DEPRIVATION, CLASS AND IDENTITY ISSUE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION

New economy–politics and globalization have not only been changing the structure of class but the representation of identities as well. New social roles are reproduced and also criticized by the means of cultural production in which media and cinema instruments included. In past, the class structure and attachment to identities were effected by modernization process; in a similar way; in the current state of modernization, the new cultural sphere shaped by global communication networks and global consumption attitudes have been alternating the class structure and attachment to identity. With this context, this study analyzed some contemporary social realistic films (Zerre, Araf, Köksüz, Yozgat Blues) to understand how the position of individual changes within its role with herself and its relation to social institutions through a critical approach towards the dimensions of culture and economy-politics of the change. The aim is to start a discussion over cinema, about the effect of cultural change on class and representation of identity. The theoretic frame enlightening the change of the relation of the individual with her work, family, and society was built with the help of critical works. The economy-politics result of the globalization phenomenon has isolated the individual and detached her from its position, subject of politics. The structure of class has changed, the attachment to identity has weakened. The desperation of individual belonging to nothing, is a subject of cinema as well. The isolation and the deprivation of the new individual emerges as the very “violence” itself in the fantastic world of cinema.

THE ISSUE OF CLASS AND IDENTITY IN THE EXISTING CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE

“If nostalgia is a reason to be aggressive and uncomprehending toward the present, it has to be excluded.” (Foucault, 1999: 5)

“The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning.” (Foucault, 1999:2)
With a brief expression, in his philosophical essays, the main thesis of Louis Althusser interpreting philosophy as ‘class conflict’ in the last instance, is that Marx constructed a new science, ‘the science of history’. To Althusser, the philosophy of history as ideological ideas having inspired by religion, ethics, law or politics once; by revealing a social and historic layout, conceals the mechanisms governing the society and history with misleading notions. The reason of this deception is derived from its ideological functions. All the religious, ethical, judicial or political practical ideologies whose main function is to reproduce the relations of production-exploitation of the class society are for creating a misleading philosophy of history. Althusser indicates that Marx opened a ‘continent of History’ by splitting from these views. Moreover, he points out that the history of human is the history of struggle, the history of exploitation and class domination which is eventually the history of class conflict (Althusser, 1991: 59-63).

The theme of how human thinks as a thinking existence depends on society, politics, economy, history and the official structures functioning within global, generalized categories. However as for Foucault, the thought differing from social relations, cannot be analyzed with the global categories of logic. When talking about his trial to show ‘humans are more free than they feel’, Foucault wants to hint that the common themes, perceptions and the assumed evidences accepted as the evidence of the truth and created in the specific moments of history, can be criticized and shattered (Foucault, 1999:2-3).

Culture is formed within a creative process but at the same time it is normative and ruling. Both our languages and the relations, the institutions inside which we move; create a pattern, draw lines and precess inside the action maps related to life without the recognition of individuals. That’s why the cultural development should be discussed with its meaning of cultural pressure and force. The concept of “repression”, examined with psychoanalysis theory by Freud, is the production of new social relation forms imposed by the civilization and complex social life of the beginnings of the 20th century. Trying to ‘realize’ the self identity, individuals experience a conflict between their instinct desires, desires to express freely and the demands of society (conscience). They create their identity through repressing some of these desires and adopting some. According to Freud, self-knowing occurs through recalling the painful memories, conflicts and experiences from their hidden spaces of the repressed and forgotten, namely the subconscious memory. Recalling the experiences gives the individual the power to struggle with the current problems and fixing the lost dimensions of the identity (Hutton, 1999: 104-107).

To Benjamin, the dialectic of history does not function as imperativeness, history never sides with somebody and be his tyranny. When criticizing the Western idea of ‘progress, development’, Benjamin says that being dependent on progress means to surrender to history, leaving one’s self to flow of history and letting the history to be a joy of the hegemon. Criticizing the idea of progress with running, scanning the history backwards, Benjamin says “Capitalism will not die a natural death” to point out that people can judge, criticize the history (Benjamin, 2005:33-35).
To Benjamin, the function of violence as a means is because of its use as legislator or law enforcement. At the same time, all the reconciliation related to society has a forcible quality. The function of violence as legislator is both to determine the thing as law and to create potency. “Justice is the principle of all divine endmaking, power the principle of all mythic lawmaking” (Benjamin, 2005: 112-119).

