

Heroes Seeking for Their Own Justice as a Cultural Reflection on New Turkish Cinema

Tugba Elmaci, Canakkale Onsekizmart University, Turkey

The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2016
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The concept “justice” had been one of the most solutions seeking concept since the existence of mankind. The first age philosopher (earliest philosopher) Aristotle claimed that the origin of justice had been the notion of equality. For him, it not satisfactory for justice to treat everyone equally, yet law can be judicious till it protects weak people. In modern law, it is thought that it provides justice if the judge assesses by taking the specialities of the condition into consideration while enforcing the law on any case. By this way, the short comings of a general law can be fulfilled in practice and the justice can be provided well. Yet justice is a cultural fact beyond all these. Although societies live and secure their lives with law, their prejudice arising from their own internal dynamics don’t match with universal law. That is why especially in non-aligned countries where in the law is less trusted and custom loyalty is still banished, people mostly try to seek and distribute their own justice. These practices of seeking and distributing justice developed culturally against universal law are affirmed culturally as well.

The acceptance of people who distribute own justice is mostly seen within art products and anti-heroes those who distribute own justice can become social heroes who serve social catharsis. We can see the most significant examples on New Turkish Cinema countlessly. Moreover, the audiences enjoy distinctly solving the problem of both their and their country’s being hard done by the heroes of motion picture screen. For instance, in 2003, during American occupation in Iraq, American troops captured Turkish military officers located in the northern Iraq by putting sacks over the officers’ heads. This was a political crisis which was imprinted on memories and discussed on media for months as an honour tarnishing event. Later on in 2006, valley of the wolves Iraq was produced and four million people rushed to cinemas to watch the avenging in the name of Turkish people by the hero.

In this study, the (own) justice seeking heroes from historical perspective on New Turkish Cinema are going to be analysed by the use of physiological, sociological and ideological critics methods.

Keywords: Justice, New Turkish Cinema.

“The enactment is imperial therefore the mountains are ours” – Dadaloglu

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

When the cinema in Turkish is watched, we see a cinema which is just located in the center of social events and change. Turkish cinema has been shaped mostly according to society's admiration, daily regards and world perception but not superior minds. In this study, a general picture is drawn regarding the society's justice sense and the correspondence to this sense in cinema field. Hereby, it is required to focus on how the people in Turkish perceive the concepts such as living conditions, trust areas of the society, state and law. Procuration is also overtaken from the culture (where in the person lives) and becomes a significant part by interiorising. (Ryan, Kellner, 1997:37) Modernization movement in Turkish is based on Europe and it is beyond figural imitation that it is not considered with the philosophy of modernisation. According to well-known Turkish sociologist Serif Mardin, modernisation movement initially affected institutive fields then intellectual fields and finally social fields. In his famous book called Turkish Modernisation, he claimed that it is independent tradition from time for Turkish society to resist again alteration and change and he also claimed that Turkish society took the shape but resisted against philosophy of the modernisation for a long period. Another sociologist Nilüfer Göle stated that Turkish modernisation experience is not based on western countries (non-western based modernisation). For her, modernity dictates a hierarchy in its own periphery center within traditional modern differentiations that is why it could become resolution mechanization for societies out of Europe. She stated that modernisation could be possible in non-western countries by an inner exposition without demolishing it. (Göle, 2008:170) Turkish modernisation took place both in destruction of past and future because it was carried out as an movement which was based on refusal of past. For Göle, *modernization is not that accepts traditions as taboo which will be lost later. It should be a bounding bridge between past and future but we destroy past while going on.* (Göle, 2008:173) Turkish now in a period where in it staggers between modernisation (westernisation) and restoration of past which it misses. May be as Jose Ortega y Gasset says; *to believe in modern culture was something melancholic: it was to know; tomorrow everything would be equal to today and advancing was not different than what proceeded. Such a way reminds a prison, a prison; elastic, long and capturing* (Gasset, 2010:60-61). For the hostages of this prison which has no way out, rebellion and opposition is a nostalgic resting area which they can go finally hosts a little hope as a cultural fact. The fact that representation of opposing against the rebellion and law has a relation with history and gives meaning to present time with a passion of tradition or past is an indispensable final or start for Turkish. As a cultural representation tool when cinema is regarded, we watch the social injustice in all times and see that there had always been historical press, exploitation and frustration between urban and rural area. Therefore the theme opposition, seeking own justice, social rebellion against social injustice is spectacular for Turkish Cinema.

