

Constructing Socialist Thought through Translation: Alâeddin Şenel and the Politics of Activist Translation in Türkiye*

Çeviri Yoluyla Sosyalist Düşünceyi İnşa Etmek: Alâeddin Şenel ve Türkiye’de Aktivist Çevirinin Politikası

Research/Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how activist translation practice has been utilized to disseminate socialist ideology and related concepts in Türkiye through the case of Alâeddin Şenel. The theoretical framework of the study is twofold. First, as a historiographical method, it employs microhistory. This approach makes it possible to focus on ordinary people and supplement the missing fragments of historical processes that are typically viewed through a macro lens. The second pillar of the theoretical basis consists of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts, specifically habitus, field, and capital. Rather than presenting a mere compilation of biographical details, these concepts enable a systematic analysis of Şenel's role as an activist translator. Activist translation is a concept with fluid boundaries and has been practised by translators in various ways throughout history. The strategic selection of texts for translation, aimed at establishing a canon without manipulating content, can be considered a form of activist translation. Şenel, who translated books authored by Marxist and socialist writers whose works have been dominated by historical materialism, appears to have aimed not only to construct an alternative intellectual framework for Turkish readers but also to contribute to the global struggle against dominant historical, political, and social discourses. The case of Şenel demonstrates that translation can be

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conceived as a strategic ‘front’ within the ideological struggle. Ultimately, this study illustrates that advocates of socialism in Türkiye, despite never constituting a dominant political trend, were not merely passive supporters, but waged a quiet struggle to disseminate their ideologies.

Keywords: Activist translation, ideological translation, socialism, translation history, translation sociology

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Alâeddin Şenel örneği üzerinden aktivist çeviri uygulamasının Türkiye’de sosyalist ideolojiyi ve bununla ilişkili kavramları yaymak için nasıl kullanılabileceğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesi iki ayaklıdır. İlk olarak, tarih yazım yöntemi olarak mikrotarih yaklaşımı kullanılacaktır. Bu yöntem sıradan insanlara odaklanmayı ve büyük merceklerle ele alınan tarihsel süreçlerin eksik parçalarını tamamlamayı olanaklı kılar. Teorik altyapının diğer unsuru ise Pierre Bourdieu’nün habitus, alan ve sermaye kavramlarıdır. Bu kavramlar, biyografik detaylar yığını sunmaktan ziyade Şenel’in aktivist çevirmenliğini sistematik bir biçimde analiz etmeyi mümkün kılacaktır. Aktivist çeviri, sınırları belli olmayan bir kavram olduğu gibi, tarih boyunca çevirmenler tarafından çok çeşitli şekillerde uygulanmıştır. Kaynak metnin içeriğini manipüle etmeksizin bir kanon oluşturmak amacıyla, çevrilecek metinleri stratejik olarak seçmek de aktivist çeviri stratejilerinden biri olarak değerlendirilebilir. Şenel, Marksist ve sosyalist yazarlar tarafından kaleme alınan ve tarihsel materyalizmin hâkim olduğu kitapları çevirmekle, Türk okurlar için alternatif bir entelektüel çerçeve oluşturmuş ve aynı zamanda egemen tarihsel, siyasi ve toplumsal söyleme karşı küresel mücadeleye de katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamış görünmektedir. Şenel örneği, çevirinin ideolojik mücadelede stratejik bir ‘cephe’ olarak kavranabileceği fikrini ortaya koymaktadır. Dahası, bu çalışma, Türkiye’deki sosyalistlerin, hiçbir zaman bir siyasi çoğunluk oluşturamamaları da sadece pasif destekçiler olmadıklarını, ideolojilerini yaymak için sessiz bir savaş verdiklerini de göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: aktivist çeviri, ideolojik çeviri, sosyalizm, çeviri tarihi, çeviri sosyolojisi

1. Introduction

Language and discourse are central pillars of the ideological struggle that continues both within and across nations. As Li (2023, p. 1) observes, “[t]ranslation, an often overlooked yet potent force in political discourse, plays a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and global narratives, mediating information flow across linguistic and cultural boundaries.” It is therefore unfeasible for an ideology to achieve global success in the absence of translation, which enables political discourse constructed in one language to be received by individuals across diverse cultures and helps perspectives that have been suppressed or marginalized garner support from broader communities.

The political efficacy of translation also extends beyond the mere transmission of content: stylistic delivery is of equal importance, since political theorists strategically select certain terms while omitting others, and translators’ choices directly shape the reception of the message. The role of translation in political activism has further expanded in the digital era, as individuals increasingly use it as a strategic instrument to disseminate their worldviews online. In Türkiye, translation has long been deployed for activist purposes. The Tanzimat era and the Early Republican period stand out as epochs

in which the ideological power of translation was leveraged to reconfigure the intellectual framework of the populace and transform imperial subjects into a nation through the diffusion of the Western literary and intellectual canon. After Türkiye entered the bipolar world of the 1950s, translation moved beyond mainstream ideologies to serve activism in fields such as feminism, animal rights, migration, and gender equality.

