

GERMAN FILM “FACK JU, GÖHTE”: THE IDEA OF FREEDOM EDUCATION IN GERMANY

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Abstract: The film “Fack Ju, Göhte” is a comedy film produced in 2013, which could attract three million people in its first 17 day of screening, and regarded as the most successful film in Germany then. This film tells the story about an ex-convict, Zeki Müller, who disguises himself as areplacement teacher to obtain a hidden money stash in the building of Göthe Gesamtschule. However the ambience of the class and the students who Zeki teaches, garner sympathy for him from his students with teaching style people calls as “unique” at least and “maverick” at best. Zeki becomes the favourite teacher at his school and he manages to increase the school’s ranking in the town. This writting has a purpose to describe the idea of freedom in education field is potrayed in the film“Fack Ju, Göhte”. The method used is qualitative method with contain analysis, and data gathering technique used is literary study. The theory used are semiotics theory from C.S Peirce. The result of this research shows that the film “Fack Ju, Göhte” use this film as one of their education media, a new standpoint in portraying the education field which is the idea of freedom and self expression for the learners.

Keywords: the film “Fack Ju, Göhte”, freedom in education, film semiotic, reception

INTRODUCTION

The age of globalization in postmodernist society could not be separated from the realm of information technology, which supports all forms of mass media to develop and disperse as much information as possible. In Germany, there is a specific phenomenon observed in society, which is the arrival of the immigrant, who brought with them changes in German societal structure.

The advent of immigrant in Germany began in the 1950s. The immigrant, who were designated as “*Gastarbeiter*”, was attracted by the advanced development of West German economy. The government promoted an opportunity to work for the immigrants to overcome the lack of workers. Began in the 1950s, majority of the immigrants who migrated to Germany, came as people hit by poverty in their home country. These *Gastarbeiter*, or guest worker, or immigrants, came from every corner of the world, such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, South Korea, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia, while most of them arrived from Turkey. However, after their contract was finished, these immigrants would not depart for their respective home

countries. Many of the guest workers eventually stayed in Germany and brought along their families.

They brought with them varieties of habit and tradition from their home country to Germany, therefore cultural variations existed and intertwined with German culture. There are many art forms with conceived idea of immigrants and most of them have some kind of connections with Turkish immigrants. Those works came in the form of literary works, either novels or films, such as a novel titled *Die Heimkehr oder Tante Helga und Onkel Hans* written by Alev Tekinay and *die Brücke von goldenen Horn* written by Emine Özdamar. Meanwhile, there are also films containing the theme of life of Turkish immigrants, namely *Almanya, Welcome to Germany* (2011), *Kebab Connection* (2004), *Solino* (2002), *Mostly Martha* (2001), and *Fack Ju, Göhte* (2013).

The film *Fack Ju Göhte* is a German film with comedy genre released in 2013, directed by Bora Dagtekin and starred by Elyas M'Barek and Karoline Herfurth, meanwhile Max von der Groeben and Jella Haase acted as supporting casts. This film was produced by Rat Pack Filmproduktion in collaboration with Constantin Film. This film portrays the life of a robber named Zeki Müller (Elyas M'Barek), who was just released from the prison. Before he was jailed, he asked his friend to store their stolen money in a construction project. Unfortunately, during the time in which Zeki was jailed, the construction project finished to be a high school, named *Goethe Gesamtschule*. As such, he intended to obtain his stash by all means, and disguised himself as a replacement teacher. During his time as a teacher, he tried continually to retrieve his stash, otherwise he was involved in a romantic affair with a teacher named Lisi Schnabelstedt (Karoline Herfurth). Every conflict they faced managed to bring Zeki and Lisi closer, meanwhile the atmosphere of the class taught by Zeki became better. Zeki left his previous life as a bank robber, and chose to continue his life as a high school teacher.

According to Gräme Turner in the book *Film as Social Practice* (2006), a film has a meaning as representative of reality in societal life and societal problems. As a representative of reality, a film forms and depicts reality based on conventioned codes in a controlled setting, and also its cultural ideology. A film does not reflect nor record reality, instead it deconstructs and “represent” the picture of reality. In representing reality, a film will always be influenced by social scope, and ideology in which a film was made will reflect in the society condition. At the same time, a film supports a reflective interaction between cinematic representation and real life experience happen outside the screen.

This film portrays heavily the stereotyping of Germans towards Turkish immigrants as a manual worker, therefore they are less educated, foreign to norms, and regarded as troublemakers. They do not have a sufficient education and qualification, meanwhile in the film, it showed that the lack of education would offer no obstruction for this Turkish-German educator to be well-regarded by his fellow colleagues and students.

