

## **Social Mobility from City to Province in New Turkish Cinema**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with the reflection of the concept of social mobility from the city to the province in the movies produced between the years 1990 and 2000, when the New Turkish Cinema came to the fore in Turkey. Before 1990, the mobility from the countryside to the city was on the contrary, towards the countryside again. For this reason, the homeland of the New Turkish Cinema is the countryside. Especially after 1990, the increasing importance of the countryside in cinema means a mood for the characters rather than being a place. In a perspective stretching from the end of the 90s to the 2000s, the countryside is sometimes defined as a place to live in and sometimes to return to. After the transition from the city to the countryside was explained in the cinema during the Yeşilçam period, the return to the countryside in the New Turkish Cinema was tried to be explained through the films “KışUykusu”, “Yumurta”, “Ana Yurdu” and “Kelebekler”. The main reason for limiting the study to these four films is that these films, which were shot in different periods and by different directors, can unite on common ground thematically. The plots of these four films unite under the themes of returning to the countryside as a form of reconstruction, returning to the countryside after trauma, returning to the countryside as an intellectual crisis, and returning to the countryside in the pursuit of lost time.

**Keywords:** Center; city; new turkish cinema; periphery; province

## INTRODUCTION

*“Cinema can't change anything, but it makes people understand many things. It's not the movies that will change the world, it's the people watching those movies.”*

Krzysztof Kieślowski

Cinema may not change anything, but it makes people understand many things. When we look at Turkish cinema after the 2000s, we can see that the films tell people about many issues from life and diversify both in content and aesthetics. After the 80s, we can see that the Yeşilçam period has come to an end in terms of production and consumption in Turkish cinema. In the 90s, we can say that there was a transition period or a process of change after Yeşilçam in Turkish Cinema. In this period, it is accepted that the production of cinema was realized with more individual initiatives, both economically and as an artistic choice. When we come to the late 90s and 2000s, it is observed that the cinema started to revive with the economic support of festivals and international funds.

New Turkish Cinema has already given examples that deal with the problems of city life and the relations of urban people in a social and economic context. However, one of the other outstanding themes can be called the return to the country. Before 1990, the cinema, which was about the mobility from the countryside to the city, this time turned to mobility to the countryside, on the contrary. In this context, we can argue that the motherland of Turkish Cinema after the 2000s was the countryside. It is seen that the 1990s in particular prepared this trend, and in this period, the countryside meant a frame of mood for the characters rather than being a place. In a perspective stretching from the late 90s to the 2000s, the countryside is sometimes depicted in films as a place to live in and sometimes to return to. Therefore, in this process, the relationship between the city and the country appears as a trend rather than a typical migration movement in Turkish cinema, so we can call it "social mobility". However, the most striking theme after the 2000s appears as a tendency towards the countryside, a reckoning or a search for a bond. Contrary to some

examples in the 90s, this reverse migration movement emerges as an individual journey, an individual existence, an individual rebuilding process.

This reverse migration or the theme that emerged as a return to the countryside can be associated with the economic, social and political climate of the period, or it can be considered as individual preferences. However, in this thesis, it aims to investigate and describe the underlying causes, claiming that such a social mobility has not appeared in this form before in Turkish cinema.

The films that we can call “return to the province” coincided with the revival of economic and cultural supports. However, this thesis aims to discuss the social reasons for the emergence of films on reverse migration, which increased in number in the 2000s. As of the period, a period in which neo-liberal policies and brutal capitalist conditions permeate every aspect of life and dominate the cultural climate stands out. Being suffocated by the exclusion created by these social conditions, individuals with generally well-educated professions try to leave the city and return to the rural life where their roots are based. However, sometimes, as a result of a traumatic event, deaths and great losses, the inability to hold on in the city, and the effort to rebuild and create themselves, they break away from urban life and return to the countryside, and they take new life practices there and continue their urban life.