Although several researchers have examined activist translation in Türkiye from various angles (Akçasoy & Işıklar Koçak, 2022; Akgün, 2024; Bayraktar, 2022; Duraner, 2021; Gülen, 2024; Sarımeşmet, 2024; Yıldırım Şensoy, 2023), there is a limited amount of scholarship on the role of activist translation in disseminating the socialist worldview specifically. Alâeddin Şenel, whose translations exhibit a substantial correlation with socialism, offers an apt starting point for investigating this relationship. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how translation can be utilized to disseminate a major ideology such as socialism through the case study of Alâeddin Şenel. To carry out this investigation, several research questions have been inquired such as “which specific activist translation strategies (e.g., textual manipulation vs selective canon construction) can an activist translator employ in their works?”; “what factors in an activist translator’s education, professional career, and social context can influence their identities as an activist translator?”; and “where does the translation fit into the ideological struggle?”

A brief note on the conceptual building blocks of this study is warranted before proceeding. Translator studies, a term coined by Andrew Chesterman (2009), denotes a sub-branch of translation studies that takes the translator, rather than the translated text, as its primary object of inquiry, examining the agent's life, decisions, working conditions, and ideological positioning. Microhistory, in turn, is a historiographical approach that emerged in Italy in the late 1970s and centers on small-scale subjects such as an individual, an event, or a community, to illuminate broader historical processes from the bottom up. Combining these two lenses, this study positions Alâeddin Şenel, a Turkish academic, author, and translator who rendered numerous works by Marxist and socialist thinkers into Turkish, as a microhistorical case through which the function of translation in the propagation of socialist ideology in Türkiye can be examined.

To pursue these research questions, the study employs a twofold methodology: the microhistory approach, which has recently been introduced into translation history, and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Since socialism and its supporters have been historically marginalised in Türkiye, microhistory's ‘history from below’ perspective suits the case. Bourdieu's framework, which treats the agent as both shaping and shaped by society, complements this lens by preventing the analysis from collapsing into a mere accumulation of biographical detail. Both pillars are elaborated in the relevant sections below.

Şenel completed his undergraduate education at Ankara University (Faculty of Political Science) and authored his doctoral dissertation on Ancient Greek society, focusing on the theme of unequal social order, drawing on Marxist concepts and a historical materialist perspective. He maintained these themes in subsequent works on

political thought, the emergence of civilization, racism (Şenel, 1984), and contemporary political movements (Şenel, 2001). His translations show a marked parallelism with this worldview. Throughout his prolific career, he prioritized rendering into Turkish works by Marxist and socialist scholars such as Franz Oppenheimer, E. J. Hobsbawm, Gordon Childe, and Louis Althusser, as well as authors who interpret societies through Marxist frameworks or provide historical accounts of socialism. Building on this pattern, our hypothesis is that Şenel constructed a socialist canon in Turkish by selecting texts parallel in methodology, content, and theme, practising activist translation through canon-building rather than textual manipulation. The remainder of this article tests this hypothesis, beginning with activist translation as a concept.

2. Activist Translation – Types, Categories and Examples

Activism can be defined as a reaction to oppression, deprivation, or abuse (Bandia, 2023, p. 515); the term entered widespread use in the 1960s and 1970s to describe collective protests and demonstrations (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 12), and the digital realm has since expanded its scope. Where, then, does translation stand within activism? Translators are often imagined as neutral intermediaries, yet “[b]eing ‘neutral’ is of course an illusion”: translators inevitably affiliate, professionally, emotionally, and ideologically, with particular agendas and communities (Baker, 2009, p. 223). Indeed, most undertake their work because they believe their texts will benefit humanity or the receptor culture in broadly ideological ways (Tymoczko, 2000, p. 26).

Researchers have classified activist translation in diverse ways. Paul Bandia (2023, p. 516) divides it into “internal” activism (resistance to the class and power dynamics between the populace and the elite) and “external” activism, which centers on transnational concerns such as warfare, gender equality, environmental issues, child labor, femicide, and mining colonialism. In historical research, however, it is often infeasible to confine ideologically motivated translators to a single category, since translators advocating an ideology typically aspire to its dissemination both at home and abroad, and their efforts serve both objectives simultaneously. Bandia's typology can therefore be supplemented with a third position: ideological activist translators who operate across both domains simultaneously.

