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UNDER THE CELLULOID SKIN

A Social Semiotic Analysis of Tunç Okan's Debut Film *Otobüs*

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

TAYFUN TEZEL

Division of Art History and Visual Studies
Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences
Lund University
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Supervisor: **Jonnie Eriksson**
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*for Günter Wallraff
the inspirer of the Swedish verb 'wallraffa'*

*'Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism
should also remain silent about fascism.'*

Max Horkheimer

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Abstract

Cinema is an externalised, materialised form of collective memory in which one can find experiences, desires, traumas, ideas, hopes and imaginations of the given society. One can - with the utilisation of the right set of tools and methods - learn a lot about a society by studying its cinema. In this context, this thesis offers a social semiotic analysis of the debut film *Otobüs* (The Bus, 1974) by the Turkish film director Tunç Okan. The film, which follows the dystopian journey of nine Turkish workers from Turkey to Sweden, who are cheated by an international human trafficking gang, offers a very rich set of symbols that constructs an alternative socio-historical record from the point of view of often ignored *other*, namely the immigrants of whom Okan himself is one. This thesis -by utilising the Marxist social semiotic approaches of Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress- attempts to make the cinematographic signifiers visible and connect these signifiers to the socio-historical signifieds. In relation to the analysis of the film the thesis also introduces a new concept *transboundary cinema* in order to avoid shortcomings in the existing terminology dealing with the multi-transitional structure of the film and to be able to recognise the film's unique qualities.

Keywords: Social semiotics, Transboundary cinema, Marxism, Immigration, Orientalism

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Under the Celluloid Skin

A social semiotic analysis of Tunç Okan's debut film Otobüs

1. Introduction

In his book: *Sculpting in Time*, the renowned Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky compares cinema and sculpture:

We could define it [cinema] as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it—so the film-maker, from a “lump of time” made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image.¹

From Tarkovsky's comparison one can attain two important claims: Firstly a poetic definition of cinema which elevates cinema into the league of fine arts by associating it with the sculpture, one of the oldest and most established art forms. Secondly and more importantly (for the argument of this thesis), an insight about the positioning of cinema (as an art form), the director (as an artist/creator) and life, as well as their relation to one another.

In his comparison Tarkovsky underlines the fact that the main material of cinema is time, which is *made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts*. A film director as an artist/creator is the one who processes the *lump of time* in order to create her/his artwork. Through his/her aesthetic and ideological filters, the film director processes the *lump of time* into a unique completed cinematic form. However, with Tarkovsky's comparison in mind, one can claim that just as a completed marble sculpture is different from the shapeless marble block that it stems from, but still carries the qualities of it, so does a completed film in one way or another, continue to include the social and historical texture of its time regardless of the director's intentions.

¹ A Tarkovskij, *Sculpting in time: reflections on the cinema*, Bodley Head, London, 1986, p. 63-64.

Cinema is one of the forms of the '*visual constructions of the social field*'² and as Martin Lister and Lis Wells rightly point out it is almost impossible to separate the representations, visual or otherwise, from the the practices and cultures of everyday life.³ In that context an artist can be conceptualised as the witness of her/his age and the artwork(s) as the solidification of that witness testimony.

According to one of the most cited anecdote of cinema history (considered by some as an urban myth) said when Lumière Brothers were screening one of their and cinema history's first films *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station) in 1895 in Paris, some in the audience got so scared that they started screaming and escaping when they saw the life size train on the projection screen because they thought it was real and coming towards them. Whether or not it is true, as the anecdote/myth suggests, cinema has special relations to reality. In fact cinema is one of the most, if not the most, realistic art forms and it is very successful in recording and re-producing the reality. In this context cinema (due to its special relations with time and space) has a significant place in testifying. Cinema (especially the social realist cinema) provides an alternative documentations of the social reality in the layers of the film(s) regardless of the plot.

With the references to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critique of culture industry and their re-articulation of Leo Lowenthal's famous expression, it is possible to define cinema as the '*psychoanalysis in reverse*'.⁴ Cinema is an externalised, materialised form of society's subconscious in which one can find desires, traumas, memories, histories and imaginations. With the utilisation of the right set of tools and methods, it is possible to subtract knowledge about any given society from its cinema.

This thesis, in this context aims to engage in a dialog with the Turkish film director Tunç Okan's debut film *Otobüs*, The Bus (1974) to make hermeneutical reading/analysis of the film by applying approaches of Robert Hodge and Gunther

² Mitchell, W. J. T., *What do pictures want?: the lives and loves of images*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005, p.345.

³ M Lister & L Wells, *Seeing beyond belief: 'Cultural studies as an approach to analysing the visual'* in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, T van Leeuwen and C Jewitt (Ed.) Sage, 2001, p. 61.

⁴Adorno, Theodor W., *Essays on music*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 2002, p. 50.

Krees which are solidified in their collective book *Social Semiotics* in order to make the subconscious of the film conscious and extract an alternative documentation of the society by establishing the connections between film's cinematographic reality and socio-political realities of the time.

The results of this hermeneutic attempt of social semiotic reading of the film can be completely 'wrong' and I may completely 'misunderstand' the film. However, as Asuman Suner suggests, '*even misunderstanding has a undeniable power*'⁵

1.1. *Background*

Okan, a dentist by training, started his cinema career as an actor in 1965. He achieved fame in short time after playing roles in successful commercial movies. In 1967, Okan immigrated to Switzerland, quitting his career in commercial cinema industry, which he accused of anaesthetising and preventing society from understanding the real conditions that they live in.

In 1974 Okan had his debut as an independent director with the film *Otobüs* (The Bus) based on an actual event. Okan was concurrently the scriptwriter, editor, producer of, and actor in the film. The story is about a bus full of illegal workers from rural parts of Turkey who are left without passports or money in the middle of Sergels Torg, the most central public square of Stockholm, by an international human trafficking mafia.

Beyond its rich symbolism, the film offers an alternative presentation of 1970s Sweden, which challenges Swedish society's commonly shared self-perception of openness and tolerance, as reflected in cultural narrations such as Lukas Moodysson's film *Tillsammans*, Together (2000).

⁵ '*Diğer yandan yanlış anlamının da yabana atılmayacak bir gücü var.*' Translation is mine. A Suner, 'Yusuf'u yanlış anlamak' in *Bu Kapıdan Gireceksin: Türk sineması üzerine denemeler*, (ed.) U. T. Arslan, Metis, Istanbul, 2012, p. 57.

Otobüs also provides a rich source for comparison between closed and underdeveloped Turkey and the developed Sweden during the 'golden age'⁶ of its modernist social democratic project.

In 1985, Okan made his second film *Cumartesi Cumartesi* (Drôle de samedi),⁷ which is a loose adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's⁸ short story *Die Wurst* (The Sausage) from the point of view of an immigrant worker in Switzerland.

Cumartesi Cumartesi can be conceptualised as a negotiation attempt of an immigrant with a new culture and society in order to create belonging for himself by commenting on the local literature. Okan's choice of the script for the film also indicates a shift in his relation with reality, from real event to literature; from unmediated to mediated reality.

In 1992, Okan made his third film *Sarı Mercedes* (Mercedes mon Amour), a close adaptation of Adalet Ağaoğlu's⁹ novel *Fikrimin İnce Güllü*. Both film and novel centre on a Turkish *Gästarbeiter* who works as a waste collector in Germany, whose ultimate dream is to buy a Mercedes and return to his village where he once was an underdog. The worker manages to buy his Mercedes and immediately starts a long and dystopian journey to his village, which he will never find. The worker becomes *homeless*¹⁰ once more, this time in his own country.

In my opinion these three films are sufficiently unified by their dystopian narratives, themes and their search for home and identity. Therefore, I prefer to name these films as *The Trilogy of Migration*. In this context, each film corresponds to different stages of migration, an 'ideal' migration for the *Gästarbeiterprogramm*¹¹, but a catastrophic one for the *Gästarbeiter*:

⁶ L Erixon, *The golden age of the Swedish model: the coherence between capital accumulation and economic policy in Sweden in the early postwar period*, Stockholm University, October 1996, p. 4.

⁷ He was again director, scriptwriter, editor of, and actor in the film.

⁸ Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-1990), a prominent Swiss author and dramatist.

⁹ Adalet Ağaoğlu (1929-), respected Turkish novelist and playwright.

¹⁰ A Sivanandan 'Introduction' in G Wallraff, *Lowest of the Low*, Methuen, London, 1988, p. xiv.

¹¹ The *Gästarbeiterprogramm* has never intended to have permanent immigrants and integration as it was clearly indicated by the name, *Guest Workers Program*. The workers were guests. They were to go back after a period of successful *exploitation*.

Migration and its problematics in *Otobüs*;

Being an immigrant and questions of integration in *Cumartesi Cumartesi*;

Return to 'home' in *Sarı Mercedes*.

The fact that the films take place in different countries with different stories and actors, underlines the transcending nature of the questions beyond any specific place or/and individual. It adds an existentialist layer of universality both to the questions and Okan's cinema.

Even though the trilogy promises a highly interesting and fruitful subject to think on, the thesis will focus on only the first film of the trilogy because of the limitations in time and the space.

1.2. *Relevance of the Work*

Okan is one of the first *Gastarbeiter* who questions the issue of migration and identity through his firsthand experiences with a postcolonial awareness in cinema. His film *Otobüs*, provides a rich source of information coded with a creative symbolism, which by the application of right theories and methods can be transformed into an alternative socio-historical record of the time. This alternative record can surely contribute to a variety of ongoing discussions from migration to orientalism, from identity to occidentalism and their surrounding discourses from the point of view of the often ignored *other*, the immigrant. These features of Okan's work give its significance to the project.

1.3. *Research Question, Research Goals and Hypothesis*

The research questions of the project consist of one main and several interconnected sub-questions. The main question of the project will be the following:

How does the film signify the social and political fabric of its time?

This question will be further detailed with the following sub-questions:

Are the film's representations of the topic (migration, human trafficking, xenophobia...) specific to any national context?

