

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Muruvet Esra Yildirim, M.A.

Acıyı Bal Eylemek [We turned the Pain into Honey]

Cemal Karpat ve Kemal K. Karpat

Historical Background

The book demonstrates how a country's socio-economic and political transformation impacts individuals and families. In that regard, the experiences of the Karpat Family are intertwined with the course of Romania in world history.

The Treaty of Adrianople (1829) marks the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829 and grants some privileges to Wallachia and Moldavia. The two principalities united to form the Romanian United Principalities. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Romania declares the independence of the principality, which is recognized by the Treaty of Berlin (1878). In 1881, Romania is proclaimed a kingdom, and Dobruja becomes a part of it. In the aftermath of WWI, King Ferdinand I decides to confiscate the arable lands to solve the economic problems caused by the expenses of the war. The reform is carried out in 1921, but in 1924, much of the lands are expropriated in Dobruja inhabited by Turkish people. As a result, many of the Turkish families migrate to Turkey. In time, the conditions lead to loss of life and property safety in the region. After WWII, Romania undergoes regime change, and many people of Turkish descent are killed or incarcerated. The memories of Kemal and Cemal Karpat show how the transformation shaped the future of their family.

People

Kemal Karpat: He is the first male child of the Karpat family. He migrates to Turkey in pursuit of education at a young age and becomes a well-known professor in the USA.

Cemal Karpat: He is the youngest child of the Karpat family. After his brother left their village, he does whatever he can to sustain their farm. He, as a Muslim man of Turkish descent, spends much of his early adulthood years struggling to achieve the profession he dreamed of in Romania, a part of the Iron Curtain. When he realizes that he could not shake off discrimination in Romania, he migrates to Turkey with his family.

Three older sisters: Kemal and Cemal Karpat do not tell much about their older sisters Nazmiye, Vasfiye, and Adviyeye probably because they had left their natal village by marriage.

Events

Since the book is Cemal Karpat's memoir Kemal Karpat's contribution to it is limited. He provides his perspective on the events his brother recalls and tells other stories related to his brother.

Shared Memories

Their earliest shared memories depict two cheerful boys living in their natal village, Armutlu, located in Dobruja in the southeast of Romania. "Armut" means pear in Turkish, because there were many pear trees in the area it was called Armutlu, which means "with pear." The name of the village was changed to Turda by the communist regime, but the Karpat brothers prefer Armutlu in their memories.

Cemal starts telling their shared memories by the day of circumcision. Their family decides to have their two young sons circumcised following the wedding of their daughter, Vasfiye. Cemal is four years old while Kemal is nine. So, it is a hazy memory.

Yet they build a friendship with many fond memories while they are in primary school. They spend their time together near a mill run by a stream that is passing through their field. They usually walk there and spend their days playing. Cemal told how one day they stole the dough bowl of their gardener George's wife. When she realized it, she stole their garments as they were swimming in the stream. In the end, they exchanged the bowl for their garments, and George's wife Maria fed them and gave them a basket of fruit as a gift. Sometimes they hang out at the treehouse that they built near the

mill. One night they get permission from their father to stay overnight in that treehouse, but Kemal cannot stand the mosquitos and decides to return home despite the frightening sounds of sheepdogs in the middle of the night. Cemal follows him helplessly. The next morning, their father says to them that his intention in giving permission was to help them learn to handle trouble in life.

Kemal's most emotional memory about his brother is also intertwined with life's troubles. It is the day they lost their father, and fifteen-year-old Kemal promised himself to protect his little brother. While the crowd in the funeral places stones on the grave, Cemal tries to hold a big rock but cannot. He slips and falls down many times. When Kemal sees him crying, he starts to feel a responsibility for filling the space left by their father. In fact, he has always been his little brother's protector. Whenever other kids bully Cemal, Kemal is there to protect him. Now, he promises himself to be both his brother and father.

In their more exciting childhood memories, Kemal is the adventurous and competitive one, while Cemal is more cautious and naïve. For example, on a feast day, Kemal overdresses and gets outside to show off to his peers. His uncle, Rifat, grasps his intention, and to teach Kemal a lesson, he challenges him to jump over the stream. Despite Cemal's warnings, Kemal immediately accepts the challenge and jumps over the stream. Then, he falls into the stream, and his dress gets dirty. When his older sister, Vasfiye, sees him, she cries because of his ill-considered behavior. Kemal tells a few similar stories to exemplify their different attitudes and manners.