Activist translation can also be classified by the translator's mode of action. Gould and Tahmasebian (2023, pp. 2–3) distinguish four roles: witness-bearer, voice-giver, vernacular mediator, and revolutionary. The fourth, directly relevant to Şenel, encompasses translators who position themselves at the “barricades” of physical or digital struggle, spearheading new class alliances, consolidating post-revolutionary orders, engaging in collective translation, or using social media for activism (Bayraktar, 2022). The strategies of activist translation are inherently difficult to categorize. As Tymoczko (2010, p. 230) emphasizes, no single binary, literal/free, domesticating/foreignizing, or any other, has been historically privileged, since these strategies are “selected, invented, and improvised for their tactical values in specific situations, contexts, places, and times.” For analyzing Şenel, two broad headings suffice: intra-textual and extra-textual activism.

Extra-textual activist translation can be defined as disseminating a worldview by strategically selecting texts and constructing a body of literature, individually or collectively. The Turkish translator Ayşe Düzkan (2023) offers a clear instance: she rendered into Turkish a portion of Alice Schwarzer's interview with Simone de Beauvoir under the title *Ben Bir Feministim* ("I am a Feminist"), translated articles for the feminist journal *Pazartesi*, and introduced numerous women's rights advocates and feminist authors such as Valerie Solanas and Fay Weldon to Turkish readers, every author she translated being a woman. Düzkan herself frames her activism as canon-construction without textual intervention, declaring, "I believe that I owe loyalty to the text and the writer. If there is an expression I wouldn't use myself for the sake of political correctness, I feel obliged to translate it as it appears in the original" (Düzkan, 2023, p. 219).

A worldview can thus be disseminated without textual intervention, simply by selecting works systematically to construct a canon. Intra-textual activist translation, by contrast, involves alteration, addition, omission, or manipulation within the texts themselves. The Turkish translation of Hanne Blank's *Virgin: The Untouched History* offers an instructive example: in her preface, translator Emek Ergün (2008, p. 14) explains that she rendered the term hymen as "himen" rather than the more common "kızlık zarı" (literally, "virginity membrane") in order to "construct a discourse against such male-oriented definitions of the female body" (Blank, 2008). Even a single lexical decision can thus serve as resistance to a dominant discourse. At the more institutionalized end of the spectrum, deletions and omissions became "the most common manipulative strategies used by the translators" in the Soviet era, where ideological censorship pervasively shaped translation practice (Klimovich, 2017, p. 362).

As Nord (2016, p. 111) puts it, "Almost any decision is — consciously or unconsciously — guided by ideological criteria. Therefore, the 'objective translator' does not exist." Some translators act on this through textual intervention; others through the strategic selection of works to build a canon. Some declare their ideological commitments in paratexts, while others let their choice of authors and titles speak for itself. The remainder of this article examines how Şenel utilized translation to disseminate socialism in Türkiye, beginning with the methodological foundations, microhistory, and Bourdieusian sociology that frame the analysis.

3. Basic Principles of Microhistory and How They Are Used in the Context of This Study

The most significant elements that distinguish the microhistory approach from other historiographical models are its "history from below" perspective and its focus on "ordinary" people (Brown, 2003, p. 11). In other words, microhistorians use the "deviant cases, recovered especially from Inquisitorial and other court records, permit access to experiences and mentalities of peasants, giving a voice to people who [are] hitherto silent, in part because of the paucity of sources revealing their experience" (Brown, 2003, p. 11). The microhistory approach also introduces innovative perspectives on sources. Whereas Rankean historiography prized official archival documents, 'history

from below' requires non-traditional materials, since official sources tend to reveal ordinary people only when they have violated the law. Microhistorians therefore draw on diverse evidence, from court records to visual and material objects produced or used during the period (Wiesner, 2013, p. 13). Within translation studies specifically, Munday (2014, p. 3) proposes a more radical use of extra-textual sources such as archives, manuscripts, and translator working papers, arguing that, although these require careful evaluation, they offer "more direct access to the working practices of the translator and can give crucial insights into both historical circumstance and translation" (Munday, 2014, p. 3). This view runs counter to Toury's (2012, p. 88) caution that such sources are "partial and biased" and prone to propaganda; both perspectives, however, agree on their evidential value when handled critically.

Crucially, microhistory does not isolate its subject: "history from below does imply that there is something above to relate to [...] [T]he history of 'the common people' [...] cannot be divorced from the wider considerations of social structure and social power" (Sharpe, 2001, p. 33). The approach is thus an intensive effort to grasp small details while situating them within larger historical processes. The fit with the present study is direct: socialism has never been a mainstream ideology in Türkiye, and its supporters have often been defined as marginalized, suppressed, or silenced (Bora, 2017, p. 624). Şenel's individual experiences may appear insignificant in isolation, but placing them within this historical context can yield new data on the role of translation as an ideological instrument. More broadly, applying new historiographical methods to translation history opens space to re-examine topics previously thought settled and to challenge established assumptions.

