kind of loyalty to the former master and a rebellion to candidate master (or new master). Nevertheless, as opposed to the people such as Ludingirra and Firdevsî, many of the historical figures like Hannibal whose resistance turned out to be inconclusive were damned for the history is “written” by those who overpower their opponents.

Every new social engineering scheme is decisively bring mankurtisation together with itself; because, to assure a certain kind of homogeneity, all the social engineering projects try to reduce differences and unify the society under a particular frame of a supra-identity. It is impossible for human beings or societies to live together without resembling each other; but the main issue this process of resembling with one another will take place without any outside

force or by means of an intervention, a social engineering scheme that can be called as “assimilation” or “mankurtisation”.

For an instance, let us have a look at the process of building nation-states: While theoreticians, who defend that nations emerged as a result of people, who live together in a certain location have a common history and culture, stress the spontaneous resemblance, theoreticians, who defend that nation is a community designed by means of imagined conventions and introduction of new traditions, evaluate the social engineering aspect of the nation-states' emergence. When the second form is at the stake, those who resemble each other do not experience much difficulty; in spite of this; when there is not a dynamic, an interrelated history among these communities which may bring about a kind of natural fusion, the communities (whether they are voluntarily or reluctantly) taking part in the new society are tried to be assimilated. In such a case, at the very beginning of building a unity would mean one or some of the components of the unity are perceived as “other”, which causes a social psychology to emerge like that of one's alienating from one of his organs. Moreover, even if they have the mentioned interrelated history, communities that do not share the dream put forward by social engineering project and want to maintain their former condition will be marginalized, assimilated, and if not, they will be destroyed. This “societal sacrifice” is often observed in such structures where society or state's interests are valued over the individual. Societal sacrifice appears in the form of murdering, frightening, exiling, imprisoning, excommunicating and declaring someone as a traitor; these subjects all of who are the members of a group which may composed of an ethnic group, a mass of people coming together around a certain ideology or intellectuals mistakenly give way to illumination of people.

BECOMING MANKURT, MANKURTISATION

In the foreword, Jean Paul Sartre, who wrote for Frantz Fanon's book titled “The Wretched of the Earth”, states that European educational policies over colonized countries are oriented towards to bring up colonized intellectuals who have internalized the culture of Western civilization. According to Sartre, the characteristic of these intellectuals is that they are equipped with terms that do not let them utter arguments against the interests of the colonizer:

Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had the Word; the others had the use of it. Between the two there were hired kinglets, overlords, and a bourgeoisie, sham from beginning to end, which served as go-betweens. In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on: the native had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved. The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. (2001, p. xliii)

Envisaging that colonialists pay so much attention to education is something only to do with bringing up individuals who behave in accordance with their interests is to make them look like the heroes of the pre-modern literatures. Distinguishing West as “Good West” and “Bad West” and adopting an envious glance towards to “Bad West” make it hard to comprehend the situation. Certainly, colonialists behaved in tune with their interests but that they claimed they haven't got the notion of morality of the colonized communities must not be assessed only as an effort of image to justify or legitimize what they have done; that “Good West” may have

shared with its colonized countries the things what it considered good should not be undervalued.

In the words of Frantz Fanon (2001, p.39), colonized societies are vicious and other as they lack the notion of morality in the eye of Western colonialists. The emergence of the discourse about the immorality of colonized is based on the fundamental differences between Western morality and that of the colonized and the criteria concerning the morality being always self-centered. In the same way, it is possible to detect this case in Ahmet Mithat's *Felâtnun Bey and Râkım Efendi* (1992, p.17) in which while Felâtnun Bey is mentioned, the author implies Westerners are immoral: "Actually the old don't see it fitting for bravery to behave kindly to someone whom they curse afterwards though, those who favour European mode of living are of the opinion that bravery and honesty are stupidity." If Ahmet Mithat had the opportunity, he, too would have tried to instruct Europeans within the frame of his perception. Furthermore, whatever he is trying to do to his readers is nothing less than this. In other words, there is a great similarity between the logic of colonialist's education policy towards to colonized and the education policies of intellectuals to public, centre's to periphery or that of state's to its citizens. This sameness stands out to be more concrete in the similarity between view of colonialist to colonized and that of the intellectual to public. According to Fanon depiction of human being through animal attributes is one of the significant characteristics of the colonialist discourse:

The language used by colonialist while mentioning the natives is a zoological one; reptilish movements of the yellow man, the odor of native land, bees that swarm, silliness, laying egg, speaking through hand movements are mentioned. Whenever the colonialist wants to describe the native through the best terms, he recurses to the words concerning the animals. (2001, p.40)

As Berna Moran points out in *Yaban* written by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu' (1993, p.211-212) main character, Ahmet Celâl's view on the common people living in Anatolia and his application of animal names every time to depict them overlap with colonialist's outlook on the native.

