

Züğürt Ağa (Broke Ağa) 1985

Nesli Çölgeçen

Overview

The *Broke Ağa* screenplay was written by Yavuz Turgul, who entered the cinema industry in the second half of the 1970s with his adaptation of the Osman Sahin story. The film was directed by Nesli Çölgeçen and depicts the internal migration and urbanization which are shown as being among the major problems of the era in Turkey. The film tells the tragicomic story of an hereditary Ağa. Although Nesli Çölgeçen was the director of the film, it is possible to see the effects and narrative strategies of Yavuz Turgul's cinema in this film. In this film, as in other films of Turgul, the frame of the cinema witnesses a social change. This time it is the aga of the village Haraptar who is standing against the passing and changing times and has had to migrate to the city, like the music organizer Muhsin Kandıkırık who tries to resist changes in the music business in *Muhsin Bey*, the director Haşmet Asilkan, who tries to keep up with the changes in the cinema sector in the *Unforgettable Director of Love Films*, and the old-time bandit Baran who stands against the new mafia regime in the city in *Eşkiya*.

The aga type in *Züğürt Ağa* is far from the evil, ruthless and brutal aga type depicted and represented in village and countryside literature. For this reason, this film is an important film in terms of the history of cinema because it brought new representations into Turkish cinema. It won several awards; the 1986 Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival; Best Supporting Actress (Fusun Demirel), the 1986 Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival; Best Screenplay (Yavuz Turgul), the 1986 Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival; Best Music (Atilla Özdemiroğlu) and at the 1986 Istanbul Film Festival it was named the Best Turkish Film (Nesli Çölgeçen).

Visual Language

The film *Züğürt Ağa* uses a mainstream visual language which has the narrative and stylistic features of the period. Dialogues flow between characters by using double shots and angle and opposite angle shots. In the film, continuity-based linear editing is preferred, but there are two important scenes which disrupt this narrative structure. The first is the scene in which Züğürt Ağa goes to the village of Haraptar after the maraba has stolen the goods from his warehouse. He realizes that the villagers have all left one by one. In this scene, it can be argued that the director wanted to emphasize Ağa's state of mind as he was running around in the middle of the empty and devastated village, trapped in the space and left alone. The director used the same zoom-out technique again in the scene in the city when he frees his aide. In this scene, the two people are seen going in different directions and moving away from each other with a quick zoom out. This physical distancing is actually used to show how Ağa is gradually losing the status of being an ağa.

Another noteworthy narrative element in the film is the buzzing of the fly which constantly accompanies the narrative, especially in the scenes in the village and in the aga's house. The buzzing is intense enough to make itself felt in almost all of the countryside scenes. This continuous fly sound is used as an indicator of decay.

The director used wide-angle shots in the Istanbul scenes to show the difficulties which the aga encountered in the city.

Characters

Züğüt Ağa: He is the lord of the village of Haraptar. He gave it this name himself. He is the principal character in the movie. He has to sell his village and move to Istanbul with his family.

Kekeç Salman: He is a devious maraba who had previously worked for Züğürt Aga and lived in the aga's house with his sister Kiraz, his wife and baby, and he advises the villagers about how they can cheat the aga.

Müsselim Efendi: He is the Aga's right-hand man, an honest aide who is always with him.

Kiraz: Kekeç Salman's sister. Even when everyone else has left, she is the only person who stays with the aga.

Zana: Aga's wife, whose father is also an aga, like her husband: there is no emotional intimacy between Aga and Zana.

Abdo Ağa: Aga's father. This is a character who has a place in the history of Turkish cinema with his ear teak and his repeated statement 'I want a wife'.

Summary

Aga is a married man with two children who continues her father's and grandfather's village management system and likes both wrestling and the feast which he provides at the end of the wrestling. He owns the village and every living creature within it. But things have not been going well in the village for a few years. Because of the lack of rain and the impossibility of irrigation, the crops have not paid any wages and the animals have not been well fed. The villagers are hungry and desperate. Ağa has not been able to handle the situation very well because of his soft and emotional nature and the lack of work, and things have deteriorated badly. Problems are never far away in his family with whom he lives in the same house. His father constantly wants to marry again and beats his mother every day, and his wife is constantly sad because she thinks that the possessions which came from her father's house are being treated roughly because of the aga's lack of financial acumen. It becomes a turning point for Ağa when the villagers, who have followed the urgings of Kekeç Salman, whom the Ağa took in because of his painful circumstances, steal the aga's wheat, empty his warehouse and then evacuate the village. The Aga, who is not a villager, realises that he can no longer be the aga, so they sell the village and move to Istanbul as a family. However, the Ağa has never done anything other than being an aga and he finds it difficult to survive in Istanbul. Although all the villagers somehow find their way to a city like Istanbul and find work, Ağa cannot do the only thing which he knows how to do. He has no understanding of business and the grocery store which he buys is a failure. He cannot sell tomatoes because he cannot shout as loudly as the other street traders, and he loses all the goods on his street counter because he does not know that he should run to escape from the police. His loyal aide, his wife and their children all leave, and Ağa is alone. The only thing that Aga does well is make meatballs; *çiğköfte*. So he sells his fine strapped boots, which are the last remaining symbol of being an aga, and he buys the raw materials to make *çiğkaöfte*. And in this business he can be successful.

