



TRAUMA CINEMA: A CRITICAL VIEW ON  
*BEYNELMİLEL* AND *BABAM VE O LUM*

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By  
Özge Üstüner Wambach  
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Dedicated to my affectionate husband Wolfgang Wambach with heartfelt gratitude and deepest love, for always supporting me with heart and soul, and for having made my thesis process much more enjoyable than otherwise it would have been...

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

ÖZGE ÜSTÜNER WAMBACH

## ABSTRACT

### TRAUMA CINEMA: A CRITICAL VIEW ON *BEYNELMİLEL* AND *BABAM VE O LUM*

Özge Üstüner Wambach

M.A. in Media and Visual Studies  
Supervisor: Assistant Professor Dr. Ahmet Gürata

June, 2009

Cinema, one of the most popular instruments of mass media, is also a product of the society and it cannot be thought to be independent from the social history. *Beynelmilel* (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, 2006) and *Babam ve O lum* (Ça an Irmak, 2005), being popular Turkish films can be put and analyzed under the category of 12 September films and trauma films. The characters in both films bear the features of traumatic personalities produced by the 12 September 1980 military coup and its aftermath in Turkish society. The two films create a cinematic field to discuss the 12 September trauma and its impacts. *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* should therefore be paid attention and analyzed, as popular products of the society.

Key Words: 12 September Films, Trauma, Trauma Cinema, Social Recognition, Coming to Terms with the Past

## ÖZET

### TRAVMA SİNEMASI: *BEYNELMİLEL* VE *BABAM VE O LUM'A* ELEŞTİREL BİR BAKIŞ

Özge Üstüner Wambach

Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar  
Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Asistan Profesör Dr. Ahmet Gürata

Haziran, 2009

Kitle iletişim araçları içinde en popüler olanlardan sinema toplumsal bir üründür ve sosyal tarihten ba ımsız olarak düşünülemez. *Beynelmilel* (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, 2006) ve *Babam ve O lum* (Ça an Irmak, 2005), popüler filmler olarak, 12 Eylül filmleri ve travma sineması kategorilerinde incelenebilirler. Her iki filmdeki karakterler de 12 Eylül 1980 askeri darbesinin ve sonrasında gelen sonuçların Türk toplumunda do urdu u travmanın izlerini taşımakta ve kişiliklerine yansıtmakta ve 12 Eylül travmasının ve etkilerinin tartışılması için sinematik bir alan yaratmaktadır. Bu yüzden ki, bu travmayı hatırlama ve tartışma şansı kaçırılmamalı ve *Beynelmilel* ile *Babam ve O lum* filmleri, toplumun üretti i popüler ürünler olarak incelenmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 12 Eylül filmleri, Travma, Travma Sineması, Sosyal Farkındalık, Geçmişle Yüzleşme/ Hesaplaşma

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZET .....	v
ACNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	viii

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
---------------------------	----------

<b>1. AN OVERVIEW ON 12 SEPTEMBER .....</b>	<b>5</b>
---	----------

1.1. The Disposition of the 12 September Military Coup in Turkish History .....	5
--	---

1.2. Could Cinema Function as Memory Banks of the Society? .....	7
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1.2.1. Cinema: Reproducible and Recollectible	
Art Works .....	7
1.2.2. Cinema: A Popular Cultural Force .....	11
<b>2. 12 SEPTEMBER MILITARY COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1. The Socio-Political Turmoil between 1975 and	
1980 .....	14
2.2. The Background of the 12 September	
Military Coup .....	20
2.3. The Aftermath of the 12 September Military	
Coup in the Political and Economical Sense ....	30
2.4. The Effects of the 12 September Military	
Coup on the Turkish Socio-Cultural Life .....	35
2.5. The Influences of the 12 September on the	
Turkish Cinema as Part of the Cultural Life ..	40
2.6. The 12 September Turkish Films and Their	
Political Disposition .....	46
<b>3. FROM COLLECTIVE MEMORY TO THE MATTER OF TRAUMATIC</b>	
<b>    MEMORY THROUGH MATTERS OF COMING TO TERMS WITH</b>	
<b>    THE PAST AND COLLECTIVE CRIME .....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1. The Origins of the Term <i>Collective Memory</i> .....	55
3.2. From Individuals' to Societies'	
Collective Memory/Recollective Nature .....	59

3.3.	The Appearing of the Concept <i>Coming to Terms with the Past</i> after 1945 as a National Issue and its Acquisition of a Global Perspective in the 1980s.....	65
3.4.	Alternative Terms for the Concept of <i>Coming to Terms with the Past</i> .....	68
3.5.	The Discussions on <i>Collective Crime</i> and <i>Traumatic Memory</i> .....	70
<b>4.</b>	<b>THE CONCEPT OF TRAUMA AND THE TRAUMA ANALYSIS IN CINEMA.....</b>	<b>74</b>
4.1.	From Individual Trauma to Collective Trauma...	74
4.2.	12 September as a Chronic Crisis in the Turkish Social Realm.....	78
4.3.	Trauma Cinema: The Characteristics of the Genre and How <i>Beynelmilel</i> and <i>Babam ve O lum</i> Fit in it.....	81
<b>5.</b>	<b>BEYNEMİLEL and BABAM VE O LUM AS 12 SEPTEMBER FILMS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMA CINEMA.....</b>	<b>84</b>
5.1.	<i>Beynelmilel</i> .....	84
5.2.	<i>Babam ve O lum</i> .....	93
5.3.	The Comparison of <i>Beynelmilel</i> and <i>Babam ve O lum</i> in the Context of Trauma Cinema.....	97

6. CONCLUSION ..... 109

REFERENCES ..... 117

FILM INDEX ..... 129

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout this thesis, I intend to deal with the 12 September Turkish military coup as a turning point in Turkish history, which is a traumatic event that has been influencing the social life together with the culture as well as having influences and impacts on the political and economic aspects of life. The films *Beynelmilel* (Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Muharrem Gülmez 2006) and *Babam ve Ölüm* (Çağrı Irmak 2005) are to be investigated throughout the research in order to see to what extent this event has reflections on these two films and if there are any, to look into and analyze those reflections of this critical event on the films.

Holding the belief that 12 September is a traumatic event in the Turkish history that has been creating individual traumas, which later pile up and form a trauma on the

social level; all in all a traumatic society, the two films will be analyzed under the category of trauma cinema owing to the films' and the experiences of the main characters' compliance with the definition of the concept of trauma. The 12 September military coup in 1980 has been a traumatic socio-political event in Turkish history owing to the fact that the event and its aftermath brought along and spread fear and vulnerability within the society and caused people to lose hope and sight of the future by leaving no room for security and trust. The main characters in the films (*Gülendam* and *Sadık* and also their families) are victims of the 12 September military coup, who bear the characteristics of traumatic, muted and fragmented individuals, who have lost their beloved persons as a result of the event.

It is a common belief and opinion of many film critiques and film scholars that *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* do not really serve the purpose of reflecting the absolute trauma within the Turkish society. This assumption is true to a certain extent and it could be argued that it occurs as a result of the films' too much focus on individual and familial traumatic experiences and the way they cope with them rather than dealing with the question of the 12 September for serving such purposes as judging the real reasons behind the event, criticizing the

perpetrators of it and analyzing objectively the victims who suffered from the event...etc.

However, the fact can be by no means ignored that this ingrained approach of "not being able to analyze and cope with the 12 September socio-political event and its consequences" is not specific to films but, this approach has been confirmed for a long time by the very society itself. Until the traumatic event has been recognized by the society, the experiences will always stay at the individual level. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that it is unexceptional that the films, produced by film-makers within the society, also deal with the 12 September event on the individual level, telling audiences about individual stories. Yet, the contribution endeavors of the films into the discussion of this traumatic event through keeping the matter alive should not be completely ignored. From 1984 till 2009, 36 films have been confirmed to have been made which could be put under the title of 12 September films<sup>1</sup>. The two films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* have been chosen to be analyzed in this research, because these films were made after the year 2000, and could be argued to have been the most popular films that could be analyzed under the

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<sup>1</sup> The list of 12 September films confirmed is available in the Appendix.

category of 12 September films. In spite of the fact that the film *Beynelmilel* has been received better critiques than *Babam ve O lum*, thanks to its humorous critique of the military logic; thus the 12 September event, the two films resemble each other through carrying certain features of the genre melodrama. Both films provide and represent examples, particularly with their main characters, for the analysis of trauma cinema; however, both films get caught in the trap of the difficult of trauma representation, which is itself a very problematic issue, as it will be analyzed and expanded below with concrete examples.

The films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* should at least be appreciated owing to the fact that they create a cinematic field to represent the internalized societal/collective traumas. As also underlined by Nilgün Abisel (1995) popular genre films cannot be discussed being independent from the social history. Therefore, popular genre films deserve a closer attention and analysis. (Abisel, 1995, p. 31)



## **1. AN OVERVIEW ON 12 SEPTEMBER**

### **1.1. The Disposition of the 12 September Military Coup in Turkish History**

It could be claimed that the 12 September 1980 Turkish military coup has been a great turning point in the history of Turkish Republic. The 12 September military coup is critically important not only because of the individual, social and/or political events that were actually experienced at the time, but also because of the fact that the military coup of the 1980 is regarded as a signal that declared the characteristics of the period that came after the 1980s. The military's overthrowing the existing government and its expropriation of the Turkish political life is considered to be a dark era in which serious violation of democracy was experienced,

which led to even more austere damages to the Turkish social political life by helping the anti-democratic attitudes of institutions and structurings to become more and more established and rooted. Murat Belge (1993) defines the September 12 military takeover and the period came after it as "the heaviest general coercion and oppression system experienced by the society since 1950, the closing of the single-party era, including the former military intervention phases" (p. 9). Belge goes on explaining why he considers the 12 September to be the heaviest oppression system in Turkish history since 1950 in the following passage:

All 'authoritarian' states require primarily a 'submissive' society and public. The 12 September did its utmost to provide that in Turkey. It directly physically exterminated and eliminated the people who were resisting not to become 'submissive...' Moreover, with the measures and policies it took in the education system and in the operating of the ideological channels within the society, it did its best to quell the free and genuine thought. Briefly, the 12 September event attempted to make a herd out of the Turkish society by eliminating individualism (Belge, 1993, p. 10)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information please see:

Kongar, E. (1993). *12 Eylül kültürü(12 September Culture)*. İstanbul: Remzi.

Birand, M. A. (1999). *12 Eylül. Türkiye'nin miladı(12 September: The milestone of Turkey)*. İstanbul : Do an Kitapçılık

Evin, A. (1988). The State and democracy: Changing patterns of cleavages before and after 1980. In M. Heper & A. Evin (Eds.), *State, democracy and the military: Turkey in the 1980s* (pp. 201-213). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

## 1.2. Could Cinema Function as Memory Banks of the Society?

### 1.2.1. Cinema: Reproducible and Recollectible Art Works

As it is a well-known fact, the main heritage of the Western aesthetics, basing its arguments on Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BC) embraces the vision that art simply duplicates/reproduces nature. All the branches of the established arts adopted this view from the early Renaissance to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and achieved great success with the pursuit of this ideal.

