

Chapter 40. Transformation of The Migration Theme in Turkish Cinema

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Migration and Cinema

According to the Turkish Language Association (TDK), migration is; the act of moving of an individual or a community to another country or settlement because of the social or political reasons. Looking at the history of Turkey, the act of immigration has been discussed in the phenomenons of domestic migration and external migration. Theme of Migration in Turkish Cinema can be separated into three groups; domestic migration, external migration and migration of minorities.

Cinematic adventure of the Domestic Migration theme in Turkish Cinema

According to this, If the thought of, “Those who decide to migrate, wouldn’t do it unless forced.” is taken into consideration, the identity of the person who decides to migrate can be used to determine the type of migration. *The important point on this categorization is the person who decides to migrate. If the people who decides to migrate, decide on their own will without the pressure of any kind, to live in better living conditions, these migrations are named free migration. Forced migrations are; the migrations which are caused by the disappearance of the human rights and living conditions and made involuntarily.* (Tiren, 2012:11). When focused on migration problem in Turkey, forced migrations are also encountered in the republic period. *“After the 1980’s forced migrations occurred because of the increasing terrorism and natural disasters.” Migrations which occur mostly in forced situations in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions of Turkey, cause important sociocultural changes in the city centers of the said regions.* (Özer, 2004:24) *Forced resettlements happened also because of the construction of dams.* (Çavuşoğlu, 2006: 83 In this context, the movies about the domestic migration can be separated in two groups. First group is the group that shows the influence of the 1950’s free migrations on the social transformation, the second has the movies about the forced migrations caused by terrorism and dam construction in southeastern Anatolia.

When looked into the movies about free migration it can be seen that; the first mass migration from rural to urban areas had happened with the agricultural mechanization movement in 1950’s Turkey. The struggles of migrants who try to cope up with the city life, conurbation and the traumas caused by the traditional values getting corrupt in big cities were important topics for Turkish cinema from mid 1960’s to 1980’s. The first real example is *Gurbet Kuşları*, shot by Halit Refik in 1964; the movie focuses on the drama of a family moved to İstanbul from Kahramanmaraş to find employment. After that, *Bitmeyen Yol* by Duygu Sağıroğlu in 1965. The movie gets banned by the censorship commission until 1967 The reason for the ban was explained as; *“Throughout the movie, ragged peasants are*

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shown tragically, sometimes in inhuman situations just to break our social structure, the movie also shows the worst and poorest parts of the city, implies the workers live the worst life possible and also implies that all the employers are wicked, bad mannered people who belittle workers..... after the examination, mentioned movie is found inappropriate to be shown to public and to foreign countries.” While the movie was banned because it showed the Turkish peasants miserable, Sağıroğlu being a director who was influenced greatly by the Italian neo-realism; had showed an exact representation of migrants who were trying to live in boxy rooms and getting involved in crimes just to be able to live in the city. So, the Turkish peasant who annoyed the censorship commission was a pure reflection of the misery amongst the immigrants. *Aslı Daldal also mentions that, with the “religious purification” theme, the movie reflects the rage towards the capitalist exploitation and consumption society. (Daldal, 2005:94)* Ömer Lütfi Akad’s migration themed movies *Gelin* (1973), *Düğün* (1974) and *Diyet* (1975, external migration movie takes place in Germany) are the ones which have the most aesthetical approach to the migration theme. In all three, their struggle to make a living, cultural degeneration and losing their humanity in the migrated place are the concepts that blend with the big city life. Ertem Göreç’s two movies that he shot from Vedat Türkali scripts, *Otobüs Yolcuları* and *Karanlıkta Uyuyanlar* are also important migration themed movies. Even though the migration was not a direct theme in the social realist movies started with Yılmaz Güney’s *Umut* in 1970’s we can clearly observe the unfair social environment caused by it. Especially in *Umut*, the car mechanic Cabbar’s struggle with poverty in suburbs definitely show us how Adana turned into the center of the traumas caused by uncontrolled migration at the time.

Giovanni Scognamillo talks about how he separated the society in three main groups while treating the subject of migration. . The first one is the rich people living in mansions which we see often in Yeşilçam, the second group is the happy poor people and the third is the people who live in the slums as a result of migration. Movies on domestic migration were focused on the stories of people trying to live in the slums (Scognamillo, 1998)

The general aspect of the movies shot during this period caused dramatical changes in personal relationships in urbanization and industrialization process. Confusion in sense of belonging and identification has dragged people into sadness. The concept of family and the social status of women started to change, traditional families started to fall apart. Especially the working of migrant women and gaining relative freedom that way has began to shake the core of the traditional family concept. The most lucid cinematic approach to this can be seen in Lütfü Akad’s *Gelin* and *Düğün*.