How does the film, in the context of these representations, relate to existing concepts developed for the recognition of transnational aspects of the films, such as transnational and exilic cinema? Is there a need for a new a concept?

Does Okan's film provide an example for nationalist, orientalist or occidentalist cinema in its representations?

The project firmly believes that cinema, especially the social realist cinema has inseparable ties to the political, social and ideological fabric of the time. The project sets its hypothesis with that belief in mind and claims that there are clear connections between the cinematographic reality of the film and the social-political reality. In this context the film should be understood as an alternative record. However, the thesis is also aware of the fact that the film has far more complex relation to the reality than just being a documentation of it.

The film transgresses several established borders -including that of social realist cinema- and provides a unique example for which the existing terminology falls short. The thesis therefore claims that the film requires a new concept for a full recognition of its nature.

The goal of the project in this context is to establish the connections between the cinematographic signifiers and the social-political signified of the time period of the film. In this process the thesis will introduce a new concept that would be helpful in avoiding the short comings of the existing terminology and therefore enrich the discussion.

1.4. Theories and Methods

The project will mainly be a social semiotics analysis of the film *Otobüs* based on Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge's approaches in order to investigate the role of the films in the visual establishments of critical discourses.

The thesis will utilise social semiotic analysis to study Okan's *Otobüs* in order to discover relatively unknown knowledge about migration to the non-Turkish speaking

world. It will be seen from the point of view of an immigrant and attain a deeper understanding of the film and its symbolic significance. In cinematic literature the predominant focus on the matter reflects the view of cultures and societies that receive the migration, not of the immigrants.

Hodge and Krees' formulation of semiotics challenges the '*mainstream semiotic*', which '*attributes power to meaning, instead of meaning to power. It dissolves boundaries within the field of semiotics, but tacitly accepts an impenetrable wall cutting off semiosis from society, and semiotics from social and political thought.*'¹² Instead they propose a different approach that they derive from Marx in which semiosis is an inseparable part of the social fabric and it must be understood always in the context of a struggle between oppressor and the oppressed.

According to Hodge and Kress a '*text [film, image or symbol] is only a trace of discourse, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading. Yet discourse disappears too rapidly, surrounding a flow of texts. Analysis needs to be able to take account of both.*'¹³ In the same context social semiotic analysis of a film requires the study of the social fabric of the time of the film in order to fully understand the *frozen* but unfixed message.

Yet even the closest social semiotic analysis can not guarantee to avoid personal interpretations as Hodge and Kress reminds us:

*'Traditional semiotics likes to assume that the relevant meanings are frozen and fixed in the text itself, to be extracted and decoded by the analyst by reference to a coding system that is impersonal and neutral, and universal for users of the code. Social semiotics cannot assume that texts produce exactly the meanings and the effects of that their authors hope for: it is precisely the struggle and their uncertain outcomes that must be studied at the level of social action, and their effects in the production of meaning.'*¹⁴

In the light of Hodge and Kress' approaches and warnings this thesis will provide unavoidably personal readings of the film while trying to provide a more

¹² R Hodge & G Krees, *Social Semiotics*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 2-3.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.12.

general analysis of the film with the references to social and political events of the time.

Due to its mainly social realist approach to cinema and its socially involved topic, Okan's film is directly related to the social fabric of the time. In fact Okan's film and its characters are always in negotiation with the dominant culture of the space where they live as immigrant. Thus Okan's cinema as a whole is a sum of a constant flux. In that context Hodge and Kress' social semiotic approaches promise to be a very useful tool for the investigation of Okan's cinema.

The analysis of the film will not be limited to the approaches of Kress and Hodge. The close reading of the film will utilise some other visual or non-visual materials, theories and approaches without necessarily following the chronological order in the development of these theories. Thus the analysis will use some material and approaches like social semiotics of Kress and Hodge itself which did not exist when the film was made. Even though the thesis will utilise a variety of material and approaches the undertone of the thesis will be a Marxist one.

In addition to the social semiotics analysis, the project will introduce a new concept called *Transboundary Cinema* to be able to go beyond the existing terminology which has been developed to recognise and underline the trans-national features of the films, in order to cover Okan's cinema in a wider and deeper perspective.¹⁵

The concept of *Transboundary Cinema* will be developed in an analogy to the geographical concept *transboundary river*, which is a river that crosses at least one political border, either within a national or international boundary. The project will demonstrate that Okan's cinema crosses not only political and national borders but also the boundaries between cultures, languages, genres, literary forms; between

¹⁵ In fact there are already similar terms existing in film studies with the intention of describing certain forms of boundary crossings or transitions such as *transnational*, *accented*, *exilic* and *diasporic cinema* of Hamid Naficy or *nomadic cinema* of Deleuze. However none of these terms are capable of fully recognising the multi-transitional nature of Okan's cinema. For example Naficy's *transnational cinema*, while recognising the boundary crossing of political and/or national borders, is incapable of recognising the transitions between genres or production practices. In this context *transboundary cinema* can be understood as an umbrella term in which both Naficy's and Deleuze's concepts fall under. Furthermore, the *transboundary cinema* concept can be adapted to other declines of the visual culture as well.

independent and commercial cinemas; between directing, acting and writing; between utopia and dystopia and between visual cultures.

1.5. *Survey of the Field and the Significance of the Project*

Visual culture and migration is one of the rising fields of study, both globally and in Turkey.¹⁶ Given this, a number of valuable contributions, mostly focusing on identity and belonging, have been made in the field of visual culture, from cinema to photography.

In addition to that there are a number of studies about Turkish cinema and directors however, there has been very limited interest in Okan.

Okan and his first film *Otobüs* are briefly mentioned in Hamid Naficy's book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*¹⁷, however Naficy's work did not provide any new material or discussion that would deepen the interest for the film and/or its director. Okan is up to this day left fairly under researched and undiscovered both within Turkish and international visual studies.

The project aims to contribute to fill this gap by conducting an extensive study on Okan and his first film *Otobüs* in the context of migration, identity and surrounding discourses.

1.6. *Structure of the Work*

The project consists of two interconnected steps: Analysis and discussion.

The analysis part covers three stages: The first step of the analysis will be the establishment of the historical context of the time in order to fully grasp the contextual, social and ideological fabric of the film's production and screening periods. The second step will be the application of social semiotics analysis onto Okan's film with the help of

¹⁶ For example: Suner, Asuman, *New Turkish cinema: belonging, identity and memory*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2010 and Dönmez-Colin, Gönül, *Turkish cinema: identity, distance and belonging*, Reaktion, London, 2008.

¹⁷ H Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2001. p. 257.

the previously gathered contextual information. In this step the film will be analysed scene by scene. The social semiotic analysis of the film will be followed by the third step, a section that reflects some of the reactions towards the film.

The analysis part will be followed by the final step of the project, namely the discussion section where a new concept, *Transboundary cinema* will be introduced in order to recognise the multi-transitional structure of the film.

2. Analysis

2.1. *Contextualisation of the Otobüs*

In this chapter, the thesis will provide historical and socio-political background information about director Tunç Okan and the time period when the film *Otobüs* was made. This is done in order to establish a context for the film. By doing so the thesis aims to provide a necessary ground for building the following chapter which will focus on the social semiotic analysis of the film.

During the 1950s and 60s West Germany signed bilateral recruitment agreements with several then underdeveloped or developing countries such as Yugoslavia, Italy and Greece in order to acquire *Gastarbeiter* to meet the extreme labour demands resulting from so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). In 1961, as a part of the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* (guest workers program), Turkey signed a similar agreement with West Germany. Many other industrialised European countries such as Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark introduced similar programs following the example of West Germany, which opened the doors to massive immigration. Millions of immigrants moved to industrialised European countries to look for jobs. This unprecedented migration movement brought many undesired effects with it. As it was famously put by Swiss novelist and playwright Max Rudolf Fisher, Europe with its still fresh colonialist reflexes wanted to have just *workers* but they got *people* instead.¹⁸ None of the countries, neither with their infrastructure nor superstructures, were ready for such movement of that scale. This caused countless tragedies which unsurprisingly found their reflections in literature and visual culture. Günter Wallraff's book *Ganz unten* (Lowest of the low) in which Wallraff documents personally experienced mistreatment both at workplaces and in the society in general after posing as Turkish *Gastarbeiter* Ali, is one of the monumental examples of this kind in literature. This thesis firmly believes that Turkish film director Tunç Okan's debut film *Otobüs* is the cinematic equivalent to Wallraff's work in the same context.

¹⁸ N Gordon (Ed.) *From the margins of globalization: critical perspectives on human rights*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Md., 2004, p.182.

In 1960, Turkey experienced the first in a line of military coups, which in the following decades would be a “routine” part of Turkish politics. On the 27th of May 1960, Turkish military overthrew the *Demokrat Parti* (Democrat Party) Government, which was the very first democratically elected government of Turkish history. The military used the corruption scandals and the party’s anti-democratic practices as their excuse to overthrow the government. The military arrested the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes who would be sentenced to death and executed in 1961. The military coup had a huge public approval and support so it is often regarded as *27 Mayıs İhtilali* (Revolution of 27 May). In 1961 Turkish military established a constituent assembly involving different sections of the society in order to create a new constitution and the military stepped back from the politics. The constituent assembly completed the new constitution in 1961 and the constitution was in force until 1980, where it was abolished by another military coup. The constitution of 1961 is by many academics and scholars, still considered as the most democratic constitution of Turkish history. The constitution guaranteed an atmosphere of freedom of speech and expression, lifted the censorship and the restrictions of social and political organisations. This freedom found its reflections in cinema.