From Giotto to Monet and the Impressionists... later the novels of Balzac and Tolstoy achieved a more accurate representation of nature and society than anything literature had previously known, and the plays of Ibsen and Chekhov seemed to carry Hamlet's ideal of the theater to its limit (Mast & Cohen, 1985, p. 1).

However, an earthquake was experienced in the fields of arts together with the invention of photography for the camera had a more different way of representing the nature than it was previously known. It is beyond doubt that the phenomenon of media, and cinema in particular, were amongst the most significant attributions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that we outpaced not so long ago. It could

be argued that many people have crowded film theatres all over the world and have seen many films in their leisure time, since the first public screening was done in 1895 in Paris (Monaco, 2000, p. 15).

Cinema could be qualified as the seventh art -in this context, the word art deriving its semantic roots from the seventeenth century when the definition of the word was being straitened from being a master on a specific field to the artistic activities such as painting, sculpture, drawing, architecture... and anything that found an acceptance in the field of Fine Arts. Though one must also admit the fact that such a traditional use of the word, as also emphasized by Siegfried Kracauer (1985 [1960]), is misleading, and it leads to a terminological quandary, because it invigorates the common belief that a piece of work is only considered to be an art piece on condition that it ignores the recording obligations of the cinema medium with the aim of reaching aesthetic beauty by using strong formative elements, and therefore not paying enough attention to the concerns of camera-reality (p. 19). Kracauer stated his strict opinion on the issue by the following:

If film is an art at all, it certainly should not be confused with the established arts. There may be some justification in loosely applying this fragile concept to such films as *Nanook* or *Paisan*, or *Potemkin* which are deeply steeped in camera-life. But

in defining film as art, it must always be kept in mind that even the most creative film maker is much less independent of nature in the raw than the painter or the poet; that his creativity manifests itself in letting nature in and penetrating it (Kracauer, 1985 [1960], p. 20).

As James Monaco (2000) also discussed, in the early times there was just one way to produce art, and that was the "present time/real time;" meaning singers would sing, story-tellers would tell their stories; actors and actresses performed their roles in dramas (p. 27-32).

It could be argued that the big progress in the communication methods came right after the invention of the scripture and then the developing of the pictorial writing owing to the fact that the images had now become preservable. The stories of story-tellers were not flying in the air any more, but they had now become recollectible and reproducible. In this way, the 7000 year history of arts based on literary or pictorial elements, in other words, the representative media, came to the end of its golden time and gave way to the recording media whose development is as fundamental as the invention of the writing 7000 years ago, because undoubtedly "photograph, film and/or sound recording has remarkably changed our historical perspective" (Monaco, 2000, p. 30).

To go back to the topic of cinema qualified as the 7th art; to use Monaco's terminology, "cinema is a branch of the recording arts that purveys a direct way between the observer/audience and the topic and that has its own codes" (Monaco, 2000, p. 31). It could be argued that this characteristic of cinema being able to build up a direct relationship between the observer and the subject matter has been the most controversial issue when one considers the whole issue of film-making. As Monaco also highlighted, the recording arts, in this very context it is the cinema, have their own codes and traditions; however a film or a sound recording is not the very authentic veracity itself. Furthermore, it has always been open to new developments that would bring the art of cinema supposedly closer and closer to the reality itself, such as the color film being closer to the real world than the black and white film, and sound films similarly having more common with the authentic world than the silent film would have (Monaco, 2000, pp. 30-31).

In accordance with these changes and improvements in the field of arts, questions and discussions picked up the speed and have been escalating since then concerning the concepts and topics of reality, formative impulses and the imitation of nature. These concepts keep on creating

their own questions and debates to this day: Is the aim of an art work to simply and only copy the nature/the world, or should an art work add a special view to the world and should it offer the audience interpretations of the world? It seems that there is no single answer to the mentioned questions, and each piece of art work, especially films, should be evaluated by considering its own characteristics and also in comparison to the other works. Yet, there is one thing for certain; and that is these shift of paradigms have been changing the historical perception, through which individuals and societies perceive and understand the world. The films as the main focus of this thesis are also elements of debates and discussions, since in this age they occupy a very significant place in the lives of the people, considering the mutual time/effort-sparing of film makers and the audience.

### **1.2.2. Cinema: A Popular Cultural Force**

Together with the individual stories and matters, the cinema also represents the changes, shifts, tensions and unrests that are gone through by the society. In other words, in this context, the cinema may be thought to be

functioning as the mirror of the society. For Bazin, film history, criticism and theory (the three being, in his view, inseparable) were meant to contribute, above all, to the establishment of an enlightened, discriminating public. By setting its standards high enough, this public could then gain some measure of control over what has become the most powerful of popular cultural forces (Turk, 1979, p. 653).

The cinema is a social phenomenon that bears much more different meanings than only being art, and at the same time it is a product of mass culture. Discussions have always been made whether or not cinema could function as memory banks of the society by reflecting the period in which they were produced. Some even support the belief that cinema is a great help for strengthening the social memory.

In her article published in the magazine *Cinemascope*, Nazmiye Karada (2007) stated that "the most important artistic weapon of invigorating the social memory and historicizing the very moment we are experiencing is the cinema" (p. 52). It is possible to associate Karada's view to Bazin, who supported the idea that the witnessed images show audiences not only the features of objects/phenomena but also the very existence of those



objects/phenomena, and that it offers audiences what has not been recognized before and represents its permanency (Büker, 1989, p. 20). In this way, it becomes easier to imagine how cinema could contribute into social memory. It could be shortly noted that in this sense "cinema presents spectators information on objective actuality, which one cannot perceive with one's senses" (Büker, 1989, p. 20).

Although this may yet sound too reductionist an approach, still cinema is the most popular instrument among all the means of mass communication, and it could influence people's historical perspective. Therefore, films, the so-called the 12 September Turkish films<sup>3</sup> in particular, should be paid more attention and be analyzed in terms of the themes, characters created in films, places used as settings in order to see how that period has been reflected in them and in which context and with what kind of direct and/or indirect messages they reach audiences.

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<sup>3</sup> A group of films made after 12 September military coup in 1980, which thematizes or deals with the event in any possible way and reflects torture, has been identified as "12 September films" in Turkish cinema (Maktav, 2002, p. 226).

## **2. 12 SEPTEMBER MILITARY COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH**

### **2.1. The Socio-Political Turmoil between 1975 and 1980**

The 1980s military coup was meant to bring an end to the domestic turmoil that was experienced between the years 1975 and 1980. Why was there a political instability and social turmoil in Turkey? It could be claimed that the industrialization period and the industrial progress that started around the 1950s led to the desire for social, political and psychological progress and enlightenment in the 1960s. As also underlined by İlkey Sunar and Sabri Sayari (1986), the impact of political parties and society by parties was on the increase after the mid-1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, in spite of the rising controls on the parties after 1961. (p. 175) Sunar and Sayari stated:

especially after the mid-1960s, the weakening and disruption of ascriptive ties, the fast increasing urbanization and growth of shanty towns, the rapid socio-economic change, and the high level of social mobilization- all these developments greatly magnified the impact of parties (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 175).

This situation could be interpreted as the society's awakening on the fact that living under better conditions was not a dream or it was just for specific groups of people. Because of that reason, people were in a fight so as to increase their share of the contemporary world.

It is also possible to talk about another social event within the society coinciding with the same time period: While this struggle for better life conditions among the people was going on, the revolutionist-socialist view among the students as well as the intellectuals was getting more and more spread (Kanbur, 2005, p. 57). This "unrest" within the society triggered the military to take action in order to bring an end to this atmosphere of political instability. The military coup of the 1971 was produced under those social and political circumstances.

Furthermore there was a political division within the security forces, as well. It could be argued that the international environment of the late seventies was also encouraging the social turmoil and political instability

within the country. At the time USA and Soviet Union were getting in a big competition, and were trying to spread their influence on the world politics. Fearing the Soviet Union influence, it became crucially important for the Turkish state to get more tied to the Western bloc.

However, when compared to the military coup of the 1980, the 1971 military coup was not as harsh and dominant (Belge, 1993, p. 9). The turmoil that made its peak between the years 1975-1980 when people were in search of more freedom and more social welfare, could be said to have been ended by the 12 September military junta, by applying violence and social suppression excessively, meaning not allowing people to create social oppositional power and act collectively, and resulting in the people being interrupted in their pursuit of welfare and freedom (Kanbur, 2005, p. 59). Metin Heper and Frank Tachau (1983) give a view over the 1980's crisis milieu: "The crisis which spawned the 1980 military intervention in Turkey was multi-faceted, including economic breakdown, civil violence, and open challenges to such highly symbolic values as secularist nationalism" (p. 25).

The two chief parties of the era were the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi; the right-wing party) and the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi; the main party

of centre-left) (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 177). The Justice Party was being accused of flirting with the fascistic idea by the Republican People's Party, for applying policies involved with "strident anti-Communism, an appeal to religious and nationalist sentiments, and a diffuse of sentimental populism" (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 177). Similarly, the Republican People's Party led by Bülent Ecevit, adopting social democracy, was being alleged with leaning towards communism and creating anarchistic tendencies by the JP for following policies involving making "basic changes in Turkey's socio-economic order; an increasingly radical rhetoric heavily oriented toward mass appeal to workers, small peasants, and urban marginals" (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 178). Thus, the political fragmentation and polarization between the two parties was at its peak (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 177). As also emphasized by Sunar and Sayari (1986) in their article where they discussed the problems of democracy in Turkey, the rise of party fragmentation does not necessarily result in big and destructive crisis in democracies but, it brings along coalitionary governments or minority part governments (p. 179). However, Sunar and Sayari underlined the fact that fragmentation among the parties can bear really disastrous consequences once polarization also appears on the stage. They noted: "...when fragmentation is

accompanied by the simultaneous rise of polarization among the parties, the result can be destructive; the functioning of democratic regimes is seriously undermined when the party system is both fragmented and polarized" (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 179).