Anything in history including power and collapse, victory and defeat, poverty and wealth, and certainly identity is expressed with symbols. As the society changes, so the identities transform. However in the symbolic level, this change should not be offending. The cultural environment should be provided so the people dragged to change would not feel ‘self-denial’. Amin Maalouf says that with the emotion of involvement into humanity, everyone can add new components to the identity that they accept. Therefore, no one feels as an outsider in the newly born civilization and everyone finds some signs belonging to her self identity and culture there (Maalouf, 2000: 63/132).

The images accompanying modern day people from their birth to death only have advertorial purposes, and represent consumption and aim mass entertainment. According to Hobsbawm; “…only the goods or the names of purchased things, brand-names” occupy the memories as if holy words. However the new human, attempting to possess the spiritual qualities required by the new life style of those symbolic brand names, belongs to nowhere and she is alone (Hobsbawm, 1996:586).

Social identity is encoded. The ones who have common experiences, have social identities. Therefore while social identity explains the common memory and us, the individual identity explains the difference from the others. The individual identity is the realization of the difference of individuals, ‘making you similar to yourself and different from the others’ (Kaplan, 2013: 51-52).

In the current world, all the cultural practices move, being open to global access, the differences can exist together and there is a perception of a one combined space and time. In this world, it is the information defining the real and surrounding the life. Current culture seems as a space where the differences and conflicts meet, any problem can be discussed publicly and demands of “recognition” intensify. Yet the need for an existing political power of organizations and classes with the knowledge and will to solve the problems should be recognized. Otherwise, every problem and identity turns into an imaginary indicative with its function of ‘visibility’ only in public sphere. ‘Although attached to quite different identities, the unique element determining everyone’s social status today is the place they occupy in the hierarchy of consumption’; their existence as consumers and their identities as consumers (Kaplan, 2013: 52-53).

Modern people win power and status depending on their consumption power, namely because of their accessibility talent and their protecting this current position is dependent on ‘effectiveness and productivity’. In the global world where the state shrinks as a result of the privatization politics, the criteria for the productivity of workers is the evaluation of the performance built upon the profit of the companies.
The relation of the modern people with their work lacks historicity because of the “flexible worker” status continuing with short term contracts. Either a worker or servant, semiprofessional or professional; whatever status may be, there is no fixed, stable work possibility for the working class. This very “uncertainty” phenomenon obliges rivalry instead of collectivism in social relations. Nowadays, the function of trade bodies and unions as a power of pressure and politics has weakened. Regarding the representation of identity, the main indicator is “the power of consumption” (Kaplan, 2013: 10).

Like the representations of identity, all the ideologies are reduced to “substitution” status, splitting from their historic context and content. The place of historicity, criticism and movement is filled with “perception of consumption and its morals” as a new metaphysic and a hard-to-change paradigm.

With globalization, the world falls apart and at the same time creates a combined one and only culture. The most determinative factor on people’s turning into themselves and searching for their own identities is the economic dimension of globalization. When mentioning about ‘the culture to exist together’, liberal tolerance, multiculturalism of today; the cultural and economic dimension of the problem should not be ignored. Whichever cultural identity they are attached to, the middle class people can be more tolerant and do whatever they want and go wherever they want. On the other hand, the poor people search for an identity they can be attached to, identify themselves with and be sure in. For lower class the multiculturalism does not express the possibilities of liberal tolerance. As this culture is an order that they stand out, and not live in. Therefore, the real issue is that this is a class problem. “It is the economic power making people tolerant or detain them from being tolerant to each other. This is a class problem” (Kaplan, 2013: 64).

DEPRIVATION, CLASS AND IDENTITY ISSUE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH CINEMA WITH SAMPLE FILMS

“The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end” (Foucault, 1999:2).

“How people act and react depends on a specific way of thinking... Certainly thinking depends on tradition” (Foucault, 1999:8).

It is the communication devices determining our relation with ourselves, others and reality. Today, media is in the appearance of a production line of a centered “entertainment and mourning” culture. In today’s world where the deprivation and exploitation does not end but everything becomes visible, the mission of visuality and cinema as an art form should be to explain the social problems and solve them on behalf of humanity. Cinema is the fantastic indicative of the deprivations of human and with this context it presents a potential of ‘critical gaze’.

From the 90s to this day, the main inclination of social realistic films, even the problem of political Turkish Cinema is the phenomena of attachment and identity. This problem bases on the fractions in the axis of immigration issue, the conflict between ethnic and national identity, the belief issue, ethics-moral issue, the conflict of
traditional and modern. As the main issue is attachment, the change of the personal, cultural and class commitments is being discussed in the films. The ideological reflections of this change is also remarkable. An ordinary person, worker or a servant does not have a strong ideological reference to trust and the intellectual moves away from her values she believes in and becomes estranged. One of the main indicator of the weakening relations and moral change is family. In the films, free from the status and class, the individual’s relation of attachment with her family, work, class and social institutions becomes superficial. In the films, human is deprived from love. This deprivation not only reflects on the domestic relations but also on the relations of work and ideals of the individual.