Social rebel are accepted people as public heroes, defenders, revengers, justice warriors, leaders of freedom, adored, helped and supported. Moreover while the rebel comes out from rural areas historically, the attraction of the rebel has always been larger than his local area. The rebel has always had glamour in legends, literatures and on tv and films 20th century's industrial cultural type. This is not just a problem of missing past. Moreover, rebel is the source of utopian hopes: rebel is the one who somehow accomplishes the justice dream. Therefore the rebel becomes a tool for a different type of future hope which is ancestral. Hobsbawm who refers Robin Hood states: it is all to defend pressed, deceived and weak people and to protect one's self from authority.(Wayne, 2011:103). Mike Wayne, in his study wherein he tells 3rd cinema states that the importance of rebel figure regarding 3rd cinema and oppressor and oppressed is an empiric sample. But he cares about the collective rebellion rather than second cinema samples of Turkish cinema which focuses on the opposition and the justice seekers against injustice. For him the first cinema sees opposition and rebellion as romantic adornment. It is subjective, although the rebel obeys the socially negotiated rules, his public relation is limited. Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan the owner of political camera support Mike Wayne while they define Hollywood rebellion films. In this book they also explain rebellion as absence rather than social inequality. In these types of films heroes are initially the part of system but later on they focus on the lacks and poverty in the society. moreover they give examples from the variation of tradition. There are also alternative norms and social ideals and alternative social structures. Mostly they refer to nature because the nature is the alternate far from the society therefore it is the new world. These films have a lot of metaphors regarding the relations between the nature and the human behaviour.(Kellner, Ryan, 1997:55) for the second cinema rebel has close relation with people but in the first one not. In the final, the individualist romantics does not change and it does not turn into a movement that heralds the public / mass salvation. As for the 3rd cinema the rebellion is mass and it is done for the salvation of pressed societies. The opposition of the rebel should go on till the social inequality and injustice gets better.

Historically Mutinousness: It is seen in all type of societies which are between the phase of clan and affinity organisation and modern capitalist and industrial society and as well as the phase of agricultural capitalism. (Hobsbawm, 1969,14). Hence, as Turkey which completed this gap process, second cinema acknowledges this relation with oppressed. This was also mentioned by Gasset as an prison. By this way the rebel becomes available fantastically to deal with national facts which the first cinema omits. It is obligatory that the rebel belongs to past and he rebels to modernisation by omitting the negatives and disadvantages of past. The emerge of capitalism and its products such as exploitation and social layers are reasons for the rebel to oppose to the system but economic improvement, effective communication and public management reduces the conditions for opposing (Hobsbawm, 1969, 15). In respect to modernisation, past speciality of mutinousness reminds the moment of Fanoun as anti-colonist. The rebel can not exist as a rebel (Wayne, 2009: 107). As fano say; massive liberation reaches the fight phase within the deal of political and cultural traditions. Here the rebel has to be radical.

In the new Turkish cinema the movies about justice distributors are very limited except guerrilla movies. Therefore this study is for the first and second cinema samples in new Turkish cinema started in 1996. It is aimed to give justice seeker heroes in three main titles.

The film heroes in the new Turkish cinema:

- 1; they prefer to distribute their own justice in order to save the men honour.
- 2; they provide international justice; they head for social justice with organized crime connections.
- 3, they save social honour.