Particularly during the 1970s, the fragmentation accompanied by polarization was also the case in Turkey; more clearly observed among the party elites and activists than among the mass public (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 179). Mostly, as a reflection of this political polarization between the parties, the political fights between the left-wing and right-wing student groups were ascending and becoming more and more violent every day. As the case was also stressed by George S. Harris (1988), "After 1968, clashes between right-wing and left-wing student turned murderous. Killings spread to labor gatherings, and forceful disruption of extreme left and right political party meetings became common" (p. 185). The economic crisis which was observable in the economic stagnation, rising inflation...etc. was also helping and cultivating the chaotic atmosphere of the country. Various types of acts of violence such as sabotage, bank robberies and killings were escalating each day. Security forces were unable to prevent these actions of violence (Harris, 1988, p. 185). The political parties

were not able to find any solutions for the ongoing chaotic and unstable political and economic atmosphere of Turkey in those years, because they themselves were more involved with their own interest of becoming dominant over the other; therefore the parties could not perform their task of protecting the interests of the whole nation and leading the country to a more peaceful and democratic milieu. This situation could well be summarized by the following statement made by Kemal H. Karpat: "In 1980 the prestige of the parties was at an all time low due to their pitiful performance in the years from 1960 to 1980" (Karpat, 1988, p. 152). All this process was at a great rate preparing the anticipated grounds for the Turkish military to intervene in politics and to justify later its undemocratic action of takeover. William Hale recapitulated why the military decided to intervene in politics:

On 12 September, the army had set itself four main tasks: firstly, to suppress terrorism; secondly, to restore economic growth and stability; thirdly, to introduce a new Constitution and legal arrangements which, it was hoped, would prevent another lapse into anarchy; and fourthly, to work out effective arrangements with the civilian politicians, both old and new (Hale, 1988, p. 166).

## 2.2. The Background of the 12 September Military Coup

...the Turkish nation has...always looked to the military...as the leader of movements to achieve lofty national ideals...When speaking of the army, I am speaking of the intelligentsia of the Turkish nation who are the true owners of this country...The Turkish nation...considers its army the guardian of its ideals (Atatürk, 1952, p. 226).

It is a well-known fact that the military in Turkey plays a vitally important role in politics, which could be thought to be contradicting with the principles of liberal democracy. This military identity of Turkish state government could even be regarded as a tradition in the history of Turkish politics, especially when one considers the fact that the military always occupied a franchised space in the political system of the Ottoman-Turkish polity. It may well be right to argue that the mission of the military to be the agent of modernization and patronage in Turkey was even more and more emphasized in the Republican period owing to Atatürk, formerly a soldier, who confided, to a large extent, in the military power for his reforms. It is true that Atatürk first appeared on the stage of the Turkish history as a military leader before he turned out to be a political leader owing to the political disposition of his actions; however it still would not be correct to consider his



movement purely to be a military intervention, as Metin Heper and Frank Tachau (1983) also pointed out:

It may be a misnomer to characterize his movement as military intervention in politics. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that his activities were highly political in nature and that he exploited his military position and skills for basically political purposes, i.e., the establishment of a new state (Heper & Tachau, 1983, p. 19).

As it has also been underlined by Karpas, "Atatürk saw himself as the total embodiment of the nation and, as such, acted to secure the nation's welfare... This resembled the Western idea of absolutist but enlightened government" (Karpas, 1988, p. 152). However, it should also be noted that one of the most significant endeavors of the Kemalist regime, particularly of Atatürk was to keep military issues separated from the political affairs, by convincing the parliament to outlaw military officers to become nominees for elections before they quit their military job<sup>4</sup>. "The aim of this policy was not only to prevent the military from exercising direct political influence, but also to insulate the military establishment from the pulling and hauling of the political arena" (Heper & Tachau, 1983, p. 19). Yet it could still be argued that the very belief that the military will be the chief guardian of Atatürk's

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<sup>4</sup> See also Heper, M. (1984). Atatürk and the Civil Bureaucracy. In J. M. Landau, (Ed.), Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey. Colorado: Boulder.

principles of republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and reformism on which he based on the Republican state, still exists and could be considered to be a significant prove what kind of a role the military is given in Turkey. Therefore; considering this fact, Harris concluded that "Atatürk's main concern with the army was not to keep it out of politics, but to make sure it remained completely loyal to him and to the Republic" (Harris, 1965, p. 56). In this case it could be stated that the Turkish military would always take an action in the event of endangerment of either of those principles of republicanism, and function what Heper and Tachau defined as "guardian" and create the "guardian regime" where "military guardians are essentially similar to moderators except that they feel it necessary to displace the civilian governors, that is, to overtly assume control of government" (1983, p. 17). Briefly, the basic executive power of democracy is perceived in a different way by the Turkish military than in other countries. As also underlined by Karpaz, "the presidency is the symbol and repository of the ideals and ideologies of the state and of the regime as a whole as these are understood by the military (e.g., nationhood, Atatürkism, secularism, and modernism)" (1988, p. 156).

Then it is not so much surprising for the military and the soldiers as the key actors, - raised and trained in such a way that their honorable and heroic mission of protecting and modernizing the country have been processed in to their minds and souls - to let the country run by the civilian control and to believe in the principle of civilian supremacy. Instead of espousing the core and the operating of the supreme civilian control, the Turkish military "felt authorized to intervene in civilian politics (issuing threats or memorandums, blackmailing or replacing the government through pressure, or coup d'état) when acts or decisions of the civilian authorities seemed to threaten what they interpreted as the national interest" (Demirel, 2003, p. 3). The following passage taken from Tanel Demirel (2003), a former military officer, could be claimed to be summarizing how the military service or job is perceived by the Turkish citizens:

The education and training of the Turkish officers does not resemble that of other armies. In those armies, officership is perceived as a professional job the same as that of civil servants. For us (in Turkey), on the other hand, it is held in high esteem. It is not only a professional job but also a national duty, guardianship of the state. Trained with such beliefs in (army) schools, officers spread these beliefs in their environment as they move up the ranks, thus the duty to watch and to protect the Republic becomes an entrenched belief in their whole army career. When they deemed it necessary, to do that job (watching and protecting the Republic), either they spontaneously act or perform commands

which tell them to intervene comfortably as if performing a normal duty (Demirel, 2003, p. 4).

Although some people referred to the military interventions as a reformist movement, the destructive effects of such kind of a military attitude on the very core of democracy may well be confessed<sup>5</sup>. Yet, it would be wrong to claim that the founders of the Turkish Republic did not favor the democratic regime, and denigrated it outright. It is perhaps true that the military has a positive image of the democracy and it respects the democratic governance of the country; however what makes the situation look contradictory and awkward is that the military tries to watch and protect the well being of democracy by interfering in the civilian affairs with the short-term military regime.

The historian Feroz Ahmad (1993) states the following: "The public, worn down by the breakdown of law and order, the galloping inflation and shortages of basic goods, the squabbles among the parties and the paralyzed parliament, welcomed martial law and the promise of stability it offered" (Ahmad, 1993, p. 182). This "unrest" within the society triggered the military to take action in order to

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<sup>5</sup> For further information see also Huntington S. (Ed.). (1962). *Changing patterns of military politics*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.

bring and end to this atmosphere of political instability. The military intervention of the 1980 was produced and justified under those social and political circumstances.

It could be said that the 1980s military coup was intended to complete the job that was not finished properly by the 1971's military coup and it was meant to bring and end to the social turmoil that was experienced between the years 1975 and 1980<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of the operation is to safeguard the integrity of the country, to provide for national unity and fraternity, to prevent the existence and the possibility of civil war and internecine struggle, to re-establish the existence and the authority of the state, and to eliminate the factors that hinder the smooth working of the democratic order (General Evren, as cited in *12 September in Turkey: Before and After*, p. 229).

In other words, considering itself as the chief guardian of the national interests, the military undertook its heroic special duty to intervene in the civilian affairs so as to save the nation from the ongoing social turmoil and political instability at the expense of the use of extensive torture, which "never uncommon, now became widespread and systematic, with a number of suspects and prisoners dying in suspicious circumstances" (Ahmad,

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<sup>6</sup>See also Heper, M. (1979, Winter). Recent instability in Turkish politics: End of a monocentrist polity? *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1, 102-13.

1993, p. 185). As also agreed and put in the following sentences by Demirel,

...the military perceived itself as the ultimate guardian of the state and national interests, there was little, if any, discomfort for the officers in conceiving the possibility of overthrowing the elected government. In their well-entrenched role as the ultimate guardian of the state, Turkish officers regarded the idea of staging a coup, not as unlawful and unethical, but as a special duty which they were trained to carry out when certain conditions occurred (Demirel, 2003, p. 6).

It could be argued, all in all, the military coup was proven to have been necessary by the reason of the government that was "driving 'our country into anarchy, fratricidal strife and social and economic unrest,' with the consequence that the future of the Turkish Republic is ... seriously threatened...," (Ahmad, 1977, p. 205). In other words, according to its implementers and supporters, the military coup of the 1980 was implemented for the sake of preventing fraternal fighting and in order to re-build a peaceful and secure atmosphere in the country (Demirer, 2005, p. 65). Briefly, the perpetrators of the 12 September did all the implementations by the name of Kemalism in order to modernize Turkey and adopt the principles of the western world. However, Murat Belge (1993) argues that the perception of the western world by the Turkish society remained on the physical level in following the westernizer ideologies (1993, p. 12). To put it in simpler terms, the Turkish society, as a

society suspending in the developing country status, got to know the western world with its military power and war competency, which were both consequences of the capitalist economic structure (Belge, 1993, p. 12). Having skipped a very significant fact; that the western world also had a more confirmed democracy understanding and civil structurings, Turkish authorities such as governments and the military have always applied an authoritarian collectivity to reach its primary goal of becoming powerful just like the western world, which was also the case considering the 12 September military coup and the periods following it. That is to say, the implementations applied in the name of Kemalism/Aataturkism regrettably remained only on the level of the elite, and could not involve the society. Kevin Robins also expressed the same assumption in the following way: Kemalism was an ideology imposed on the people from above. Its self-declared mission was to revolutionize the society for the good of the people. For the good of a backward and uncivilized people, however, a people whose commitment to progress and civilization could not be relied on. The consequence was that the society- the real people, that is to say- could not be trusted to take part its own revolution (Robins, 1996, p. 70).

This goal of modernization was strictly defined and formulated by the central power and was being imposed on the rest of the society, which is to say dissent, opposition and any kind of counterview were not welcomed and tolerated (Belge, 1993, p. 13). This intolerance of oppositional voices has also been highlighted by Karpaz in his article where he defined the characteristics of the 1980 military takeover. Karpaz stressed: "In general, the military considered that political parties should be the instruments of national unity, order and stability rather than vehicles for the expression of special interests of social or economic groups or particular regions of the country" (Karpaz, 1988, p. 152).

In the end, the military was in power for three years and in the year 1983 the management of the country was attorned to a civilian government - to ANAP (Anavatan; Motherland Party, a right wing party) headed by Turgut Özal together with a new constitution formed in 1982 (Robins, 1996, p. 73). The 1982 Constitution was formed under the control and guidance of the military; therefore it was the constitution of strict inhibitions, restrictions and supervision. As also defined and described by Sunar and Sayari:

What is envisioned in the 1982 Constitution is a state divorced from politics and a depoliticized society. A state-controlled Council of Higher



Education supervises the universities; political parties cannot form auxiliary branches; labor unions, professional associations, and university faculty members cannot engage in politics; and the government is allowed to confiscate newspapers and periodicals before their publication... The party and election laws were designed to favor two major centrist parties; Communist, Fascist, and theocratic parties were outlawed (Sunar & Sayari, 1986, p. 184).