The sources used in this study reflect this methodological orientation. Şenel's translations, together with the afterwords, footnotes, and other paratexts he authored for them, constitute the primary sources. Interviews and conversations with Şenel, as well as his own newspaper and magazine writings, serve as secondary sources. Though biased in Toury's sense, these are precisely the materials Munday identifies as offering crucial insights into a translator's historical and working context. Now that the core methodology of the study has been established, we can examine the concepts systematized by Pierre Bourdieu, which make it possible to analyze Şenel in an organized manner.

4. Why Are Bourdieusian Concepts Functional in Activist Translator Studies?

The analysis that follows proceeds in two complementary stages. The present chapter examines Şenel through Bourdieu's sociological framework, reconstructing the dispositions, capitals, and field that produced him as a particular kind of social agent; the next chapter then evaluates his translational output against the typologies of activist translation introduced. The two lenses converge on the same subject from different angles; one explaining the formation of Şenel's activist agency, the other characterizing the form his activism takes in practice. And their findings are synthesized in the discussion.

Subject-oriented studies could draw on agency models from theorists such as Lévi-Strauss (1994, p. 42) or Althusser (2010, pp. 102-104), but in their structuralist approach agents are “simple epiphenom[ena] of structure” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 9). Bourdieu instead refuses to treat agents as passive automata, framing them as forces that shape society as much as they are shaped by it - a view that aligns directly with the activist translator, who acts upon the masses rather than merely transmitting their texts. The functional and conceptual fit thus motivates the choice of Bourdieu here.

Şenel’s activist translation will be analyzed through Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, and capital. Habitus, in Bourdieu’s (2008, p. 53) definition, refers to “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures”. In plainer terms, it is the set of ingrained habits, skills, and educational backgrounds acquired through lived experience that shape how an agent acts, thinks, and decides across situations.

Starting from this point, examining Şenel’s habitus will primarily require investigating the life details that influenced his adoption of a socialist worldview. Once this is analyzed, how he utilized translation as a means to disseminate socialism can be revealed. Social agents act not in a vacuum but within a field, a “relatively autonomous social microcosm” structured by its own internal logic, irreducible to that of other fields such as the artistic, religious, or economic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2008, p. 97). Field cannot be analyzed apart from habitus and capital. At this exact point, it is necessary to consider within which social microcosm Şenel maintained his activist activities. He was an academic, a translator, and an author. He pursued his activist activities almost entirely within the microcosm of literature and academia. While examining Şenel’s activist translation, the specific characteristics, power struggles, and dominant ideology unique to this microcosm will be discussed.

The third pillar is capital. Whereas Marx framed capital strictly as economic, Bourdieu (2023, p. 166) recasts it as a multidimensional resource encompassing economic capital (convertible to money, institutionalized in property rights), cultural capital (institutionalized in educational qualifications), and social capital (built through connections and convertible into economic capital under certain conditions). To these he later adds symbolic capital, which is accumulated prestige, recognition, or consecration grounded in a dialectic of knowledge and recognition (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 7). All four forms are mutually convertible. Examining activist translators in these terms makes it possible to trace how they strategically deploy and convert different forms of capital to disseminate their worldviews. Drawing on these concepts, Şenel’s portrait as an activist translator will be developed in the following stages: first by tracing how his habitus was shaped through early life experiences, then by identifying the capitals he possessed and the field within which he deployed them, and finally by submitting the authors, works, and ideas he introduced to Turkish readers to thick description which is an interpretive method developed by Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 6-10), which goes beyond surface-level observation to situate a phenomenon within the layered networks of meaning, intention, and cultural context that inform it.

4.1. Şenel's Habitus

It appears that both his observations regarding his family and his personal experiences were influential in Şenel's adoption of a socialist worldview. Born into a working-class family, Şenel's father was a self-taught individual who worked in various demanding roles, ranging from shoemaking and carpentry to construction, factory labor, and mining (Özgür Durmuş & Özmen, 2019, pp. 339–340). Şenel himself spent his childhood years working. Having worked as a milkman, an apprentice, a grocery clerk, and a dishwasher since the age of five, Şenel even worked as a hotel bellboy and restroom cleaner to save up the money he would need for his studies upon being admitted to university. Indeed, according to him, the reason for his lack of success during his secondary education was his constant labor and the obligation to assist his uncles (Ceviz, 2009, p. 101).

One of Şenel's childhood experiences appears to be one of the first breaking points shaping his habitus. In this event, which he states he "could never forget," the owner of the factory where his father worked dismissed his father and many others for economic reasons, yet shortly thereafter hosted a "magnificent wedding" for his daughter (Özgür Durmuş & Özmen, 2019, p. 340). This incident, which Şenel, who had to work in every kind of job at a very young age at the expense of his schooling, did not forget even in his old age, must have shaped his initial views on the world, society, money, labor, and work.