1960s was also the period where the Cold War politics and propaganda of both sides were highly visible in Turkey as a country which is a member of NATO and had borders with USSR, The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Under these circumstances Turkish cinema was highly politicised in 1960s. During this period cinema was dominated by heated discussions about social realism which originates from the post-WW2 Italian cinema movement, Italian Neorealism. This can also be related to the official art style of Soviet Union, the movement of Socialist Realism. The discussions on cinema and its relations to life were not limited to these movements. One of the other dominant discussions was the national cinema discussion. Some of the prominent film directors of the time were trying to establish an unique national cinematographic language and aesthetics which would feed itself from the classical Turk-Islamic art forms. This movement can be related to the anti-communist official ideology of Turkish state during the Cold War.

In this extremely politicised context Okan was one of the most famous film stars of the mainstream cinema, or *Yeşilçam* (Green Pine), a commonly known name

for mainstream cinema. It refers to Hollywood; both in the name and also in the form of narration.

Tunç Okan, also known as Okan Külen (B.1942), started his cinema career as an actor in 1965 after winning a modelling competition organised by the famous film magazine Ses. The magazine promised the winner an acting career with the most famous actors and actresses of the time. Okan signed a contract with film makers and he played important roles in famous and commercially successful films and in return he gained big fame in a short time. In 1967, while he was enjoying his fame and stardom, Okan surprisingly quit his acting career through a highly critical interview with the newspaper *Milliyet*. After this he migrated to Switzerland. In the interview Okan explains his motivation behind his decision as follows:

Turkish cinema today is an entertainment apparatus that is harmful to Turkish society. Every year around 250 films direct society to fighting, robbery, making money without working. These films, with their disgusting exploitation of feeling, anaesthetise people and prevent the Turkish public from understanding the real conditions that they live in. This is one of the worst things that can be done to Turkish society, the majority of which is poor...¹⁹

With the highly politicised context of the cinema discussions of the time with Turkey in mind, it is easier to understand the motives of Okan's decision to quit acting in commercial escapist cinema and his sharp critique. On the other hand the interview can also be seen as a signal of Okan's upcoming film *Otobüs*.

In 1974, after a relatively long break, Okan had his debut as an independent director with the film *Otobüs* (The Bus) which was based on an actual event. Okan was, concurrently the scriptwriter, editor, producer of, and actor in the film. The story is about a bus full of illegal workers (nine in total) from rural parts of Turkey who are left without passports or money, by an international human trafficking mafia, in the middle of Sergels Torg - the most central public square of Stockholm.

¹⁹'Bugün Türk sineması, Türk halkına karşı zararlı bir eğlence vasıtasıdır. Her yıl 250 kadar film Türk halkını kavgaya, soyguna, avantadan para kazanmaya yöneltmekte yada aşağılık bir his istismarı ile insanı afyonlamakta ve Türk halkının içinde bulunduğu durumu kavramasına engel olmaktadır. Bu yirminci yüzyılda memleketin çoğu fakir olan halkına yapılabilecek en büyük kötülüklerden biridir.' Milliyet, 19.03.1967, Translation is mine.

The film was made in 1974, just a year after the 1973 Oil Crisis. The Oil Crisis started when the *Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries* (OAPEC) proclaimed an oil embargo on the countries that supported Israel during the *Yom Kippur War* that same year. The embargo affected the world economy and caused a significant slowdown in the economic growth in the industrialised countries, since much of those countries depend on the petroleum products as their energy sources. Because of the economic crisis, West German Government issued *Anwerbestopp (Recruitment Ban)* on 23 November 1973, which effectively 'halt the flow of guest workers from outside the *European Economic Community (EEC)*'.²⁰ Several other countries followed West Germany with the decision. Turkey was not, and still is not, a member of EEC and because of that, *Anwerbestopp* made it impossible for Turkish workers to legally search for jobs in West Germany and other industrialised European countries. These legal restrictions created an illegal market for human traffickers.

²⁰ Chin, Rita, *The guest worker question in postwar Germany*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.89.

2.2. Social Semiotic Analysis of the *Otobüs*

In this section, the thesis will provide a social semiotic analysis of the film *Otobüs* by mainly utilising the approaches of Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge in order to investigate the connections between the cinematographic representations of the film and the social reality of the time.

During the analysis of the film the victims of the human trafficking gang will be named as 'worker' even though non of them are seen while they are working. The reason behind that naming is the Marxist conceptualisation of the world. According to Marx the capitalist society consists of two main classes: the capitalist (the bourgeoisie) who owns the means of production, and the workers (the proletariat) who must sell their labour to survive. In this context the passengers of the bus are definitely the workers who travel to another country with the hope of selling their labour.

Director: Tunç Okan

Scriptwriter: Tunç Okan

Cinematograph: Güneş Karabuda

Producer(s): Tunç Okan, Utku Gürgen

Actors: Tuncel Kurtiz, Aras Ören, Björn Gedda, Hasan Gül, Leif Ahrle, Nuri Sezer, Tunç Okan, Ünal Nurkan, Yüksel Topçugürler

Music: Ömer Zülfü Livaneli, Leon Françoli, Pierre Favre

The film *Otobüs* (Bus) is the first film that Okan directed. He completed the film in 1974, but because of the censorship the film was not screened in Turkey in the same year as it was being screened at international film festivals. This is the reason why some sources have 1976 as the year of the film, as is the case in the online film database Internet Movie Database, IMDb.

2.2.1 Close reading of the film

In this part of the chapter the thesis will provide a scene by scene analysis/close reading of the film. By the term *scene* this thesis understands the action in a single location and/or continuous time. The definition of the term scene has significantly more dependence on time than the location because of the parallel editing technique. In this context the thesis will define its scenes according to continuity in time rather than the location.

This analysis/close reading of the film will provide unavoidable personal interpretations, as it is the case with all other hermeneutic practices. The interpretations of the thesis is by no means absolute. The film is subject to countless other confirming or contradicting interpretations.

Scene 1

The film opens with still images of rusty bus parts with the background music of a traditional Turkish stringed instrument *bağlama* and the first image appearing on the screen is a text reading '*Bir Tunç Okan Filmi*' (a film of Tunç Okan). Such texts which underlines the director's name was not common in cinema of Turkey at the time. This detail can be interpreted as the planned auteur approach of Okan to his cinema, which would become more clear with the completion of his second and third films. In my opinion the films creates a trilogy of migration, which I would like to name: *The Trilogy of Migration*.

The music of *bağlama* in the opening of the film is a clear reference to the traditional values of the workers who are most probably from the rural parts of Turkey judging from their appearances and dialects. The soundtrack of the film also has a very interesting detail. The Turkish composer and the performer of the films music, Ömer Zülfü Livaneli, was in exile in Sweden because of the political reasons, at the the time when the film was made. This detail is one of the facts that makes the film the subject of transnational cinema discussions, which will be further developed later in the text.

Still images of the parts of the bus can be interpreted as signals of distraction of the unity of the bus which would later be established as the symbol of the lost *home*, thus the alienation of the workers.

In the traditional Turkish culture home is associated with women and even though Turkish language is a gender neutral language, one can claim that the vocabulary for home (*ev, yuva in Turkish*) and concept of home is more female than male. In fact, it is possible to explain this situation with traditional gender roles which assigns the home and other home related spaces such as kitchen to women while assigning the public spaces to men. It is also possible to support this claim with the proverbs in Turkish. One of them is '*yuvayı dışı kuş yapar*' (the one who creates/produces the home is the female bird). Also the home is often associated with land/country as the idiom '*anavatan*' (motherland) clearly suggests. In fact this approach is not unique to Turkish culture, to the contrary it is commonly shared by other cultures. In this context with references to the groundbreaking article of Laura Mulvey *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* it is possible to claim that the bus is associated with the home thus with the female body and the fragmentation of the bus parts is the symbolic equivalence of the fragmentation of the female body. As Mulvey suggests the female body is transformed into an object for the supposed male gaze by the fragmentation.²¹

Scene 2

Shortly after the opening scene of the film we see the old and rusty bus drive through an icy Swedish landscape in wintertime. After a little while the bus stops by a completely frozen lake. On a piece of newspaper used as table cloth, the workers gather the food that they have with and share it among them. In fact, the workers have nothing to eat that deserves to be called food. What they have is only some pieces of bread, some onion, a couple of tomatoes and some cheese. The driver comes a little later and sits with the workers to eat with them. When he notice that there is almost no food, he says, '*There is nothing left to eat! That is not even*

²¹ L Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Erens, Patricia (ed.), *Issues in feminist film criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p.36.

enough only for me!'. Some of the workers look at him with an expression of disgust in their face. The driver continues to speak, *'Never mind. You will start working tomorrow anyways. There is plenty of food here. You will be like a pig in ten days.'* One of the workers looks at the driver and shakes his head while saying *'Forgive us God.'* After finishing their 'meal' the workers gather around a bonfire and start making music with small instruments such as tambourine and wooden spoons. These are instruments often used in Turkish folk music. One of the workers (acted by Okan himself) stays separate from the rest of the workers and he seems thoughtful. It is shown that he is thinking about a woman who is collecting cotton in a big cotton field together with some other woman. As it was argued earlier the woman that the worker daydreams of, may be his wife or his lover whom the worker hopes to reunite with after finding a better life. It could also be a visual symbol for his mother as well as a symbol of his county, his motherland, personified in the body of an unknown woman. The daydream of the worker is shown in black and white in contrast to the rest of the film, which is in colour. The black and white moving image may be understood as the symbol of nostalgia. The same scene can also be seen as the establishment of the distinction between the lost homeland embodied in a body of a female in black and white and the promising, 'colourful' new land. The black and white image is also a symbol of the underdeveloped condition of the worker's homeland.

This scene provides a number of important information about the workers' socio-economic situation, as well as their cultural and religious values. They are extremely poor and religious (one of them is even shown while he is praying). Even to a degree that they would ask for forgiveness from *Allah* (the God of Islam), when they hear the name of the pig, which is considered extremely dirty and forbidden to eat according to Islam.

The part of the scene where workers dance around the bonfire represents their hopeful mood and cultural unity.

They do not carry any commodity of material value with them but as the scene suggest: even though they do not have anything physical with them to connect them to where and what they belong to, they still carry their values, hopes, desires and culture within them.