However, both of them are never free of responsibilities. They help their father sustain their farm. They work in the garden, look after their horses, and sell their vegetables in the bazaars. Yet their father's death is the first rupture in their lives. They are on their own now. When WWI erupts, the conditions become worse. Since a few soldiers settle in their house, they can monitor the destructive force of war at a young age. The ruinous effects of war spread all over the country; people barely meet their basic needs, and most of the workplaces are closed. Yet schools continue to educate. Kemal graduate from high school and decide to continue his education in Turkey as their father desired. During the war, he says goodbye to their relatives and takes to the road. It is the second time Cemal sees his brother cry since their father's death. Kemal promises him to be both his brother and father till his death, despite the distance. The two brothers do not know that they would be able to see each other after sixteen years.

Cemal is Alone in Romania

Cemal faces many struggles during those sixteen years. Villages are depopulated because of the war; able bodies are on the battlefields. Cemal does not know what to do, yet, he has a dream. He wants to be a mechanical engineer in the future. He would help their blacksmith neighbor, Uncle Hristo, because he likes to deal with machines. When his brother left Romania, he said that their sister and brother-in-law living in Constanta would help him study. Hoping that they would help him realize his dream, he writes a letter to them. He is planning to study at an industrial high school. Yet, he is disappointed with the answer he gets. For his brother-in-law suggests that he should work as an apprentice in a mechanic workshop. As soon as he finishes reading the letter, he walks towards the mill in tears. Then he comes across their gardener George, tells him what happened, and George persuades him to do what his brother-in-law suggests because of the war conditions. Thus, he accepts what is offered to him out of despair and moves to his sister's house.

When the war is over, the Communist Party seizes power in Romania. Except for their house, the Karpas family's everything is confiscated. Cemal is more aware that nothing would stay as it was in their village. He starts to build a life in Constanta. He finds a job in a factory, rents a room, and attends the night courses of the industrial high school. Then, he starts to work in the factory at night and study at high school during the day, dreaming of studying at college. However, after his graduation, he is conscripted because the party does not permit him to study at college as a "child of bourgeois" of Turkish descent. At that time, he begins to realize that he lives in a different world from his brother's. For his brother completed his college education in Turkey and moved to America, a "capitalist" country, to pursue a Ph.D., while he has been living in Romania, a part of the Iron Curtain.

After two years of military service, he learns that their house had been confiscated too. The two brothers have always written letters to each other, and they are careful because of censorship. However, Cemal is more daring now and starts asking his brother to help him find a job in America. On the other hand, that his mother lives at her sister's house reminds him of his responsibilities. So, he goes back to work in the factory.

On a Saturday evening, as he is wandering around downtown, he comes across a friend of his and learns that because of an amendment, he can study at college in the city of Braşov. For three years, he works at the same factory in Constanta and studies at college in Braşov. In the end, he becomes a mechanical engineer. His belief in the future is refreshed, especially after he is promoted to assistant chief in the factory.

Kemal's Visit

One day, while Cemal is visiting his mother with his wife and son, his mother gives him a letter from his brother. It is written that his brother would come to Romania sixteen years later. At the time, Kemal is a professor at Montana University. Cemal takes his annual leave to spend time with his brother. When the two brothers get together, they visit their relatives and go to their natal village, Armutlu. On the way, some men give them a ride, but Cemal is aware that they aim to question his brother Kemal, a stranger. Indeed, they ask Kemal about his life story and his state in America during the ride. After they get out of the car near the village they visit their father's tomb and then go to the house of an old acquaintance. Yet as they arrive at their village they see that everything is different now. Their house is a kindergarten where the mother of Kemal's old friend takes care of children. As Kemal talks to the woman, Cemal wanders through the house and looks into rooms. In their old room, he sees that the only thing remains the same is their stove. They leave the house with the intention of visiting their old neighbors. Yet nobody wants to spend time with them in fear of being blacklisted. At the end of their visit, they feel estranged.

While Kemal is in Romania, the representatives of the regime contact him to meet. Their aim is to show the successes of the Soviet regime to an international intellectual so that he would spread them to the world. In the end, he meets the officials and goes out to dinner with them. At dinner, while speaking about the power of nation-states against a union he realizes that the regime is not composed of a homogeneous group of people. Because some support the idea of a nation-state while some do not. On the following day, he has to make an extra effort not to spend his time with the officials again and returns to Constanta. After Kemal leaves, the police question Cemal about his brother and each letter he wrote. Although Cemal does not tell much about it to his brother, he gets nervous.

Kemal Helps Cemal Migrate to Turkey

Kemal starts to work at Middle East Technical University in Turkey, but once his book, which addresses Turkey's need for democracy, is published in Turkish the then-Prime Minister Adnan Menderes's government blacklists him. In doing so, the government directs the university not to renew Kemal Karpat's contract. As a result, he has to return to his job at Montana University.