At the same time with the advent of phenomenon of films depicting Turkish immigrants in Germany, in reality the arrival and existence of these Turkish majority immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s ignited a tense debacle in Germany, due to the

concern of ghettos of immigrants in the cities of Germany. Meanwhile, the rate of criminality for teenagers with immigrant background increased, and reported by various medias. This research examined how a film can be a device and idea of liberation in the realm of education from the stereotyping of ethnicity, relation between educators and students, and high art.

THEORETIC STUDY

An American scientist, math and logic expert, and philosopher named Charles Sanders Peirce also examined the concept of semiotics. Peirce perceived the close distance of signs and logics, even proposing that logics is the sign itself (Lechte, 1994:145). For Peirce, a sign is a representamen, therefore the actual sign meaning is what it refers to. A sign refers to something known as objects, for someone or an interpretant (Kurniawan, 2001:21).

Relation between these three aspects is known as semiosis. This triadic relation produces icons, indexes, and symbols. Relation between a sign and what it refers to could be the similarity of the signs, called as icon (e.g. a painting maintains an iconic relation with the subject of the painting as far as the similarity goes). This relation could also be caused by the closeness of existence, which is called index (e.g. smoke is an index of fire and knocking on the door is an index of a guest). This relation could also be a conventional relation, which is called symbol (e.g. nodding of the head means acceptance and red-inked letter represents anger) (Van Zoest, 1992:8-9, and Hawkes, 1977: 128-129). Objects do not only bring an information meant to be communicated, but also constitutes a structured sign system. One of the important area of signs is the role of the reader. (Barthes, 1967:95). A sign emerges due to a reference. A reference could come from a world outside language, which is human social and cultural aspects. According to Saussure, our perception and view towards reality, are constructed by words and other signs used in social context. As such, a sign could shapen human perception, more than only reflects existing reality (Bignell, 1997, in Listiorini, 1999).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Device of Liberation in Education Sector: Stereotyping, Relation Between Educator and Student, and Art

First, an education relates to the idea of freedom in stereotyping in education sector, which begins in the depiction of the film's main cast. In the film "*Fack Ju Göhte*", the main character, Zeki Müller (Elyas M'Barek) is depicted as a bank robber who was just released from prison. The name *Zeki* is a name originating from Turkish language, which means "clever" and is a derivative of an Arabic word, ذكي (dhakiy)⁶. The name indicates that Zeki is not a native German, instead he is an immigrant (generation unknown) originating from Turkey. The same idea could also be applied to the physical

⁶ <http://www.behindthename.com/name/zeki50> (accessed in October 10th 2017, 19.57)

characteristics of the main character. Black-haired with dark complexion, which overall could be concluded that he is not a native German.

Zeki begins the narrative with his release from prison. He is well known to the ladies and nightlife, and has no job. After the agreement between Germany and Turkey in the 1960s, which stated Turkey as one of the *Gastarbeiter* supplier in Germany, Turkish immigrant started to arrive in Germany, usually as worker. At first, they are warm welcomed and regarded as *Gastarbeiter* who might one day return to their home country. The German Government who was caught not ready with this immigrant influx from Turkey, managed as good as they can to integrate the immigrants into German society. However, the sheer number of the immigrants left them unemployed, therefore many of them entered the underground life, even into criminality, just like what happened to Zeki Müller, who became the representative of Turkish immigrant living in Germany in the film "*Fack Ju Göhte*".

The representation of Zeki is also the stereotype of Turkish immigrants in Germany, related to his social class, which is the lower class, unemployed, and ex-convict. The data provides evidence that there are so many immigrants failing to secure a job, and eventually falls into criminality. Data from Reuters⁷ proves, that the immigrants are responsible for at least 69.000 counts of criminality, whether success or not, in Germany on the first three months of 2016.

Zeki is depicted with T-shirt, jeans trousers, and leather jacket, even when he is teaching in the class. This implicates that there is ignorance by purpose, relating to the appropriateness of a teacher inside a class. Furthermore, Zeki keeps swearing in German when he is interacting with his students in the class. This also came under scrutiny from Berliner Morgenpost, online newspaper in Germany, who claims that through this film, the language of young people became broader and more flexible. It views that the usage of swearing and rude language in this film as negative, but how the German language could develop and used casually by the young people in Germany⁸.

But at the end of the narration, Zeki became the favorite teacher in the eyes of his students, because he brought new way in his teaching. He gives freedom to his students to learn, speak (even with swearing and rude language) in the class. Through the representation of this one Turkish immigrant, Zeki is viewed as catalyst to reform the old values. It is thought that the arrival of an immigrant like Zeki is not also bringing with him negative consequences because of his low education and criminality, but also good consequences, which is when he gives freedom to his students to regard their teacher as their friend, by using informal language.

⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-germany-crime-idUSKCN0YT28V> (accessed in October 10th 2017, 20.11)

⁸ <https://www.morgenpost.de/berlin-aktuell/article125372889/Fack-ju-Goehnte-Warum-Kiezdeutsch-die-Sprache-bereichert.html> (accessed in October 10th 2017, 20.22)



Image 1.1 Zeki Müller (Elyas M'Barek) being released from prison. (Minutes 01:00)

Representation of freedom tearing the high wall between teachers and students in the film is depicted by the appearance of graffiti (images or scribble on the wall), which is heavily portrayed in the backgrounds of scenes, and become the center of focus when the main character Zeki is sitting with his students.

The culture of graffiti in Germany started after the end of World War II, when young people began to build courage to express themselves after the indoctrinating and oppressive regime of Nazis. Meanwhile, the new emerging Communist regime as their neighbors made them more creative to draw graffiti as political and cultural statement towards the policy of East German state (and communist countries in general), which were oppressive in nature. After the Berlin Wall fell down and Communist countries dissolved, in general a graffiti regarded as valued art expression, a form of freedom of expression⁹.

In the film “Fack Ju Göhte”, graffiti is heavily portrayed on the background. Especially in the school where Zeki Miller teaches, there are many graffiti on the school wall. This implicates that through education, the students should be taught with values that liberate them. The high wall between static old teaching methods should be reformed with new more open system to the changes around it. The students can sit together with their teacher to share ideas, and learning should not be confined to a room.

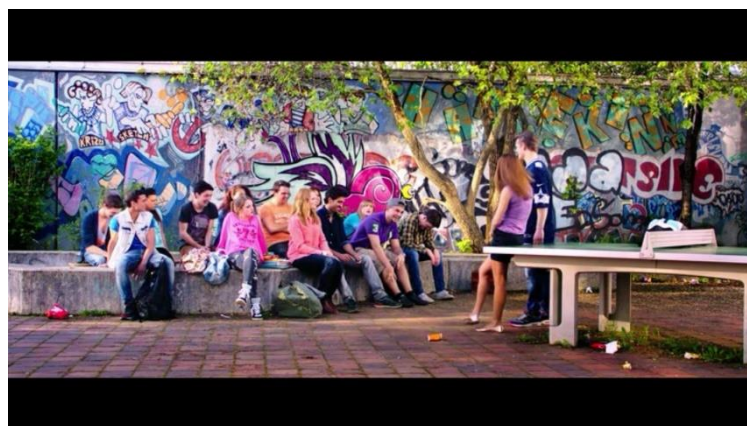


Image 1.2 Graffiti became a dominant theme in the background of the scenes in the film “Fack Ju Göhte” (Minutes 50:58)

⁹ <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2011/07/the-heritage-of-berlin-street-art-and-graffiti-scene/> (accessed on October 10th 2017, 21.02)

The freedom of expression in the education world, especially regarding to high art values also represented in this film through one scene, where Zeki had to teach a theater class to perform in the end of the year. Drama used is the famous literary work by Shakespeare, *Romeo dan Juliet*.

This literary work from Shakespeare is the tragedy roman written first in 1562 and brought into a play in 1597. As a literary work written in the High English period, *Romeo and Juliet* usually played with more formal language, with costumes which are also suited to a tragedy roman performance. Meanwhile, in the film “Fack Ju Göhte”, the students perform it with a more modern approach, based on the theme urban or urban society. They used informal expressions with spontaneity and slang languages. It is of course different with the original version, as well as the misspelling the name of ‘Göhte’ by purpose.

This explains the critics and resistance towards the high culture, like what is produced by famous writer Shakespeare and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe could be reformed to keep on with the flows of time, so that the values inherent is modified and not static.



Image 1.3 The Goethe School students playing the *Romeo and Juliet*

CONCLUSION

The film “Fack Ju, Göhte” became a critic to education sector. This critic regarding education could be applied to an education system, which gives space to stereotyping to incriminate background of the students, increasing the distance between students and teacher, confined the students to maintain relationship only formally with the teacher by confining the learning space only into a room, and gives certain values towards form of art.

This film implicating critics of how someone can be regarded as educator if he is able to instill values in his students to adapt in the society, give rooms for expressions, and to find the biggest potential for different students. The backgrund should not be a hindrance, because every individual is a free individual, who is also free from stereotyping applied by the society.

The freedom to express art with high values also indicated in this film. To enjoy art, everyone has their own way, including to modify text and story narration, using of contemporary costumes could develop creativity and self-satisfaction for the students.

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