The main subject of the study is the social mobility from city to country in New Turkish Cinema. This subject has attracted a lot of attention both in the field of cinema and in the academic field, especially in recent years. In fact, the discussion of the subject is also about where the cinema is going on a world scale. Due to the increasing interest in films dealing with minimalist subjects at major world festivals, directors whose target is foreign festivals have directed them to make films that are minimalist and take certain mathematics into account. However, the fact that Yeşilçam cinema and its financing methods, which disappeared since the end of the 1990s, gave way to individual financing and the newly developing professional production approach brought about budgetary constraints. Scripts were started to be written with the concern of producing less costly films. Cost limits have

started to be protected with films that use less space and rely on individual stories. For example, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who gave the first examples of such films, returned to his village and created a film form that approached the documentary film from time to time by using his relatives as actors. Of course, there are also social reasons behind the withdrawal of so many samples that cannot be explained only by the world conjuncture and budgetary constraints. The impact of the internal migration wave, which started in Turkey in the 1960s and continues until today, changes from generation to generation. The second or third generations of the immigration wave that started at that time benefited from all the blessings of the city and were surrounded by modern life. Members of this generation do not experience a problem of harmony in the city, but they cannot feel themselves urbanized internally either. Having a good education or a profession does not cure this wound. They search internally for a cocoon to return to. This can sometimes be a cure for the wound that modernism has created on the individual, and sometimes it can be a provincial exoticism or beautification. Its reflection on the cinema is that it is a kind of escape place. For this reason, we built the main axis of the study on the countryside.

The successes of directors such as Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Semih Kaplanođlu, who shot films that center the countryside in our country, at national and international festivals not only caused a new generation of filmmakers to return to the countryside to look at it and include it in their productions, but also caused controversy in the academic field. Throughout the thesis, we tried to explain both the academic discussions and how they were reflected through the four sample films we selected from our cinema.

After the transition from the city to the countryside was explained in the cinema during the Yeřilçam period, the return to the countryside in the New Turkish Cinema was tried to be explained through the films “Kıř Uykusu”, “Yumurta”, “Ana Yurdu” and “Kelebekler”. The main reason for limiting the study to these four films is that these films, which were shot in different periods and by different directors, can unite on common ground thematically. The plots of these four films unite under the themes of returning to the countryside as a form of reconstruction, returning to the countryside after trauma, returning

to the countryside as an intellectual crisis, and returning to the countryside in the pursuit of lost time.

The common point of the four films selected for this study is the return from the city to the countryside and the similar tendencies of the characters who make this return. It is based on the intellectual crisis, which forms the upper crust of the society trying to re-create itself after traumas, and the characters who lost themselves in the footsteps of the past, returned to their own country and urbanized it. Therefore, the films we have chosen are those who go to the country voluntarily and choose to stay there voluntarily. Or in other words, they are those who are curious about the subject of the province, idealize it and visit the province, albeit temporarily, that is, those who go for a specific purpose. Therefore, the characters in the selected films are those who go to the country voluntarily, not because they lead life. While we are always confronted with the city and the countryside, especially the city and the countryside in Istanbul, we encounter a return to the countryside for the first time in the 2000s. With the return becoming a trend, we come across a cinema where the directors have turned to this theme. We find few studies on this subject. Therefore, in the introduction part of the importance of the study, this subject has been discussed in order to shed light on future research.

Returning from the city to the countryside as a type of reverse migration has become one of the main themes of New Turkish Cinema. The success of films with this thematic structure in world and domestic festivals and the resulting formula films encourage and spark new generation directors to produce on this theme. Therefore, it will be an important effort to study this subject academically.

## RESULTS

New Turkish cinema represents a period that emerged in the 1990s, but started to experience its heyday in the mid-2000s, a period that surpassed the years without cinema in terms of the production process and the box office revenues. However, this period refers to a period in which the main place and thematic structure of the films changed along with the change in the way of film production, distribution and consumption. The change in cinema is not limited to this; we can see a new cinema structure that is financially independent and intellectually ideational, where schooled filmmakers make films together with former filmmakers.

