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"A Satirical Magazine in Its Own Way": Politicisation and Dissent in *Gırgır* (1972-1983)

Abstract

The satirical weekly *Gırgır*, founded by Oğuz Aral in 1972, has been Turkey's best-selling satirical magazine of all times. Characterized by a multitude of genres and styles, its contents ranged from written jokes to comics and political cartoons. Such diversity has prompted scholars to present this magazine in different, often contrasting ways, especially with reference to the nature and strength of its satire. This study intends to contribute to solving the ambiguity concerning whether *Gırgır*'s caricatures and cartoons may be deemed political or not. For this purpose, it focuses on its satirical repertoire from its early days up to the end of the military regime of 1980 to 1983, the most challenging time in terms of freedom of expression and dissent. This article argues that satire in *Gırgır* became increasingly political parallel to the growing politicisation of society in the 1970s and that the magazine did not bow to political pressure under the military rule. Especially its reactions to the repressive climate of the regime allow us to define its satire as political.

Keywords: Turkey, politicisation, 1980 coup, satire, *Gırgır*, political cartoons.

1. Introduction: A Magazine Beyond Definition

"A satirical magazine in its own way"[1] (*kendi halinde bir mizah dergisidir*): with this self-definition *Gırgır* introduced itself to the readership when it made its debut as a weekly publication in the summer of 1972. The launch of this magazine was the result of minor satirical spaces bearing the same name that had emerged in the previous months. In fact, the origins of *Gırgır* date back to early 1971, when cartoonist Oğuz Aral, a well-established artist active since the 1950s, was entrusted with a satirical corner in the daily newspaper *Günaydın*. Popular among the readership from the outset, this corner, titled *Gırgır*, was soon moved to the newspaper *Gün* belonging to the same owner, Haldun Simavi, where it was upgraded to a full page that came to involve a wider team of cartoonists. This full-page proved even more successful, prompting the decision to turn it into a supplement and, within a few weeks, into a stand-alone publication. The first magazine issue was published on August 26, 1972 and from that date onwards *Gırgır* was printed every week, under Aral's direction until 1989 and under different ownership and direction until 2017.

1 Author's own translation – as in all other cases of quotations from the magazine included in the following pages.

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With its 45 years of activity, *Gırgır* is one of the longest-lasting satirical magazines in Turkey, exceeded only by *Akbaba* (1922-1977). The history of *Gırgır* is marked by a trajectory of success from its early days until the second half of the 1980s. In this timespan the magazine enjoyed growing popularity and a progressive increase in sales, with the number of distributed copies reaching a peak of 500,000 between 1982 and 1987.[2] Several factors, not least its sale in 1989, caused its decline in the following years: although *Gırgır* survived for another three decades, it was outdone by newer satirical magazines.

Gırgır holds a special place not only in the history of comics, humour, and satire in Turkey but also in the collective memory of the country, and is often mentioned with nostalgic tones with reference to its golden age (the 1970s and 1980s). *Gırgır* readers tend to recall different aspects of the magazine, which was, in fact, characterized by a multitude of genres and styles. The written contents could range from short jokes to half a page of humorous stories, but were minor in comparison to their graphic counterpart, which included cartoons, comics, and photomontages. The existing literature reflects this diversity with studies that discuss, for instance, *Gırgır*'s satirical cartoons,[3] or its contribution to the dissemination of comics in Turkey.[4]

As a milestone of Turkey's humorous and satirical press, *Gırgır* is a ubiquitous presence in the literature on the subject, with a general trend of considering only the years under Aral's direction. Interestingly, however, notwithstanding the similar time frame considered, scholars have presented this magazine in different, often contrasting ways. The assessment of the nature and strength of its satire emerges as particularly problematic, leaving an ambiguous answer to the question about whether *Gırgır*'s caricatures and cartoons may be deemed political or not.

Even the recent literature appears unable to agree on this matter, as testified by the positions expressed in, on the one hand, Levent Cantek and Levent Gönenç's work on dissident satire published in 2017[5] and, on the other, Gökhan Demirkol's book entirely devoted to *Gırgır* dating 2018.[6] Throughout their book and above all in a chapter exclusively dedicated to *Gırgır* (the only publication with a chapter of its own), Cantek and Gönenç define its satire as political – far from romanticizing it and, on the contrary, discussing the limits of the political identity promoted in the magazine. Demirkol, then, asserts that politics and power relations exist in every aspect of daily life, hence also in satirical magazines, however magazines that remain within the terms of existing political discourse cannot be in absolute opposition because they rely on actual political actors and institutions. The opposite is true with magazines that manage to go beyond the existing discourse, but precisely for this reason they are not bound to

2 From a letter to Orhan Koloğlu by Oğuz Aral, written in 1984 and reproduced in Koloğlu 2005, 342. Also, Demirkol 2018, 105.
3 Arık, 1998.
4 Cantek 1996.
5 Cantek and Gönenç 2017.
6 Demirkol 2018.

last long.[7] This distinction seems to exclude the possibility of a strong political role for *Gırgır*.

This study intends to contribute to solving the ambiguity concerning the nature of *Gırgır*'s satire. For this purpose, it focuses on its satirical repertoire – illustrations and, to a lesser extent, texts –, intentionally leaving aside other contents such as comics that, notwithstanding their high presence, were not satirical in nature. The following pages trace the evolution of *Gırgır*'s satire from its early days up to the end of the military regime of 1980 to 1983, discussing how the magazine responded to the changing political climate in which it was produced. While the 1970s are a decade of growing politicisation of society and culture in Turkey, the military rule that followed, with its serious limitation of freedom of expression and political denunciation, constituted a major challenge for satire; accordingly, this study delves into the satirical production of those years. This study argues that satire in *Gırgır* became increasingly political parallel to the growing politicisation of society in the 1970s and that the magazine did not bow to political pressure under the military rule. Especially its reactions to the repressive climate of the regime allow us to define its satire as political.

