

IMMIGRATION MOVIES IN TURKEY: HOW ECONOMIC CHANGES AFFECT TURKISH CINEMA IN 1960S

Gökhan Uğur, PhD
Beykent University, Turkey

Abstract

The essence of this study is defined by the Marxist concept of infrastructure and superstructure. In 1950, Adnan Menderes, the leader of Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party) won the presidential election in a landslide victory. Then, he implemented liberal economy which caused fundamental changes in the country. The changes in economic base affected the superstructure. New economic conditions forced people to move other places, especially to larger cities. Farmers became factory workers. Meanwhile, the role of women in the society was changed, since they were also integrated into the production process. Therefore, the movies dealing with the problems of immigrants emerged as a result of the new economic system. *Gurbet Kuşları* (1964), directed by Halit Refiğ, is the first movie which analyzes the results of these economic changes.

Keywords: Economic and Social Change, Immigration, Immigration Movies

Introduction

According to some people, mass migration in 1950s in Turkey is caused by wrong political moves. In this work, how the notion of migration in 1950s is reflected in Turkish movies that are made in 1960s will be analyzed. In the first part of the work, I will focus on the theories that try to define the notion of migration in the broadest sense. If we take into consideration that the factors that lead to migration are not only wars and natural disasters but also economic conditions, it is inevitable to examine economic approaches to migration.

After a general frame about migration is created in the first part, the emergence of domestic migration in Turkey and its reflection on social life will be the focus of the second part. In Turkey, where social changes such as urbanization and industrialization are not healthily experienced, the poor who immigrate to big cities to make living get lost in metropolis. Some of them go back to their hometowns, some struggle to live in these big cities. The immigrants that start a new life in big cities (especially in İstanbul) cannot break their bonds with their hometowns and they create their own rural areas in these big cities. The ones that cannot feel satisfied economically- that include the majority- build a house for themselves in any empty area. As a result of this, "gecekodu"³³³ emerged as the biggest problem of big cities. These issues will be the focus of the second part.

The reflection of social developments in the art of cinema will be analyzed in the third part. There are two movies which are made in 1960s about migration that draw attention. Therefore; the movies *Gurbet Kuşları* by Halit Refiğ and *Bitmeyen Yol* by Duygu Sağıroğlu will be the focus of the third chapter.

³³³House put up quickly without proper permission.

A General Look at the Notion of Migration

In the broadest sense, migration means that a group of people leave where they live due to various reasons and move to another region/city/country. The history of migration is as old as the history of humanity. The notion of migration, which people have to face since the very ancient times, has affected the fate of humanity and has been experienced more in the last fifty years because of various reasons. Therefore, it draws the attention of sociologists (Abadan, 2002: 1). The first theoretical explanation about migration was made in the 19th century. Today, it is approached from various perspectives; not only economic aspects but also social aspects are taken into account. However, I contend that it is necessary to focus on economic reasons that lie at the core of migration. Hence, it is of utmost importance to concentrate on explanations which are based on economy.

According to neo-classical approach, the main reasons that lead to migration are the geographical differences in offer and demand. While underdeveloped countries offer low salaries, developed countries provide higher salaries for employee. As a result of this difference in salaries, people in underdeveloped countries migrate to developed countries (Abadan, 2002: 6). On the other hand, recent economic theories oppose to neo-classical approach and claim that the decision to migrate is not always taken by individuals but by a whole society. According to Abadan, the defenders of this claim think that when a family decides to migrate, what they desire is not always to increase their income but to decrease the level of their relative poverty. Based on this new theory, it can be said that the main reason for migration is not the difference in salary. Even if this difference disappears, migration will not end.