In the mentioned scene the driver boldly differs from the workers with his ungrateful and greedy attitude. The attitude of the driver is clearly rejected by the workers which is made obvious by their condemning looks and prayer for forgiveness. In the scene the workers and the driver creates an opposition. An opposition of values and an opposition of world views. The driver represents the greed of an individualist industrial capitalism while the workers stand for the more traditional values of pre-industrial times, such as solidarity and sharing. The driver is the embodiment of the selfish individual of the industrial capitalism while the workers represents pre-industrial times with their communal practices.



Fig 1. A caption from the film, which identifies the workers with the old and rusty bus.

Scene 3

In the following scene the driver gathers the workers, to take a photo of these 'exotic' pre-industrial people as a *souvenir*. Meanwhile the workers have been preparing themselves for the 'civilisation' by shaving or grooming their hair. He shows his camera to the workers and says, '*Look at this machine. Latest American invention. Just push the button and get the photo immediately. What a civilisation.*' The workers get together and pose in front of the bus and the driver takes their photo.

The monologue of the driver (since he is the only one that talks so far) exposes the driver's understanding of 'civilisation' which in his view is equal to advanced materials and technology. The old and rusty image of the bus creates a symbolic contrast to the new and advanced technology of the rich countries that the driver praises. In this context the symbolic relations between the characters of the film and the objects become more obvious. The old and rusty bus represents the workers as the photo makes clear, while the consuming society with its new and advanced gadgets is represented by the driver.

The photo session scene of the driver and the black and white image of the female in the daydream of the worker mentioned earlier underlines the bold distinction between the homeland of the workers and the 'civilisation' of the driver.

Scene 4

The bus leaves the frozen lake and continues its journey by passing by idyllic places, such as a beautiful house in the middle of the forest, and then finally arrives to Stockholm. In the city traffic the driver notices a police car behind the bus and panics. The police car starts chasing the bus, but after a short while the driver escapes from the police and takes the bus in to Sergels Torg, which is closed to car traffic. Passersby look at the bus with curious and surprised eyes while the driver parks the bus in the middle of the square. After parking, the driver turns to the workers and says, '*Okay, give me the money, we arrived to the country!*' The workers slowly collect the money, as if they were performing some sort of ritual and hand it in

to the driver. After receiving the money the driver says, *'Now, everybody must give the rest of his money, by putting them into his passport, so I can go to the police station and register it. This is the custom of this country.'* The workers start to do what the driver tells them to do. The driver passes a small hand bag to the workers and adds *'Do not forget the coins and put them into the bag!'* One by one the workers give all of their money with their passports to the driver. After receiving the money and the passports the driver says, *'Okay. The police station is nearby. After I register your money and collect your working permits, I will immediately return. As we talked earlier you will start your jobs.'* The driver opens the door of the bus, but when he is about to leave the bus he stops for a while and says to the workers *'Do not show yourselves to the police before I come back. If you do, the police will send you back because you do not have working permits.'* The driver leaves the bus and arrives to the airport after passing through some parts of the city with the company of a Swedish song of a street musician with lyrics of it describing the corrupt nature of the driver playing in the background. He collects his flight ticket from *Lufthansa* and throws the passports of the workers in a nearby trash can.

The scene should be interpreted with a reference to the political and economical developments of the time. After the declaration of *Anwerbestopp* (Recruitment Ban) by the West German Government on the 23rd of November in 1973 the restrictions created an illegal market of human trafficking from the countries outside of EEC to the industrialised countries of Europe. The film *Otobüs* is one of the reflections of the tragedies which are the result of this illegal market. The illegal immigrants (the workers in this case) are the victims of heartless traffickers who are embodied in the image of the driver who collects even the last coins of the workers with the promises of a better life. In my opinion, the driver is the symbolic embodiment of *the capitalist* whom Marx defines as *'the most ruthless and inhuman of exploiters, entirely heartless and indifferent to the plight of wage earners'*²².

With the colonialist history of Europe in mind, it is possible to conceptualise the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* or similar worker recruitment programs as new forms of slave trade. Frisch's previously mentioned quote exposes this neocolonial European

²² Churchich, Nikolas, *Marxism and Alienation*, Fairleigh Dickenson Univ. Press, 1990, p.85.

motives of the issue by underlying the imaginary distinction between *workers* and *people*.

According to Karl Marx, and many other anti-capitalist theorists, there are undeniable similarities between wage labour of the capitalist industrial era and classic chattel slavery of pre-industrial era. Some of the theorists even argues that wage labour is even worse than the slavery '*as the chattel slave is valuable property his master has an interest in preserving his life and strength, while the wage-slave is always at risk of being thrown out of employment and left to starve*'²³ and propose the term *wage-slavery* instead of wage labour. In this context it is reasonable to claim that the newest form of slavery institutionalised by the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* or similar worker recruitment programs, (one might call it *neo-slavery*) and its subjects (*neo-slaves*) have even worse conditions than the *wage-slaves* since on top of already miserable conditions of the *wage-slavery*, the *neo-slaves* have to face with the difficulties of being immigrants. The existence of the migrant *neo-slaves* are regulated by a tight set of rules. This is not only in a sense of being allowed to be in a particular location but also in a sense of surviving in the guest worker receiving countries (*neo-colonisers*). A quote of Marx which he wrote to explain the condition of the wage-labourer in the industrial capitalism, also explains the conditions of the *Gastarbeiter* very well: '*He [Gastarbeiter] can work only with their permission, hence live only with their permission.*'²⁴ In this context the precision of the title of Wallraff's book in reflecting the observations regarding the living and working conditions of the *Gastarbeiter* becomes more clear. *Gastarbeiter* are *ganz unten* (*the lowest of the low*).

Beyond providing a political and historical context, the scene also provides a set of visual symbols which can deepen the interpretation. One of them is the trashed passports of the workers. This image signifies the loss of the *identity* of the workers, not only in a material sense of the word *identity* as a form of documentation (a passport in this case) but also in a conceptual sense of the word. With the loss of the passports the workers loses their belonging to their land.

²³ Stefan, 'Are you a wage slave?', *Socialist Standart*, Vol. 106, No. 1269, May 2010, p. 16.

²⁴ K Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' in *Marx today: selected works and recent debates*, 1. ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, p.151.

The other visual symbol in the scene is the ticket of *Lufthansa*. The driver flies to an unspecified place (which is shown to be Hamburg in the following scenes) which underlines the international nature of the human trafficking gang.



Fig 2. A caption from the film which shows the bus in the middle of the Sergels Torg in Stockholm

From the cinematographic point of view, Okan's decision of the location for the film should also be seen as an important symbol. The place is in no way accidental. Sergels torg is the most central square of the Swedish capital Stockholm. By placing the bus and the workers in the very centre of Stockholm, thus of Sweden, Okan symbolically places the workers in the centre of the Swedish civilisation. This connection can be supported with the help of etymological argument. The term *civilisation* comes from the Latin *civilis*, which means *civil* and it is related to the Latin *civis* (citizen) and *civitas* (city or city-state). A similar connection can be established in Turkish language as well. The word for civilisation in Turkish language is *medeniyet*, which comes from Arabic and originates from the Arabic word *mdn* meaning state or city. The connection between city and civilisation

is not only limited to etymology. Cities, especially the capital cities are the show cases of the countries. Capital cities are the places where the representatives of the countries' population such as governments, parliaments or ruling elites are located. In this context capital cities and their culture tells the most about the countries' civilisation.

The Sergels torg itself offers another symbolic reading because of the decoration of the square. Sergels torg is decorated with black and white triangular patterns, this colours combinations (with a little bit of free imagination) can be interpreted with the reference to neo-colonialism in which white represents the coloniser and the black the colonised.

Scene 5

After the driver leaves the workers in the bus without their legal documents and money, the workers continue to wait for the driver's return, but he never appears. The workers notice a policeman outside the bus and they close the curtains of the bus in order to hide themselves.

In that scene the police is given two different symbolic meanings. In a shot a local asks for direction from the police, thus the police becomes a symbol of security and trust. In a later shot the police is a symbol of danger for the illegal immigrants who hide themselves with the help of curtains.

In this scene the bus is transformed into a *home* where one can protect her/himself from the external threats. In that sense the bus can also be conceptualised as the symbolic equivalence of the mother's womb in which the foetus (worker) feels most secure. Later in the film some of the workers will be shown while they are sitting in the bus in a way that their positions clearly resemble that of the foetus. This approach is compatible with the earlier claim of conceptualising the bus as a mother or a fertile female.

Scene 6

In the scene the plane that the driver took arrives to Hamburg and the passengers pass through the passport control desk. All the passengers except the driver pass the control desk within a couple of seconds after an officer briefly controls the passports, but when the driver hands in his passport he gets a “special” treatment. The border control officer looks at the driver and at his passport suspiciously and keeps the passport for an extended study. The officer studies the passport carefully and finally allows the driver to pass the control desk, but this is not the end for the driver. He is stopped by another custom officer in the airport, who checks the driver's money-filled bag. The officer asks the driver to get naked for a body search. The driver gives in after an attempt of short lived resistance. The officers (now they become two) check the clothes of the driver inside out. After the search of the clothes is over, the actual body search starts. One of the officers asks the driver to open his mouth and ungently searches the driver's body. Later, the officer asks the driver to bend over. The driver resists and says that, *'You are looking for drugs, I do not involve in that kind of business.'* But this is not enough to stop the officers. One of the officers puts on medical gloves and performs an anal search on the driver without the driver's permission. The driver manages to free himself from the officers and tells them, *'Are you crazy? I am bringing money to your country, but you are making an anal search on me!'*

The scene provides a fruitful set of symbolism. The passport control scene clearly implies the official practices of the “normalised” racism of everyday life. With the historical context and racist practices of Nazi Germany during the 30s and 40s in mind, the scene makes a lot more sense.