New Turkish Cinema (Independent Cinema or Intellectual Cinema), which started in the mid-2000s and made the province its main venue, can be seen as "a critical cinema that seeks originality instead of imitating traditional models, and in search of self-discovery and re-creation of people and society" (Büyükdüvenci & Öztürk, 2007: 45). Here, critical cinema should not be seen only as a thematic change, it means the change of all formal features of old cinema in technical and organizational norms.

The place of New Turkish cinema, which started in the 1990s and reached its peak in the mid-2000s, is undoubtedly rural. The province has always been an important place in Turkish cinema. Sometimes it is the place of village movies, sometimes it is the space where a political existence is experienced. With the new Turkish cinema, it had a different meaning and importance. It is the place of the characters who return to the country and try to transform the country within itself and create new cities from the provinces, while telling their own stories.

The countryman knows almost everyone in his area. Although this seems positive in terms of relationships, it creates a situation that restricts the individual. The countryman is used to this situation, but this limitation creates a problem for the individual who comes from the city to the country. Even today, a metropolitan inhabitant of a town feels a similar constraint, at least in terms of genre. The narrower the circle constituting our environment,

and the more restricted the relationships that the individual establishes with others, which dissolves his own boundaries, the more the circle in question watches the activities, lifestyle and perspective of the individual, the easier it is for a quantitative and qualitative specialization to break the framework of that small circle (Simmel, 2009: 324).

One of the most important elements separating city and country life is people's relations with each other. We find that life in the metropolis is essentially intellectual, as opposed to psychic life in the towns, which is based on emotions and emotional relationships (Simmel, 2009: 318). The provinces are small places, so people have more information about each other. In this context, there are more cordial and warm relations in the province since it is smaller than the city life. Relationships in the town are rooted in more unconscious layers of the psyche and thrive in the regular rhythm of the most comfortable, uninterrupted habits (Simmel, 2009: 319). However, this small environment also restricts the people living in the country, people control each other, and someone who comes from the city to the country will feel this situation. Province shows the reaction caused by the psychology of being pushed aside against the center. The change of the province always lags behind the center, so the province is more traditional and conservative than the center.

Another important impression is the entry of capitalism to the province, which is seen as both a cause and a result of the increasing migration from the city to the province, especially in recent years. Thanks to the effect of the modernization attitude integrating the independent from each other, the provinces began to turn into a uniform province. In this understanding, with a reactionary provincial mystification against the modernization experience, provincial conservatism is reproduced as a native, humane and cultural essential homeland (Bora, 2013: 51-52). Globalization also breaks the locality of the province and prevents it from being on its own. With the change of the world system, the meaning of the province, which has a historical characteristic, also begins to change.

While talking about the provinces from the early Republican period to the 60s, the flattening effect produced by rapid globalization today transforms the provinces with different internal dynamics into the provinces. While the provinces have diversity and local



characteristics, the 'province' has turned into a place that is defined by standards, defined not by its difference, but by its similarity (Bora, 2013: 46). Capitalism also enters the provinces, thus changing the class structure, culture, worldview and production system of the province. It is the lifestyle of the lost country.

It is possible to clearly analyze the latest situation of modernism and globalization in Turkey by looking at the provinces. This analysis can be made by looking at the reflections of the province and the concept of the daily rural in the new period Turkish Cinema. While he may slip into provincial conservatism, it should not be overlooked that the value produced by the province derives from the tension between the city and the center. One of the experiences that allows artistic production is the rural-urban tension. The relationship, which is based on the unfixable and changing balances between the center and the periphery, contains the driving force of the mutual transformation of the parties due to its productive nature (Bora, 2013: 63-64). It is important to understand the migrating community to make cultural and political analyzes of cinema works based on the concepts of provincial and provincialism.

As Bayrakdar stated, New Turkish cinema is a bit like a panorama of 'Scenes from My Country' (Bayrakdar, 2008: 36). Cities, which have been the most important venues of Turkish cinema for a long time, have been replaced by the province with this new cinematic understanding. As Akça stated, New Turkish Cinema reveals the soul of Turkish people who are stuck between the country and the city, by making use of religious norms and transformations, mythology, architecture, photography and painting (Akça, 2013: 176).