2. The Early *Gırgır*

The definition "a satirical magazine in its own way" through which *Gırgır* introduced itself to the readership in August 1972 was maintained in the following years as its subtitle, with good reason. In fact, *Gırgır* emerges as an original magazine, that introduced several groundbreaking novelties in the well-established tradition of Turkey's satirical press.[8]

One innovation lies in its objective; namely, making satire popular and enjoyable for the wider public. Until then Turkish satire had been a high form of art through which intellectuals addressed each other. Indeed, in the 1930s and 1940s cartoons were successful in relieving, for instance, the discomfort caused by the new alphabet; however, the reading public did not represent a large part of the population.[9] In the 1950s and 1960s, then, a generation of artists known as *Elli kuşağı* (1950 Generation) introduced a new wave marked by a strong political content and an abstract style that, willingly or not, distanced cartoons from the masses.[10] With *Gırgır*, Aral, who belonged to

7 Demirkol 2018, 52.

8 Turkey's tradition of graphic satire dates back to 1867, when the precursors of modern Turkey's satirical cartoons first appeared, in the newspaper *Istanbul*. Three years later, the first satirical magazine of the Ottoman Empire was born: *Diyojen*, founded by the eminent writers and journalists Namık Kemal and Teodor Kasap. Modern cartooning, then, took its first steps in the late 1920s with Cemal Nadir (Güler), who was the first artist to work for a newspaper as a cartoonist.

9 In 1945, about 45% of the male population aged over 14 was literate; literate women did not exceed 15% (cf. table 1.6 in Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu 2010, 7).

10 Actually, this is the paradox of the 1950 Generation, which sought to mobilise the masses through a visual code that the masses were not able to understand.

this generation, moved away from this path to restore the tie with the people and increase the public interest in satire.

Directly connected with this objective was *Gırgır*'s policy regarding the contents. Initially, the pages of the magazine were filled with often sexually explicit sketches and jokes. This is testified above all by the typical *Gırgır* photomontages, namely black-and-white photos of naked women (actresses, models, show girls of that time) on which the cartoonists used to draw comic characters that made funny jokes while surrounding or covering the female body. The display of the naked female body was not a peculiarity of *Gırgır*; what was new, however, was the idea of resorting to this kind of eroticism to create humour.

The choice of sexuality as a core theme may be in part ascribed to the fact that in the beginning only men contributed to the magazine.[11] Most importantly, it shall be inscribed in the political and cultural context in which the magazine was born. In particular, *Gırgır* was launched during the 1971-1973 military interregnum, characterized by mass arrests, imprisonment and in many cases torture not only of people involved in radical activities but also students, academics, journalists and trade unionists who had allegedly embraced leftist ideologies.[12] In this forcibly apolitical environment the mass media as sites for the promotion and elaboration of cultural norms began to devote increasing attention to the lives of individuals, no longer seeing people as part of a collective community. This trend brought about a shift in interest of the general public toward the private.[13] Under these circumstances, *Gırgır*'s policy to address ordinary people translated into portraying their faults and vices.

In this regard, it should be noted that the words *kendi halinde* from *Gırgır*'s subtitle form an expression that, itself, means 'quiet and inoffensive'. Thus, it may be claimed that the subtitle stood as a verbal introduction to the magazine that, on the one hand, emphasised its originality compared to previous satirical trends, and, on the other, declared its innocence with respect to its content.

11 Within a few years the first women cartoonists joined *Gırgır*, opening new perspectives, including on the female body, with their female gaze.

12 The unequal treatment of radical leftist and rightist movements before and during the 1971-1973 period is widely acknowledged. For example, Clement Henry Dodd makes the point that just before the 1971 coup, although the militancy of leftist and rightist groups was "*equally devastating to law and order*" the members of the rightist faction were "*described by the former general, then President, [Cevdet] Sunay, as 'patriotic youngsters'*". See Dodd 1990, 14. Besides, Erik Jan Zürcher defines the two years of military-backed rule as "*a veritable witch-hunt against anyone with leftist or even progressive liberal sympathies*". See Zürcher 2004, 259. See also Kalaycıoğlu 2005, 106-107 and Mango 2004, 69-70.

13 Saraçgil 2001, 289-290. For discussion of the socio-cultural impact of the media see Koloğlu 2006 and Gürbilek 2011.

3. Reshaping Identity: *Gırgır* and the Growing Politicisation of the 1970s

The second meaning of the subtitle, suggesting *Gırgır*'s inoffensiveness, became less and less valid starting from the mid-1970s. As the political identities and debates that the 1971-1973 government had tried to suppress re-emerged in the public sphere, the magazine became increasingly concerned with social and political issues, and sexual gags were progressively abandoned in favour of a more critically engaged satire.[14]

Gırgır cartoons began to depict key issues of the time such as workers' rights, the education system, and the consequences of the rapid urbanisation such as unemployment, the neighbourhood dimension of social interactions, as well as the clash between the 'modern' city lifestyle and a more conservative rural culture. To a certain extent, by depicting the local world, this satire drew from its precursors of the 1930s and 1940s; yet, contrary to the latter, who focused primarily on the humorous representation of peoples' faults, *Gırgır* pushed forward the interest in the social aspects of people's existence. These issues were accompanied by illustrations that targeted political leaders, corruption, and the deep state.