Those three years under the rule of the military and the constitution of the 1982 that was setup under the guidance of the coup government, naturally could not have made possible a total civilization and a complete return of democracy to the country. As Binnaz Toprak also pointed to this difficulty of total democratization in the period after the military coup of 1980: "Taken as a whole, the 1982 Constitution and other post-1980 legislation represent a significant attempt toward depoliticization coupled with greater state control over both legal arena and the institutional framework of the nascent civil society in Turkey" (Toprak, 1988, p. 127). The 12 September military coup has been ingrained in the memories as a socio-political event that was launched targeting at the most politicized decade of the Turkish history (Laçiner, 2007, para. 1).

### **2.3. The Aftermath of the 12 September Military Coup in the Political and Economical Sense**

Ömer Laçiner (1993) argues that the Turkish political parties founded in the mid 1980s were established with the reinforced principles adapted from the political policies and the rooted convictions of the putsch government, such as supporting and promoting de-politicization and blocking any oppositional ideology (p. 17).

It should be noted that the shift in the social life was a reflection of the shifts in the political and economic life after the ANAP government was delegated for the management of the country on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, in 1983; therefore the political and economical shifts during the 1980s bear a considerable significance. It could be argued that the Anap government headed by Turgut Özal was given the project and the mission to reunify the Turkish society, whose main elements could be put under two major categories: 1. reconciliation of the political parties; 2. getting the society also support it by the influence of Islam as a cultural re-unifier. As also stressed by Robins:

The new project was called "Özalism," which involved;

...the unification of the mainstream political groupings under the banner of ANAP, along with a refocusing cultural orientation of Turkish society, by which the intention was bringing together of religious conservative circles and liberal Kemalist tendencies. The new cultural orientation emphasized the significance of Islam as a unifying element in the society. The nationalism and religious ideas of the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' were influential within one wing of ANAP. In this respect, Özalism may be seen as a conservative project, in continuity with the earlier political culture of unity and consensus, merely giving a religious inflection to an authoritarian state (Robins, 1996, p. 73).

The Özalism project also involved economic dynamics and radical changes in economic policies. The ANAP government quit the national progressive economy and instead supported the neo-liberal economic policies, which cardinally promoted the financial aids and neo-liberal strategies by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), reducing the role of the government whereas expanding the privatization (Robins, 1996, pp. 73-74). Ahmad (1993) also stated in his book "Özal, with close ties to financial circles in the West (especially the IMF and the World Bank), had been consulted by the junta immediately after the coup" (p. 183). As also underlined by Asuman Suner (2005), the policies that were advised by the IMF basically aimed "to hasten the process of compounding of Turkey with the global capitalism" (p. 20). As a result of that, consuming was encouraged in every field of life, as also underlined by Ahmad:

The new money created a consumer boom fed by Özal's liberal import policy. Suddenly everything was available in the stores but at a price. Advertising, especially on television, became more sophisticated with commercials aimed at specific audiences. During soccer matches, for example, the commercials were aimed at male audiences to encourage the purchase of cars, motor oil, beer and clothes (Ahmad, 1993, p. 209).

By considering all this, it could be argued that one gets the impression that the society's trending to get involved in the global trends and inclinations of turning into a consumer society took place only as a result of the policies followed by the Özal government promoted by the Turkish military, three years after the 12 September military coup in 1980. At this point it would be appropriate to mention the theory put forward by Murat Belge (1993), who claims that the orientation of the Turkish society towards the consumer culture was not only actualized through the military coup and the liberal political policies followed afterwards, because the Turkish society had already been familiar with the social and economical global trends before the military intervention in spite of being isolated from the rest of the world in such positive fields as human right improvements, the spreading of democracy, and working for the world peace and environment protection (p. 8). It is possible to find the traces of Belge's theory in his following statement: "...From hoola-hoop to mini skirts,

from Penthouse to Lotto; whatever was invented in Europe or in the world, it immediately was reflected to us (Turkish society). We never are isolated in such fields, and we have never been" (Belge, 1993, p. 8).

In short, Belge believes that the Turkish society would have still adapted to the rules and circumstances of the global and economic trends, which he himself describes as a negative trend, even if the September 12 had never taken place. According to Belge, "Turkey, with its natural talents, would have kept pace with the rest of the world in following the movement of getting shallow, superficial and self-centered" (1993, p. 8). However, there are academicians holding the belief the September 12 military takeover has had a vitally significant role in the shaping of the perception of western and global trends, which could all be defined under the category of modernism. Karpaz also argued that one of the key changes of the September 12 event was the perception of modernism and its principles only on the economic and material level (Karpaz, 1988, p. 156). He emphasized the following:

The key ideological change has occurred in the meaning attached to 'modernism.' Today the cultural and political emulation of the West is no longer the axis of modernism. It is, rather, economic development, technological advancement, and material progress in all its forms (Karpaz, 1988, p. 156).

As it has also been discussed by Laçiner (2001 & 2002) in his article called *1980'ler: Kapan(may)an Bir Parantez Mi? (1980s: Is It an Unclosable Paranthesis?)*, one of the most significant consequences of the promoted neo-liberal policies was the economic gap between the lower and the upper classes, widening every day; people working under the service of the government began to earn less whereas those who preferred/had the chance to work for the private sector - at the multinational companies, especially on the fields of communication and finance - were able to push up their life standards toward the better. As a result; health, education and social security services were not delivered justly (Kandiyoti, 2003, p. 19). In short, until the 1980s, the political utterance was the promise to organize political policies that would increase the welfare standards of the society (Laçiner, 2002, pp. 15-16). However, after the 1980s the political utterance has dramatically changed and has turned into an economical power utterance aiming to "conquer" the world market with its new companies and sectors and to achieve great accomplishments in world economy (Laçiner, 1994, p.10).

#### **2.4. The Effects of the 12 September Military Coup on the Turkish Socio-Cultural Life**

All dictators (dictatorships) tell you what to think and how to think. This is the definition of dictatorship and that is why it is evil (Belge, 1993, p. 29).

It could be argued that one of the most crucial extensions of this privatization period was on the cultural life; privatization of radio and television broadcasting. In the year 1994, the Law on the Private Radio and Television was passed, and hundreds of radio and television stations both on the local and national scale started to make broadcasting. In other words, the monopoly of TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) was ended, and competition among the hundreds of private radio and television stations was introduced. It could be argued that the images, pictures and allegations promoted by the current media ethics helped the justification of the neo-liberal economic system, particularly by utilizing the cultural orientation of Islam. As underlined by Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy (2000):

This alternative narrative would also have to take account of rural and religious migrations into media spaces, particularly as a consequence of the development of commercial television in the 1990s, sustaining a new popular culture- including *arabesk*- that dramatically outpaced the 'official' output of

the state broadcaster TRT<sup>7</sup>, and also worked to normalize and render ordinary the image of the 'dark face' of Islam<sup>8</sup> (Robins & Aksoy, 2000, p. 209).

The primary aim of the commercial television could be interpreted to be that the idea was promoted and imposed that it was always possible to make improvements on the individual level and to go up into a higher social class. To conclude, it would not be wrong to attest that consuming and idealizing the wealthy life style began to be seen as the only meaning in life (Ahmad, 1993, p. 209). The secondary aim of the commercial TV was to involve the people in masses flowing into the western cities from the eastern villages during the 1980s. As mentioned above, the urbanization had already started in mid-1960s as a result of the industrialization that appeared on the stage during the 1950s. However, the migration during the 1980s was at its peak, and people who had not been touched by the secular Kemalist ideals and implementations of the republic occupied the cities preserving their own cultural elements, customs and traditions (Robins, 1996, p. 75) As Robins puts it; "the Real Turkey made its presence felt" (1996, p. 75). This

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<sup>7</sup> See also Robins, K. & Aksoy, A. (1997). *Peripheral vision: Cultural industries and cultural identities in Turkey. Paragraph, 20*, 75-99.

<sup>8</sup> See also Öncü, A. (1994). *Packaging Islam: Cultural politics on the landscape of Turkish commercial television. New Perspectives on Turkey, 10*, 13-36.



fact transferred another 'significant duty' on the new commercial television channels that were charged with justifying the ideology of the ongoing neo-liberal system. Robins emphasizes:

The proliferation of new commercial television channels has become a crucial means of facilitating the encounter with the diversity of civil society. Under the old state broadcasting system (TRT), Turks only ever saw images of the official culture. The new commercial companies are eager to reach the new populations (and markets), and are consequently making programs about the real Turkey (Robins, 1996, p. 76).

The on-going shifts done in the field of politics and economy for the sake of modernization of Turkey and for the reunification of political parties inevitably affected the social arena, and helped the reformation of the members of the society with new value systems. Belge stresses that the 1980s could be regarded as a decade in which the freedom of thought and expression were restrained and the oppositional/dissenting voices were appeased. This situation involving inhibitions, limitations, restrictions and the quelling/censoring of the oppositional voices could be regarded as an extension of the 1982 Constitution prepared under the supervision of the military into the social life. Counterviews were not tolerated any more; furthermore they were muted (Belge, 1993, p. 13). The members of the society who had been actively participating in the political and social

life before the 12 September military coup and who were forced to keep their controversial views for themselves with the anti-democratic applications of the military, then were oriented to keep themselves busy with the other fields of everyday life. Briefly, "the new ideological power did not want any opposition or dissenting voices, which it considered to be equivalent with treason felony (Belge, 1993, p. 13). That is to say, the grounding of the de-politicization process began to be formed in the 1980s. Furthermore, those people could be said to have gone through a "social explosion" as Nurdan Gürbilek defined it (1992, pp. 16-17). In other words, on the one hand people were experiencing the suppression of their thoughts and expression, and on the other hand they were experimenting the explosion of expression, image and pictures, encouraged by the hundreds of private radio and television stations. This may seem like a contradictory position; however when analyzed more deeply, it could easily be observed that this explosion in the public sphere on consuming the allegations, images and pictures was just a justification of the on-going system in order to give public the impression that the social unrest and the critical political crisis period were now overcome, everything was under control and the nation was safe. This attitude could be assumed to be the denial of the big shock created by the 12 September military

intervention and its aftermath. It could, however, also be interpreted that, as also underlined by Hilmi Maktav (2001 & 2002), social fields which were freed from the politics and oppositional dispositions as a result of the 12 September event, were now filled with utterances done over private lives and promises on individual levels (p. 225).

As a result of all these, the cultural life was also materialized and it became a commodity for the neo-liberal market. With all these variety in the media, it might have seemed like a polyphony; however when the content is considered, it will be seen that there was no real alternative to what was being presented to the public.