A second decisive factor was the books he encountered at an early age. In his senior year of high school, Şenel borrowed Max Beer's *General History of Socialism and Social Struggles* (1957) from a friend's mother, a librarian, and the book left a profound impression on him (Ceviz, 2009, p. 102). During his first year of university, he would walk through the slums with cheap rations and connect Beer's arguments to the poverty he observed (Özgür Durmuş & Özmen, 2019, p. 340), building, in his own words, "utopias in my mind that I thought would eliminate this poverty and lack of culture" (Ceviz, 2009, p. 102).

It follows that Şenel's personal life experiences at a young age, his observations regarding his family and environment, and the books he read served as the initial bricks in the construction of his future socialist identity. These abstract thoughts, accumulating over time, eventually led Şenel to take action. An early example of this "desire to do something" occurred while he was still a student, when he said of former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who was facing the death penalty: "At that time, I viewed Menderes as the representative of the poor and said, 'if he is hanged, I will take to the mountains'" (Ceviz, 2009, p. 102). Şenel had decided to become an active participant rather than a passive observer in the face of what he perceived as social injustice. For Şenel, who began penning socialist-themed articles in the following years, the final brick of his socialist identity was laid when his path crossed with *Yön* magazine. In the post-1961 atmosphere of freedom, *Yön* was a publication that "delineated the boundaries of leftist discourse in Turkey... set the agenda, [and] stood at the center of leftist thought" (Gencer, 2020, p. 225). Şenel fully crystallized his worldview, stating, "after reading the first issue from cover to cover, I decided I was a socialist" (Ceviz, 2009, p. 103).

The article titled *The Fiasco of the Liberal System* in the third issue, to which Şenel also contributed with his writings, serves as a manifesto of his worldview. In this piece, where he praises socialism and severely criticizes the liberal economic system, the following sentence summarizes his worldview at that time: “[T]hat underdeveloped states can join the ranks of advanced states in a short time through socialism stands before our eyes as a truth as solid as a mountain [...] It has become an evident necessity for [these states] to move toward a complete ‘socialist’ regime” (Şenel, 1962).

Şenel also supported his intellectual efforts with political party activities. Stating that he “established a bond of heart” with members of the socialist Workers’ Party of Türkiye, Şenel prepared three speeches for a rally, “working until dawn without sleeping” (Özgür Durmuş & Özmen, 2019, p. 340). Furthermore, regarding the rally, he expressed that disseminating his political stance was his primary life goal, saying: “In my mind, I ultimately placed my political goals ahead of my academic goals. Sooner or later, I was going to participate in this work” (Özgür Durmuş & Özmen, 2019, p. 340). Şenel’s habitus thus crystallized through four stages: working-class origins, exposure to socialist literature, contribution to socialist publications, and direct involvement in party politics.

4.2. Şenel’s Capitals and Fields

Şenel’s economic capital was never high throughout his life. As previously mentioned, Şenel, who had to earn even his own school allowance during childhood, lived under similar conditions during his university years. In fact, he undertook the obligation of performing social service in exchange for the scholarship he received. During his years as an academic, although he managed to purchase a house, he attempted to generate additional income by renting out the upper floor of the house to students (Ceviz, 2009, p. 104). However, one of the most significant turning points in Şenel’s life was the small but effective social capital he built during his years at the Faculty of Political Sciences. In his own words, the relationship Şenel established with the Abadan couple enabled him to enter academia (Ceviz, 2009, p. 103).

Recalling Bourdieu’s framework, social capital can be converted into economic capital and may even be institutionalized in the form of a “title of nobility” (Bourdieu, 2023, p. 166). This phenomenon is evident in Şenel’s trajectory. While his social capital may not have been converted into large-scale economic wealth, it secured him a level of financial stability that spared him from major livelihood struggles. Similarly, although he may not have reached a pinnacle of social hierarchy, the social capital he cultivated during his student years granted him an academic title that bolstered his identity as an author. This allowed him to remain within the academy, at the very center of the literary and intellectual world. Had it been otherwise, as an independent theorist or activist outside the academy and without a sustainable income, he would have had to navigate a much more arduous path. Consequently, Şenel’s ability to remain in academia through social capital was of vital importance for his subsequent activist endeavors.

The reason for such a strong emphasis on academia is, of course, that the first and most powerful microcosm in which Şenel pursued his social power struggle was

academia. During the 1970s, when Şenel was actively serving within the academy, even disseminating propaganda for socialist ideology could constitute a crime (Özkandaş, 2022, p. 220). Consequently, academics faced criminal charges and were convicted (e.g., Mümtaz Soysal). Similarly, in the period following the 1980 Coup, numerous leftist academics were dismissed from public service under the framework of Martial Law No. 1402 (Özen, 2002, pp. 20, 64, 88). As is evident, within the academic field, the socialist front of the ideological power struggle occupied an extraordinarily disadvantaged position.