It is also possible to interpret the scene in the context of the critique of biopolitics of Michel Foucault, in which he reminds us of the controlling and regulating practices of the authority over its subjects' body and life.



Fig 3. A photo showing a German doctor conducting a health check of the potential *Gastarbeiter*, while the body languages of the candidates express shame²⁵ (up) and a caption from the film.

²⁵ <http://cevdetalbay.wordpress.com/2011/02/21/asil-fotograf/>. Accessed on 18 April 2104. According to guest worker Yakup T. (shown in the same webpage while examining the photo) the photo is not representing the true nature of the medical examinations. According to him, who himself had been through a similar examination, the things shown photo is far more gentle than the reality. In reality the candidates were often examined without even their underwear.

According to Foucault, biopower is a *'number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.'*²⁶ The biopower is a technology of power that is used by the *authority* to control and regulate the behaviours of the people. Airports are maybe the places where the practices of biopower technology becomes the most visible.

In another context, the very scene can be related to the medical controls of the *Gastarbeiter* often conducted by German doctors before granting the potential workers permission to migrate to Germany, as it is shown in the image (*Fig. 3*).

In the same scene the reaction of the driver also provides an interesting point. The driver tries to protect himself from the inhumane treatment by referring to the money that he stole from the workers. In the case of the workers he was the perpetrator but now he is the *victim*. The driver is the embodiment of the typical, almost caricatural capitalist who thinks that money is the absolute purpose and can solve every problem. This interpretation is supported by the following scene where the driver pads the money-filled bag immediately after leaving the airport.

Scene 7

In the following scene the driver takes a taxi from the airport. During the journey the driver tries to communicate with the taxi driver but the taxi driver does not bother. During the journey the bus driver comments on a big bridge that the taxi drives over by saying *'Nice bridge'* but the taxi driver does not react at all. The driver finally leaves the taxi and delivers the bag to his boss, who speaks German. This again implies the international nature of the human trafficking gang.

The comment of the driver for the bridge is the extension of his praise of the "civilisation" which he equals to the infrastructural advancement.

²⁶ M Foucault, Senellart, Michel. & Davidson, Arnold Ira., *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2007, p.1.

While the driver travels to Hamburg, the workers in the bus continue to wait for the driver in vain. The natural needs of the workers like toilet, water and food starts to push the workers to their limits.

Scene 8

When it gets dark outside some of the workers hesitantly dare to leave the bus to look for food, water and toilet with the challenging fear of police hanging over them like the sword of Damocles. Two of the workers leave the bus and enter the nearby subway station. The first thing the workers see becomes a couple who have sex in a phone booth.

This is a very strong indication of the “strangeness” of the worker’s new country. The workers pass the couple in the booth without minding too much and reach the toilet. After the first two worker’s return, the others follow the same route to the toilet with curious but not minding looks. While two of the other workers are in the toilet, a Swedish man appears and asks the worker if they have drugs for him. The workers do not understand the question and leave the place.

The questioning character of the local man to the outsiders can be interpreted as a sign of the established prejudgement assuming that every outsider is a potential drug dealer or a criminal. An idea which xenophobic political movements still utilise even today.

Scene 9

In the following scene the workers start to discover their new neighbourhood surrounding their *home*, the bus. The workers look at the colourful shop windows which display a variety of consumption goods; clothes on half naked female dummies, porn movies and magazines in the windows of the sex shops.

This scene provides a critique of the consumer society in which everything, including the human body (as it is the case for naked models and porn industry), is transformed into a buyable and sellable commodities ready for consumption. In this context the film offers a sharp critique of advanced capitalist consumer society from

the point of view of the citizens of undeveloped countries. With the driver's glorifications of the technologically advanced commodities in mind, the critique of the consumer society can be elaborated even further. From the point of view of the driver, the western civilisation and achievements of the society are equalised to the technical advancement. In the same context the citizens of the society are transformed into the robots who are the producers and the operators of these technologically advanced tools and commodities. This situation can be conceptualised in the context of critique alienation of Marx. As Marx reminds us:

The worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the less he possesses. What is embodied in the product of his labour is no longer his own. The greater this product is, therefore, the more he is diminished. The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently, outside himself, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.²⁷

In the same Marxist context the problematic approach of the driver to the commodities and their significance can be understood with reference to the Marxist dialectic conceptualisation of relationship between infrastructure and superstructure. According to Marx, superstructure of the society which corresponds to legal, political, ideological, religious, artistic and philosophical achievements of the society is based on the economic fundament namely the relations of productions of the society.²⁸

Judging from his distinctive outfit and his Turkish passport in the airport scene, the driver is also an immigrant. For him it is an almost impossible task to understand the superstructure of the society that he lives in. The driver, who does not have the necessary cultural and intellectual capital, as Pierre Bourdieu would have said, reduces the superstructural achievements of the society (if there are any) to technical advancements and commodities. He misses the sophisticated details of the superstructure and instead he glorifies the infrastructure. This situation can be

²⁷ K Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, New York City, International Publishers, 1964, pp. 13-14.

²⁸ K Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy in Lawrence H. Simon (Ed.), *Karl Marx, Selected Writings*, Hackett Publishing, 2004, p.211.

explained with the driver's "unnatural" shift of superstructures as a result of his migration. The driver experiences a different superstructural reality in his new country. This new superstructural atmosphere is the result of a different infrastructural fundament than that of the driver's own country. The cultural and intellectual capital of the driver, which are the products of his society's own infrastructural fundament, is not capable of decoding the superstructural reality of his new county.

The similar situations can be observed in the societies where transfer of technology from the technologically advanced places is dominant.

Scene 10

In this scene the workers unwillingly come across a policeman while they are looking at the colourful goods in the shop windows. The policeman asks the workers to show their passports and the workers start to run away. During the police chase one of the workers loses his way to *home* (the bus) and gets lost. Later, the lost worker meets a man with a dog. The worker asks the man in Turkish if he knows where the bus is, but the man gets scared of the worker and escapes by taking his dog to his hand. The escape of the man with a dog is shown two times.

The scene can be interpreted as the metaphorical loss of the underdeveloped country citizen in the developed market capitalism of the consumer society. The man with a dog is the metaphorical embodiment of xenophobia towards non-blond, non-nordic looking immigrants who are in Swedish humiliatingly named as "*svartskalle*" (blackhead or can roughly be translated to English as wog). The dog in the scene is not a coincidence. In contrast it appears to be a very carefully chosen visual symbol that underlines the loneliness of the developed countries citizen. In this case that of Sweden. In the countries where the citizens are extremely individualised, like Sweden, the pet ownership is one of the most common ways of compensating the loss of social contact.

The same scene can also be interpreted as a visual symbol that indicates the position of the immigrants in the massive immigrant receiving societies, where

the immigrant, *the outsider* has less value than the pets, *the insider*, which belong to the home of the local.

Scene 11

In the following scene we see innumerable women and men walking in a tunnel like place (most probably a subway station), without any human interactions. The images of the people moving like robots supports the interpretation of the alienated, individualised citizen of the technologically developed country. This image of robot like people resembles one of the iconic scenes of the well known film *Metropolis* (1927) by German film director Fritz Lang. It is considered one of the most prominent cinematographic critique of the industrial society. Obviously the resemblance between *Metropolis* and the *Otobüs* is not limited to visual similarity between these scenes. Like *Metropolis*, *Otobüs* also offers a harsh critique of the industrial society but unlike *Metropolis*, *Otobüs* offers its critique from the point of view of the often ignored *other*, the immigrant.

Metropolis is not the only film that *Otobüs* can be associated with, both in terms of visual and ideological aspects. Another film that *Otobüs* has resemblance to is *Playtime* (1967) by the renowned French director Jacques Tati. Both *Playtime* and *Otobüs* have a similar cinematographic aesthetics of depicting and representing the urban landscape. The similarity between these films is not limited to their cinematographic aesthetics. In fact both films share a very similar ideological position when conceptualising the human in relation to their urban landscape. Both films are very critical to the capitalist modernity and its alienation.

If one thinks anachronically, it is also possible to draw similarities between the later films of Swedish director Roy Andersson (*Songs from the Second Floor*, *Sånger från andra våningen*, 2000 and *You, the Living*, *Du levande*, 2007) and the *Otobüs*. These two films of Andersson share similarities with Okan's *Otobüs* with their cinematographic aesthetics, their criticisms towards modernity and also their dystopian conceptualisations of life.



Fig 4. Captions from the films *Metropolis* (up) and *Qtohubis*.

Scene 12

In this scene the worker, who earlier could not find his way to the bus, is shown while he waits frozen and crouched down on top of a wall under a bridge by the river. A couple of people pass in front of him without even noticing him. After a while, a passerby touches the worker unintentionally and the worker falls into the frozen water of the river covered with ice. The passerby stops and looks at the river for a second, then leaves without showing any emotion but murmuring '*stinkpot*' to the worker, whose dead body has already disappeared in the icy water. While the frozen body of the worker sinks in the river, the other workers await in the bus without knowing what would be coming next. They are trying to survive in the unwelcoming harsh winter of Stockholm.

The death of the worker in the scene can be read as the cinematographic symbol of the dangerous, unwelcoming, emotionless nature of the industrialised land that the workers migrate to for a better life. However, the visual reading is not limited to that interpretation.

One of the alternative readings of the scene can be made with reference to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Marquez in his book *One Hundred Years of Solitude* writes that, '*A person does not belong to a place until there is someone dead under the ground.*'²⁹ In this context the death of the worker can be conceptualised as the symbolic turning point that provides belonging for the rest of the workers. The workers can now claim belonging to their new country.

With the disappearance of his dead body the worker becomes a part of the ecosystem, thus becomes inseparable from the new land both in a biological and philosophical sense.

Scene 14

The scene opens by showing the "usual" life rhythm of the industrial country's citizens, such as buying alcohol, making plans of summer holiday despite

²⁹ G G Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, (e-book) Avon Books, 1971, p.38.

the fact that it is middle of winter, getting drunk on the streets. Meanwhile the workers in the bus are still waiting without any food, water or toilet.