A major editorial innovation introduced in the same years contributed substantially to shifting the focus toward social and political issues. Namely, besides the satire created by its permanent staff, *Gırgır* began to publish illustrations made by amateur and semi-amateur cartoonists, becoming the first magazine to recruit its cartoonists from among its readership.

This trend became official in 1974, when two specific spaces within the magazine were created to give visibility to non-professional cartoonists who had started to send their work as a result of *Gırgır*'s growing popularity. One of these spaces was a section called *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* (Cub Cartoonists) in the second page. The cartoons published here were accompanied by the name, often also surname and city of origin, of their authors. In addition, a critical comment was included in which the *Gırgır* team made technical remarks and gave suggestions about each cartoon to help the amateur cartoonists. The other space was the back cover, which was entirely dedicated to the cartoons by authors whose artistic level was at an intermediate step between the amateurs of the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page and the professional cartoonists who regularly worked for the magazine. Also these cartoons appeared with the name, surname and place of origin of their author, but here no comments were provided on behalf of *Gırgır*'s staff.

Renowned cartoonists who started their career in *Gırgır* reveal that amateurs and semi-amateurs secured the publication of their cartoons through a precise mechanism. The first step was to submit in person or send in the cartoons to *Gırgır*'s editorial unit – like most of the publishing houses and newspapers at that time, *Gırgır*'s headquarters were in Istanbul's Cağaloğlu district. The routine procedure for those who submitted their cartoons for the first time was to leave them with someone in the building and come back to collect them in a week, when they would receive advice from Aral or

14 *Gırgır*'s first cover page to express political satire was the edition of December 7, 1975, which was dedicated to the victims of university students uprisings, leftist and rightist alike.

from other *Gırgır* cartoonists. From that moment onwards, many of them would self-train according to their comments and a few would be called in small groups of about ten to work under Aral's supervision. A similar procedure took place by correspondence for the amateurs who did not live in Istanbul. At some point during this training, Aral would deem one cartoon ready for publication, eventually choosing it for the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page.[15]

After this first significant achievement, Aral's 'disciples' would pursue the technical study of the art of cartooning, at the same time, more of their cartoons would be published on the second page. When Aral deemed a cartoonist expert enough, his or her work would be published on the back cover.[16] After acquiring more experience as back cover cartoonists, the most talented and determined semi-amateurs would be offered the opportunity to work at the headquarters, hence earning the status of full-time *Gırgır* professional. By 1978, four years since the creation of the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* space, the first amateurs had joined *Gırgır*'s regular team.[17]

From the point of view of the aspiring cartoonists, drawing for *Gırgır* was a matter of prestige, predictably, but also money. For, Aral used to pay for all the cartoons that he selected, deciding the amount for each of them every time, and the remunerations could be very significant. Cartoonist Murat Kürüz, who started working for the magazine in 1976, recalls having received 75 TL for one of his first cartoons.[18] Cihan Demirci, another cartoonist who started his career as an amateur in *Gırgır*, even talks about 250 TL, in a period in which the monthly wage of a school teacher amounted to 500 TL, he explains, mentioning as an example his father's salary.[19]

From the point of view of the magazine, then, several reasons lied behind this practice. Murat Belge recalls an occasion on which he asked Aral to explain the recruitment of such inexperienced cartoonists. The latter reportedly replied that, in a country where very few doors were opened to the new generations, he meant to give the youth hope, show an interest in their creativity, and give them a concrete chance.[20] On a more practical level, it should be noted that the amateur-semi-amateur-professional system provided *Gırgır* with an ever larger editorial board, crucial to meeting the demand of a fast-growing readership.[21] Moreover, with this system Aral managed to create a *de facto* cartooning school shaped by his own artistic vision, at a time when the cartoonist sphere was largely dominated by the line of the 1950 generation.

The training of the amateur and semi-amateur cartoonists, and even more the employment of some of them as professionals, may be recognised as the utmost expression of *Gırgır*'s founding principle of bridging the distance between satire and the people.

15 Pek 2014.
16 Demirci 2011.
17 Turay 2013.
18 Kürüz 2007, 14.
19 Demirci 2011.
20 Belge 2010, 31.
21 The distribution of *Gırgır* grew from 64,000 copies in August 1973 to 200,000 in June 1976 and 350,000 in February 1979. See Demirkol 2018, 88.

In fact, the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* and the back cover essentially put ordinary people in professionals' shoes. In experimenting with satire, these people drew from direct experience of the world around them, of their reality and problems as students, workers, children, partners, citizens, etc. In so doing, these cartoonists brought social and political dynamics at the core of *Gırgır*.

4. A New Challenge: The 1980 Coup

In 1980, the coup d'état of September 12 and the three years of military rule that followed attempted to turn citizens into a homogeneous, uniform, and apolitical society. The 'depoliticisation mission' of the military in power set new dynamics and challenges that inevitably affected satire in several ways. A number of satirical opportunities died with the decision of the junta to forbid political debates, critical analyses of their political performance and discussions on any political matter. While censorship became the most effective tool by which the regime came to control the intellectual and artistic life, no official list of off-limits topics was ever produced during the three years. Rather, the prohibition of paragraphs, articles or entire publications was totally arbitrary and seemingly daily the regime would identify newly forbidden topics,[22] triggering a precarious scenario.

This scenario has prompted scholars, cartoon historians and cartoonists themselves to frequently pass over early 1980s satire.[23] Some works that envisage investigating the cartoons of modern Turkey take 1980 as the last year of their timeframe, even though they are completed much later;[24] likewise, the tendency to neglect the illustrations of the years of military rule can be detected also in studies that specifically explore cartoons from 1980 onwards.[25] Even the already mentioned study by Demirkol quickly dismisses the 1980-1983 period claiming that "*in Gırgır politics was put aside*".[26] Cantek and Gönenç, instead, acknowledge that the magazine kept being in opposition under the military rule, but remark that it did not exceed the limit.[27] A close look at the whole *Gırgır* production from September 1980 to November 1983 suggests that the widespread idea that between 1980 and 1983 the magazine was not, or not strongly politically engaged needs reconsideration.