Conclusions

1. Men Honour

The social gender codes means to form a society's gender by informal rules and to attitude according to those rules. So the roles of women and men changes in every social order. In Turkey the gender codes are rubbed in urban areas yet it forces many people to obey its rules. In Turkey gender codes can be quite difficult for both men and women that in some cases the results emerged by these rules can be also very sorrowful. Especially the case of integrity has a great pressure on women and men distribute justice in case of any delict. The notion custom determines the way of providing justice. Mostly the men are assigned to execute the rules. Those who do not want to perform or provide justice are marginalized. So the results are dramatic both for men and women. What is the origin of custom in Turkish society? What does it mean? Custom/tore were the un written rules in Gokturks. *The customary law dominated the social and political order within the societies of Central Asia. But with the will of Göktürk khan founder it became a custom. The Hakan added his own orders to it and put the province in a new order. Custom is the whole of the rule of objective law which are connected to the ruler .” (İnalçık 2000:160).* In the Turkish tradition the customs are not independent from the daily life. While the word used as custom up to today meant all the rules protecting the social order in the Turkish communities in Central Asia, today it continues its existence as the codes of conduct helping the traditional society by still protecting the social order outside the universal law. Violence is the most basic tools determining the hierarchy among men even if they are in the same classes. In this context, there is a direct relationship between male dominance and violence (Connell, 1998:151). Especially, in the eastern part of Turkey the custom which provides a daily life pattern beyond the state law, the commitment of the society to it is more respectable than many other laws and can be more stringent in terms of the results. On the other hand *masculinity is built on a huge role; namely perhaps we are a gentle human our inner world, you need to be more severe due to be man. While you are able to sit concatenating legs, you're sitting astride. So you need to show that more men. (Sancar,2011:134)* Especially the custom ensuring the patriarchal domination over a woman does not find it unfavourable if a woman is killed by her closest relative when she contaminated the honour of the family. Moreover, this reduction continued until the early 2000's along with the compliance laws of the European Union. Unfortunately, in Turkey for many years it was possible to benefit from the so called vendetta and honour murders deduction law which was also blessed by the legislator. This phenomenon when the community struggled on its own was analysed many times within the new cinema. For example

the subject of the film which was nominated by Turkey for the Oscar nomination in 2012 was about the story of a family which was forced to deploy its own justice despite of everything when the customs entered into play. In 2012, the subject of the film which was shot by Ismail Günes and was titled as “Where the fire burns” was briefly the following: It is the drama of the sixteen-year-old Ayse. The sixteen-year-old Ayse who is the daughter of a farmer family from Eastern Turkey and lives in Alanya gets suddenly ill and needs to have a surgery. Ayse’s family showed great solidarity in order to carry out this operation. But everything has changed when during the operation it was found out that the girl was three and a half months pregnant. The family who just learnt that their daughter was pregnant were forced to bend their neck against the custom. The family who was fighting in order to keep Ayse alive wanted to kill her due to the shame. Ayse enters a journey with her father Osman who undertook the duty of killing Ayse. This sad journey helped the father and his daughter to learn and love each other again but it did not change the fate of Ayse. The Hidden Faces directed by Handan Ipek in 2007 and the Uncoming spring directed by Emrah Doğan in 2013 focused on the new cinema’s seeking for this terrible social justice.

The reason for starting this section with justice of social gender was the film called The Bandit (Eşkiya) which was the cornerstone of 1996 by starting a different cinema understanding in the Turkish movie theatre historiography. The Bandit film which was directed by Yavuz Turgul tells the story of a former bandit who was arrested through the notice of his best friend and struggled to find his former lover. The best friend of the bandit tipped him off the cops in order to take his lover then later the bandit returned back to Istanbul to get the ex-girlfriend back. But here he made friend with a young man who tried to take him in and found himself in the middle of an immoral and criminal world, while his old friend has become one of Istanbul’s most famous mafia leaders. He faced an unjust world which was against the law and also far beyond the traditional values and the unwritten rules of masculinity he believed. The bandit put on the role of the distributor of the Anatolian –specific justice in order to get back the woman he loved and to save his young friend from the hands of the mafia. He did not leave the justice for the law and took the revenge on his loved ones by knowing that he will die. In 2004 the same director made the film called Lovelorn (Gönül Yarası). The same leading actor had to save a woman escaped from her husband and from the customs as a heroic and naïve teacher. Stories of Yavuz Turgul which were blessed with the job of dispensing justice have not finished yet. He continued this with the film For Love and Honor (Kabadayı) which was shot in 2007. Zeki Demirkubuz’s film 3rd Page (1999) and Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Three Monkeys (2002) also focused on the murders committed in order to clean the family’s honour or the dignity of the masculinity. The murders which were committed by the male heroes for the masculine dignity arise as the result of the seeking for justice upheld by the society.

Films such as Emin Alper’s Behind the Peak (Tepenin Ardı, 2012) which was a metaphorical film trying to give its justice over the paranoia are encountered as man stories running mostly after their own justice.

Beyond all these, there are two films about the small but successful women seeking for their own justice; The films Last Stop: Salvation (Kurtuluş son durak) directed by Yusuf Pirhasan and What remains left (Geriye Kalan) made in 2012 need to be evaluated in this context. Last Stop: Salvation tells the stories of 5 women who punish the men causing them pain according to their own methods. The film What remains left provides her own justice by killing the successful woman having a relation with her husband. Both of these films are appropriate to the feminist film theory and the solutions suggested to the women were written in the language of the father and not in the language of the law.