Story

Opening The film begins with the preparations for a feast, with the sound of drums, and dust and smoke in a barren landscape. The Aga approaches on his horse and the rush and the crowd shift towards the direction from which he has come. From the dialogue, we understand that the Aga is keen on wrestling and habitually provides a feast for his villagers after a wrestling event. Although these wrestling bouts mean a lot to the Ağa, they mean only a feast for the village peasants who are struggling with hunger. Each wrestling bout is organized in a way that the Aga will be beaten, although he believes that he really wins. In these scenes, we understand the purity of the Aga, which is respected by the peasants, as well as the hunger in his village. During this wrestling match, Kekeç Salman comes to the village; he sets up a plan to undermine the Ağa because he understands the Ağa's devotion to glory.

Home. After the wrestling scenes, the home scenes of the Aga begin. In his house, the Aga lives with his wife, mother, father, two children and employees. His elderly father, Abdo Aga, wants to marry a young woman again, despite his age, and is known for his flirtatiousness. For this reason, he constantly beats his wife and there is always shouting in the house. Aga's own wife is also a complainer. In these scenes, we realize that Aga is mild-tempered and regularly tries to keep the peace between his family members. There is also a guest waiting for him at home; this is Abuzer Aga,

who left the village to go to the city where he works at a gas station and as a money-lender. He asks, "How are things, my brother?" and the Aga replies, "Let go of it now, OK, once in forty years ..."

Abuzer Aga advises Zugurt Aga to join him in the city. Even though Aga agrees with him, he does not want to leave the village. From this scene, we learn that the Aga has no understanding of business, is unable to pay his debts, and cannot get loans from banks. We also see the importance that he gives to being the Aga and the honour which it bestows on him.

Kekeç Salman. Noticing the Aga's weaknesses during the wrestling matches, Kekeç comes to kiss his hand and skirt and by means of various compliments and displays of servitude, he gets a job with the Aga. But the main thing that attracts the Aga's attention is Kekeç's sister, Kiraz.

In fact, he liked Kiraz as soon as he saw her, but he would not even think of looking at the maraba's wife and daughter in the flat which he has given them, as it will be seen as a lack of honour. We realize from the dialogue between Kekeç Salman and his wife that he is a crook and that he was sacked for theft in the place where he previously worked. Meanwhile, Kiraz has also attracted the eye of Abdo Ağa, who actually starts to abuse her.

Wedding night Kekeç Salman sells Kiraz to Aga's aging father for a large sum of bride money. A wedding arrangement is settled. Meanwhile, Aga, who has been unable to get the money which he needed from the harvest, has reduced the pay of the villagers. While they are thinking about what to do, Kekeç Salman advises them; he tells that they can sell the goods in Aga's warehouse and all go to the big city where they cannot be traced. The old man's wedding night is seen as a very suitable night for this. On the night of the wedding, however, Abdo Aga dies and all of the Aga's savings and goods are stolen by the villagers. The absence of the maraba has disturbed the fine balance of the Aga's life and there is now no choice left for him: he puts his village up for sale and after selling it very cheaply, moves to Istanbul with his family.

City Life City life is something that the agha and his family have never experienced. First, they settle in the house of his blood brother, but discomfort sets in as their stay becomes prolonged. Then they rent a house in the ghetto. The city is big, crowded and scary. In order to depict this, there are shots of Aga getting lost in Istanbul and rushing around the roads. Aga is now a man who has lost everything that he had in the village and just runs around desperately in the unfamiliar space. He meets households from the village but is now even more incapable of reasoning with them. Even so, he still tries to be an Aga.