The film returns to the driver. The driver wanders aimlessly in the street with the company of colourful spot lights and windows of the shops. He is also lonely and seemingly unhappy. In the following shots, the driver becomes drunk after drinking a lot of alcohol alone and continues to wander in the streets of the city that is full of drunk people like himself. Then the driver wants to buy sex and finds two prostitutes in the street whom the driver takes to a hotel. The prostitutes and the driver get naked and go to bed, but under the influence of alcohol the driver falls asleep immediately. The prostitutes steal the money of the passed out driver and disappear.

The scene is a strong indicator of the dangerous and lawless social landscape of the capitalist world where the brutal social equivalence of the orthodox Darwinian natural selection finds its reflection in which only the powerful can survive. In that sense the scene underlines the already dystopian imagination of the film. In Okan's film there does not exist a *happy ending* for anyone.

Scene 15

In the next scene, the workers leaves the bus and start digging the trash cans aggressively in the hope of finding something to eat. One of the workers (acted by Okan himself) does not follow the others and goes to the toilet in the subway station. A Swedish man with seemingly homosexual tendencies approaches the worker and tries to see his genitals while the worker is peeing. The Swedish man invites the worker to hang out with him. The worker follows the Swede without even understanding a word from the man. The Swedish man, on their way to a club tells the worker that '*You have a really big penis.*' But the worker does not understand this either. He just follows. The Swedish man takes the worker to a night club where the perverted fantasies of rich customers are performed freely. Customers watch porn movies while they are dining and compete to be the playboy of the year by showing off their fancy cars. While all these "weird" entertainments take place the worker tries to fulfil his days long thirst and hunger like a wild animal even though he is surrounded by these "civilised" customers. The Swedish man starts to show his

sexual desire towards the worker by touching the workers body. The worker jumps from his seat like a startled animal and starts to eat anything he can find on the tables. One of the female customers complains by saying, '*He stole my food*'. The worker is taken away by the bodyguards because he is disturbing the entertainment of these 'civilised customers' who calls the worker '*barbarian*'. The worker is taken to somewhere dark, beaten and stabbed to death by the bodyguards.

This scene offers a strong visual critique of the consumer society in relation to the earlier argumentation of objectification and transformation of the body into a commodity. The scene creates a strong contrast between the needs of the underdeveloped country citizen (embodied in the image of the worker) and the industrialised country citizen (embodied in the image of the Swedish man). In this context the worker is transformed into a sex toy servicing the industrialised country citizen (embodied in the body of the Swedish man). For the consumer of the toy, the feelings or wellbeing of the worker is not a matter of importance. The only thing that matters is the toy's capability of providing pleasure for the user. For the audience one of the only hearable parts of the dialog (better call it monologue) between the Swedish man and the worker is the part where the Swedish man talks about the *penis* of the worker. The director, by letting the audience hear and understand that part of the monologue underlines the fact, that the worker is transformed into a *big penis* only. The worker is no longer an individual, he is a *penis*. In the same way as the other men in the club (who compete to be the *playboy of the year*) are not individuals, but the cars that they own. The woman who has sex with the winner of the competition, does not have sex with the man. In fact, she has sex with the car.

One of the details of the scene worth noticing is the part where the female customer blames the worker for stealing her food. This accusation has ontological ties to the xenophobic political views of today, which often accuse the immigrants of *stealing* the jobs thus the food of locals.

While all this perverted performances take place in the club the other workers explore the subway station, which is something that they see for the first time. This is made clear by the director by showing the workers reaction to the escalator. The workers are noticed by a group of locals who seem to be coming from a masquerade with their scary masks. The locals decide to play with the workers

using their masks. The workers get very frightened and escape from the masked creatures. They take the wrong escalator and hardly manages to clime the descending escalator, only to take refuge in their only safe place in this scary country; the bus.

In this part of the scene the workers share the same destiny as the worker in the club. The workers in the subway station are also transformed into toys for the entertainment of the locals. They play with the workers like a cat would play with small and helpless mice.

The part of the scene where the workers take a wrong escalator is a very strong visual symbol. The escalator that moves mechanically downwards from the surface to the underground may be interpreted as the metaphor for the degeneration of the humanity of the citizen in a industrial country. The subway is portrayed like a dark and claustrophobic space, as if it is a grave or one step further, hell. In this context the masked locals in the subway station transforms into the symbolic equivalentents of the demons of hell who sadisticly derive joy from the sufferings of the workers. In line with this interpretation the effort of the workers to climb to the surface by taking the constantly descending escalator can be interpreted as the resistance of the pre-industrial country citizen to the industrial alienation and degrading nature of the capitalist modernism.

In the same scene one must be aware of an important visual symbol which supports the ongoing interpretation. When the workers use the escalator for the first time, they find fresh looking fruits and food on one of the benches of the subway station. With the pressure of the days long hunger, the workers compete with each other to pick up something to eat from the bench. The workers who managed to get some food immediately try to eat what they found, but they can not eat any of them because these realistic looking fruits and foods are in fact toys made out of plastic. Every time the workers bite them the plastic toys whistle. For the workers who most probably come from the rural areas and accustomed to eat fruits from their trees, the plastic fruits of the subway is something impossible to understand. These plastic fruits and toys provide strong visual symbols for the critique of the capitalist industrial modernism, which on the one hand destroys the nature, and on the other hand tries to replace it with artificial, plastic imitations of nature. The plastic fruits of

the subway station is the symbols of the new *nature* of the industrial society's urban landscape.

Scene 16

After the workers escape from the scary creatures of the subway they arrive back to their only safe place - the bus. Again they continue to wait without knowing their next challenge. In the morning the bus starts to shake, which makes the workers startled. The workers do not understand what is going on, since they covered the windows tightly with the curtains due to the fear of being noticed by the police. The bus is towed to the police station where two policemen brakes the door open, gets into the bus and find the workers squeezed together in the back of the bus, paralysed with fear. The police asks the workers who they are and where they come from, but the workers do not give any reactions. They just look at the policemen with fear, in the same way a rabbit would look at the light beams of the truck. The policemen take the workers by dragging them one by one from the bus to the police station. The workers are paralysed with the shock of being caught and filled with hopelessness. They do not even think of escaping from the police. The only thing that they want is to stay in the bus, because they already experienced that anywhere else but the bus is a dangerous place in this 'strange' country. In the scene after the catch of every worker the director shows us a shot where the bus is crushed and destroyed by a giant press. Every time when a new worker is taken, the same image of the destruction of the bus is shown from a different camera angle. The destruction of the bus is the symbolic representation of the destruction of the workers; their home, belongings, expectations and hopes of finding a better life. The director, by showing the same scene again and again from different angles underlines the very personal attachments of the workers to the bus.



Fig 5. A caption from the film Qtopūs. Destruction of the bus. A strong symbol of the immigrants' lost dreams, belonging and identity.

2.3. Reception of the film

Okan is one of the first *Gastarbeiter*, who questions the issue of migration and identity through his firsthand experiences, through a neo-colonial awareness in cinema. The *Otobüs* is one of the earliest products in the cinema in this context both within cinema of Turkey and international cinema.

The film have received mixed reactions from the audience and sparked intellectual discussions.

Because of the claimed negative depictions and representations of the Turkish workers, and the Turkish society in general. The film was banned in Turkey for some time by the censorship board. However, while the film was banned in Turkey, the *Otobüs* was screened in different international film festivals abroad and won several awards.³⁰ With the appeal of the director the ban on the film was lifted.

The negative portrayal of the film was not only problematised and criticised by the official bodies, such as the censorship board, but also by some of the distinguished film critiques and intellectuals of the time. One of them was the writer and film critique Onat Kutlar. Kutlar wrote the following about the film in 1977:

The source of my anxiety is this: in the film, which explains the striking encounter between the villager population of a poorly developed country, submerged in animalistic fear and constituted by similar animalistic tendencies (eating, urinating, being afraid), and the 'west,' composed of foreign enemies, selfish people who think only of their own best interests, people who stuff themselves like pigs, homosexuals, whores, and middlemen, we know that realism and naturalism are not the same thing.

We also know that contemporary Sweden does not merely consist of the aforementioned, nor is the Turkish villager as simple as described above. In this case, then, the question becomes: did the director want to illustrate a comparison of the elements born out of the irregularities of two separate capitalist social structures, and for that reason did he indulge in exaggerations; or does the director conceptualise the west as well as the Turkish villager in the way that we see them in the film?

If the first, then the director's project was successful. No artist can claim to fully represent reality in his or her work. If the second, however, then the film has a significant flaw and has sunk to a level of spectacle that attempts to make us accept this crude perspective. This is precisely the source of my anxiety. The

³⁰ Some of the awards of the film are the Golden Charybde Award at the Taormina Film Festival, the Don Quixote Award given by the Film Club Federation, the Human Rights Film Festival Award in Strasbourg, and the Best Film Award at the Santarem Film Festival.

claims of western and Turkish intellectuals who enjoyed the film have been unable to ameliorate this anxiety because they rely upon their own cultural and ideological repertoires when examining this 'deficient reality.'

Commentary on the film by informed intellectuals tends toward the first point mentioned above. Do the uninformed, however, watch and enjoy the film for 'the antagonism between a corrupt west and a primitive east'? This film does not shed any light on these questions. It is my sincere desire for Tunç Okan to bring and end to this anxiety with his second film.³¹

Kutlar's critiques places the film into an interesting context which would later be named as *Orientalism* after the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking book *Orientalism* in 1978. Kutlar predates the discourse and notices the elements of the film, which would be associated with the other *orientalist* representations of the *Orient*.

³¹ 'Tedirginliğimin kaynağı şu: filmde homoseksüeller, orospular, araçılar, domuz gibi tıkınan, kendi çıkarlarından başka hiç bir şey düşünmeyen bencillerden ,yabancı düşmanlarından oluşan bir 'batı' ile,hayvansal bir korku içinde, gene hayvansal yönsemelerden (yemek,işemek korkmak) ibaret bir az gelişmiş ülke köylü topluluğunun çarpıcı karşılaşması anlatılıyor gerçekçilik ile natüralizmin aynı şey olmadığını biliyoruz .