Colonialist's point of view to colonized, that of center to periphery, that of city to town etc. are always in this manner. For example, if the woman of the rural life is animal, that of the urban life is "immoral." Authors such as Hobsbawm and Chatterjee state that colonialists legitimize their power by emphasizing the modernizing role that they undertake for the colonized countries. The same discourse is valid for the Jacobean centre-periphery relationship. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that examples of those coming from the periphery over which the centre tries to dominate bear the same feature. As an example, "*Şeftali Bahçeleri*" from Refik Halit Karay's *Memleket Hikayeleri* or Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *Yaban* can be examined. It can be argued that mankurtisation is not only a kind of violence visible in such forms as colonialist subjects the colonized, centre victimizes the periphery, city applies it to rural areas etc.; because, ultimately the violence of the colonialists (state, centre, city, etc.) which they subject onto the colonized (in civilian life, periphery or rural areas) is the same sort of violence, too.

THE OTHER AND AITMATOV

In his work, *Aytmatov Anlatılarında Ötekileşme Sorunu ve Dönüş İzlekleri*, Ramazan Korkmaz (2008, p. 19), uses "mankurtisation" synonymous with "otherization" because

mankurtisation is the removal of other from its otherness either by force or deceit and changing his definition of himself by the intervention into his perception of self, making him look like the dominant one and if possible making him “be more royalist than the king.” Korkmaz lays (2008, p.19) his recognition on such foundations as “the problem of marginalization in Aitmatov’s fiction surfaces by the spoil of the existing cultural codes, breaking the convention’s ties off with its vitalizing aspects and producing rather groundless and slogan [like] patterns.

Korkmaz (2008, pp. 20-21) associates *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*’ mankurt Sabitcan’s being brainwashed with the deification of ideologies, which is in the form of religious organization, through reason and science by forcing Twentieth century atheism and Soviet boarding schools. The premise that Sabitcan proposes that people’s minds will be controlled in the future by means of radio waves can be evaluated as a dystopian examples much like “Big Brother” or “Matrix”; On the other hand, based on “God” metaphor in the text, is it adequate to think the forms of political organizations within the frame of forced atheism and relate it only with Soviet Communism? Although they do not include forced atheism, in the words of Aitmatov, suppressing any kind of opposition in accordance with the high interest of the society is policy peculiar to Stalin’ rule. In fact, all cultures, in which sacrificing oneself for a whole more valuable than himself, bear the same potential and realize it. The same situation can also be observed not only in Communism but also in nationalism or in radical theocracy. In the same way, church is the search of “mankurtisation” in Aitmatov’s novel “*The Place of the Skull*.” Consequently, it is difficult to separate Christian missionaries and Soviet education system from the courses that nation-state organization adds into the curriculum to serve to build a national conscious or from the Capitalist system that sanctify democracy as means to create market. Likewise, as Ramazan Korkmaz indicates that Aitmatov deems Soviet regime (Communism) in *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, church (consequently the theocracy) in *The Place of the Skull* and scientists (consequently the technocracy) in *Cassandra’s Brand* suitable for the same role. According to Aitmatov; “Totalitarianism is all the same for all ages, in this respect, there is not much difference between Chinghiz Khan and Stalin” (Ayvazoğlu 1993, p.8). Thus, as is stated in *The White Cloud of Chinghiz Khan*, Aitmatov’s main argument is “regarding the interests of individual above that of the state” (quoted in Korkmaz, 2008, p.77).

In this case, Aitmatov’s matter can be argued not to build or protect a particular “self” but to defend the state of being “self”. As the individual does not have to transform into a particular thing, he does not have to remain in his existing self/position, as well. If he transforms into something/somebody else, he will transform into it in accordance with his desire, conditions and interests. He will preserve and maintain whatever and how much he preserves or maintains. Rightfully, Ramazan Korkmaz (2008, p. 88) emphasizes Aitmatov’s attitude in the direction of authors’ belief in his following statements: “human beings must learn to live on earth worthy of his name.”