In addition to the general approaches to migration, a new theory emerged recently; Split Labor Market Theory. According to this new theory, the main reason for external migration is not unemployment or low salaries in underdeveloped countries but the need for employees that will work with low salaries in the countries to which people migrate. If the fact that the main principle in market economy is the lowest expense with the highest profit and production, the need for employees in developed countries can be understood better (Abadan, 2002: 11). Another claim of the defenders of split labor market that draw attention is that the main desire of the people who migrate is to increase their social reputation (Abadan, 2002: 11). The aim of individuals is to have a place as high as possible in social hierarchy. Immigrants from underdeveloped countries give the people in developed countries chance to climb up the social ladder because these people consider themselves only as workers, not as citizens of the countries they migrate. Moreover, since now their salary is higher than the salary they receive in their own countries, they have already received the prestige they needed. In this respect, while immigrant workers can be classified as having no desire to reach higher levels, native workers are more motivated to climb the social ladder. Therefore, it can be said that they are more qualified in market; this claim gives birth to Piore's split labor market (Abadan, 2002: 12).

I would like to refer to another view about migration without getting to much far away from the main approaches that analyze migration in 1960s. According to Wallerstein's World-systems theory, as capitalist countries economically have more control over non-capitalist countries, migration from underdeveloped countries begins. According to this theory, international migration is a result of developments in capitalism. Migration is inevitable when developed countries take control of labor and commodity in underdeveloped countries. The factories that developed countries run in underdeveloped countries depend on technological developments, so they put an end to traditional production methods. Moreover, more women workers are employed because they are given lower prices. As a result, the possibility of employment for men decreases and this gradually leads to migration (Abadan, 2002: 16). If we take this approach in consideration, it can be better understood that the

internal migration in Turkey emerged as a result of the changes in economic conditions. Although all the theories mentioned so far are about migration from underdeveloped countries to developed countries, it is possible to consider the same approaches to understand migration from developed regions to less developed regions in a country. As Adnan Menders became the prime minister of Turkey, the relationship between Turkey and the United States of America got closer. This increased the level of development in different regions of Turkey. Production depending on machine power started and this became the main reason that led to migration from rural areas to cities. All these will be analyzed in detail in the second part.

Migration in Turkey

The theories about migration that are explained in the first part also give important information about Turkey that rapidly started to adopt capitalist economy since 1950. Democratic Party, founded by Adnan Menderes in 1946, followed policies to create a consumer society in Turkey since 1950s. Therefore, industrialization relatively increased and migration from rural area to urban areas increased. According to Turkish scholar Oğuz Makal, crediting facilities in urban areas is the reason behind industrialization (Makal, 1987: 31). Moreover, the rural people's view of the share of land between brothers and inheritance law in East and South East of Turkey caused each member to have less amount of land. This, in turn, led to lower income (Esen, 2000: 102). Furthermore, social insurance, which is considered to provide individual safety, is more common in urban areas; that is why, this is another factor that triggers migration to urban areas. While such changes occurred in urban areas, trade increased in cities and economy got livelier; these changes made cities more attractive. When these changes happened in Turkey between 1950s-1960s, the rise of population in cities was around 80%. In addition to the changes in economic field, developments in transportation were made in 1950s. This made transportation between cities easier. It means going to cities was no more difficult. High rates of unemployment in rural areas, together with easy transportation to cities made urban areas hopeful places. The city which was affected mostly by these changes was İstanbul and it was reflected as a magical city (Öztürk, online). However, migration from rural areas to cities in Turkey was different from migration in West.

The point that should be paid attention is the fact that when big cities like İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir got bigger due to migrations, the people who migrated there could not get urbanized at the same speed. Moreover, the number of immigrants who were expecting to find jobs in big cities was a lot more than the employment opportunities in big cities. As a result of the rise in population in big cities and insufficient employment opportunities, unemployment emerged as a big problem in these cities. Unemployed immigrants did not consider going back to their hometown as a solution. However, they did not have the money to buy a house for themselves in big cities, either. Therefore, they built their own houses and "gecekondu"s emerged. According to Öztürk, the history of gecekondu overlaps with the history of urbanization (Öztürk, online). Turkish movies made in 1960s showed the life of bourgeoisie living in İstanbul. This made people watching them in urban areas to dream of such lives and as a result, migrate to cities (Öztürk, online). People who migrated to big cities with big expectations could neither end connection with their hometown nor adopt the life styles of the places they migrated. This caused them to be alienated to and to be in conflict with where they live. What Makal claims is that an immigrant in a big and different city struggles with his problems that he has no chance to solve. He feels disappointed as a result of the big gap what is reflected in movies and what he has experienced in reality. Therefore, all the values he used to have in his hometown collapse and he feels alienated to society. His failure in social life and his inner conflicts make him feel desperate (Makal, 1994: 32). His personal values and the values where he has migrated clash. As a result of this, he looks for