Although it was true that there were serious limitations and constraints on the intellectual, ideological and cultural life, it should also be noted here that the oppositional voices were not totally managed to be killed. There were still some, who wanted to create a dissenting movement and declare and spread it through cultural products, in order to utter the injustice and the negativity about the application of the ongoing system; however it was quite grueling to find a place in the market for themselves to raise their voices, owing to

the conflict with the ascending social and economic values of the public that were formed and re-organized by the new economic system promoted. As a result of this, as also underlined by Mesut Kara, "a society was constituted, which was getting individualized, isolated and fragmented. Briefly a new human culture was created" (Makal et al., 2007, p. 57).

## **2.5. The Influences of the 12 September on the Turkish Cinema as Part of the Cultural Life**

Together with the 12 September, by which the intellectual conception was demeaned, taking political stands were identified with terrorism, and the depoliticization policy was infiltrating into the every single domain of life, it could not have been expected that this would not affect the cinema and literature (Kıraç, 2007, p. 51).

It could be claimed that there were still some oppositional groups endeavoring to raise their voices and declare their complaints and dissatisfaction about the new system, in spite of the 12 September military coup and the society it reformed and re-organized. These groups wanted to utilize the mass communication instruments to be able to reach the masses. Cinema was only one of those instruments; perhaps an influential

one. The cinema is definitely a very powerful means of mass media and a very vibrant source of education, although it is non-official. It could be professed that the cinema cannot represent itself by abstracting itself from the very social, political or economic experiences of a society. Therefore, it could be deduced that the cinema can never be thought to be distant from the value judgments, political and ideological tendencies. This is the reason why the dissenting voices of the time had big difficulties trying to utilize the cinema to make their remarks and statements; because now the cinema also belonged to the market; and in that market there was no room for voices spoiling the harmony of the chorus. As underlined by Meral Gündo du:

When the insufficiency of strength in the return of intellectuals -of course also film-makers- is considered at length, the concern of getting a safe place within the relationship between the media and market, and furthermore, a powerful ideological submission will be encountered (Gündo du, 1993, p. 40).

Nijat Özön (1995) noted that in 1966 Turkey ranked as the fourth country after Japan, India and Hong Kong in film production, with 229 films (p. 34). Nezih Erdoğan and Deniz Göktürk (2001) stressed that the film production in Turkey in the year 1972 was at its peak with 298 films (p. 535). However, the economic liveliness in cinema sector experienced in the first half of the 1970s came to

an end as a result of the spreading of television culture, the increasing production expenditures, investors' trending to make cheap sex films as a result of the economic crisis (Maktav, 2001 & 2002, p. 225)<sup>9</sup>.

In the 1980s the cinema in Turkey was trying to get over the crisis which had actually started in the late 1970s. The 1970s, promising years of Turkish cinema, was left behind (Maktav, 2001 & 2002, p. 225). Still cinema in the 1980s managed to re-acquire its prestige that was lost during the 1970s. The number of the films made in 1980 was 68; however this number rose to 184 in the year 1986 (Özgüç, 1997, p. 38). However this improvement in Turkish cinema did not escalate for a long time. American film distribution companies started opening offices in Turkey, which brought along the awakening of Hollywood cinema in Turkey. The number of films that were produced by Turkish film-makers were too less whereas the imported films were quite popular among the public. In the year 1989, only 12 Turkish films managed to be screened over against 210

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<sup>9</sup> For further information and discussion on the economic crisis experienced by Turkish cinema during the 1970s, see also:

Abisel, N. (1994). *Türk sineması üzerine yazılar (Notes on Turkish cinema)*. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi; and

Onaran, A. Ş. (1994). *Türk sineması (Turkish cinema) (Vol. I)*. Ankara: Kitle Yayınları.

Hollywood movies shown in the same year (Evren, 1994, p. 35, qtd. in Maktav, 2002, p. 227). This discrepancy between the ratios of Turkish and Hollywood films got even larger in the 1990s.

In the years following the 12 September military coup the number and the content of the Turkish films produced did not change drastically; meaning the quantitative and qualitative features were kept stabilized. The far-east fight films and the arabesque films in which the popular arabesque singers took place were also preferred by the audience of the 1980s. However it should also be noted here that together with the types of films mentioned above, in the 1980s, the films that aimed to reflect the sufferings of the 12 September coup were also made in addition to some successful opposition films made around the same years such as *Yol* (written by Yılmaz Güney and directed by Şerif Gören in 1982), *Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim* (by Erden Kıral, in 1983) and *Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar* (by Tunç Başaran, in 1989) (Maktav, 2002, p. 226). Hilmi Maktav features the Turkish cinema of the 1980s as the cinema of the 12 September (2002, p. 226).

However these films and their directors have been criticized to a great extent because of the assumption that they did not discuss the social-political phenomenon

of the 12 September in the way they were supposed to do, and they did not aim to awaken a consciousness among the public. This issue seemed to be problematic when one considers the fact that the cinema is perhaps the only art form that is being expected to bring up a discussion on the very issue of the 12 September. As also underlined in the following passage taken from Engin Ayça:

People always expect something from the cinema. Do people carry out a similar inquiry about the other arts or artists? We do not ask a painter whether or not he has made the painting of the 12 September, or we do not ask a singer why he/she has not made a song for the 12 September; however we ask the film-maker why he/she has not told the story of the 12 September (Makal et al., 2007, p. 58).

It could be argued that Ayça seems to be right in his ascertainment about the art forms/artists and people's different expectations from them. Similarly, Hilmi Maktav draws the attention to the same topic. In his article where he discusses the reflections of the 12 September military coup in Turkish cinema, Maktav (2000) claims that the so-called 12 September films do not question the event and its aftermath in the literal sense; rather they just focus on the memories left from that period. He argues that especially the ending of the films are far away from making a critique of the event but, more in the mood of convincing the audience that film characters would lead a happy life forever despite the tragic event (Maktav, 2000, p. 84). Maktav brings along a very



functional critique on 12 September films; however might be missing one important point in his questioning owing to his generalization on what kind of an impression or feeling the audience might possibly receive from films. It should also not be ignored that there will be a group seeing the films and remembering and commemorating the 12 September event and sympathize with filmic characters. Particularly, the very people who have experienced that period personally will get over their melancholy and start living today, as also underlined by Hakan Şükrü Do ruöz (2007, p. 71). This could still considered to prove the power of the cinema medium and its popularity among the public. As mentioned above, the cinema is considered by many to be the most influential artistic weapon through which groups can reach to masses and promulgate their statements and stands in life. Therefore, the endeavors and the desire to make the film of the 12 September should always continue. The assumption that "no successful 12 September film has been made until now," cannot justify any reason not to criticize the ones that have already been made and to make any further films on the issue.

## **2.6. The 12 September Turkish Films and Their Political Disposition**

Maktav (2000) argues that the 12 September military takeover represents significance in terms of two major perspectives: In the first place, it has changed the historical perspective of people by influencing the social perception; therefore it also has affected the cinema as a cultural product of the society. This to say, a new period has begun in Turkish cinema history, which could be named as "post-80s" (p. 79). Secondly, films have been made after the second half of the 1980s, which thematize the chaos atmosphere and turmoil of the pre-1980 period and the coercion years which were brought along with the 12 September military coup (p. 79). Maktav also claims that films do not directly deal with the 12 September military coup but, they indirectly talk about the event (2000, p. 79). According to Maktav there are films that criticize the oppression period brought along by the 12 September event as well as films that consider the chaotic atmosphere of the pre-1980 period to have been caused by leftist activists (2000, p. 79). Maktav also claims that it is possible to come across films that consider the 12 September event as a chaos and do not question the perpetrators but, are only interested in the

psychological disaster caused by the very event (2000, p. 79).

It could be argued by many that cinema is one of the most important artistic instruments that transmit reality through representation of images. However this representative function of the cinema, as mentioned above, inevitably becomes a controversial issue when the nature of the cinema is taken into consideration. Debates concerning this issue date back to the Lumière Brothers (1895) who discovered portable camera and made the first documentary films by taking their invention to the streets, and following this, to Georges Méliès, a magician who made the first fantasy films, having developed some special effects to contribute into the filmic language by emphasizing the elements of the fantasy world that was created through the film (Kracauer, 1985 [1960], p. 10). With the different perspectives they reflected on their films, Lumière Brothers and Méliès started different filmic traditions; the former inspiring the realist tradition and the latter leading the formalist tradition (Kracauer, 1985 [1960], pp. 10-14).

The nature of that visual and auditory art of film making where the image is thought to be identical with the

movement (image = movement), seems to be contradictory with the idea that cinema is an instrument, which transmits the reality through representation of images. In other words, at the level of immanence, the movement-image binary destroys the very logic of representation. That is to say its model would not be natural perception, but rather a "state of things that is constantly changing, a stream of material, in which no anchoring point or center of reference could be indicated" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 86). In spite of the fact that the representational characteristic may be distorted the very logic of representation, it could be argued that the art of film-making can still be used to make statements, depending on the point of view of the film-maker and his/her unique ways and styles of promoting his/her art.

In spite of the fact that it could be argued that it creates a certain problematic situation to define the 12 September Turkish films owing to what has been included and what excluded within the films, it is true that the political instability and polarization among the parties that started long before the 1980s, the coercion period that came along with the military coup of 1980, the state and conditions of people who were put into jail in that specific period and the changing social relationships in the society occurred often as important themes in Turkish

made after 1980. It is clear that 12 September was a political event as well as a debrief and a social event. However, this fact does not bring about the necessity that every film that deals with, discusses or mentions the 12 September military coup makes a political statement, and therefore, it questions the hegemonic ideology. The concept of political cinema is itself a problematic concept that it is difficult to define and draw borders. Suner (2005) argues that there is no doubt that the so called 12 September Turkish films focus on the real and/or hypothetical political events, that they problematize the official ideology and lay out a dissident stance; however, beyond thematizing political acts and affairs, it is not possible to talk about a common critical questioning in a true sense. Therefore, Suner argues that it does not look so logical to use the term "political" for all the Turkish films that deal with the political events (2005, p. 255). This is due to the fact that there are also film-makers and films that do not directly thematize political events and stay away from the up-to-date political events, but those films can still be counted in the category of political films owing to the attitude they maintain in the context of human existence and related issues such as identity and belonging (Suner, 2005, p. 256).

Then at this point it would be logical to refer to French director Jean-Luc Godard, considering his definition of the cinema as "a form that thinks," which he pointed out in the voiceover of his video project *Histoire(s) du cinema: La monnaie de l'absolu* (1989, min. 12:20). This definition of the cinema by Godard could be lead to the interpretation that in the cinema it is mostly the point of view in which the main story is told by the filmmaker. Vrääth Öhner (2003) could be claimed to have analyzed and summarized this Godardian perspective in his article, *What Does Political Film-Making Mean?*:

In fact, there is something problematical about the relationship between film and politics, which does not permit simply going from one to the other, from making films to making politics and vice versa. What is problematical here has to do with the position from which one speaks, with speaking itself, and with the medium that conveys it; in short: with the problem of the "how" of representation, in which the becoming-problematical of every form of representation is found (Öhner, *What does political film-making mean?*, 2003, para. 3).