Naturally, the effects of this situation also permeated the intellectual stratum. It is clear that during the periods in question, historical materialist analyses and the tendency to address history through Marxist concepts were not dominant. Nonetheless, Şenel's doctoral dissertation, which he built upon the theme of inequality using Marxist concepts in defiance of the established historical approach, marked his first rebellion within academia. His subsequent works of a similar nature would also be penned to support the socialist front of the ideological power struggle persisting in this field. From the day he entered academia, Şenel, who would engage in active resistance against social and political events, fought his struggle primarily with his pen within this very field.

All this struggle for socialism and activist effort is primarily observed in Şenel's original works. In his doctoral dissertation, titled "On Equality and Inequality in Ancient Greece", Şenel (1970) examined Ancient Greek society on the basis of Marxist concepts and class inequality. He authored works in Marxist publications criticizing racism and nationalist movements, some of socialism's greatest battlegrounds (Şenel, 1984; Şenel et al., 1992); allocated more space to socialism and leftist thought currents than others in his political history lectures (Şenel, 2001); utilized a historical materialist perspective in his social analyses; diversified the concepts and terms developed by Marx and Engels; and utilized numerous socialist and Marxist authors in his bibliographies. It is evident that Şenel aimed to disseminate a socialist worldview both in the works he prepared for the students he trained and in the books, articles, and columns he wrote for the general public. He supported all these efforts through intensive translation activity within the academy, outside the academy after his resignation, and during his eventual return to academia. The details and activities concerning Şenel's activist translation will be addressed comprehensively in the following section.

5. Şenel as an Activist Translator

Before analyzing Şenel's translations, his own statement reflecting the function he assigned to translation should be underscored: "I have never done 'commercial' translation. I have always translated works connected to my existing knowledge, works concerning political thought, the state, the emergence of civilization, and social formations..." (Ceviz, 2009, p. 106). Thus, Şenel indicates that the primary motivation behind his identity as a translator was not merely generating income but rather providing social benefit. Another statement supporting this is regarding a translation he wished to undertake without expecting any financial compensation. Wishing to bring the work *The Early State* (1978), which is constructed upon concepts and periodization

proposed by Marx, into Turkish, Şenel applied to his institution, the Faculty of Political Sciences, to find funding. When his application was rejected, he stated that he wanted to undertake the translation without any financial return. When this proposal was also declined, Şenel ultimately translated a portion of the book himself and explained the situation in the foreword to the Turkish edition (Claessen & Skalník, 1993, p. vii).

Both excerpts demonstrate that Şenel viewed translation as a vehicle for disseminating his worldview. Beyond these direct declarations, a meta-analysis of the selected works and authors also appears to support this view.

Table 1

Chronology of Alâeddin Şenel's Translations (1974-2011)

Original Title	Translated Title	Author	Publication Date of the Translation
<i>What Happened in History</i>	<i>Tarihte Neler Oldu?</i>	Gordon Childe	1974
<i>The State</i>	<i>Devlet</i>	Franz Oppenheimer	1984
<i>A World History</i>	<i>Dünya Tarihi</i>	William McNeill	1985
<i>The Industrialisation of Russia 1700-1914</i>	<i>Rusya'nın Endüstrileşmesi 1700-1914</i>	M. E. Falkus	1986
<i>The Politics and History</i>	<i>Politika ve Tarih</i>	Louis Althusser	1987
<i>The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848</i>	<i>Devrim Çağı 1789-1848</i>	Eric Hobsbawm	1989
<i>The Birth of Civilization in the Near East</i>	<i>Uygarlığın Yakındoğuda Doğuşu: Mezopotamya ve Mısır</i>	Henri Frankfort	1989
<i>Middle Eastern Mythology</i>	<i>Ortadoğu Mitolojisi</i>	S. H. Hooke	1991
<i>The Origin of the Human Race</i>	<i>İnsan Türünün Kökeni ve Gelişimi</i>	V. P. Alekseyev	1993
<i>The Early State</i>	<i>Erken Devlet</i>	Ed. Claessen & Skalník	1993
<i>The Emergence of Civilization</i>	<i>Uygarlığın Doğuşu</i>	C. K. Maisels	1999
<i>How Societies Remember</i>	<i>Toplumlar Nasıl Anımsar</i>	Paul Connerton	1999

<i>A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism</i>	<i>Rus Düşünce Tarihi</i>	Andrzej Walicki	2009
<i>Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy</i>	<i>Diktatörlüğün ve Demokrasinin Toplumsal Kökenleri</i>	Barrington Moore	2011