5. The Caricatures of Political Leaders

Cantek and Gönenç's remark that *Gırgır* did not venture beyond the limit appears to be true insofar as representations of the junta were avoided almost entirely. The absence

22 Kabacalı 1990, 210.
23 For instance Alsaç 1994, Çeviker 1997, Koloğlu 2005 and Öngören 1998.
24 For instance Sipahioğlu 1999.
25 For example Arık 1998 and Tunç 2010.
26 Demirkol 2018, 92.
27 Cantek and Gönenç 2017, 18.

of caricatures of the generals does not mean, however, that the magazine gave up its political commentary. On the contrary, 1980-1983 *Gırgır* is characterised by a wide array of cartoons that call upon political figures who were unmistakably intermingled with the military power. In other words, while avoiding explicit representations of the generals, caricatures began to satirise the civil officers whom the junta had invested with important political duties.

The political figure that emerges as the favourite protagonist of *Gırgır*'s cartoons is, unmistakably, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Turgut Özal, the highest figure in the military government aside from the generals.[28] The consequences of his economic reforms are cunningly captured in a considerable number of cartoons, including some cover illustrations. In the one of the January 4, 1981 issue, for instance, Özal is represented as having an unnaturally long and large right arm and hand, and, by contrast, an equally unnaturally short left arm and small hand. In the words of another character in the scene, "one is the hand that gives, the other is the one that takes!..".

Another public figure who was invested with a political function by the regime and, as such, is a recurrent protagonist of *Gırgır*'s satire is Professor Orhan Aldıkaçtı, head of the advisory council that was entrusted with drafting the new constitution which came into effect in 1982. Cartoons featuring Aldıkaçtı generally denounce that the new constitution – that envisaged increasing the power of the National Security Council and of the president, put an end to the independence of institutions, and limited civil rights and liberties – is putting civil society at risk. In a caricature published on September 5, 1982, for instance, Aldıkaçtı is sitting at a desk during a public meeting where he invites the citizens to express their opinion on the constitution. The professor looks calm and seems keen on welcoming comments and criticism; however, two corks poke out from his ears suggesting that he is only pretending to be willing to enter into a dialogue with the people, while the truth is that he is not even listening. The falsity of the man is emphasised by the fact that he does not wear earplugs but rather big wine corks, showing that he is not even ashamed of his attitude.

A third man of the entourage of the junta who was abundantly mocked is Professor Doctor İhsan Doğramacı, who came to the limelight in 1981 when he was appointed chairman of the newly founded Council of Higher Education (from now on CHE). In the *Gırgır* issue of September 12, 1982, a cartoon shows one of the practical aspects of the higher education reform and the fact that, to put it as its title, "CHE has put former students in a difficult situation". The scene is set in an operating theatre, where a doctor is getting ready to begin operating. Doğramacı has unexpectedly entered the room and is reproaching the doctor by pointing a finger at him and declaring that "We don't care if you happened to become doctor 30 years ago. You need to be graduate according to CHE [parameters]. Leave the operation immediately. And make the other people whom you cured ill [again]!..".

28 This remained true until his resignation due to a banking scandal in 1982. Later, Özal founded his own party and ran for the parliamentary elections of 1983, which saw his rise to power as prime minister.

6. Politicising the Social

Parallel to the satirical representations of the civil officers involved in the military government, political denunciation between 1980 and 1983 emerges from cartoons that politicise the social. As explained above, by the time of the military coup social issues had become a major topic of *Gırgır's* satire. In its aftermath, some of them were addressed as responsibilities of the government, to be ridiculed and condemned.

A clear example of this trend may be found in the summer of 1981, after Istanbul Police forbade singer Bülent Ersoy from performing on June 11 of that year. This restriction came at a time when the famous and highly acclaimed artist, born a male, was resuming her career after the sex reassignment surgery she had undergone in London two months earlier. The surgery made Ersoy's homosexuality, already quite prominent, overtly explicit – thus her return to stage presented an unacceptable challenge to the military, who were struggling to impose traditional socio-moral values. Unsurprisingly, the ban on Ersoy's public performances was immediately followed, the next day, by a more extensive prohibition against all homosexual, transsexual and transgender singers appearing on stage.

In that period *Gırgır* published cartoons of, among others, a young man suggesting to a male friend that he change sex in order to wear his tight jeans more comfortably; men puzzled at the presence of tall masculine women in men's public toilets; and men walking in the streets surrounded by female breasts emerging from the walls of surrounding buildings. In the light of the particular time at which they were published, these illustrations may be read as *Gırgır*'s response to the persecution which homosexuals became victim to, an attempt to protect and stand up for Ersoy's presence in the public sphere, as well as to assert and normalise the existence of homosexual, transsexual and transgender people in general.

In a similar fashion, *Gırgır* reacted to the increasing problem of drugs that marked the end of 1982. In December that year, drug related issues became commonplace in the press. The main issues were illegal drug production at the outskirts of the big cities, drug trafficking, the rise in drug use, and the effects of this phenomenon on the youth. To mention one example, on December 23 the daily *Milliyet* led with an article that stresses the extent that drug problems had reached throughout the year. The piece discusses the struggle of the state by reporting statistics from police operations, as well as declarations from the authorities at the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance.[29] The article continues on the inner pages by commenting on a dramatic picture from a section of the mental hospital of Bakırköy (Istanbul) that is crowded by victims of drug addiction. Later on in the same page, the news follows the case of a drug dealer recently released on bail.[30] The many aspects of the problem that are dealt with in one day by a single paper indicate the alarming levels that the issue had reached.