Gene biliyoruz ki, ne günümüzde İsveç, salt yukarda verilenlerden ibarettir, ne de Türk köylüsü salt orada verildiği kadardır. Öyleyse soru şurada: acaba yönetmen daha geniş bir gerçekliğin belirli bir yönünü ,kapitalist iki toplum yapısının çarpıklıklarından doğan unsurların bir karşılaştırmasını mı göstermek istemiş, bu nedenle abartmalara başvurmuştur; yoksa yönetmen, batıyı filmde gördüğümüz biçimde, Türk köylüsüne de gene orada gördüğümüz gibi mi kavramaktadır.

Birincisi gibiyse, yönetmen başarılı bir iş yapmıştır. Hiç bir sanatçı yapıtında gerçeğin tümünü yansıttığını iddia edemez. İkincisi gibiyse, film önemli bir sakatlığa uğramış, ilkel bir bakışı bize kabul ettirmeye çalışan bir gösteri düzeyine inmiş olur. İşte tedirginliğimin nedeni buydu. Filmi beğenen batılı ya da Türk aydınlarının tepkileri de bu tedirginliği gideremedi çünkü , onlarda ' bu eksik gerçekliğe' kendi kültürel ve ideolojik birikimlerine yaslanarak bakıyorlar.

Bilinçli aydınlar filmde yukardaki birinci yorumu buluyorlar. Bilinçsizler ise, filmdeki 'yoz bir batı ile ilkel bir doğu arasındaki zıtlığa' bakıp eğleniyorlar mı?

Bu film bu sorulara bir aydınlık getirmiyor. Bütün dileğim, Tunç Okan'ın ikinci filmiyle bu tedirginliğe bir son vermesi.'

3. Discussion

The film provides a very rich material for several seemingly independent but in fact inter-connected discussions. One of these discussions can be established in the context of orientalism. With Kutlar's critiques in mind and with a little anachronistic flexibility the film can possibly be discussed with the references to the writings of Said.

Okan's representations of the workers obviously have common features with the repetitive depictions of the *Orient* or Non-West which Said demonstrates. The '*imaginative geography*'³² of the *Orient* created and defused by the many generations of Western writers and re-presenters with its wild animal-like subhuman creatures, *barbarians* or limitless sexual fantasies finds its reflections in Okan's *Otobüs*. The workers of the film who dig the trash bins to find something to eat in a Darwinian competition of survival or the worker who brutally eats the piece of meat in the night club scene are undoubtedly re-presentations of the Orientalist imagination. Okan's film's similarities with or references to the Orientalist narrations is not limited to the *sub-human* creatures or the *barbarians*. In the film, it is also possible to trace the sexual fantasies of orientalist writers such as Flaubert and his novels. According to Edward Said the *Orient* has always been associated with '*the freedom of licentious sex*' by the orientalist writers.³³ For the Orientalist writer '*the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe.*'³⁴ In this context the scene where the Swedish man takes one of the workers to a night club, commenting on his genitals on the way, is the crystallisation of sexual fantasies of western orientalist. The worker as an *oriental subject* is boldly associated with the unobtainable sexual desires of the Swede, the Orientalist. In 70s, the time period of the film, homosexuality was an unacceptable sexual orientation and was considered by many, including scholars and scientists, as an illness in its best and perversion in its worst. With this remark in mind, the connections between the film and Said's quote exposing the sexual nature of the orientalist imagination becomes undeniable.

³² E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 54.

³³ Ibid. p.190.

³⁴ Ibid. p.190.

The Swede, the Orientalist, does not hesitate to perform his “sick” or “perverted” sexual fantasies on the worker, the orientalist subject. Fantasies which are condemned by his own society.

If one insists on reading the film in the context of the discourse of Orientalism, there appears a tricky point; Okan, as a citizen of Turkey, which is traditionally *imagined* as part of the *imaginary geography* of the ‘Orient’, becomes the *self-orientalist*³⁵ with his re-presentations of the negative *imaginary* image of the ‘Orient’ in the body of the workers. *Self-orientalism* in this context should be understood as the internalised form of Orientalism.

The problematic nature of Okan’s (re)presentations are not limited to the depiction of the non-west. Okan’s descriptions of the West or non-Orient in the body of the social landscape of Sweden, are also very problematic, even to a degree that it may be branded as being Occidentalism, in a sense of being the mirror of *orienting* West, with the actors swapping the roles. In this new order of representations the passive *oriental object* of the active West becomes the *othered* occident, the passive imaginary subject of the active Orient.

The origin of the discourse of *Occidentalism* can be traced back to the very beginning of the discourse of Orientalism. With the conceptualisation of the discourse of Orientalism, which defines the world and its cultural space as *we* and *the others*, the recognition of *the other* becomes a fundamental necessity for the very existence of the *we(st)*. The recognition of *the other*, automatically requires the recognition -not necessarily approval- of the world view of *the other* as well. In this

³⁵ The term *self-orientalism* is best explained with the concept of *pizza effect* of Aghananda Bharati. Bharati coined the term to explained the re-importation of cultural exports by the originator of the cultural products after modifications by the exporters. Bharati, to make his point clear, uses a simple example of pizza. Bharati writes:

The original pizza was a simple, hot-baked bread without any trimmings, the staple of the Calabrian and Sicilian contadini from whom well over 90% of all Italo-American descend. After World War I, a highly elaborated dish, the U.S. pizza of many sizes, flavors, and hues, made its way back to Italy with visiting kinsfolk from America. The term and the object have acquired a new meaning and a new status, as well as many new tastes in the land of its origin, not only in the south, but throughout the length and width of Italy.

A Bharati. ‘The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Feb., 1970), pp. 267-287, p. 273.

context the Occidentalism as a set of narrations of the non-orient that must be conceptualised as old and valid as the Orientalism.

Okan by employing the classical mechanisms of the Orientalism against the non-orient creates the *imaginary geography* of the 'Occident' where the wild animal like creatures (remember the scene with masked people in the subway station) or people with shameless and perverted sexual lives (remember the night club scene with live sexual intercourse in front of the customers) live freely.

By utilising the very same mechanisms in depiction of both the Orient and the Occident, Okan positions himself in a place where he is free from both Orient and Occident, yet he is capable of seeing both places (both their physical and imaginary sense) critically.

Okan, in a interview explains his position in relation to the binary opposition of Orientalism-Occidentalism.

What I wanted to do was to make a clash, a big incompatibility visible from the very beginning. It was to position the people of the extremely technically developed society and people of the underdeveloped society as the opposites. I wanted to underline the grim clash between them. My aim was neither humiliate the Turkish worker nor Turkish society, as it was claimed by the censorship board or some of the critiques. The workers in the film could have been the citizens of any other underdeveloped country, not Turkish. The Turkishness of the worker's is coincidence. If they were Italian or Spanish, the film would not lose anything of its message.³⁶

With the interview, Okan takes the discussion from its geographical connotations and places it into the context of a critique of industrial capitalism and its social landscape. Okan's explanation makes the discussion in the context of Orientalist-Occidental binary oppositions less necessary, if not entirely pointless. This position of Okan's can be defined as neo-colonial. I prefer the term neo-colonial

³⁶ *'Başlangıçtan beri yapmak istediğim bir çatışmayı, bir büyük uyumsuzluğu, aykırılığı ortaya koymaktı. Tekniğiyle, aşırı gelişmiş tüketim toplumuyla az gelişmiş toplumun insanlarını karşı karşıya getirmektir. Bunların birbirleriyle olan kendi içlerindeki çelişkiyi, aralarındaki korkunç çatışmayı vurgulamak istedim. Yoksa amacım sansürün ve bazı aydınlarımızın iddia ettiği gibi, ne Türk işçisini, ne Türk insanını küçük düşürmek değildi. Filmdeki işçiler Türk değil, herhangi bir azgelişmiş toplumun insanları olabilirdi. Türk olmaları bir rastlantıdır. İtalyan ya da İspanyol olsalardı, film bildirisinden bir şey kaybetmeyecekti'*

Milliyet Sanat, 19/12/1977, Translation is mine.

instead of the term post-colonial, because of the false suggestion of the term post-colonial. The term post-colonial suggest that the era of colonialism is over, but this is far from the reality. In this context of neo-colonial discourse, the problematic references of the film to both Orientalist and Occidentalist narrations can be seen as some form of mockery or rejection of the discourses of both Orientalist and Occidentalist.

Okan's explanation also underlines the transnational nature of his film which will be confirmed with his following two films *Cumartesi Cumartesi* (1984) and *Sarı Mercedes* (1992) which altogether creates *The Trilogy of Migration* in my opinion. *Otobüs's* transnational nature was recognised by Hamid Naficy in his book *An Accented Cinema* (2001) by referring to it as an *exilic cinema* and *diasporic cinema*.³⁷

Otobüs's nature is not limited to its trans-nationality and in this context Naficy's terminology is not fully equipped to correspond and reflect the multilayered structure of the film. Naficy's terminology may be helpful to recognise and appreciate the geographical or/and political, thus to some extent the cultural border crossings, however Naficy's terminology is not capable of recognising the transitions between cinematographic styles, aesthetics and production practices.

Okan's *Otobüs*, not only crosses the geographical, physical and political borders but also crosses the borders between film production practises as being the first independent film of a former commercial film star as a director and its dominantly amateur actors; crosses cultural borders with its comparison between developed and underdeveloped society citizens; crosses lingual borders with its three languages (Turkish, Swedish and German) spoken in the film; crosses cinematographic aesthetics with its transitions between social reality and absurdity and between drama and dark comedy. At this very point the insufficiency of Naficy's terminology to deal with Okan's film becomes impossible to hide. The same insufficiency is also valid for variety of other terms that is designed to underline the transitional nature of films such as *nomad cinema* of Gilles Deleuze or *hybrid cinema*. All of these term fall short to recognise the multi-transitional nature of Okan's

³⁷ H Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2001. p. 257.

film(s) with the terms' devotion to the geographical, physical, political border crossings.