Before identifying the general patterns in Şenel's translations between 1974 and 2011, it is helpful to examine the authors individually. Gordon Childe, author of *What Happened in History*, was an archaeologist who wrote socialist-themed articles for magazines such as *The Labour Monthly* during his student years at Oxford, applied the arguments of Marx and Engels to the field of archaeology (O'Connel, 2022), and penned his later works from a Marxist perspective (Playford, 1963, p. 57). Childe insists that "[e]ven the student of material culture has to study a society as a cooperative organization for producing means to satisfy its needs, for reproducing itself and for producing new needs" (Childe, 1971, p. 24), analyzing society through the lens of economy, means of production, and relations of production. The book addresses social inequality, the economic foundations of institutionalized religion, and economic exploitation in prehistoric societies, mirroring Şenel's own ideological outlook.

Another translation, *The State* by Franz Oppenheimer, was authored by a liberal socialist who explicitly drew on Marx while attempting to refine certain Marxist arguments (Şenel, 1984, p. 12). In his introduction to the Turkish edition, Şenel describes Oppenheimer as someone who "subscribes to the dialectical materialist approach and class concepts of Marxists, and shares their egalitarian values and aspirations for a future classless society" (Şenel, 1984, p. 14). The work analyzes the acquisition of economic resources, private property, and class-based wealth accumulation, drawing inspiration from Marx and Weber. Şenel later explicitly stated that he embraced Oppenheimer's socialist theory of the state, underscoring his motivation in translating it (Şenel, 2024, p. 8).

The Early State is the volume Şenel was willing to translate without remuneration. Its editors, Claessen and Skalník (1978, p. 5), construct the work explicitly along Marxist lines, framing the early state as "typical of the initial stage of the evolution of the precapitalist non-industrial state" and focusing on the transition between Marx's "primary" and "secondary" social formations. Most of the contributors to the multi-authored volume were Soviet citizens, and substantial space is devoted to detailed commentary on Engels and Marx. Şenel's willingness to forgo payment likely stemmed from his sense that the volume would render Marx's and Engels's ideas as accessible to Turkish readers as those of contemporary authors.

The Birth of Civilization in the Near East, *The Origin of the Human Race*, and *The Emergence of Civilization* follow the same thematic and methodological pattern as the works analyzed above. Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848*, however,

deserves a separate examination. Hobsbawm, whose works have been translated into many languages, became a member of the Communist Party in 1936 and dedicated himself to “telling a counter-tale, undermining the capitalist’s bid for narrative supremacy” (Robin, 2019). He opens *The Age of Revolution* by framing the great revolution of 1789–1848 as the triumph “not of ‘industry’ as such, but of capitalist industry; not of liberty and equality in general but of middle class or ‘bourgeois’ liberal society” (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 11), establishing his historical-materialist lens from the outset. Consistent with Marxist historiography, in which capitalism is not the final destination but a precursor stage to socialism, he insists that “[t]he Industrial Revolution was not indeed an episode with a beginning and an end. To ask when it was ‘complete’ is senseless, for its essence was that henceforth revolutionary change became the norm” (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 41).

By analyzing two critical thresholds of human history, the Industrial and French Revolutions, through a Marxist frame, Hobsbawm raises a flag against “bourgeois history” and develops a counter-discourse to capitalist historiography. In rendering this work into Turkish, Şenel arguably lent local support to that broader struggle between Marxist and Whig, Revisionist, or Liberal historians. Another work Şenel introduced to Turkish is *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* by Andrzej Walicki, who studied at the Institute of Russian Studies in Stalinist Poland and authored numerous works on Marxism and Polish-Russian intellectual history (Krasowski, 2022). Unlike the other titles in his portfolio, this volume traces the intellectual foundations of socialism itself, introducing Turkish readers to its ideologues and origins. Şenel’s choice here suggests a pedagogical aim, supported by Walicki’s pervasive use of Marxist terminology and analytical frame (Chapman, 1982, p. 286).

The final work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* by Barrington Moore, follows the same pattern: Moore is a leading representative of the “neo-Marxist” school (Young & Leszczynski, 2021), and in this volume he offers a harsh critique of capitalism, arguing that the path to socialism runs through revolution rather than peaceful democratic means. The selection completes the ideological arc of Şenel’s translation portfolio.

A clear pattern emerges from these analyses, and the remaining titles in Şenel’s bibliography can reasonably be expected to exhibit similar characteristics. The authors he sought to introduce to Turkish were figures shaped by socialism and Marxism, scholars working within the tradition, or critics seeking to refine its arguments. Far from offering a balanced introduction to diverse positions, Şenel selected works that reflected his own worldview. Nearly all are books of historical sociology, combining historical narrative with social analysis to reach broader conclusions. Like his original writings, these translations emphasize social inequality and present socialism as a more desirable ideology. Şenel thus did not treat translation as a mere textual exercise but used it as a vehicle for disseminating socialist ideology and the Marxist understanding of history in Türkiye, with his activist character running parallel across both his authorial and translatorial identities.