Gırgır dealt with the drugs issue in its own way. For example, on January 2, 1983 it dedicated a column to a fictional professor who is supposed to be an expert in the field.

29 *Milliyet* 23/12/1982, 1.
30 *Milliyet* 23/12/1982, 9.

The man acquaints the readers with the effects of drugs by describing them one by one, with the goal of discouraging their use; nonetheless, the descriptions are amusing to the extent that at some point they seem to have the opposite effect, that is, to encourage people to try them.

Of particular interest is a cartoon included in the issue of January 23, 1983. Here a drug smuggler is trying to sell his illegal wares by loudly advertising them in a crowded spot in broad daylight, as if he were a street seller of fruit and vegetables. Evidently, by emphasising the seller's brazen insolence, the sketch draws attention to the ease with which drugs were circulating at the time. Certainly, in different conditions the reader should understand this scene as criticising the inability of the state to stem this phenomenon, implying that the strategies against drug smuggling are not efficient enough. However, in the particular circumstances of the regime, when soldiers garrisoned public spaces and social control was practiced with all possible means, the criticism seems rather directed to the lack of concern of the state over this matter. In other words, the cartoon implies that the regime is intentionally not dealing with this matter, at least not to the extent that it could.

7. Illustrating Repression

The recurring representations of civil officers and the politicisation of issues which normally belonged to the social sphere shall not mislead into concluding that *Gırgır* was avoiding the most crucial aspect of the military regime, i.e. repression. On the contrary, other cartoons prove that the magazine elaborated an articulated discourse about political persecutions and violence.

These cartoons denounce, first, mass imprisonment, a phenomenon with which Turkey became acquainted in those years with unprecedented figures. In order to highlight the frequency, ease and arbitrariness with which civil society was subject to arrests, cartoons insist, for instance, on the fact that a prison had become a synonym for a house, even a holiday destination. In a cartoon published on January 30, 1983, a handcuffed man accompanied by a soldier has reached the entrance of a prison where a guard has come to 'welcome' him. The building is visibly overcrowded, to the extent that not only are the windows packed with detainees, but the external walls too appear bursting under the pressure of the inmates. The newcomer is disappointed at not being allowed in and says angrily to the prison guard: "Mate, what do you mean 'we are full'? I phoned and reserved a place three months ago...".

Furthermore, *Gırgır* insists on the identity of the victims of mass imprisonments, focusing primarily on labour unionists, artists, intellectuals, and ordinary people. While these protagonists tend to be for the most part anonymous, in some case cartoonists dare to represent real-life people. In a cartoon published on January 4, 1981 titled "mafia chiefs accused of dealing contraband foreign money, cigarettes and weapons were set free", two handcuffed men are being led toward a prison cell and three other are walking away in the opposite direction. The former look serious and worried while the latter smile embarrassedly as a guard tells them: "If you stay in prison any longer you'll

corrupt the morality of [Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions] CRTU administrators. Get going, outside..". It is so understood that the handcuffed men are CRTU labour unionists, and the other three characters are mafia bosses who are being released from prison despite their involvement in smuggling that is declared in the caption.

The cartoon draws inspiration from two events that came to light in the news in the weeks prior, namely an operation against some clandestine organisations and the start of the trial against CRTU. On November 11, 1980, several men had been taken into custody under accusation of being chiefs of mafia organisations, their trial was conducted one month later and resulted in the arrest of 15 out of 23 suspects on December 13. The same days saw the opening of a collective trial against 577 CRTU members who had previously been taken into custody based on their political activity; the first sentences were pronounced on December 27, when 68 members of the confederation were arrested, including its president Abdullah Baştürk and and secretary general Fehmi Işıklar. The cartoon thus sheds light on the double standard that military tribunals had in store for unionists and criminals.

Finally, *Gırgır* explicitly condemns systematic violence and torture. A cartoon on January 4, 1981 portrays a man who is forced to sit on a small stool with his hands tied behind his back; his right foot and left ear are connected to some cables, and a *çaydanlık* (Turkish tea-kettle) is positioned on his head. His burnt hair and dark eye sockets suggest that the cables in question carry electricity and are connected to a generator or a plug; in addition, the steam which comes out from the teapot so vehemently indicates that the energy transmitted to the man is so high that the temperature of his body suffices to make tea boil. A commissioner who stands next to the examined man stares at him maliciously, while holding a glass of tea, and declares with satisfaction: "Without this electric torture we would greatly feel the absence of hot tea...". Altogether, beyond referring to the fact that electro-torture was normal procedure during the regime, this illustration judges it as sadistic and useless, thus heavily condemns the interrogators as fully conscious of the atrocities that they were committing.

8. Amateur Cartoons as a Chance for Expression

This brief overview has begun to reveal that *Gırgır* did non refrain from criticising the military government. As the examples discussed above show, criticism was elaborated through specific choices in terms of themes, subjects, characters and dialogues. While these choices are strictly interrelated with the content of the cartoons, other significant strategies emerge at the authorial level.