In this sense, in spite of the unconcern of films to make a political statement right out loud, it would not be wrong to claim that politics are included in the art of film. This is to say that the film-maker does not have to make a special effort to include what is political in his film, because what is political in the film is not as easy to identify as it may be thought. It could be a simple statement, one small imagery detail in one scene

or could be spread throughout the film. What could be identified as political could even be something that is not included, mentioned or referred to in the film, but could be something that is totally excluded.

However it should not be forgotten that making interpretations and creating meanings from a film is not a one way process; what the audience understands from the film or how it interprets it is as significant as what the film-maker aims to present and tell to the audience. The meanings produced by the audience could be totally original and free from the intentions of the film-maker. This is also one factor that builds up a relationship between what is political and the cinema, "because the audience brings his own political thoughts and opinions as well as his ethical and cultural values, and evaluates the film with those thoughts" (Yılmaz, 1997, p. 10). It would be awkward to deny the fact that while consuming one particular media text, one would bring other discourses that he/she has come across so far, in that particular area or in other directly/indirectly related areas, as well. The messages that he/she has got prior to the new messages he/she receives at the very moment come together in order to make sense of what is being watched at that specific moment, and are definitely going to affect the way he/she will decode, interpret and make use

of other messages in the future time. The sociologist David Morley (1992) stated the following:

They (the new messages) intersect with other messages that we have received - explicit and implicit messages, from other institutions, people we know, or sources of information we trust... Thus, how we respond to messages from the media depends precisely on the extent to which they fit with, or possibly contradict, other messages, other viewpoints that we have come across in other areas of our lives (Morley, 1992, p. 77).

Making his/her own interpretations, the audience in this way, becomes a subject that gets constituted and re-constituted each time he / she is faced with any kind of a discourse; he/she becomes an arena where the multiplicity of discourses meet, that is ready for a new discourse, which will relate itself to the previous messages. The following passage by Pêcheux (1982 [1975])<sup>10</sup> also points to this issue:

...interpellation - the entry into language and the symbolic - which constitutes a space wherein a complex of continually interpellated subject forms interrelate, each subject form being a determinate formation of discursive processes. The discursive subject is therefore an interdiscourse, the product of the effects of discursive practices traversing the subject throughout its history (Pêcheux, qtd. in Morley, 1992, p. 164)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> For further information see Pêcheux, M. (1982[1975]). *Language, semantics and ideology*, New York: St. Martin's Press.

<sup>11</sup> See also Pêcheux, M. (1988). Discourse: Structure or event?. In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. (pp. 633-650). Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.



Considering this sense that has been mentioned above, each film could be considered to be a political film, and this is to say it is almost impossible draw borders to the genre of political cinema and discover its limits. The Turkish film critic, Atilla Dorsay (1984) dealt with this problematic of the political cinema and tried to draw borders of this specific genre. According to Dorsay (1984), in order for a film to be considered to be within the boarders of the political cinema, it should try to have a direct rather than an indirect political content, and should aim to create a shock for the audience, which will urge or provoke his world view and his political choice in a certain way. Dorsay divided the genre of the political cinema into four different categories: 1. Films that reflect the significant and well known political events of the recent past. 2. Films that use of the fictional and imaginary events in order to transmit political thoughts and views. 3. Films that have political characteristics. 4. Fantasy political cinema (Dorsay, 1984, pp. 35-36).

It would be too optimistic to argue that many examples of political cinema have been observed throughout the political history of Turkey. However there have also been efforts by some film-makers such as Yılmaz Güney, who made social realist films in the 1970s. 1980s were also

rich of important political events; considering its social effects and long-term influences and the continuity of those social effects, the 12 September military coup, as a turning point in the Turkish political history, became an important material for the content of a good number of films made after 1980. Although, in those films brought together under the title of the 12 September films, the military coup of the 12 September has never been directly dealt with, the periods before and after the actual event have been densely used as a background in Turkish films. Considering this fact, it could be argued that Turkish films thematizing the 12 September event can be put into Dorsay's second political film category, which use of the fictional and imaginary events in order to transmit political thoughts and views.

### 3. FROM COLLECTIVE MEMORY TO THE MATTER OF TRAUMATIC MEMORY THROUGH MATTERS OF COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST AND COLLECTIVE CRIME

#### 3.1. The Origins of the Term *Collective Memory*

History combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both *res gestae* (the things that happened) and *historica rerum gestarum* (the narration of the things that happened). This is no coincidence (Hegel, qtd. in Funkenstein, 1989, p. 5).

The estimation that the human being is social and collective-oriented entity has existed since Aristotle (335 BC) with the assumption that human beings depend on each other to survive. Karl Marx extended this assumption by claiming that human beings are social beings owing to the fact that they are themselves products of the very

society. According to this assumption, we are all collective products of our society just like a commodity being a collective product of the factory it has been produced (Akçam, 1993, p. 25). A human being is complete with its physical and mental existence; therefore considering the assumptions above, it would not be wrong to argue that the idea of "collectiveness" has existed for a long time.

However, the concept of *collective memory* had long been regarded as mystification before Maurice Halbwachs ushered a new era in the discussion of this concept, primarily with his book called *The Social Framework of Memory and Collective Memory*, which he published in the year 1925 and by which he emphasized the significance of the social memory and argued that even individual memory carried the traces of the collective memory. It could be claimed that initially his sociological approach on the concept of memory was severely criticized owing to his adaptation of such terms as "remembering," "forgetting" and "memory," which were already being studied and disputed within the framework of the discipline of psychology.

In spite of the fact that Freud and Halbwachs, the former with his psychological and psychoanalytical approach to

the issue of memory, and the latter with his sociological perspective on the topic of memory, formulated their views around the same time period, it could be said that Halbwachs' theory was ignored until recently whereas Freud's theory received a considerable attention. Patrick Hutton (1994) explained the reason of the negligence of Halbwachs' theory at the time it was formulated and its receiving more attention in the postmodern era as to be the contemporary (postmodern) historians' exertion to explain and perhaps justify the abandoning of the modern tradition, in relation to the politics of memory (p. 149). As Hutton also made it clear in his article, it could be stated that Halbwachs and Freud agreed on the fact that the living memory is constituted by the mutual interaction of repetition and recollection, but the former chose to explain the case in accordance with the social dynamics whereas the latter believed that the case functioned in accordance with the psychological dynamic. Unlike Freud, Halbwachs argued that the repeated memories cannot be conveyed and recited intact; meaning they change in time and "they are conflated as they are continuously being revised" (Hutton, 1994, p. 149). The second important assumption made by Halbwachs is that memories are reconstructed each time they are repeated within the framework of the social context. As a recollection of these two assumptions, one can deduce

that the images of the past in one's memory cannot be the original images, but rather those images are adapted to the current social framework and conceptions of today. Halbwachs emphasized his theory as in the following passage:

When we return to a city previously visited, what we perceive helps us to restore a picture, certain portions of which had been forgotten. If what we currently see fits into the framework of our old memories, the converse is also true, for these memories adapt to the mass of present perceptions. It is as if we were comparing the testimony of several witnesses. In spite of discrepancies, they agree on the essentials that permit us to reconstruct a body of remembrances that we recognize (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 22).

Thus, it could be argued that "what we remember, therefore, is a function of the influence that social groups presently have over us. Without social frameworks to sustain them, individual memories wither away" (Hutton, 1994, p. 149).

Halbwachs is well known for putting an emphasis on the "recollectivity" of the memories in his works and for his main thesis arguing that the memory is predicated on the social conditions and contexts. In the quotation below, it could be evidently depicted that Halbwachs (1980) almost openly denied the individual framework of the memory; meaning that one's physical-personal experience of the past memories do not change the social dimension of the case, owing to the fact that experiences have been

accumulating up to that moment, being re-constructed each time of remembrance.

We appeal to witnesses to corroborate or invalidate as well as supplement what we somehow know already about an event that in many other details remains obscure. One witness we can always call on is ourselves... Our memories remain collective, however, and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone. Other men need not be physically present, since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 23).

### **3.2. From Individuals' to Societies' Collective Memory/Recollective Nature**

It would not be wrong to claim that societies also have stories just like individuals do. As Mithat Sancar (2007) also underlines, these societal stories are given names like "past" or "history" (p. 11). The name history does not only refer to the past events that actually took place in one era of a society but, what is more interesting, it also refers to what people recall about those past events, in relation to what they are presented with in the contemporary times. As Susan Crane (1997) also underlined the fact:

Perhaps the most banal thing that could be said about history, in general, is that 'it happened' or something happened. But of course, history is not only the past or pasts that 'happened' or continue to

happen, it is also what is written or produced about those pasts both then and now (Crane, 1997, p. 1372).

The individuals and societies of today also both have an interactive relationship with their past, which is to argue that they -whether they are aware of this fact or not- form or re-shape their on-going present taking the past experiences into consideration as well as having an impression of their "histories" being under the influence of today. Amos Funkenstein (1989), a scholar working in the field of collective memory, also explained the significance and the position of "the present" within the complete insight of the theory as follows: "The experience of memory is also a measure of time. The past is the remembered present, just as the future is the anticipated present: memory is always derived from the present and from the contents of the present" (Funkenstein, 1989, p. 9).

It could be claimed that some individuals and societies would have a tendency to forget about their past or an intuitive desire to escape from it. Whether or not individuals or societies accept that, it is an inevitable fact that the past always stands behind them, and it always occupies a space and significance in today's world. It could be said that this tendency or aim to bury the past or escape from one's own past creates a kind of



a vicious circle in the sense that the insistence on the act of ignoring or brushing aside could be argued to be bringing along the consequence that the stuff that is being hidden from increases its emphasis and its influence and efficacy on the present day even more. It could be argued that this tendency to ignore the past had long been a strategy that was used by the nation states. This kind of a relationship between the past and a nation state was found to be mandatory in order to create and retain the integral characteristics of building a favorable identity for the nation state. In order to pursue this aspiration, a past which is full of heroic events or myths of heroism were taken as references with a view to keep their national identity virtuous and decent.

At this point it would be relevant to refer to Freud's studies on the processes of memory. Freud (1986 [1901]) stated that it is highly encountered that one's childhood memories are full of trivial, insignificant and unrelated details in terms of the content. He explained the reason of this finding as to have been engendered owing to a "relocation process." What he meant by this relocation process is the fact that all these childhood impressions and memories that seem meaningless and incongruous essentially substitute other meaningful impressions from

the childhood. Those memories which have been substituted were defined by Freud to be the "screen memory" (Freud, 1986 [1901], p. 45). In short, "screen memories are substitute images that displace more painful memories in our conscious reminiscences. They are, in effect, place markers for the true record of past experience that the unconscious psyche covetously conceals" (Hutton, 1994, p. 147).