new things and gets closer to people who live the same dilemma. As a result, even if he lives in the biggest metropolis in the world, he cannot benefit from the urban features of the city. He creates, together with the people like him, a rural area in the city. Hence, the borders of village and city intertwine.

According to Split Labor Market Theory, which was explained in the first part, immigrants are like unqualified workers that increase the employment opportunities of the qualified workers in the places they migrate. The situation is the same in 1960s in Turkey. People who have no source of income except for agriculture in rural areas migrate to big cities due to various reasons. These people turn into unqualified workers who are willing to do any kind of job in order to survive. In other words, these immigrants are employed for the jobs that do not require much qualification (Öztürk, online). Moreover, the same theory explains that these people migrate to big cities for a temporary time period. Therefore, they are not interested in how prestigious their jobs are but how much money they earn.

What Kaplan states is that a person differentiates himself from others by means of the identities he owns. Indeed, this differentiation can be explained through the importance of others for us (Kaplan, 2005: 48). The identities other people have are more related to how we perceive them rather than what they reflect to us. One has to create an identity in order to define himself (Kaplan, 2005: 48). This is also the beginning of a binary procedure. Knowing the identity of others means knowing who you are. It will be beneficial for us to consider this situation together with the identity problem of one who migrates to big cities with big dreams but who gets disappointed. Cultural reflection of this situation begins in 1970s and 1980s (if not in 1960s) with the birth of arabesque. Arabesque music, which is like a village boy born in a big city, mainly reflects the regretful feelings and longing for going back to hometown of the people who cannot receive what they have expected in city life. Regrets and disappointments of immigrants were reflected in folk song lyrics as follows: “Why have I come to Istanbul?”³³⁴, “Come on, Let’s go back to our village”³³⁵, “Wash me with the rain of my village”³³⁶. This arabesque culture was born to explain the feelings of the immigrants and to create an identity for them. After it was mixed with pop culture, it became popular in city as a new kind of music type called “fantasymusic”.

Movies in 1960s That Concerned with Migration

The art of movie is explained by Öztürk as accompanying reality with photographic reality. (Öztürk, online). It can be seen that the reasons for migration did not change between 1960s and 1980s (Kamal, 1994: 34). In 1960s Turkish movies, there are only two movies that dealt with migration which was a recent social phenomenon then. The first one is *Gurbet Kuşları* made by Halit Refiğ in 1964, and the *Bitmeyen Yol* made by Duygu Sağıroğlu in 1965. What Güçhan states about these movies is that the characters in the movies feel humiliated because of being from a village and they want to be like the people in the city. However, the moral values of their society do not let this to happen (Güçhan, 1992: 168).

Refiğ, described by Sconomillo as “respectively moved from being a cinema writer to assistant director, then from a scenarist to a director” says although some scenes were not shot as he desired due to financial reasons, the movie *Gurbet Kuşları* is close to what he desired to make (Refiğ, 1971: 15). The movie, which is a turning point in the director’s life with the passion and the scene- setting in it (Sconomillo, 2003), is about the story of a family who moves from Kahramanmaraş to Istanbul but cannot adapt the life there and turns back to

³³⁴ “Neden Geldim İstanbul’a” is a folk song written by Erkan Oğur

³³⁵ “Hadi Gel Köyümüze Geri Dönelim” is a very popular arabesque song performed by Ferdi Tayfur

³³⁶ “Beni Köyümün Yağmurlarında Yıkasınlar” is very popular song written by Erhan Guleryuz and song by Omer Danis.