Six years later, in 1964, he decides to visit his family. After the visit, Cemal is interrogated again. In 1965, he goes to Romania to ask his brother whether he would like to migrate to Turkey or not. Cemal had changed his job when the factory was preparing to move to another city. Yet, in the new factory, he is discriminated against. His colleagues object to working under him because he is a person of Turkish descent. When his brother asks him, he determines to migrate to Turkey with his family. Despite the many obstacles he and his family have to meet, including being refused at the Central Bank to convert currency into US dollars, they migrate to Turkey with the help of Kemal. Cemal Karpat has worked as a manager for twenty-five years in Istanbul.

Themes

Multiculturalism: A multicultural environment shapes the childhood of the Karpat brothers. Their father knows both Arabic and Latin and speaks Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Tatar language. Their gardener George and his wife Maria are often mentioned along with other Christian neighbors in their childhood memories.

Patriarchy: Kemal Karpat says that their father Haşim Karpat was one of the most significant persons in the region and wanted to have a son to manage everything he had. The same mentality is visible in the brothers' memories. Kemal and Cemal make their nieces kiss their hands as a sign of respect in religious festivals, although they are peers.

Traditionalism: Since Haşim Karpat had served as a religious specialist in their village, people expected his older son Kemal to assume the same responsibility after his death. Although Kemal does

not favor the situation, he serves as a religious specialist when needed. What disturbs him is that he is recognized as the son of Haşim Karpata, not as Kemal, an independent individual.

Commitment: Kemal, as the son of Haşim Karpata, takes the responsibility of saving their relatives who are stuck in Tulcea during WWII. He goes to Tulcea by a military truck carrying provisions for the soldiers in Tulcea and comes back with his relatives by the same truck.

Perseverance: After the death of their father, two brothers work in different bazaars to sell the vegetables from their garden. While Kemal keeps studying, Cemal works in a factory and struggles to study at school at the same time during and after WWII.

Oppression: The regime confiscates the whole property of the Karpata family and spies on each suspicious act. After Kemal Karpata completes his compulsory military service in Ankara, he applies for a visa to visit his family in Romania. However, he does not get any result even after months, and he goes back to New York to write his dissertation. One year later, a representative of the Embassy of Romania visits him in New York regarding his application. The aim is to attract international intellectuals who would witness the successes of the Soviet Union. Kemal informs the representative that he cannot go anywhere before finishing his dissertation, but he feels uncomfortable thinking of the possibility that the U.S. government would find the visit suspicious. Years later, after obtaining tenure at Montana University, he reapplies for a visa and goes to Romania. During his journey, he is questioned by both military and unmilitary officers. However, he does not say anything to his family not to cause any harm. Yet, the police abuse Cemal after his visit.

As an intellectual, Kemal experiences the oppression of the Turkish government as well. While he was working as a professor at METU in Ankara, his labor contract is not renewed because then-government officials find his book inappropriate. Then he goes back to his former job at Montana University in America.

The scale of oppression is visible in Cemal Karpata's memories of migration to Turkey too. The officers refuse to sell him US dollars and treat him with hatred. He and his family have to face many obstacles before their travel. When they get on the train unmilitary officers try to exchange their currency illegally. Their aim is to catch them red-handed, but the Karpata family does not fall into the trap.

Alienation: Sixteen years later, two brothers visit their natal village together, but they see that everything they used to love does not exist anymore. Their house is a kindergarten, and their mill and the garden surrounding it are demolished. Nothing is untouched by the regime. Even they see that their father's old friend from the Liberal Party does not want to talk to them because Kemal lives in America, a "capitalist" country. At that point, Kemal perceives that his childhood site is the habitus of the regime, and he is just a "stranger."

Discrimination: Although Cemal Karpata desires to study at college, the party disapproves of his desire because he is a Muslim man of Turkish descent. Instead, he is conscripted for two years. Similarly, although he becomes chief in the factory, his subordinates do not respect him, and they insult him whenever possible. Despite his perseverance and devotion, he cannot shake off discrimination as a minority man.

Patronage: When Cemal Karpata decides to migrate to Turkey in 1965, Kemal Karpata connects to Süleyman Demirel, the then-prime minister of Turkey, and İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, the then-minister of foreign affairs. The government involves in the issue, but Romania refuses to give the Karpata family permission to leave the country. Subsequent attempts succeed, and the Karpata family migrates to Turkey eventually.

Fatherland: Kemal and Cemal Karpata mention their commitment to their natal village throughout their memories. Even if their fatherland is Turkey, the air and earth engraved in their minds belong in Dobruja.