Apart from all these, although films like “Pardon” and “Paper” came up as good examples for the people’s distrust in the legal system and for the weakness of the social beliefs, but the individual in the searching point of his own justice is faithless and frustrated.

2; Justice of the Social Honor

In this section, it was observed that especially in the 2000’s the problems experienced during the international crises and the internal conflict periods were carried to the cinema. These films which were shot especially in nationalist line intended to save the honour of the country. Then the results which can be taken neither from the national nor from the international law caressed the society’s sense of justice on the screen.

The film the Valley of the Wolves Iraq which was directed by Serdar Akar was shot to save the honour of the Turkish soldiers who were taken hostage in northern Iraq by the Americans by passing sacks on their head. At the time when this incident happened there was a huge social honour crisis. Together with the film which was shot during this period and the hero of the film Polat Alemdar defeated the Americans by fighting with them and saved everyone. The film broke a record in the Turkish cinema and was watched by large audiences (4.5 million). The world shown during the entire film was set up to prove how the visible legal system turned into the symbol of injustice in the human spirit. The hero Polat Alemdar who rose against the imperial order over the American symbol turned into a superhero while searching for the justice of delivering the rights of all oppressed people. Polat Alemdar caressed the sense of justice belonging not only to his own nations but of all oppressed people and delivered their rights.

The Masked Gang: Iraq film focused on the same issue but in comedy style. The 5 mindless heroes saved the honour of their country in Iraq and cured the conscience of the oppressed people.

The film Breath (Vatan Sağolsun) focuses on the conflict between the Turkish military and the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK. This film tells the story of a raid carried out in October 2007 by the PKK against a police station on the mountain. During this fight 12 soldiers died, 16 of them got injured and 8 soldiers were taken. Again it was intended to save the social honour after a social trauma. The film witnesses the rituals blessing the militarism and masculinity rituals in a police station on the mountain far away from the practice of law. Anyway, the basic thing blessed by the dirty militarism is the lawlessness and it is the strategy of seeing its own lawlessness as a facility of law or justice. The commander’s absurd daily life and the

fact how far it is from the reality was emphasized and it was told on the first day that the mountain had its own rules and those who did not comply with these rules will be erased by the nature.

3; The Establishment of Justice through Organized Crime

Before starting to explain how the organized crime establish justice, it should be explained how the organized crime organizations are considered by the society in Turkey. Despite the crime related nature of the concept it should be explained by different cultural perceptions and different social structures. For example: *mafia Omerta arise from the omu term in the Sicilian dialect which means man. The meaning expressed by the word first of all is the thought of a real man. According to the Sicilians the nature of a man is to gain respect with his own possibilities, to protect his goods and property alone, to make anybody accept his and his family's honour and dignity, to resolve the problems and conflicts alone not to seek for help coming from outside and not to apply for the bureaucracy (Mafia-Zentrali Herrschijit and Lokale Gegenmacht,(Hess 1996:208)*

In this sense a similar mechanism and concept can be mentioned also in Turkey. In this sense, in Turkey the concept of “Kabadayı” defines the man who defences the right of those who believe in him, resolves the inequality and loves his country and nation. His is different from mafia or gangster. He is closer to Mike Wayne definition about the social rebels. He is a modern Robin Hood who is far from the law but has terrific respect towards his own rules and traditions; he is always on the side of the people and the righteous.

The film Love and Honour (Kabadayı) directed by the famous director Yavuz Turgul in 2007 worked precisely with these traditional code. It is blessed to be the organization of the Greaser. “Greasing” hosts all the organization rules of omerta throughout the entire film. “ *Within the mafios social structure the so called “omerta” rule constitutes the most important pillar of the local people’s resistance against the general law and ethics. Omerta includes an important component of the basic morality that prevents the recourse to the common law for the individual who suffered injustice in the mafios society in order to search for his rights. In other words, it suggests that a person who suffered injustice should not apply to any authority other than the local to remain silent and search for his right with his own power by contacting one of the local center powers. Briefly it is called as the “rule of silent” in the mafios social structure. If the individual who suffered injustice do not comply with omerta he will be punished. Not complying with the omerta will be treated as illegal and non-moral behaviour and will be punished. The punishment is execution by using physical violence. Cogito 208: whether it is called omerta or greaser, all these rules turn into codes described one by one with the film of Love and Honour. Despite the respect of the heroes towards the state, there is a serious distance at the point of establishing justice. Although the state’s punishment is accepted the execution of his own omerta rule is beyond all these. (Culcu 1996:208)* Within their world the state cannot be the tool of establishing justice. In fact, the main concept of the film is he saved his son whom he met after many years by distributing his own justice by killing. Other search for the right does not suit for the greaser.