Domestic migration theme also triggered a rush of arabesque movies in 1970’s. As we know, arabesque is; the genre of music played frequently in the jitneys that transport people from the slums to the city center. Arabesque which has named this culture, was not only the music of the subcultural groups, it has also occupied a place of importance as a subculture in our cinema. During the crisis in the Turkish cinema in 1980’s, it was unfortunately the only genre survived along the erotic movies. In this sense, the arabesque movies can be categorized within the migration movies, as they show the cultural reflections of the slums. Halit Refik states that

his movie *Gurbet Kuşları* -which is considered as the milestone of the domestic migration movies- is a movie about slums; *"I would like to point out that Gurbet Kuşları is not a movie about the migration from the village to the city, it is about the migration from rural to urban areas. The family is from Maraş and they are not farmers, the character is a car mechanic. The main point of the Gurbet Kuşları is the meeting of the two different cultures. The family with the Anatolian traditional values undergo a cultural shock after encountering the Istanbul's cosmopolitan culture."* (Toklu, 2012:32) In studies of the new era it can be seen that the arabesque genre is also named as "slum cinema". In his book "Gecekondu Filmleri", Engin Yıldız uses slum cinema to examine the Turkish cinema after 1980 and reads in the context of place: *"When we say "Slum movie" the quick definition of what comes to our minds must be a movie about urban social breakdown and crisis. But if we are to make an extended definition, the center of the slum movie genre should contain the following:* Based on the water, electricity, transportation, in-house structure problem, healthcare issues, regional and ethnic problems (socio-economic imbalances between East and West), ghettoization, cult ideology, social disorders, "cultural delay", stigmatization and discrimination of people from the slums and the East, stigmatization of the urban women by the rural people, the problem of integration with the urban cosmopolitanism, 'invasion' of the city centers with lots of slum and rural people, unemployment (...) problems, slum movies can be identified as products that show the social and economical issue chain during the urbanization period." (Yıldız, 2008:8-9) It's problematic to categorize the slum concept as a result of modernization basing purely on location in the mean of writing cinema history. Even on the previous studies, movies called slum cinema by Yıldız are categorized as arabesque movies. Also arabesque movies are categorized as a subgenre of melodramas and musical dramas. In this sense, slum movies are more appropriate to be categorized as subcultural movies with their hierarchical codes and cultic iconographical elements.

The amount of domestic migration themed movies began to decrease in 1980's, the forced migration caused by the 1990's political situation took the place of free migration theme. The conflict zone in Southeastern Anatolia in 1990's, caused evacuation of villages either by the terrorist organization PKK or Turkish armed forces, and the migration of villagers to big cities and the ghettoization as a result of this caused serious problems. It should be stated that the dam constructions in Southeastern Anatolia is an another reason of forced migrations, it caused evacuation of villages and resulted in a domestic migration forced by the government at the time. In Turkish Cinema - which is never insensitive to social troubles- the first examples of this can be seen in *Eşkiya* (1996) by Yavuz Turgul, the movie was a turning point of his career. In the opening scene of *Eşkiya*, protagonist Baran returns to his village after a long period of imprisonment and witnesses that his village is under the waters of dam. His whole family and acquaintances from the village had to move to Istanbul. Thus the story of migration turns into the story of Baran. The first example of forced migrations political side is Yeşim Ustaoglu's *Güneşe Yolculuk*. After that, major movies such as Handan İpekçi's controversial *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* and Mahsun Kırmızıgül's *Güneşi Gördüm* which reached to a wider audience, are the examples that can be categorized in this aspect.

Güneşe Yolculuk revolves around Mehmet from Tire and his pro-PKK friend Berzan's friendship and Berzan's love for a Turkish girl. One day his friend is found dead after a police investigation and the journey of alienation and sense of belonging of Mehmet who wants to bury his friend to his place of birth, Zorduç village, begins to unfold with this reverse migration.

Handan İpekçi's controversial *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* tells the story of a friendship started with prejudices between a retired judge and Hejar who doesn't know a single Kurdish word. The movie was banned by the Ministry of Culture. The movie focuses on a friendship between an old man and child but in the meantime, the background theme is a drama of a family that's in Istanbul because of forced migration, and that makes it an important entry to the era's conjuncture. As a movie especially examining the period's sense of belonging issues through the prohibited language Kurdish and identity aspects, it is an important migration movie.