Different jobs Aga has no financial awareness and he starts to lose his savings little by little with every job he takes on. First he sees an advertisement for the sale of a grocery store. It is clear in this scene that he does not understand anything about business but he sees the chance to enter the market and decides to buy it. He makes this decision because the shopkeeper tells him that things are good. For the Aga, trust in the spoken word is essential. He wouldn't even think to investigate, to learn more. In a very short time, the shop collapses. He then takes a car and drives around street by street trying to sell tomatoes. But because of his embarrassment and not wanting to disturb the environment, he is afraid to shout 'Tomatoes' out loud in the street. Then, as he is getting used to it, his car is pulled over by the police because he does not know the parking rules. So he decides to sell fruit from a street stall, but because he does not know that he should run to escape from the police when the other stallholders are all running away, Aga gets caught and loses all his produce. He then sets up a stall selling lemons in the market, but all his lemons turn out to be rotten. He wants to sell balloons, but he loses all the balloons. So he just tries to sell whatever is on hand, but everything goes too slowly.

Loneliness. Although he is running out of money in the city, he gives his lighter, ring, rosary and plate to his loyal steward who is embarrassed that he has not been able to send money to his mother for a long time and has received news that his mother in the village is sick. This is his last act of being an Aga. The friendship formed between them over the years is finished, and the Aga has become a little more lonely. When he arrives home, he learns that his wife and children have gone to her father's house. In fact, his wife's departure has eased his circumstances a little because it means that his children's lives will be saved and he will be free from his wife's constant nagging.

New way Only Kiraz, whose aged husband left her a widow on their unconsummated wedding night, has remained with Aga. She admits that she is in love with him and she asks him, "Isn't there

something you do well?" Aga sarcastically replies "*Cigkofte*". Then he gets an idea: they don't have the money to buy raw meat or anything to sell. All that remains of his previous life are the strapped boots which he has polished every day, which he does not take off during the film, which he regards as the symbol of being a landowner. Finally, he sells them too. Aga starts selling *cigkofte* in entertainment venues wearing plastic sandals. The movie ends as he goes home happy after selling them all and with an empty tray in his hand.

Themes

Feodaliteden Kapitalizme In *Züğürt Ağa*, it is through the characters that the story presents a tragic narrative on Turkey's period of transition from the feudal past to capitalism. The film depicts a process of conversion, the decreasing share of the agriculture sector in terms of economic components and the restricted state support for agricultural tools represent the steadily decreasing state support for agriculture. Moreover, the free-market economy undermines the economic model dependent on agriculture. Unable to keep up with the new order, Züğürt Aga finds himself caught in the tension between the glory of the old world and the new worries of the present day. The old hierarchical order based on heredity and status is now being dissolved due to its dependence on the land. This is felt more deeply in big cities such as Istanbul.

For example, Kekeç Salman, the old *maraba* who begged Ağa to take him in and give him shelter, entered the scrap-trading business and set up a company called 'Salman Ticaret'. Kekeç, who had fulfilled his duty of polishing the aga's boots, is now the new lord of the new order. In one scene, Ağa has seen his mother and wife constantly tormenting Kiraz so he tells her, "Don't cry, Kiraz. Come on, let's send you to your brother. Now his hand holds the money, and he too is considered an ağa". Kekeç Salman, who has jumped from working for bosses to being a boss himself, even has the effrontery to offer Züğürt Aga a job, but Aga asks "Who are you that you will give me a job?" But Kekeç Salman is aware of the changing power structure and of the changed situation of both himself and Züğürt Aga in this new structure. Feudal relations in the village are being broken in the city, and capitalism is taking their place. The basis of social stratification is changing, and innate social positions derived from lineage are being replaced by an economic class structure. The economic class structure offers a new fluidity with the impression that it has all the necessary dynamism within itself. The main conflicts and the thematic pattern in the film's story are based on this change.