During the military regime the amateur and semi-amateur spaces were maintained. By the time of the coup the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* and the cartoons on the back cover experienced a real boom, to the extent that Cihan Demirci recalls that up to a thousand aspiring cartoonists could show up to Çağaloğlu in one day.[31] It appears that so many amateurs had started to turn to *Gırgır* that Aral deemed it necessary to impose

31 Demirci 2011.

some sort of 'pre-selection' and to disclose some details of the selection mechanisms so as to prevent thousands of below-standard cartoonists from wasting their time. In a collective message entitled *Minik Yalvarmalar!..* (Small Requests!..), published on the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page of September 14, 1980, Aral advises:

> Don't rush to send in the first cartoons that you draw just because you think "I like cartoons". It is a pity for both you and me, since you waste money for the mail service and I waste my time, which is already lessening more and more. Please, work, work hard in your environment, and send something only after having pleased the people around you. Don't send in your works thinking "Ok then, I'll try my luck. Perhaps I have some aptitude for cartooning of which I'm not aware myself, maybe it's a stroke of luck like just picking up a ten at the bingo." It's not my dear... It's not...

He also stresses:

> If you live in Istanbul, don't send your cartoons by mail. Leave your works at the magazine on Mondays. I tell you, it also increases their value. […] There are many friends who travel many kilometres from Artvin, Sivas, Bolu, Burdur, Adana, Ankara and many other provinces exclusively to have the opportunity to show their cartoons. Is it that hard to come to Çağaloğlu from [the neighbourhood of] Erenköy?

Furthermore, he clarifies:

> In many cases, in spite of being good your cartoon will not be published... it will not be published. Don't be hurt, don't get angry. You think of yourselves as individuals, I necessarily have to see you as one of thousands.

The fact that amateur and semi-amateur cartoons continued to flow to the magazine during the military rule is extraordinarily important for several reasons. First, the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page and the back cover preserved that direct interchange between the masses and culture that the regime was so vehemently trying to suppress. Furthermore, by publishing cartoons that came from all over Turkey (and even from Turkish citizens abroad, in particular from Cyprus and Germany), the magazine contributed to the circulation of points of view among people from every corner of the country, during a period in which the restrictions imposed by the military on the means of communication were leaving some provinces and regions relatively isolated. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, since the satire made by amateurs and semi-amateurs covered nearly all the themes that were treated by *Gırgır*'s professionals, including political issues, the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* space and the back cover assured common citizens, in the guise of cartoonists, a freedom of expression that the authoritarian regime generally denied elsewhere.

9. A Specific Category of Amateurs: Political Prisoners

The issues of *Gırgır* published under the military rule reveal the presence of a specific type of amateur and semi-amateur cartoons that deserves particular attention; namely, cartoons drawn by people who were detained in prison. As a matter of facts, the first *mapusaneden karikatürler*,[32] 'cartoons from prison', date back to the mid-1970s, but it is in the aftermath of the 1980 coup that they experienced a boom, as a consequence of the fact that a high number of people found themselves in jail. Between 1980 and 1983 these cartoons emerge as a minor yet regular presence in the magazine.

The creators of the prison cartoons were, generally speaking, people who had been arrested for their political ideas and ranged from young students to unionists and intellectuals. These prisoners had no professional connection with the art of cartooning and, conceivably, they had never thought about drawing cartoons before. In fact, there are reasons to believe that prisoners began to send their cartoons to the magazine inspired by the fact that (free) non-professional cartoonists were given a chance of visibility on the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page and back cover, thus they were presumably encouraged by the idea that these spaces could also provide them with this opportunity.

Aral's account reveals that prisoners usually established contact with the magazine by sending sketches scribbled on small pieces of paper and made with rudimentary materials. What the *Gırgır* staff used to do at that stage was to forward a letter to each prisoner who had sent in a cartoon, to provide them with explanations of the basic principles of cartooning and the necessary equipment to draw. In addition, these letters were accompanied by messages addressed to the directors of the prisons, in which *Gırgır*'s team praised the latter for allowing the packages to reach the detainees.[33]

Hundreds of letters and materials were sent to prisons across the country; however, the majority failed to reach their intended destination and, in some case, they were even sent back. Above all, Aral reports that it became particularly difficult to communicate with Ankara's Mamak jail, Metris prison in Istanbul, and the prison of Diyarbakır.[34] Yet, despite all these difficulties, *Gırgır*'s staff pursued the correspondence, managing to establish contact with about 90 detainees countrywide.

The mechanism of publication for the cartoonists who drew from prison appears similar to the one put in practice for the other amateurs, albeit with some differences. First, it was similar in terms of the training that preceded the first publication, since detainees trained themselves according to the comments and directions provided by correspondence by *Gırgır*'s experienced cartoonists. To some extent, however, the path to publication was also different from that of free amateurs and semi-amateurs: prison-

32 The word mapushane is intentionally reproduced with the missing letter 'h' because this is how Aral writes it in his texts. The missing letter is not a spelling mistake; on the contrary, it should be understood as conforming to a trend of *Gırgır*'s style, namely that of deliberately misspelling words for comic effect or to make them sound more familiar.

33 Oğuz Aral in Various Artists 1986, 5-6.

34 Ibid., 6.

ers' cartoons were published at an earlier stage, that is to say, without long waiting periods even though their standard was often lower. This policy suggests that the primary goal was to provide these prisoners with a platform to communicate with the outside.

A second similarity with the other amateur or semi-amateur illustrations is that the cartoons from prison were integrated in the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page and back cover, according to the level of expertise of their authors, appearing along with the name and surname of their authors. What made them easily distinguishable from the others, though, was the place of origin, which was the name of their detention centre rather than their city or neighbourhood.

A third similarity concerns personal progress. While some prison cartoonists tried only one publication, others established a regular (conditions allowing) correspondence with the magazine. The ability of the latter improved with time and their name began to appear relatively often in the amateur and semi-amateur spaces. In the end, their cartoons came to be published not only to allow these individuals to express themselves from behind bars, but also for their quality.