Belonging and identity issues seen in domestic migration themed movies are more apparent in movies about forced migration, and these movies have harsher statements on the subjects. Asuman Suner categorizes the movies in this context as political movies and finds them invaluable because of the standing out national identity issue. According to her, these movies show correlation with international movies and because of the unrepairable situation of the sense of belonging, they are not objective. Also for her, these movies cannot be objective and emphasize on subjective perceptions and experiences. (Suner,2005:257)

Another movie shot in 2000's about the Kurdish migration is Mahsun Kırmızıgül's *Güneşi Gördüm*. It starts with a scene of a gunfight and a family migrates to Istanbul subsequently. The family is apolitical, and just wants to live in peace in Istanbul. But while trying to live in Istanbul the family splits apart and rides for a fall. The movie does not only focus on Kurdish migration. It has important scenes on human trafficking in Turkey and emphasizes the importances of the region as a migration route before the Syrian civil war. In this sense, it includes migration theme even for a little amount in the scruffiness of its universe of the story. Generally, it doesn't focus on anything, rather revolves around trailers of scattered side events, thus it progresses rather complicated.

Cinematic adventure of External Migration theme in Turkish Cinema

After the World War II, Germany undertook a new approach in industry and as a result of this they needed industrial workers. After an agreement between Germany and Turkey in 1961, an external migration had started in hopes of employment. The identity problems, maladaptations, disjoined families between the countries were the main themes of the eras movies. Between the years 1970-1990 there are more than twenty films about the external migration. Directors such as Tunç Okan who lives abroad (*Otobüs*-1974), Şerif Gören (*Almanya Acı Vatan*-1979) and Tevfik Başer (*Kırk metrekafe Almanya*-1986) produced important movies on the subject.

In 1990's external migration movies have become a genre which focuses on 3rd and 4th generations. The genre which is in the center of concepts such as language, identity and belonging was ironically named as accented cinema as if it was highlighting the belonging problems. In his book "An Accented Cinema" Hamid

Naficy comes up with the term accented cinema and defines it as “*An aesthetic response of directors from 1960’s to present day to the experience of displacement through exile, migration or diaspora.*” *If the mainstream cinema is considered as international and accent-free, movies made by diasporic and exiled director’s movies are accented. (...) Accent is not caused by characters accented speech, it is caused by directors being exiled, which shapes their perception and comprehension of the world. The main reason of these movies categorized as “accented cinema” is the feeling of displacement (migration/exodus) experienced by respective directors. But Naficy defines the displacement narrowly, only as “A movement from Third World to the West.”* (Suner, 2005:258,262) Road and travel are the most basic themes of accented cinema. Therefore, being an exile can be the main theme and also can be the ending of this cinema. “*Travelling, as a path in accented movies, not only means the arraignment and problematization of place, but also the identity. We witness the identity in these movies separated between different places and societies, shattered, multilayered and in a complicated structure. Identity, being defined and fictionalized by society allows different cinematic strategies. These strategies include disruption of audio-video synchronization, allowing a Narrator speaking about the situations differently and usage of several languages during the narrative without translation, thus not giving the full meaning directly.*” (Suner,2005:262) This definition of Naficy can mostly be seen in movies by new age filmmakers who were born and raised in Germany. With this genre named as hybrid or accented cinema in the literature, migration cinema has taken a different turn associated with cultural transmission, especially with Fatih Akın’s cinema (2004’s Golden Bear winner *Duvara Karşı*). In *Duvara Karşı*; a Turkish woman who was born and raised in Germany tries to overcome the depression of being stuck between two nationalities with a man who experiences the same depression as her. When looking at his filmography, it can be seen that identity and belonging was fictioned not as subjective but as strategic, separated and pulled out from the past just like Stuart Hall’s definition. With the 3rd generation represented by Fatih Akın The underlined diaspora identity was already abandoned and an assimilated, entegrated identity took its place (Hall, 1996:3 Akt. Deliormanlı 2006:11) Bilingualism is the core of the whole Fatih Akın cinema. For example, when we relook into *Kısa ve Acısız* -which is from his first period- (2003) within the frame of the friendship between a Serbian, a Turk and a Greek it is obvious that Akın does not belong to a single world, his accented cinema belongs to both worlds.

Migration Theme’s Journey of Minorities in Turkish Cinema

Turkish land is a dramatical place that’s covered with wars, social movements and migrations in its last 100 years. This study implies that the migration problem is one of the most important factors that affect human life in the area. With Armenian relocation in the Worl War I years and radical changes in Balkan borders after the war, the population exchange of the people who lived there caused severe traumas. Greeks and Armenians who stayed in Turkey were the subjects of different dramas. According to Mithat Sancar; “*the past is drawn to discussion with 2 reasons. Either trying to protect it and follow its teachings or trying to escape from its hegemony. The route will be chosen by praising the past, calumniating the bad things to others and trying to “wipe the history clean” or by trying to establish*

social peace and consensus to prevent the same mistakes from the past happening again. The cinema is a tool that can be used in both arguments.” (Akt.Mersin:2010:28) Turkish cinema produced important movies on these subjects especially in 1990’s. Within the context of this study, we encounter movies such as, Yeşim Ustaoglu’s *Bulutları Beklerken (Minorities in Black Sea region)*, Çağan Irmak’s *Dedemin İnsanları (Population exchange)* Tomris Giritlioğlu’s *Salkım Hanımın Taneleri (Forced migration through capital tax)*.