That’s why in the film Uzak by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, the multidimensional alienation of an intellectual who is away from society, his family and ideals is narrated. In Üçüncü Sayfa by Zeki Demirkubuz, the reason why Meryem does not love his truck driver husband and out of hostility conspires to kill him is the tragic outlook of the domestic poverty. In Filler ve Çimen by Derviş Zaim the reason why the worker character Havva loses in the end in spite of all her efforts as a sportswoman and a successful athlete is her being an outsider of the society economically, her poverty. In Güneşe Yolculuk by Yeşim Ustaoğlu, the reason making Mehmet from the west, Berzan from the east and Arzu from Germany close to each other, their cooperation, friendship is mainly their poverty. And certainly the social position of each as an immigrant/other, their economically being at the bottom. And in the film Duvara Karşı by Fatih Akın, the real reason of the cultural conflict of Sibel born and grown in Germany and Cahit and their journey coming till Turkey is their facing with their bonds they belong to. Their facing the past. Their problem is cultural and class.

The film Araf (2012) by Yeşim Ustaoğlu draws a micro-sized portrait of the effects of globalization on today’s world. The struggle to change the lives with unknown futures of young people who do not belong to anywhere, namely remaining in limbo, is depicted. The grey atmosphere of Karabük which does not have a industry in the center or agriculture in its rural, reflects the spiritual worlds of the characters. Once having the potential of production, this city is idle with its partially working factories and cannot offer a future for its inhabitants. The main characters of the film, Zehra and Olgun work in a filling station on the freeway. This place where everything is temporary and faces nowhere, is like an indicator of the social positions of the characters. They are neither peasants not townsmen, they neither belong to tradition nor to modern world; just like the disidentified city, they are dispersed into unknown. The only rescuer and hope of the youngs watching television in their free time, is the promises of the television. While Zehra searches for the love who can take her from this world to the big city (with the motif of truck driver, Mahur coming to the filling station); Olgun wants to direct his life by participating to contests offering money awards. What the characters of the film is deprived is “hope”. They do not have a cultural ground to trust. With a short expression the film; criticizes the “new human” consoling with identities and imaginary promises of media in a world where the new relations of production does not give confidence.
Deprivation, Class and Identity Issue in Contemporary Turkish Cinema

In Yozgat Blues (2013) of Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun; it is the deprivation and economic impossibilities that Yavuz and Neşe, the main characters of the film start their common stories in Istanbul and continues in Yozgat. Yavuz, a master in music, struggles to live by working both at the shopping mall and as a music teacher at a course of municipality. Neşe, working at the same shopping mall in a promotion booth of a supermarket is a young woman with ideals, participating to the music courses of Yavuz. The reason they decide to organize a common music program in a night club in Yozgat is the difficulties of life in İstanbul. The competitor culture of the metropolis does not allow the future ideals of a young educated woman and a professional music master. The journey of the characters from the metropolis to a rural city indicates nowhere in the world there is a “space to live safe and work stable, offering a future” for anyone regardless the status. It is quite difficult but for a sustainable life to hold on to the service sector or work life even for semiprofessionals like Neşe, or professionals like Yavuz. Maybe this is the reason why Neşe prefers to be the ‘wife of her house’ through getting married to a barber she met in Yozgat and gives up the struggle (her ideals) regarding her life. Besides the poverty, the “deprivation of ideal” is also remarkable in the film. Briefly, the film criticizes the current cultural atmosphere from “the perspective of new people who have lost their ideals”.

Köksüz (2013) directed by Deniz Akçay; a family, living in İzmir with 3 kids but no motif of a father, struggles with the “life and lovelessness”. The cleaning obsession of the mother Nurcan is a metaphoric indicator of the desire of salvation from the past and the mistakes. The big daughter Feride, working in a finance company is tired both physically and physiologically as she bears the role of the “father” for her two little siblings and mother. While the 17-year-old brother İlker is being dragged in the trauma of frustration against his sister’s authority and deprivation of his father; the little girl Özge, reflects the need for “family solidarity” and love search with her trials to communicate with her family and her success at the school. When Feride carrying her role of father, decides to get married, her mother crashes. Through issuing a family as a theme, the film focuses on the change of social roles and indicates the importance of “love, labor, solidarity” of which day by day we are deprived. The film gives an opportunity to criticize the culture we are in, from the perspective of “the representation of family and social roles”.