In order to connect it to what was the main topic one paragraph above, it has to be stated that Freud built up a connection, and made an analogy between the formation of the screen memory and the aspiration of a nation state to create certain characteristics. To make it clearer, it could be said that Freud argued that the legends and the myths a nation has resemble the screen memory of individuals' childhoods, in the sense that national legendary stories and myths substitute other real stories that cannot be recalled any more (Freud, 1986 [1901], p. 48).

Sancar (2007) underlined the fact that the science of history is used widespread while building the national identity and the national memory, and that the education system and schools, which constitute one of the most significant rings of the Ideological State Apparatus

chain, operate effectively to teach children the history of the nation-state in the very way that the current ideology envisages it, by arranging curriculums and course books appropriate to serve for their purpose of creating and sustaining a clean record for the nation state. Apart from that, certain government agencies are founded in order to support and propagate the official history findings (Sancar, 2007, p. 18). As a result of these efforts to form a clean record of the nation state, it is expected that a society, which will be proud of its own history with the uppermost self-esteem possible, will be produced and perpetuated. It should also be added that together with the endeavors to develop legendary historical stories and myths about a nation state, there is another fundamental thing required to be done so as to constitute a nation state with a clean and virtuous history; and that is to prevent members and individuals of the society from remembering the real past experiences that may also include wars, times of domestic warfare societal distortion, genocides... so on and so forth, by imposing a prohibition against talking and discussing about the past on the forensic, political and public levels. It can be argued that the aim here would be to "deny, block and repress each and everything that could bring back the past" (Sancar, 2007, p. 19).

As it is clear from the aims and the aspirations of the ideologies trying to form nation states, it would not be wrong to claim that the image of past that is presented here is a reconstructed one. The way in which members of the society recalls the past on the collective/cultural/social level differs from the way individuals would separately recall their past. As it can be seen from the explanations, it can be argued that the collective memory has a capacity to reconstruct the past. It is apparent that individual memories cannot preserve the past in the way it really was, but rather they preserve it on the collective level. That is to say that what stays in minds of people is what is presented to them in the contemporary era.

Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation. True, it is fixed in immovable figures of memory and stores of knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation. Cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct as a total horizon, and second in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving its own relevance (Assmann, 1995, p. 130).

### **3.3. The Appearing of the Concept *Coming to Terms with the Past* after 1945 as a National Issue and its Acquisition of a Global Perspective in the 1980s**

Sancar (2007) argues that this strategy of repressing the real factual events of the past was effectively operated for quite a long time; until the beginning of the 1980s, when the relationship between the sense of history and national identity had to be put into question earnestly, which brought along a shift in this traditional paradigm (p. 19). Then one may want to ask the reason why all of a sudden there emerged a need to question this traditional relationship between history and national identity. The answer to that kind of a question would be that the socio-political events experienced throughout the world such as "the breakdown of the military dictatorship in Latin America, the breakdown of the racist regime in South Africa, the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc engendered the societies to go in an exchange process in their relationships to their pasts" (Sancar, 2007, p. 19). That is why the topic of relationship to one's own past was put into question seriously and why the issues related to the memory became popular subject matters of discussions. It could be said that a concept coming out of these discussions became widely used, and when

literally translated, this concept is called "coming to terms with the past."

Above it has been stated that these discussions on the memory became popular in the 1980. However it should also be underlined at this point that this issue related to the relationship between the past and the national identity became a subject matter after the World War II, beginning in 1945 (Sancar, 2007, p. 26) . At the time the issue was discussed on a national level in the context of post-war Germany. Therefore, it would be correct to claim that this concept of "coming to terms with the past" derived its roots from the specific context of the post-war Germany (particularly Western Germany), when the period of coping with the destruction of the Nazi era was at its peak. It is still not known today who first coined this term and exactly when it was used. However, it could be said that there is a proof that this concept was used in a conference arranged by Evangelische Akademie in Berlin, in the year 1955 (Sancar, 2007, p. 26). There are also records proving that the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany in the post-war era, Theodor Heuss, used the concept of "coming to terms with the past" (Vergangenheitsbewältigung) in several of his speeches that he delivered after the second half of the 1950s, and that he had a contribution in the spreading of

the concept (Sancar, 2007, p. 26). Perhaps, owing to the fact that the concept was coined in the very specific context of Germany, it can be thought to be typically German, and this is the reason why it is so difficult to translate this term to the other languages.

As mentioned above, the concept acquired a global perspective after the 1980s, when the act of coping with the past came on the stage once more, and when it was considered to be a serious matter how some nations, having experienced dictatorships, domestic turmoil, violation of human rights, could cope with their pasts, and reconcile with their present day in order to re-build the society basing the foundations on peace, democratic values and human rights. Of course, as it can be imagined, it was not easy to re-constitute a society which espoused a political culture based on peace, and at the time those were already problematic questions on a global perspective how to manage that issue. Today the matter of "coping with the past" is regarded as one major part of the whole big issue of the collective memory.

### **3.4. Alternative Terms for the Concept of *Coming to Terms with the Past***

There are terms that can be alternative to the concept of coming to terms with the past. As Sancar (2007) also noted, "relationship to the past" (Umgang mit der Vergangenheit), "politics of the past" (Vergangenheitspolitik), "operating with the past" (Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit) and "the remembering culture" (Erinnerungskultur) were only some of those terms offered to be alternatives to the concept (Sancar, 2007, p. 28). However, none of these terms were able to replace or substitute the concept of "coming to terms with the past," because of the fact that the suggested alternatives do not include any kind of a normative statement, but rather they sound -are- neutral and impartial. In contrast to the neutrality of its alternatives, "coming to terms with the past" is rather a normative one; it gives one the impression that the subject matter is quite negative. Of course, it should also be admitted that all these offered terms have something to do with revealing what really happened in the past and with representing the will to know more about the past experiences and events.



As for the concept "coming to terms with the past," it could be argued that the term includes many more other meanings, as well as embracing the content of all the other alternative terms. The act of coming to terms with the past could be interpreted to be harboring denotations such as having the courage to face the past, make discussions on it openly and critically, being able to accept the outcomes of what has been revealed out of the discussions, making settlements on the political and forensic arenas, punishing the perpetrators as well as compensating the needs of the victims... so on and so forth (Sancar, 2007, p. 30). Furthermore, it can also be argued that the concept of coming to terms with the past represents rather a continuous act buttressed by a strong will power, and the desire to remember the past (Sancar, 2007, pp. 31-32). Therefore, it is possible to come up with the conclusion that all the other terms and concepts offered as an alternative to the concept "coming to terms with the past" can be considered to be the ways that would lead one at the end to come to terms with the past.

### **3.5. The Discussions on *Collective Crime and Traumatic Memory***

It could be argued that within societies that have traumatic events in their pasts, which could be regarded as a crime, most of the time the dominant attitude is to deny the whole event and ignore coming to terms with it instead of finding ways to face the reality and cope with it. However, this approach causes the crime to become collective and has an implication posting that the guilt has been shouldered by the whole society, regardless who the real perpetrators are. Briefly, the very act of coming to terms with the past makes it possible that the crime is not a collective burden any more for the current and coming generations (Sancar, 2007, p. 145). In other words, denying the traumatic event and not being willing to deal with it results - such as punishing the perpetrators, curing the victims...etc. - implies that the society is cooperating with the offenders of that specific event. Therefore, members of the society become offenders themselves indirectly. "Acting with a continuous solidarity with perpetrators means to shoulder a crime which one has not committed in person" (Sancar, 2007, p. 146).

When the concept of "collective crime/guilt" is mentioned, some think of a case where the crime descends from father to the son; from one generation to the next one, only because of carrying the same genes of, or being a member of the very society that formerly committed to the crime. However, the factor that bears the collective guilt cannot be described or identified like a sickness that is carried for generations. The real significant factor that creates or prevents the collective guilt is the attitude and approach of the next generations towards the crime in the past and their decisions on how to handle it (Sancar, 2007, p. 147). It should also be underlined that the true aim of a society for dealing with the past is not to convict the public body or the whole nation, because it does not bring along any concrete result that would cure the wounds of victims and that would prevent that a similar kind of action happens again. As emphasized by Sancar, the essence of learning to deal with the past is to eliminate the ingrained and institutionalized mentality that legitimizes massacres, crimes and murders (2007, p. 147).

A traumatic event is most of the time a large process that evolves in time. Jenny Edkins (2003) provides an example for this issue from the topic of Nazi genocide of the 1940s. Edkins states that the genocide matter and the

survivors of the event were largely ignored at the beginning until it became a topic of fascination (Edkins, 2003, p. 2). It is clear that crime and violence victims as individuals and/or communities suffer from the traumatic events in their pasts. The way a society - regardless of its position as offender or sufferer - chooses to deal with the past would bring along different consequences in different time periods and change the historical perspective and shape the future of that society. Owing to this fact, collective trauma and collective memory are closely related to each other (Sancar, 2007, p. 150). This close relationship can definitely be observed in the example of the Nazi genocide of the 1940s, owing to the fact that the event changed the perception of the collective identities of the two different groups involved in the traumatic event; Jews as the victims and Germans as the perpetrators. Both groups suffer from the traumatic impacts of the event; Jews experience the victim/ sufferer trauma and Germans suffer as a result of being the reason and offenders. This impact of trauma is a phenomenon that soaked into the identities. (Sancar, 2007, p. 149)

As expressed above, the social recognition of traumatic events, like mentioned for the recognition of the 1940s Nazi genocide, is a long process and it takes time until

offenders and victims can start voicing themselves and discuss the traumatic event with some certain recognition. This issue could also be applied to the traumatic event, 12 September, in Turkish history. However, it should also be noted that in 12 September event, being different from the Nazi genocide, the offenders and the victims are members of the same society, meaning the sense of belongingness is stronger in the case of the 12 September victims and offenders, in terms of common history, language and religion. It could be argued that this fact, the offenders and the victims being from the same society makes the social recognition process even longer, owing to the fact that the feeling of betrayal is even heavier within the same society than that of between different groups.

## 4. THE CONCEPT OF TRAUMA AND TRAUMA ANALYSIS IN CINEMA

### 4.1. From Individual Trauma to Collective Trauma

The concept of trauma is applied primarily to extraordinary experiences in the personal life of individuals. Trauma involves an element of shock, such as the shock of being stunned by a bee, touching a live electrical wire, undergoing surgery, or being in a serious automobile accident (Neal, 1988, p. 3).

As it can also be understood from the cases Arthur G. Neal (1988) chose to clarify the concept of trauma, the essence of trauma is hidden within the fact that "an ongoing activity has been interrupted by an adverse happening that is unexpected painful, extraordinary, and shocking" (p. 3). With these qualifications, it could be deduced that a trauma always involves a radical change

that happens instantaneously; it could simply be said that a fracture occurs in the lives of people. It would not be surprising to recognize the fact that traumas brought along by these radical instantaneous changes also themselves bring along some radical consequences such as the destruction or loss of the previous feelings of safety and security, and acquiring of perceptions of danger, chaos and a conjuncture in embarking the oncoming events with meanings.