Interestingly, in some case prisoners' enduring relationship with *Gırgır* allows us to trace the trajectories of their detention experience. For example, several cartoons by prisoner Mithat Solmaz published throughout 1983 state the prison of Afyon as his detention centre, while others realised by the same author in 1985 locate him in the prison of Kütahya. This difference indicates that Solmaz was moved from the penitentiary of Afyon to that of the near town, a deduction that the former political prisoner confirms as true.[35]

And fourth, a further common feature of free and imprisoned amateurs was the opportunity to become a permanent member of *Gırgır*'s staff, provided that the latter were eventually released from prison. This is the case, for instance, of cartoonist Erhan Başkurt, who joined Aral after his release and worked by his side until the sale of *Gırgır* in 1989.[36]

10. Political Prisoners' Stances in the Cartoons

The prison cartoons are politically relevant not only in terms of authorship but also of content. In fact, a close look at these cartoons reveals that prisoners systematically portrayed their jail experience, making themselves protagonist of their illustrations, rather than opting for other subjects and issues.[37]

Daily life behind bars is represented, for instance, in a cartoon by Uğur Ozakıncı hailing from Metris prison and published on the back cover of *Gırgır* on November 14, 1982. The view is of the interior of a prison cell where five cell mates are absorbed in their individual activities: one is knitting while sitting at a table in the background, a

35 Solmaz 2014.
36 Aral 2012.
37 For a systematic analysis of the prison cartoons see Marcella 2020.

second one is sitting on a stool in the foreground where he is busy assembling a rudimentary contraption, a third one holds a fishing rod in a bowl full of water pretending to be fishing, the fourth is playing with a kite whose dimensions (small kite, short string) have been adapted to the limited space of the cell, and the last one pretends to be a diver by standing on a wooden box that represents a springboard beneath which a small water bowl stands in place of the sea or swimming pool. The man who pretends to be fishing looks off in the direction of the observer while explaining "What [should] we do, bro', we try not to break off from society".

While this and other similar cartoons revolve around the status of being a prisoner in general terms, other focus more specifically on the squalor of prison spaces. In an illustration that was sent from the closed prison of Trabzon by Avni Şahin and published on the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page of January 9, 1983, the reader is faced with a prison courtyard that evidently has seen no cleaning for such a long time that a big spider web is now very visible in the middle of it, along with the spider itself that is shown weaving the web. The web originates from a corner that is created by a pole and a thread that connects the latter to a second pole, prompting a prisoner to exclaim: "One day we [will] play volleyball thanks to this spider!".

Besides portraying the practical activities and inconvenience of jail life, prison cartoons do not fail to denounce the judicial fury of the regime. In a cartoon realised in the prison of Afyon by the already mentioned Mithah Solmaz, and that was published on the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* page on January 3, 1982, a man wishes good luck (lit. 'nice trial', *iyi mahkemeler*) to his cell mate who is about to appear in court. In the following scene, the latter is visibly upset and when a third mate asks for the reason for his mood the former explains that "he got five years, he thinks himself heavily sentenced", implying that a five-year sentence is relatively light compared to the general trend.

Moreover, prison cartoons reflect on the impossibility of going back to the routine of ordinary life after having experienced a long period in jail. Remarkable in this sense is a cartoon that appeared on the back cover of *Gırgır* on September 18, 1983, sent by Bozkurt Belibağlı from the prison of Çanakkale. The scene visually narrates the first night of a newly married couple, specifically the moment the groom takes his bride in their new house. As he shows her their bedroom she is left speechless at the view of two bunk beds, prompting the groom to apologise: "I hope you'll pardon me, my love, after having slept this way for years in jail it is impossible for me to lie anywhere else".

In the light of these examples it is possible to assert that through this art these prisoners came to openly challenge the regime. In fact, considering that they had been arrested for political reasons, their decision to make political cartoons specifically denouncing their captivity shall be read as a way to rebel against the depoliticisation and silence that the military power was trying to impose on them.

11. Attempts to Undermine *Gırgır*: Censorship and Legal Trials

The political cartoons and authorial strategies illustrated above show that *Gırgır* stood against power in multiple ways. None of the examples discussed so far fell under the grip of censorship; nonetheless, the military regime showed signs of intolerance to other cartoons.

In the summer of 1981 *Gırgır* was subject to censorship and temporarily banned. The cartoon that the regime would not tolerate appeared on the cover of the issue of July 19, 1981 and featured Müşerref Akay, a singer who became extremely popular at that time with the deeply nationalist song *Türkiyem* (My Turkey), which was regularly played on the state radio and television. The cartoon represents Akay in the act of singing *Türkiyem* in a television studio; meanwhile, a flag seller approaches the cameraman and states, very seriously: "No excuses!.. You'll broadcast me on television too! I sell [Turkish] flags too...". The comment alludes to the singer's dress, which resembles the Turkish flag. As a matter of fact, this outfit is not dissimilar to the one that the woman actually wore in the official video of *Türkiyem* – which was red, with the white star and crescent; nevertheless, precisely this detail caused the reaction of the regime: the cartoon was put on trial for "*insulting the Turkish flag by drawing it on the body of an old, ugly and inauspicious woman*".[38] In addition, *Gırgır* was forced to close for four weeks.

Concerning the trial, despite an initial request of imprisonment for Aral, the sentence was converted to a pecuniary fine.[39] Regarding the ban, then, the four week closure should be evaluated in relation to the founding policies of *Gırgır*. In fact, the magazine traditionally refused sponsors and advertisements, financing itself entirely through its sales. Consequently, the break of four weeks, along with the pecuniary fine, caused a substantial financial damage.