Kahramanmaraş. Refiğ reflects his ideas about migration during the movie. The story is based on play writer Turgut Özakman's *Ocak*; the scenario is completed by Refiğ and Orhan Kemal (Makal, 1994: 37). According to the interview between Refiğ and Onaran, Refiğ wants to “consider migration as a problem, analyze it realistically, and reflect the problem and the people experiencing it with a realistic approach” (Onaran, 1981). Refiğ reflects the story of people from a conservative environment, from minorities, and from a modern environment in order to show the contradictory structure of Istanbul. By doing so, he reflects three characters from three different environments. According to Makal, women do not have the primary status in the movie and they are used as a means to depict the desired idea (Makal, 1994: 38). What Scognomillo states is that Fatoş, who is defeated by her desires, the belly-dancer working in the pavilion, and the women with Greek origin, played by Gülbin Eray, are the examples of women that live in big cities and they draw attention sexually (Scognomillo, 2003: 227). On the other hand, Akad thinks that the subject of this movie is misleading and criticizes that the failure of the family is directly connected to sexuality in the movie (Onaran, 1990: 165). Overall, Refiğ considers alienation in social terms in the movie and emphasizes the fact that one should be like the people living in a city in order to succeed living in a big city (Makal, 1994: 39). At the end of the movie, he shows that İstanbul is a big hope for people despite everything (Esen, 2000: 109). Migration continues to draw Refiğ's attention, in 1970s and he makes a new movie *Fatma Bacı* in 1972. Since my main issue is the movies about migration in 1960s, I will mention *Fatma Bacı* briefly. It tells us the story of a woman who migrates to a big city from Anatolia with her children and works as a custodian to make her living. This movie created different reactions (Scognomillo, 2000: 232). According to Nijat Özön, *Fatma Bacı* is not strongly founded (Özön, 1985). On the other hand, Uçakan thinks that Refiğ reflects the disappointment of the new generation very scientifically and beautifully in that movie (Uçakan, 1977).

The movie *Bitmeyen Yol* was made by Duygu Sağıroğlu one year later *Gurbet Kuşları* was shot. It is about the people who leave everything they have in their hometown and move to a big city to find a job. However, by time, these people understand that finding a job in big city is not easy and they feel disappointed. (Esen, 2000: 111). This was the first movie by Duygu Sağıroğlu and it was censored. It starts with Güllü Bacı who lives in “gecekondu” that recently emerged in those years. Makal notes that this is the first movie that closely depicts “gecekondu” (Makal, 1994: 39). There are villagers who migrate to Istanbul with their quilts on their shoulders. The first thing they do in the city is to find other immigrants and get information from them about city life. Sağıroğlu highlights how social inequality in city defeats the villagers who leave their hometowns (Şaşa, 1968: 118). In terms of the story it tells, the movie *Bitmeyen Yol* is in agreement with the ideas of sociologists. According to Makal, it reflects the reality of not its own time period but of 1940s and 1950s. Moreover, some critics think that the movie is sometimes like a manifesto, so criticism and depiction are intertwined (Şaşa, 1968). On the other hand, Scognomillo contends that *Bitmeyen Yol*, which is sometimes natural and sometimes lyrical, if approached with today's point of view, reflects one of the first examples of movies to be made twenty years later (Scognomillo, 2000: 232).

These two movies I explained in this paper received great attention through the ideas they represent and their great success in reflecting reality during the years they were presented. Refiğ and Sağıroğlu drew attention to internal migration in 1960s when it was not a popular issue. They are the first successful directors that depicted migration and its bitter results on screen.

Conclusion

Migration starts with the history of humanity and still continues. Although many different reasons are considered to be behind it, mainly economic reasons are focused in this

paper. As far as the theories based on economic reasons are analyzed, it can be seen that they can explain internal and external migration in Turkey. The problems experienced in urban areas in Turkey during industrialization mainly depend on the fact that this period was experienced not naturally as in Europe. Industrialization and urbanization/urbanization and migration to urban areas did not occur in a balanced way, so problems could not be solved and cities became centers of problems. The directors who dealt with these problems for the first time in 1960 are Refiğ and Sağıroğlu. They created the best art products that focused on migration through the way they represent the issue.

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