It is possible to encounter the two faces of the province; the province as a place, and the narrowed and excluded moods that people experience in big cities and metropolises in the post-1990 Turkish cinema. These moods are often told through the eyes of Istanbul, the center, and sometimes from the province. It has become an important trend in fictionalizing the space by adding a certain romance to the situation in the stories told from inside the province or by returning to the province. According to Akbal, romanticizing the province in such films is a 'global' situation. This is the result of the close relationship that the post-

modern mind has established with the province. Cities were based on modernism; post-modernism chooses the province as its place with its new eclectic mind. Post-modernism is thus a spatial factor, not a temporal one. For this reason, those who return to the province do not return to space but to time (Akbal, 2010: 95).

When we look at the films about "from the city to the province", what we will see is the fact that the main characters of the films return to the province within themselves rather than the province, and the fact that they want to return is not a place but a time. They are in trouble to find and replace.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan was the first director to make the concept of the province the central and fundamental subject of the film in the new Turkish cinema. The view that Ceylan creates against the country, the city, the home and the concept of belonging from time to time, from the inside, and from time to time from the outside, has been the harbinger of a new cinema. Although this is a kind of image cinema, it also heralds a much deeper political cinema.

The main motivations of the characters returning from the city to the province are returning to the province as a form of reconstruction, returning to the province after trauma, returning to the province as an intellectual crisis, and returning to the province in the pursuit of lost time. The films that are in our field of interest are Semih Kaplanoğlu's 'Yumurta' (2007), Nuri Bilge Ceylan's 'Kış Uykusu' (2014), Senem Tüzen's 'Ana Yurdu' (2015), and Tolga Karaçelik's 'Kelebekler' (2018).

## **DISCUSSION**

Cinema, which is both an art and a mass media tool, is in a dynamic relationship with the social structure. Today, movies are read with various analysis methods such as sociological, psychological, political, structuralist, feminist and Marxist and they are the subject of serious analysis. A cinema approach that takes the pulse of society sociologically

also ponders on concepts such as urban change, transformation and migration. Social realistic cinema, which started in Turkish cinema at the end of the 1950s, is a living witness of the social disintegration experienced during the 1960s and 1970s; it has ensured that basic subjects such as migration, urbanization, unplanned housing, rural-urban duality, women and family problems have become the most important subjects in our cinema.

With the urbanization and migration movements in our country, the social change that has occurred since the 1960s has changed over time. The beginning of this painful process in Turkish cinema has accelerated with the social realism movement, so many directors have started to touch on the issue of migration at the point of spatial separations in cities. Films have started to be shot on subjects such as immigration, the process of immigrants' attachment to the city, slums, worker problems, and patronage relations.

In today's world, it is possible to live migration which is the most important type of social mobility, in the opposite way. This reverse migration is from the city to the countryside. Especially this reverse migration movement, which is the most important subject of New Turkish Cinema, reflects today's world. We can reveal the process of social mobility from city to country in Turkish cinema by changing the center-periphery approach. As a western art, it can be said that cinema is an art that was born in the center, appeals to the audience in the center and takes its subject from the life of the people in the center. We can say that the transition from the center to the periphery emerged with the first village films. It has been observed that the tense relationship between the center and the periphery begins right here.

As a result of the research, it can be said that the venue of New Turkish Cinema, which started in the 1990s and reached its peak in the mid-2000s, is undoubtedly the province. The countryside has always been an important place in Turkish cinema. Sometimes it is the place of village movies, sometimes it is the location where a political existence is experienced.

With the New Turkish Cinema, it had a different meaning and importance. It is the place of the characters who return to the country and try to transform the province within itself, and to create new cities from the provinces, together with telling the own story of the province. New Turkish Cinema, which started in the mid-2000s and made the countryside its main venue, is to be seen as “a critical cinema that seeks originality instead of imitating traditional models, and in search of self-discovery and re-creation of people and society”.