In “*Kitleysel Terör; Savaş*”, a subtitle under which is placed the title of “*İnsanlığın Üç Büyük Tuzağı*”, Korkmaz (2008, pp. 88-97) analyzes Aitmatov’s attitude of man’s transformation into a machine “manipulated for a one-time businesses.” Here, Aitmatov’s war, just in the sense of Heidegger, is against the reduction of man to a position of “remaining under the hand” (*bestend*), which brings man to the object of universal and philosophical criticism. While Martin Heidegger relates the matter with the level that civilization has reached in the twentieth century and explains it through man’s enslavement to the very order he has set up, Aitmatov deals with body politics that can be handled independently from the stages of

civilization and an aspect of man's instrumentalisation which is rather universal and valid for all ages.

The point of view Aitmatov holds for Soviet education policies that Korkmaz evaluated in the sub-part of "Yüceltilen Yalıtım; İdeolojik ve Dinsel Koşullama" is a complete Althusserian reading and reflects the ideological instruments of state's mankurtisation attributes. As opposed to this, Korkmaz's (2008, p. 104) argument that Aitmatov calls everyone to unite for a common human ideal without fail (and necessarily as being his own "self") is controversial; because, every common ideal (even if it is a human ideal it is the same for it will envisage common values and (en)force them which will bring an effort of homogenization) brings mankurtisation with itself. Aitmatov, at best, must have been against building "common" ideals.

In the sub-section "*Ölümcül Kaçış; İçki ve Uyuşturucu*" in which disasters caused by alcoholism in the parts of Aitmatov's fiction are handled in line with man's instrumentalisation and his being shaped by ideological instrument, which is dealt with as the third sub-section and arguing that alcohol is "the new, widespread and innocent aspect of marginalization of which features "destroy the common sense and awake the savage in man" is startling on the grounds that the relationship between "alcohol" and "other" is unidentifiable (Korkmaz, 2008, p.106).

Nevertheless, would not it be asserting that Aitmatov, an author like him who is against all sorts of marginalization, marginalize those who drink alcohol if it is argued that Aitmatov alleges "alcohol strips man off all noble virtues; a latent *enemy* (emphasis added, Korkmaz, 2008, p.107) that inclines him negligence and treachery and the man who tries to define himself "through superficial escapes" [(here, alcohol is explicitly implied)] is the enemy of the whole universe? (Korkmaz, 2008, p.108). An Aitmatov analysis of this kind, even if it is an undeliberate one, may lead to the decrease of author's universal value by way of making him look like a marginalizing figure. Aitmatov mentions the harm that one gives to himself and to his environment when he drinks excessively and gets drunk. Aitmatov does not explicitly negate the drunkenness. Nevertheless, claiming that he declares those who drink as the enemy of the whole universe consequently marginalizes for instance Christians who hold wine sacred would mean to demonstrate the author as if he could not embrace the whole humanity.

CONCLUSION

Generally, in the Platonist sense "Self" signifies an identity that man learns and appropriates rather than it is his effort to understand himself. Nevertheless, for the conditions which the mystic tradition is a determining factor or in the structures the values upon which they are built regarded as sacred, for the dominant transcendental truth perception opts for highest level of knowledge as "hakk'al yakiyn" namely not acquiring knowledge through observation or learning but by means of becoming, hence appropriated identity is regarded as the "genuine identity." After this perception is formed, each individual of the society is a "bestent" namely "remaining under the hand/remaining under control" in the sense of Heidegger explains.

Power is an inheritance and it is always taken over by the methods of the power. The most savage aspect of the inheritance law is that the methods of power become excessively visible during the suit of inheritance. Because, for the evidence of the inheritance, all the genes are meticulously examined and brought to broad daylight. Until the mankurt (the son) proves his being the son of his father (his loyalty) will display the most awful genes of his father and

try to destroy everything that do not regard his power (his father's power is now his power, as well) as legitimate or try to annihilate anything that may give harm to his power. Moreover, he not only prove that he is the son but also he is bound to demonstrate that he is the best, most appropriate one. Shifting to adolescence, prove of one's maturity, the rituals of having all of which are directed towards this aim. In this respect, power is the organized form of violence.

“Juan Juans” need to be understood so that we can understand the “mankurt”; because, the moment one becomes mankurt, he becomes one of the members of the Juan Juans. He is more “Juan Juanist” than the former “Juan Juans.” He has to be act in this manner so that he can prove his being “Juan Juan”. Chronologically, societies first destroyed their “others.” Afterwards, they aligned them with themselves (for example, they included them to their armies), made them look like themselves namely they were mankurtized. The current situation today indicates that we have to live together by the recognition, understanding of other through which giving no harm to him and not trying to transform him into us by deception. In the end, we, at best, would likely to resemble each other naturally without violence and deception. Because, what is valuable is not remaining as we are but becoming better than we are. If there something called “good.”

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