The concept of organized crime or mafia emerged during the 90's in Turkey as a phenomenon other than greaser. In this study the mafia which is on the agenda due to its wide network of cooperation with the state, mafia organizations, politicians and police does not remain on the side of the people at the point of establishing its own justice. It should be kept separate from the rebel-type gangster or bank robber. *According to Fanon, gangster even if he tries to reach the capitalist wealth or if he is in a grotesque parody is the false assimilation imitating the bourgeois values. A rebel is the person who on the contrary tries to integrate within the social order but is living on the edge of it and questions the basic assumptions of this order. The rebel does not seek for wealth he only seeks for revenge, justice and living. In contrast to the gangster figure, the rebel maintains the contact with the oppressed while the gangster represents a political congestion; accepting greed, selfishness and the capitalist competition values even if he often comes from a poor and marginal past he is weak in a way that he never feels solidarity with the oppressed (Wayne, 2009:104).*

Mafia or gangster movies can be encountered frequently within the new Turkish movies. Especially in the 1990's the deep relationship between the mafia and the politics led to the emergence of such organizations within the films and TV series. The most serious examples in this sense are ; The Cholera Street (Ağır Roman) the film of Mustafa Altıoklar made in 1998, Elephants and Grass (Filler ve Çimen) directed by Dervis Zaim and Serder Akar's On Board (Gemide, 1999), the Magic Carpet Ride (Organize İşler) directed by Yılmaz Erdoğan in 2005, these films focus on relationship among the mafia, state and the ordinary people. Indirectly, many film including mafia organizations continue to be seen in the new movie. In general these films demonstrate that even the people whose hands are clean do not believe in the law and seek for their own justice by distributing the law on the mafia. For example in the comedy film called Magic Red Carpet (organize İşler) which was directed by Yılmaz Erdoğan in 2005 a women who works as a professor at a university seek for help from to mafia to get her car back from a mafia gang. It creates a serious social allegory that an individual who comes from the most educated segment of the social hierarchy asks for justice from the mafia due to the fact that even she does not believe in the law and does not accept the late justice.

John Wayne focused on the point that the power of turning the justice seeking of the rebels or in the context of this article the heroes who are looking for their own justice against the social inequalities into a collective action can be one of the dominant issues of the 3rd cinema. However, in this context the Turkish cinema repeats it away from showing political connectedness by trying to solve its own justice and by blessing a deep pessimism.

The love of a nation which turned the words of the folk hero Dadaoğlu " If Ferman is a sultan the mountains are mine " into a cultural motto to distribute its own justice is encountered in many field from the daily life to the art as a cultural allegory. First the new Turkish Cinema were many movies which aimed to save the honour of the manhood and to impose its own justice to this world. In this sense, the new Turkish Cinema does not show any difference from the past and is rewarded by the audience as a cinema consecrating those who seek for their own justice.

References

- Connell R. W. (1998) *Gender and Power*, Istanbul:Ayrıntı Press, 158
- Culcu,M. (1996) *Mafia and violence in Cogito* Istanbul:YKY, 207-213
- Gasset,y O. (2010) *The Revolt of the Masses* Istanbul:Is Press, 60-61
- Göle, N. (2008). *Hybrid Patterns* ,İstanbul: Metis Press, 170-173.
- Hess,H. (1996) *Mafia-Zentrali Herrschajt und Lokale Gegenmacht, in Cogito* Istanbul:YKY, 207-213
- Inalcık,H. (2000). *Genre and Tradition in History of Turkish Law*, in *Dogubati* 160 Istanbul: Dogubati Press, 160.
- Kellner, D. & Ryan,M. (1997) *Politic Camera*, Istanbul:Ayrıntı Press,
- Sancar, S.(2011). *Masculinity: İmpossible Power* (2. Edition). Ankara: Metis Press, 134
- Wayne, M. (2009) *Politic film*, Istanbul:Ayrıntı Press, 104-155
- Contact email:** tugbaelmaci@comu.edu.tr