In Zerre (2012) by Erdem Tepegöz, the story of Zeynep, the main character reveals the current status of today’s lower and working class. The life struggle of a lonely woman who has to look after her mother and child opens a discussion on “the exploitation of labor” in a new cultural sphere. After not taking her salary on time and being fired from her low-paid job in a textile factory, Zeynep starts to work in a factory on weekly salary in Thrace. She cannot make enough money to take care of her own and her sick child’s health. The situation of Zeynep creates an opportunity to understand the exploitation of the labor of workers with no health insurance and with temporary contracts. At the same time, film presents that the politics of urban transformation removes the poor from the city center, so from the resources. With this context, the film provides an opportunity to discuss the problem of “special separation of the new people”. The film describes the deprivation from “health, education, work security, thereby love” of the lowest class working with temporary contracts.
The common theme of the films analyzed, is that the characters feel attached to nowhere. The individuals deprived of love and solidarity, move here and there in life. The worst part of this dramatic existence of human can be seen as “giving up the struggle” and “removal from the ideals”.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As subjected in social realistic films; regardless of class, status and role, there is no work possibility guaranteeing the future for today's workers. Especially the workers in the sector of service live with temporary contracts and “fear and anxiety for future”. In the globalizing world, the most important element determining the social positions and identities of individuals is their capital and “power of consumption”. The struggle to hold on to life; scatters the individuals spatially and weakens the bonds of attachment.

The despair, uncertainty, worries premising the future in dystopian sci-fiction films have changed into motifs of dramatic films explaining the daily life itself. Real life has changed into a narration of dystopian sci-fiction. The deprivation of love, hope, confidential social institutions and ideals seems like the biggest problem of “new people”.

In that case, this outlook of the current culture is the panorama of internalized violence. Media functions as an instrument of this culture of violence and should be criticized. Social realistic cinema films have a revolutionary potential with their description of the outlook of psycho-sociological violence and making the viewer feel it. Since the fantastic world of cinema, with the help of creative directors; creates a potential to reveal the repressed inner worlds of individuals. By means of cinema, the memory of individual and social surfaces. Thus cinema enables the construction of a better future by revealing the reason of individual and social “deprivations, conflicts, problems”. At this point, it is useful to remember Freud.

As to Freud; “Thinking in pictures stands nearer to unconscious processes than does thinking in words, and is unquestionably older than the latter both ontogenetically and phylogenetically” (Sakman, 2014:65).

When interpreted from the perspective of the modern world, the act of Thinking in Pictures said by Freud implies the circulation of symbols, images with a stories, with an unbelievable speed. Moreover it marks the medium including audiovisual texts of any kind where the things change into spectral phantoms and phantoms into pseudo-realities (lies/so-called realities) with the guidance of ordinary people, the artist or community engineer; namely, the new media including the traditional media with Radio-Tv and Cinema and the conceptualization of social media intertwined with this traditional media continuously. We as social scientists and especially communication scientists try to read, understand and diagnose through working on the cinema texts in the state of fictional dreams of visible fantasias and media texts where displaying and peeping intertwine with each other; just like Freud who in the beginning of XX. Century tried to understand, diagnose and offer therapeutic solutions for the nature of normal and neurotic human within the context of ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, ‘Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious’
each as a visual and audial indicator in the state of symptom. When we position thinking in pictures into our analytic center, it is clear that the Psychopathology of Popular Culture and the Psychology of Everyday Life is reflected either through ordinary people as social media psychics or through Cinema-Tv-New Media by community engineers or artists (See: Kaplan, 2015).

In that case, the function of cinema as an art form should be both to describe the problems and to create an imagery world stimulating conscious and desire to struggle with these problems. In this sense, the thing what today’s Turkish Cinema needs is sincerity. This sincerity necessitates for the creative directors to believe in their stories first. The imagery world created by the creative director’s faith, should imply the possibilities to surpass the criticism of the real world. It is possible today as well to create sincere stories not only criticizing the real world but also changing it, just like in “Umut by Yılmaz Güney, Sevmek Zamani by Metin Erksan, Ah Güzel İstanbul by Atif Yılmaz, Kırık Çanaklar by Memduh Ün and Anayurt Oteli by Ömer Kavur”.

For the creative directors of today’s Turkish Cinema to serve for the attempt to solve the problems of daily life and surpass them, they need to take the historic inheritance of Turkish Cinema into consideration as well. Recognizing the past creates a possibility to understand the problems of today and it is an indicator of the sincerity of the work of art (films).
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