Ayak Uyduranların Dünyası. The changing world of Züğürt Aga is based on the differences between those who can keep pace with change and those who cannot. The tension between these two groups shows another thematic tendency, starting with the character of Behram, who calls Aga his blood brother after he arrives in Istanbul. Behram proudly tells Aga how he became successful: "Work, work, work non-stop. Believe me, bro, this Istanbul is not easy. Every house here has my mortar, my bricks. There is sweat. ... But what happened? I made my two sons into men. One has a furniture store and the other is an AEG dealer; their lives were saved". The transition between the classes is measured by the ability to keep up. Keeping up with the system is a state of success which can only be achieved by working hard. When the aga offers to go into partnership with his blood brother by saying "Now it's my turn", Behram replies, "Well, a partnership is trouble. It even splits brother from brother". "So what can I do? At least give me some advice; who is there other than you?" asks Züğürt Aga. Behram says "Well, what should I say? This job wouldn't make any sense either. Istanbul is a different world. Everyone has the same answer – every man for himself". In this new world, everyone is striving for themselves. Behram has won his 'struggle with life' and the struggle he won has given him a hierarchical superiority over Züğürt Aga. In this new power relationship, Züğürt Aga is the weak link despite all his claims of brotherhood, and in fact he is a burden on the other's back. When Aga realises that his blood brother sees him as a burden, he immediately moves out. He says "We weren't going to be a burden for a lifetime, blood brother" to Behram, who replies "Is that okay?" Everyone for himself, so Aga says "Don't worry about me, blood brother", and expresses his disappointment. Unwritten social contracts based on sacred and sublime solidarity, such as blood brotherhood, are no longer valid among those who keep up with the change. These concepts are important for those like Züğürt Aga who still wears feudalism as if it is a pair of boots.

He experiences the difficulty of not keeping up when he realises that he cannot shout 'Tomaatooooo', saying, "I won't disturb the whole country", but the other villagers have already learned to cheat: "Put the good ones at the front and the ones with bruises behind them", but Züğürt Aga finds the damaged ones and throws them away instead of putting them at the back of the stall, behind the good ones. He

wants to sell the remainder and make some money so that he can burn the shabby van. But no matter how hard he tries, life always knocks him down.

Migration and urbanization. Migration and urbanization is another theme of the movie. Migration was one of the important problems of the period, and the problems which the migrants had to face in the life of the big city are depicted by the experiences of Zügürt Ağa after he arrives in Istanbul. The city is depicted here as a place where every man is out for himself and where the sacred and lofty values of the countryside mean nothing any more, and everyone who comes afterwards is seen as a parasite. For this reason, after the Ağa arrives in Istanbul, the residents of the old *maraba* sitting in the coffee house will say, "The one who broke the rope should come here" referring to the arrival of Ağa. The places where those who come from Haraptar settle and live are the slums of the city. Streets of single-storey houses and places with an unregulated infrastructure. In other words, the film shows the worst places where urbanization is experienced. The difference in the level of urbanization between the places where Ağa tries to sell tomatoes, lemons and balloons and where he lived before is striking.

Character analysis

Zügürt Ağa Zügürt Ağa is a character who symbolizes the transition from one social order to another, with his story of losing his status as an Ağa and becoming a common pedlar. Instead of social position, honor and clearly understood mutual obligations, the character has to find a way to reconcile himself with the new reality build on self-interest and money-based relationships. Zügürt Ağa loses everything and is abandoned by his wife, but he starts life again as a pedlar in the city.

A different Ağa Zügürt Ağa is a character who feels deeply surprised and disoriented by the socio-economic and historical processes which have radically changed and destabilized his familiar world. This is different from the Ağa characters represented in Turkish cinema in the early days. Emotional, moral, graceful sometimes childish, he is a character who places great importance on his honor. With these very features, Ağa the landlord cannot do his job properly. He is a landlord who is fond of his children, likes to listen to the books which his son reads at night, and does not dare to even look at Kiraz, even though he likes her, because it would besmirch his honor. He is a character who can be easily manipulated, and it is precisely this characteristic which makes him vulnerable to Kekeç Salman's dishonesty. These features of the Ağa encouraged the villagers to rob and cheat him.

Glory, Honor, Status The surname Ağa which came from his father and grandfather is a matter of honor and status which it is important for the Ağa to protect. The character traits of the Ağa are shaped by these values. So the wrestling and the feast given afterwards are important to him. His wife tells him, "For my father's wedding gift, we sold three villages ... You sold the bride price, you ate. The other villages have gone now. Only Haraptar is left. The more you wrestle, the sooner it will go too". Her words summarize the situation. Zügürt Ağa ends every wrestling competition he wins with a feast appropriate for the glory of the lord. His wife says, "The money goes like water. Come on, you wrestled, what's the point of the feast every time?" and he replies, "Damn wife, come and watch the peasant lord, won't we give a treat?" He is aware that wealth is not enough to earn respect for his position: that wealth must also be used to maintain glory and status.