In order to overcome the short comings of the existing terminology, I propose a new term *transboundary cinema* in an analogy to a geographical term transboundary river, which is a river that crosses at least one political border, either within a national or international boundary. The term with its sole focus on boundary crossing without necessarily limiting this crossings to any kind of boundary can be useful to recognise and describe the films like Okan's *Otobüs*. The *transboundary cinema* concept is compatible with the existing terminology since it is not denouncing any of them but just widens the scope of the existing terminology. In this context the *transboundary cinema* concept can be conceptualised as an umbrella term that both Naficy's and Deleuze's concepts fall under.

As an independent film, made by a former commercial cinema industry worker, the *Otobüs* crosses the borders between different film production practices; Okan, as the director and the actor of the film crosses the border between being in front of the camera and behind the camera, the border between acting and directing. Okan as the script writer and director of the film crosses the boundary between creative artistry and manual craftsmanship, between creating and materialising. The film crosses international political, geographical and lingual borders. The film crosses cinematographic narrations by flexing between social realist drama and absurd comedy. In this context Okan's cinema proves itself to be a *transboundary cinema* and Okan to be a *transboundary director*.

The film with its transboundary nature provides an interesting example when it comes to the relations between the film and the social reality of the time. As it was suggested earlier in the text, the film has a transition or flexion between cinematographic aesthetics, starting from the social realism and reaching to an absurd dark comedy. This transition jeopardise the solid and predictable position of the film in relation to reality. In the beginning, the film sets itself as a social realist with its clear references to the political and social issues namely immigration and human trafficking. Later on the film becomes more abstract and loosens its ties to the reality. The film transforms its cinematographic language from neorealist visual resemblance to a more symbolic relation with the social reality. This movement in the

film can be understood as an attempt to adopt a universal language. The film by loosening its direct resemblance to the reality, elevates a local story into an universal one. In this elevation process the details, that have direct and specific connections to the local story, that requires the familiarity with the history, culture or politics of the local place and/or time, becomes less necessary. In return the film gains a new cinematographic and symbolic language that can be understood and appreciated by a greater number of people without any pre required cultural and intellectual capital. This new cinema-symbolic order does not mean that the film's local and personal aspects cease to exist; they are just positioned to be less required or secondary if one may wish to call it. This new condition of the film can be better understood in an analogy to the classic literature. For example, the classic novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky is a novel about the dilemma of a Russian student named Raskolnikov from St. Petersburg, who killed a person. The novel can be read in various ways. One of them can be a reading that focuses on the social reality of the late nineteenth century Russian Empire. One can obtain a lot of information about the time by such reading. One of the other readings can be a reading that focuses on the universal human condition, the dilemma of a person who committed an action, which is ultimately considered as an immoral crime. The second form of reading is the one that makes this Russian language novel a world classic because of its excellence to deal with the human substance; the moral dilemma. Dostoevsky creates a novel that poses timeless universal moral and philosophical questions, based on a fairly simple murder scene. He elevates a local story into a universal level similar to what Okan does with his story.

By this transformation/elevation Okan (like Dostoevsky) testifies at least two types of witnessing. Firstly, a witnessing that provides an alternative record of history and secondly a witnessing that makes a certain type of human condition with its philosophical and moral connotations visible. In that sense the film is transformed from a visual documentation into a philosophical standpoint. This new philosophical position is the one that makes the film timeless and universal while preserving the visual documentation intact for the eyes who is equipped with a correct set of cultural and intellectual tools.

This new philosophical position is also the result of the transboundary nature of the film and the director. A boundary crossing between the concrete and the abstract.

One of the other often reappearing issues of the film is the body. The issue appears in a variety of forms such as connections between the bus and woman body and the womb, hunger and thirst of the workers, sexual fantasies of the locals, body search at the airport, homosexuals and the prostitutes. These figures are all related to a body and ownership discussion. In fact immigration itself is a discourse in which the body plays a key role. As Nejat Ulusoy puts '*[t]he body of the immigrant is one of the most self evident and vulnerable bodies.*'³⁸ Earlier in the thesis it was claimed that the Gastarbeiterprogramm is a form of slavery in which the ownership of the body of the worker, thus the power over the body of the worker is transferred to the employers or the capitalist neo-slave owners. The worker/labourer by definition is the one who sells her/his labour for survival. The bodies of the workers (immigrant or not) are transformed into commodities for the service of the production of other commodities in the capitalist form of the production. The body discourse is one of the fundamental discourses of the neo-colonial capitalist regime. In this context it is inseparable from the critique of capitalism, thus of the film which offers a harsh critique.

The film can be conceptualised as an analogy to the classic colonial slave trade. During the classic colonial era the slaves -they were mostly of African origin- had been transported to Europe and America in order to be used as the most cost effective form of production. The transportation of the slaves often had been performed via the ships and during that journey a significant percentage of the slaves lost their lives because of the inhumane conditions such as hunger, thirst and infectious illnesses. In this context the bus can be seen as the modern version of a slave ship. The workers face similar inhumane traveling conditions and some of them loose their lives.

³⁸ 'Göçmen bedeni, görünürlüğü en aşikar, en korunmasız bedenlerden biridir.' Translation is mine. N Ulusoy, 'Göçmen' in *Bu Kapıdan Gireceksin: Türk sineması üzerine denemeler*, (Ed.) U. T. Arslan, Metis, İstanbul, 2012, p. 119.

Even though the body discussion appears to be an independent issue, it is in fact fundamentally connected to the discourse of orientalism as well, thus that of occidentalism. The body is one of the pillars of the orientalist discourse in which the fantasies of the Western re-presenter finds its physical embodiment in the *imaginary Oriental geography* with its promises of sexual freedom. The similar argument is also valid for the occidentalist discourse.

4. Conclusion

Otobüs, as it was demonstrated by the social semiotic analysis, has a complicated yet traceable relation to the reality. The film sets itself as a social realist film and it provides a familiar example of the genre both in its cinematographic aesthetics and its relations to the real world. The film fulfils the expected promises of the social realist cinema movement by its story that is adapted from a real life event with its clear references to the political and social issues namely immigration and human trafficking, its predominately amateur actors (only two of the actors are professional), its realist directing and realist visual aesthetics. However the familiar social realist attitude of the film starts to deform during the second half of the film. The film transforms itself from a social realist film to an absurd dark comedy. By this the film establishes a more abstract cinematographic narration and loosen its ties with reality. In connection to that *Otobüs* transforms its cinematographic language from neorealist visual resemblance to a more symbolic relation with the social reality. This transformation on the one hand jeopardises the concrete and identifiable relation of the film with the socio-historical context of the time, but on the other hand it provides a new universalist structure. The film by loosening its direct resemblance to the socio-historical reality, positions its relatively simple local story into an universal level. In this process of universalisation the film adds one more layer on top of its already multi-layered structure. The layers of the film, which have direct and detailed connections to the local story, become less visible and, the film's demand from the audience for pre-existing knowledge and familiarity with the history, culture or politics of the local place and/or time, becomes less necessary. The film gains a timeless and placeless universal position. In this new condition, the film establishes a new cinematographic and symbolic language that can be understood by a greater number of people without any pre-required socio-historical contextual knowledge. This new cinema-symbolic order of the film does not mean that the local, contextual and personal aspects of the film cease to exist; they are just positioned to be less required in the first dialog with the film.

The film, by its transition from social real to abstract symbolism transforms its capacity of acting as documentation as well. In this situation the film provides at least two different testimonies, a social realist one that provides a lot of information about a local story with its place and time specific context, and a symbolic one that witnesses a particular human condition with its universally valid moral and philosophic references. In this context the film is transformed from a visual documentation into a philosophical standpoint. This new philosophical position is the one that makes the film timeless and universal while preserving the visual documentation intact.

In this new universalist context, as Okan makes it clear in his interview by underlining that the nationalities of the characters are result of pure a coincidence, that the representations of the film and its topic also is independent from any local or national context.³⁹ With this departure and distancing from the specific local and socio-historical context, the film distances itself from place and/or time specific discourses as well, such as orientalism and occidentalism.

The film, with its flexion from the local to the universal, adds one more transition to its already multi-transitional nature of the film which existing terminology of film studies fall short to recognise the unique qualities of the *Otobüs* at once. Existing terminology of the film studies which have been developed to recognise the transitional structures of the film(s) almost always focus on only one specific form of transition at a time. For example the *transnational cinema* of Hamid Naficy focuses only on the national border crossings of the films. Naficy's terminology is not fully equipped to correspond and reflect the multilayered structure of the film *Otobüs*. Naficy's terminology may be helpful to recognise and appreciate the geographical or/and political, thus to some extent the cultural border crossings, however it is not capable of recognising the transitions between cinematographic styles, aesthetics and production practices. Same shortcomings are valid for other similar concepts such as *exilic cinema* of Naficy or *nomad cinema* of Deleuze. In this context, the thesis recognises a need for a new concept and suggests *transboundary cinema* which is capable of recognising the number of transitions of the film at once without denouncing any of the existing terms that are developed for dealing with a particular

³⁹ Remember the quote on page 43 of the thesis.

form of transition. The *transboundary cinema* is conceptualised as an umbrella term by this thesis. The potential of the *transboundary cinema* concept is not limited to cinema, in contrast it is an open and dynamic concept that can be adapted and utilised for other visual as well as non-visual disciplines.

Challenging yet fruitful cinema of Okan is not limited to his debut film *Otobüs*, in contrary his second film *Cumartesi Cumartesi* (1984) and third film *Fikrimin İnce Gülü* (1992) take the challenge a couple of step further and create a trilogy on migration and the search for immigrant identity. I hope there will be more interest on Okan and his cinema in near future.

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