Tomris Giritlioğlu’s *Salkım hanımın taneleri*, focuses on the last struggles and the migration of the non-muslims stayed in Turkey after the World War I. While the movie is after the forgotten and those who were forced to be forgotten, it also takes the viewer to a journey on the migration path. Based on Yılmaz Karakoyunlu’s bestselling book, Giritlioğlu’s first movie *Salkım Hanımın Taneleri*, focuses on the forced migration of non-muslims who stayed in Turkey after the population exchange within the excuses of war measures and nationalism with the taxation and other social oppressions. In the introduction, the Capital Tax laws planned for non-muslims are explained over the radio by the voice of Prime Minister of the time Şükrü Saraçoğlu. “*We want them to know their place as guests. According to some annoying voices, we are issuing this tax to oppress minorities. This is an obvious lie. But, the whole world should know that, we are Turks and we will be more Turkish every single day.*” With this announcement, the process of the forced migration of the last remaining non-muslims begins. The Armenian family in the movie cannot pay the capital tax and forced to move to Erzurum Aşkale with obligation to work. Ending of a rich family in Erzurum Aşkale paints a picture of a devastating migration story. The movie does not only focus on the forced migration of non-muslims, but also tells the story of first signs of the eras migration in early 40’s from rural to urban areas through the ambitious Turkish character. Migration turns into a source of pain that cannot be erased in this time period too.

Yeşim Ustaoglu’s *Bulutları Beklerken (Pontic Greeks in Black Sea)* focuses on the different story of people who left over or was not able to migrate with the population exchange, that subject was not talked about due to the rejectionism of the period. Because directors *Güneşe Yolculuk* is also examined here, we may need to go into details about her. When we look into Yeşim Ustaoglu’s cinematography, from *İz* to *Pandora’nın Kutusu* and *Araf*, road and travelling thus the migrant mood can easily be found. In one interview she says “*I looked at the road whole my childhood. We lived near a highway for years, and its rear was a pitch black sea. I was thinking about leaving that place. This feeling of hitting the road lasted for years. When I got the first chance with my graduation from the university, I packed and found myself in Istanbul.*” (Aslan, 2010:128) and explains how roads and travelling was at the center of her life for a while. As known, in the Ottoman period there were Pontic Greeks living in the Black Sea region. But with the destructive effects of the Balkan Wars lots of Turks had to move to Ottoman lands and government placed them into Black Sea region. This caused clashes between the new immigrants and Christian Greeks and also gang activities occurred frequently. After that in the World War I, with the Russian entry to the Anatolia, it had been decided to exile Greeks to western provinces because of the battleground safety. (For a more detailed analysis, Atam, 2011:618-632) The movie tells the story of two sisters who do not migrate to Greece hiding their Greek identity, the process of

their Turkization and years later, their coming up against the secret. In an interview about her film she says “I tried to ask what would be the harm of past difficulties, departures on us and the next generations and also tried to ask how can we bear the conscientious responsibilities caused by them and I’ve always kept the movies structure current.” (Edener, 2016). Even though the movie loses its persuasiveness from time to time due to nonprofessional actors, it has its place in cinema history as the one and only example of Greek migration in Black Sea region. Also the archived footage at the end is based on the actual pictures taken by the missionaries during the migration.

Çağan Irmak’s *Dedemin İnsanları* is a nostalgic movie on sense of not belonging and population exchange. It is the story of Mehmet Bey who migrated from Crete island to Turkey because of the population exchange agreement signed along the Lausanne Treaty between Greece and Turkey. Just like lots of other migrants, Mehmet Bey is neither a Cretan nor a Turk according to the local residents. For the locals, Mehmet Bey is insulted as a ‘giaour’ because he started to live in Turkey when he was seven. This shows another drama caused by the discrimination of migrants. In this context, even though Çağan Irmak’s movie was a little exaggerated, taking a different perspective at the migrant lives after the population exchange gives it an important spot in cinema history.

This study is a pioneer draft text on migration’s sociological classification and it’s equivalent in the cinema history. Therefore, it aims to be the start of new classifications and a new major categorization study. Maybe in the future the migration theme’s adventure will flourish with this text or with the areas expandable scientifically. At the time this text is written and in the conjuncture Turkey belongs to, we are unfortunately facing one of the biggest migration waves in the history of mankind. As a result of Syrian civil war, 7 million people were internally displaced and 4 million were externally displaced. Numbers are easy to say but the sufferings and lives lost are not. With the fact that the art reflecting the society, people who live and will be living in Turkey will be the subject for art in the future. The Syrian migration we currently only see as side stories in today’s cinema, will unfortunately be the main theme for lots of papers written about the migration cinema in the near future.

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