In another scene, their old *maraba* is seen carrying their belongings brought from the village to the house which he has taken in Istanbul, and he asks Zügürt Ağa for money. When he asked "What money", he receives the answer "Ee, this is what happens here, my brother". However, the duty of the *maraba* is to serve the landlord without pay. "Go give it to the housekeeper" he angrily tells the peasant who wants money for the work. He initially tries to protect the reputation of the landlord. This was the Ağa's intention when he was providing the feast in his village, and in the coffeehouse which he ran in Istanbul after he had left the village, he tries to order tea for the villager Hirpit Ali, saying, "Since when has Lan Hirpit ordered tea in the place where the ağa is located, everybody is provided for by me" and he orders tea for the *maraba*.

Longing for the past Zügürt Ağa longs for the past. He looks at the soil cracked by the drought and says, "In the past, my grandfather used to tell me how these places were completely different. They were green in a way that you would not know. We were very generous. The animals almost burst from eating so well. Crops everywhere, this high ... huge. But what has happened? ... Why is nothing like before?" he asks.

Transformation Züğürt Aga undergoes a change as he adapts to the new order and becomes a part of it. In response to Kiraz's question, "Is there is no job that you know?" he replies "No. I am the tree". He has never acquired any profession, craft or skill due to his status as a descendant of his own kind, and he has lived his life with the advantages brought by his status. Then he thinks, and he says "Yes, there is, raw meatballs". Raw meatballs, which he used to knead in the village to host his friends and guests, will be a source of livelihood for him in the city. All the skills which he has acquired due to his status are simply hobbies which do not bring any profit, which he had acquired just for the sake of honor. Now he learns to adapt to the system by learning how to make money from one of these hobbies. He decides to sell raw meatballs following Kiraz's suggestion. He sells his strapped boots (the final symbol of his former status) in order to buy bulgur. He starts selling with plastic sandals on his feet and a tray of raw meatballs in his hands. He doesn't care, or rather he tries not to care, that his former villagers will see him in this state. Urban life has changed him, and his embarrassment about his lost status and his efforts to maintain it have become pointless. The film also abandons the "I am a man, it does not suit me" mentality which he repeats many times. He has learned to prefer life to the feelings of honor appropriate to a lord. The important thing is to earn a living and survive. In the village scenes of the film, the Ağa is seen admiring himself as he dresses in front of a mirror polished a thousand and one times, but he gradually casts off all the symbols of his landlord status and matches his pace with Istanbul. He puts on a working man's cap, takes off his baggy shirt and wears ordinary pants. But he doesn't take off his strapped boots almost the entire length of the movie. The going of the boots represents the final going of the dynasty. It also changes him in terms of his physical appearance.

Kekeç Salman Kekeç Salman goes to Züğürt Ağa after he has been sacked for stealing from another ağa. After Züğürt Ağa has to reduce the share of the *maraba* in the crop from two-thirds to one-third because of the poor harvest, Kekeç Salman encourages the villagers to steal their rightful wheat from the Ağa's warehouse, he organizes the theft, arranges for someone to buy the stolen wheat, and leaves the village to go to Istanbul without permission from the Ağa.

Capitalism Kekeç Salman represents the idea of a capitalist society lifting people from poverty and giving them access to the upper classes by their own efforts. It is the fluid identity between classes which is the motto of capitalism. Kekeç Salman agrees for his sister Kiraz to marry Abdo Ağa, the elderly father of Züğürt Ağa; he even negotiates with Abdo Ağa for Kiraz by saying, "Tell me how much you want?" the old Ağa says, "By God, you know, it is just property. Jewels like Kiraz are rare in the world, so the bride price should also be appropriate to her beauty". His sister simply represents capital for him. The old Ağa says, "I will buy Kiraz. I will provide a wedding worthy of the Kiraz's glory". And he says, "Forget the glory and fame now. Tell me what you are going to give me". Money and profit are the most important values for him because he understands that in the new order, money is valid, not honor.

Rationality and pragmatism After the death of Abdo Ağa before he was able to consummate the marriage, Kekeç Salman is rational enough to tell Züğürt Ağa, "Your father died without touching his wife. Well, if you want, take the girl, we'll get along with the bride price". With this rationality and pragmatic approach to the bride price, he establishes his own company in Istanbul and becomes the Ağa of Istanbul. He is more of an Ağa than the Ağa with his own rational ethics in Istanbul. This rational ethic leads him to go as far as offering a job to the Ağa, his former employer.



Züğürt Ağa Film poster



Züğürt Ağa and Kiraz decide on selling Çiğköf. The scene where Kiraz opens her emotions



Züğürt Ağa in front of the market he opened



Züğürt Ağa puts up an ad for sale in the village.