Ironically, this episode turned out to be a double-edged sword for the regime, as, ultimately, it earned the magazine an unprecedented popularity. In fact, its return to the market on August 23, 1981 marked the beginning of a fast growing sales record: from the already remarkable average of 400,000 copies of the previous month, to almost 500,000 afterwards.[40] These rates elevated *Gırgır* to the best-selling weekly magazine in the country.

The success of a work that is at the centre of a controversy is not surprising: that controversy sparks attention and attention may fuel curiosity is a general axiom. That said, in this case it seems reductive to attribute such an astonishing rise only to new readers whom the *Gırgır* affair might have attracted to the magazine out of curiosity. Rather, it is likely that a number of readers who used to buy *Gırgır* collectively and circulate it in their circles (of relatives, schoolmates, colleagues, friends, etc.) began to buy their own copies in order to contribute to the financial recovery of the magazine. Without denying the importance attributed to curiosity, this explanation completes the

38 Cartoonist Ergün Gündüz, author of this caricature, in Various Authors 2010, 40.

39 Aral 2012.

40 More precisely, after the episode of censorship *Gırgır* had a print run of 500,000 copies, of which up to 489,000 were sold in 1982 (Demirci 2011).

picture, suggesting that the loyal readers showed exemplary solidarity to the magazine in response to the regime's attempt to reshape the tones of its satire.

After the ban and trial of 1981 *Gırgır* resumed the same satirical line as before. And not only: on September 25, 1983, Müşerref Akay and her song became the subject of a new caricature. This time the singer was portrayed selling cassettes of her famous song in the streets; a caption explained that the occasion was a decision by the Ministry of Education to broadcast *Türkiyem* in primary schools in order to strengthen patriotism. Once again, the point was the nationalist message of the song and its ties to the regime. This cartoon and the rest of the satirical production of August 1981 onwards prove that the *Gırgır* team was not daunted by the ban.

12. Conclusion

The analysis of *Gırgır* in the 1970s and early 1980s proves that its satire may rightly be defined as political. While the magazine initially emerged with a markedly sexual humour, from the mid-1970s onwards it came to mirror, and at the same time contribute to, the emergence of a socially and politically critical field, affirming itself as a major vehicle for political satire. The opening of the doors of the magazine to young, inexperienced cartoonists through the amateur and semi-amateur pages testifies to, on the one hand, the search for alternative means of expression on the part of the youth and, on the other hand, satire's ability to embrace this search and form new collectivities.

The military regime of the early 1980s attempted to repress such forms of political expression; however, the pages of *Gırgır* show that the magazine stood up to the repressive climate in multiple ways. At the content level, its cartoons avoided explicit representations of the generals but were nonetheless merciless in portraying high-rank figures who were unmistakably intermingled with the junta. In addition, the representation of social issues acquired new political meanings, highlighting that the social and political spheres were closely intertwined. Furthermore, cartoonists did not hesitate to denounce the darkest sides of the regime, including torture. The final responsibilities of the circumstances and pitfalls denounced by all these cartoons pointed at the military government, allowing satire to preserve its essence.

At the authorial level, by publishing amateur and semi-amateur cartoons also between 1980 and 1983 *Gırgır* made an inestimable contribution to keeping the satirical production not only alive but also very lively. The intrinsic complicity between the individual cartoonists, *Gırgır*'s staff, and the readership that was implied in the very existence of the cartoons of the *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler* and of the back cover was a meaningful response to the efforts of the military regime to control society and culture.

The whole set of activities that surrounded the prison cartoons (training, publication), then, emerge as *Gırgır*'s highest achievement in political terms. In fact, the system through which the production of the cartoons from prison was encouraged and the fact that they were published throughout the entire period of military rule prove extremely important for several reasons. To begin with, by establishing communication

with these political prisoners, *Gırgır* manifested interest and solidarity to them. In the second place, by teaching them cartooning techniques, it encouraged them to defend their own opinions and to adopt new ways of expressing them. Moreover, by publishing and exhibiting their cartoons, it provided them with a platform to communicate with the outside world. And to conclude, by allowing the most talented of these cartoonists to become part of the permanent staff of the magazine once they were released, it gave them a chance for the future.

Overall, it is possible to conclude that *Gırgır*'s satire was political. It was popular, it often revolved around daily life, but these features did not prevent it from being politically critical, on the side of civil society and of the oppressed.

It is no exaggeration to claim that *Gırgır* and especially its editorial line in the years concerned in this study shaped Turkey's later trends of political satire to a large extent. It is no coincidence that most satirical magazines that emerged in the same period and afterwards follow its format and were founded by cartoonists who had grown professionally in *Gırgır*, often moving their first steps as *Çiçeği Burnunda Karikatürcüler*. The mid-1980s, in particular, were characterised by a mushrooming of magazines on the model of *Gırgır*, including some that managed to conquer a prominent space in the market – like *Limon*, ancestor of the current *LeMan*.

This, along with a tense media context in the late 1980s, caused disagreement between *Gırgır*'s editor and owner, leading to the sudden sale of the magazine in 1989. This decision, of which the staff was informed only afterwards, prompted Aral and other colleagues to leave overnight. The following owners and directors never managed to achieve the previous satirical standards, nor intended to respond to political pressure as firmly as Aral had done before them.[41] Significantly, in 2017 *Gırgır*'s latest editorial group shut it down following the publication of a religious-themed cartoon that sparked controversy. While these later developments trace a descending parabola, there is little doubt that 1970s and 1980s *Gırgır* has been a pioneer of political satire, "in its own way".

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41 For a succinct account of post-1983 *Gırgır* see Tunç 2001, 250-53.

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