Despite this purposeful selection, Şenel did not manipulate the texts themselves. In the “Translator’s Final Note” to his rendering of *Middle Eastern Mythology*, he writes:

A translator is responsible to both the author and the reader. Responsibility toward the author can be summarized as “maintaining fidelity” (translating the text as close to the original as possible) and “avoiding betrayal” (not intervening between the author and the reader). Responsibility toward the reader begins with the selection of the work (one cannot say, “the publisher chose it, it’s not my concern”), covers responsibilities regarding the language of translation, and extends to helping the reader grasp the work accurately and completely (Şenel, 2002, p. 255).

For Şenel, intentional manipulation of source content amounts to betrayal of the author, while indifference to the choice of works betrays the reader. He thus attributes a social mission to the translator: deciding which knowledge and worldview circulates. Because he took such care to select texts already aligned with his outlook, textual intervention was unnecessary. His responsibility was to disseminate, raise awareness, and offer an alternative to dominant historical and ideological frames, not to alter source texts.

6. Discussion

Read together, the Bourdieusian analysis and the activist translator analysis produce a coherent portrait in which the two sides illuminate each other. Bourdieu’s lens explains how Şenel became an activist translator: a working-class habitus shaped by early labor and observed injustice, a small but decisive social capital that secured his place in academia, the limited economic capital that nonetheless freed him from market-driven translation work, and a field, Turkish academia and intellectual publishing, in which the socialist position was structurally disadvantaged. The activist translator lens, in turn, characterizes the form his activism takes: his efforts for canon construction rather than textual manipulation, extra-textual rather than intra-textual activism, and the deliberate selection of authors whose Marxist or socialist outlook would offer Turkish readers a counter-discourse to the prevailing historiography.

The two analyses converge most sharply on the question of intentionality. Bourdieu’s framework cautions against reading social practice as the conscious execution of rules, yet Şenel’s habitus was so closely aligned with his ideological commitments that his translational decisions read as deliberate strategy. He articulates the choice to forgo ‘commercial’ translation, to translate a Marxist volume without payment, and to refuse interventions he considered ‘betrayal.’ The two lenses thus complement rather than duplicate each other: Bourdieu accounts for the conditions of possibility, the activist translator framework for the mode of execution. Mapping Şenel onto the typologies introduced previously sharpens the picture. Within Bandia’s (2023) internal/external division, Şenel occupies both positions at once, as ideological activist translators typically do: he served the dissemination of socialism within Türkiye while simultaneously contributing to the global struggle against prevailing historical, political, and social discourses. Within Gould and Tahmasebian’s (2023) four-fold typology, he is most readily classified as a revolutionary activist translator. From his student years, he

assumed responsibility in the socialist struggle through writing for socialist publications and participating in the Workers' Party of Türkiye ; after the 1980 coup, he attempted to organize fellow academics for a collective work stoppage and ultimately resigned in protest at the purge of leftist scholars; subsequently, he sustained the struggle through translation. Translation was thus one instrument among many in a broader activist commitment.

On the textual axis, Şenel falls squarely on the extra-textual side. His translatorial notes on his translations cast textual intervention as a form of 'betrayal' against authors, while his careful selection of texts already aligned with his outlook made manipulation unnecessary. His activism resides in his efforts for canon construction: the deliberate, work-by-work assembly of a Turkish-language socialist literature.

7. Conclusion

The case of Alâeddin Şenel demonstrates that translation in Türkiye has functioned as a strategic 'front' in ideological struggle and that the practitioners of that struggle on the socialist side, despite never constituting a dominant political tendency, were not passive supporters but active agents who quietly disseminated their worldview. Şenel's specific contribution to that war was the deliberate construction of a Turkish-language socialist canon: a body of historical-sociological works selected for their Marxist methodology and their power to provide an alternative to the dominant historiographical and ideological frame, rendered into Turkish without textual manipulation but with clear curatorial intent. This study contributes a building block to activist translator studies in Türkiye, a field that still needs more examples. Future work could investigate translators advocating different ideologies, examine cases that rely on textual rather than extra-textual activism, or interrogate the ideological motivations behind publishing decisions more broadly. Each study will have the potential to refine the field's typologies and to deepen our understanding of the socio-political function of translation.

Author Contributions

First Author: Barbaros UZUNKÖPRÜ 50% (literature review, data collection and analysis, theoretical framework, discussion)

Second Author: Neslihan DEMEZ 50% (literature review, data collection and analysis, theoretical framework, discussion)

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