That's why we discussed the intellectual migration from the city to the countryside in New Turkish Cinema in our study. Today, we tried to trace the migration of intellectuals and white-collar people from the city, which is an important part of both cinema and our social life, and their tendency to cling to the countryside, to change and transform the countryside as they wish, in New Turkish Cinema.

## **CONCLUSION**

The four esteemed directors of New Turkish Cinema; Semih Kaplanoğlu, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Senem Tüzen and Tolga Karaçelik impress with their films and win important awards at festivals in Turkey and around the world. Semih Kaplanoğlu received the Golden Bear for the film "Bal" and Nuri Bilge Ceylan received the Golden Palm Award for the film "Kış Uykusu", which we analyzed in our study. These films have been of research value in the sense that they contain certain festival forms.

The most important common denominator of the four films we chose which are “Yumurta”, “Kış Uykusu”, “Ana Yurdu” and “Kelebekler” is production, manufacture, design and thematic affinity. We tried to examine their thematic affinities under four main headings. "Returning to the countryside as a form of reconstruction", "returning to the countryside after trauma", "returning to the countryside as an intellectual crisis" and "returning to the countryside in the pursuit of lost time". The most basic common theme in these four films is that the characters, after a trauma, throw themselves into the country where they were born and grew up and believe that they will recover there. The common theme of most of

the films made in New Turkish Cinema about returning to the country is returning to the country after a traumatic event in the city, sometimes due to emotional and sometimes financial conditions.

The search for meaning, which develops with the movement of the characters, who have become alien to themselves, the society and their whole life, from the city to the countryside, appears in provincial films with an existentialist line. In this sense, returning to the country is like an existentialist return to one's essence, self-purification and yearning for pure and naive childhood days.

The main traumatic event in the films we included in our study is the loss of a mother or father. The loss of mother and father is an opportunity to regain one's roots, since the loss of parents in a sense means rootlessness. Our characters, who came from a traumatic process filled with the loss of their mother in "Yumurta", not being able to find their old life in the city in "Kış Uykusu", the loss of parents in "Kelebekler", and not being able to write their novel in "Ana Yurdu", found the solution by returning to the countryside.

Another reason for returning to the countryside is the intellectual crisis. The main characters in these films that we have taken as examples are people who have gone to the city from the country and are kept there, who have been educated and have made a career and have ideas for themselves and the society. When these characters return to their own provinces, it is not known how much they find what they are looking for, but it will not be wrong to say that they try to make the country look like them. Among the films we have examined, the film that thinks the most about the concept of intellectual is undoubtedly "Kış Uykusu". Class relations in the countryside and sometimes even the ruthlessness of intellectual snobbery is questioned through our main character, whose name is not coincidentally, "Aydın (Intellectual)". The most important common aspect of the intellectual characters in these films is to be neither from the country nor from the city, but to stay in a limbo. This is exactly why they carry other forms of life wherever they find and live.

In Turkish cinema, provincial content and form are defined as heavy rhythm. Even if the country establishes a close connection with the city, when we return to the country, we see an inviolable sanctuary. And there, time has no meaning anymore. It is the land where tradition encompasses everything and the future becomes a symbolic pressure. For this reason, we can say that our characters in these films are characters in the traces of the past rather than the future.

In the process of our study, we tried to make various inferences from four films about returning from the city, which is an element of reverse migration, to the countryside. The judgments we reach through these four films and their characters and the subjective data we obtain are only the results obtained in line with this study. By expanding the subject of the study and diversifying the sample films, more in-depth analysis results will be achieved.

It is aimed that this thesis study will be instrumental in more comprehensive studies to be carried out in the New Turkish Cinema. Another potential research area pointed out by this study can be shown as the change of social movements. However, based on the theoretical and methodological framework in which this study works, it is thought that studies that deal with a wider time period in Turkey and examine different periods of Turkish Cinema can be done. In this context, it is clear that there is a need for more in-depth studies that support the cinema and human relationship with field researches.

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