The rape victim becomes traumatized through a diminished sense of social value and personal integrity. The person diagnosed as having the AIDS virus is traumatized by the isolating effects of the disease and by the reduced opportunity for living a normal life. Such traumas are frequently of sufficient magnitude that the individual feels that he or she has become 'damaged' or permanently changed (Neal, 1988, p. 3).

As it could be clearly seen through the help of the examples suggested above, for the victims of trauma, things would never be in the same order as they used to be before that traumatic experience took place. The following definition of trauma made by Laplanche and Pontalis (1967) and quoted by Janet Walker (2001) seems to be very well recapitulating the concept: "Trauma (Psychical): An event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting

effects that it brings about in the psychical organization" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967, p. 465). It could also be argued that it is also important to recognize by whom the traumatic situation is created and enforced, as well as to recognize what kind of a traumatic event came about. Edkins (2003) stated in her book that the very event of trauma appears when one's feelings of security are damaged by those who are supposed to provide it.

...what we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger (p. 4).

According to the statements of Edkins (2003) considering a traumatic event, as it is observed, it is also significant to define the source of the trauma.

The concept of trauma refers to the abrupt changes in the qualities of social relationships on a group level as well as on an individual level. It could be argued that the debut and the consequences of individual and national/collective traumas resemble each other a lot in the sense that both of the two types are resulted from abrupt radical changes and that they both bring about fundamental changes in the lives of people; "just as the rape victim becomes permanently changed as a result of



the trauma, the nation becomes permanently changed as a result of a trauma in the social realm" (Neal, 1988, p. 4). Fear, disbelief, vulnerability and incredulity become the indispensable social values.

Neal (1988) argues that there are two different types of national/collective traumas; the first of which is a kind of social trauma that comes all of a sudden and that "consists of an acute crisis that impinges upon the normal course of events in an abrupt and dramatic fashion" by destroying the harmony and the order of the social system due to the fact that it is an unscheduled event (p. 7). The second kind of collective trauma is described by Neal as a type of social crisis that lasts long and that has become chronic, and that "lacks the dramatic beginning of an acute crisis, but builds in intensity with the passing of time" (Neal, 1988, p. 7). The Great Depression in America during the 1930s could be regarded as a good example for a chronic crisis in the social realm, because of the fact that the peak of the crisis was not acquired over night, but rather it was the consequence of a process starting in the 1929, with the crash of the stock market. However, that event itself was not the national/collective trauma itself. The real social trauma took place when economic hardships loomed large on all the major sectors of the economy and when

levels of unemployment escalated drastically in the 1930s. This economic crisis brought along worries about the current and future state of the social welfare, and it created fear and vulnerability, which were engraved into the consciousness of members of the society (Neal, 1988, p. 8).

#### **4.2. 12 September as a Chronic Crisis in the Turkish Social Realm**

It would not be wrong to claim that, perhaps the 12 September military coup can similarly be regarded as a chronic crisis in the Turkish social realm. It could be perceived that the 12 September came as a dramatic abrupt event that came over night, impinged upon the normal course of the events and eventually imprinted on the consciousness of the entire society. However, as discussed in the first chapter, the 12 September was, or perhaps has been, a product of a process and it turned out to be the peak of a social crisis which later dragged the society in a different rotation and which had a contribution in the formation of the oncoming generations, portioning them fear, vulnerability and a sense of despair; therefore having vital contributions

into the formation and/or shaping of the collective memory. As the scholars James W. Pennebaker and Becky L. Banasik (1997) also underlined "collective memories are most likely to be formed and maintained about events that represent significant long-term effects" (p. 17). To clarify the situation in other words, the social context surrounding the people, to which they were supposed to be bound with the feelings of belonging and placement, was not a safe milieu anymore for the inhabitants of this very social text to survive and proceed their lives. Edkins (2003) explained how this situation could harm one's profound relationship with his/her social context.

This can be devastating because who we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed... Any illusion of safety or security is broken (Edkins, 2003, p. 4).

It would be correct to argue that 12 September (1980) reflects a dark time period in Turkish history, which reminds its victims and witnesses of inauspicious memories each time it is mentioned. The 12 September military coup and the period before it (particularly 1975-1980), which laid the ground work for the event, involved the most prominent symptoms proving that a civil

war was going on in Turkey. There was news on people dying everyday, and the bullet together with bomb noises were justifying the reason why the chaotic atmosphere in the country was reflecting to the people. The society was in a deep anxiety about its future (Kanbur, 2005, p. 56).

Sancar (2007) stresses that, a society just like an individual, would react in several different ways when exposed to a traumatic event. He sums these different reactions in two main oppositional categories: 1. To deny the traumatic event and avoid talking on it, or 2. to accept the traumatic event and try to face it (Sancar, 2007, p. 150). This is called the "central dialectic" of trauma<sup>12</sup>.

Perhaps these all explain why people avoid talking about it, let alone making a critique or analysis of the event. The victims and witnesses avoid "amending the damage caused by the 12 September, and self-critique" (Laçiner, 2000, p. 3). Thus, it becomes more and more practically impossible to face the past and make a peace with it, which we defined as to "come to terms with the past." However, the fact should be considered that trauma is not a one-time occurrence, but a process consisting of

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<sup>12</sup> For further information please see Judith Herman (1993). *Die narben der gewalt (The trauma caused by violence)*. Munich: Kindler.

different phases; therefore one should always take into account that it may take a long time until the trauma victim gets involved in the purposeful remembering action and becomes able to talk about the event, in order to be transmitted in the curing phase (Sancar, 2007, p. 150-151).

#### **4.3. Trauma Cinema: The Characteristics of the Genre and How *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* Fit in it**

The essence of the trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our symbolic universe. All we have to do is to mark repeatedly the trauma as such (Zizek, 1991, p. 1).

Walker (2001) claimed that 1980s and 1990s could be claimed to have witnessed the development of a 'trauma cinema,' (p. 214). She also emphasized that she referred to a group of films that treats destructive past events, such as experiencing or witnessing military combat, violent personal assault, terrorist attack, torture, so on and so forth, on an individual or a social level, or both of the mentioned. Walker said the films which one could categorize as trauma films "were characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound,

repetition, rapid editing and strange angles" (2001, p. 214).

In the films *Beynelmilel* (Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Muharrem Gülmez 2006) and *Babam ve Ölüm* (Çağrı Irmak 2005) the 12 September military coup can also be observed to be a dramatic event that changed the destinies of people. This is why it has been assumed that they would make good examples in the context mentioned and why they have been chosen. However, the films do not handle the very day of the 12 September, but rather they deal with the world-shattering events that came afterwards. One may think that the film *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve Ölüm* do not exactly and absolutely fit in the category of the trauma films, by considering the borders of Walker's definition on the phenomenon, such as the film does not involve any fragmentation, repetition, rapid editing or strange angles. However, I would like to argue that what the main characters of the film, particularly, Gülendir and Sadık, both being people from a small town who are involved in politics around the 1980s for different reasons (Sadık is actively involved in politics whereas Gülendir just reads communist manifesto books so as to satisfy her lover who is a studied person), experience throughout the films, and/or especially at the end of the films, could be considered to be providing good examples for individual

trauma and how individual traumas pile up and in the end turn out to be the experience of the entire society as a collective/national trauma; therefore contributing into the formation of collective memory.

## 5. *BEYNELMİLEL* AND *BABAM VE O LUM* AS 12 SEPTEMBER

### FILMS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMA CINEMA

Regular memory is defined as an act of story telling. Traumatic memory, on the contrary, is non-verbal and fixed (Herman, 2007, p. 227).

#### 5.1. *Beynelmilel*

*Beynelmilel* is a Turkish film made in the year 2006, and directed by Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Muharrem Gülmez. It could be discussed whether or not it is possible to make a separate category out of the Turkish films and collect them under the title of "the 12 September Films;" however if it is proved that such a category exists, then one can definitely analyze *Beynelmilel* under this specific



category owing to several reasons which will be discussed and studied below.

*Beynelmilel* has been criticized by some film scholars and academicians on the ground that it represents a love story and overshadows the 12 September military coup by using it just a background for time and setting. In other words, the subject matter of 12 September has been wasted around the love plot and has lost its credibility and estranged itself from its authenticity. According to Ouz Adanır, this has been the case in all popular Turkish films (1994, p. 152).

At the conference titled as "Cinema and Politics" organized at the Kadir Has University (İstanbul) in 2007, one of the directors of the film, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, stressed that he and his crew did not intend to make a film of the 12 September military coup in particular (Do ruöz, 2007, p. 77). Önder emphasized that they wanted to make the first anti-militarist film in Turkey, criticizing the military logic and showing the results of its being imposed in the social life. Considering the director's statements, it could be argued the film *Beynelmilel* does not aim at a particular critique of the 12 September but, rather it intends to criticize the very core of the narrow-minded military logic (Do ruöz, 2007,

p. 77). However, it would not be wrong to argue that the aim of making a critique of the military logic could in the end come to mean also having a critical view on the 12 September military takeover, because the event is by all means a product of the military which clearly reflects the core of its logic and perception of democracy. Therefore, it could also be arrogated that the film *Beynelmilel* also criticizes the very logic of the 12 September military coup. It should also be noted that the director of the film, Sirri Süreyya Önder is an individual, who has experienced the 12 September military coup and its aftermath. It could also be interpreted that the director did not wish to talk about the event, or at least escaped from the idea of making a discussion on it in any way. However, his film *Beynelmilel* thematizing the 12 September event cannot be thought independent from his traumatic experiences in those times, because the film is a product of his mindset and perception of the world. It could be claimed that the director Önder does a good job in making the audience think while also getting them laugh.

*Beynelmilel* deals with the tragicomic events that a group of local musicians (gevende) goes through during the martial law administration in the year 1982, in Adıyaman. Owing to the military governance in the city, the

military rules become dominant and it is forbidden to arrange entertainment activities and parties at night, which also kills the social life. One day it is announced that the council that did the military coup will come visit Adıyaman. Upon this announcement start the tragicomic events. The authorized military group in the city decides to create a modern and westernized orchestra out of the local musicians in order to be able to arrange a sophisticated welcoming ceremony for the military council. The local musicians are then made to leave their music instruments such as drums, violins and clarinets; and to wear military uniforms of French soldiers (which they normally use for theatrical performance organized in the name of Adıyaman's liberation day) so as to look harmonious and in unity. They take up the modern westernized music instruments and start their new job, by practicing field music, although they are not trained for it. It could be argued that this very scene provides a very good example of how the Kemalism principles have been imposed on people/ the society in the name of modernization and westernization of the country. It is practically an outstanding detail that the local gevende musicians are made to wear soldier uniforms to look orderly and appropriate according to the understanding and perception of the military authorities, because it evidently depicts the audience how

modernization took place in Turkey "without relying on the domestic dynamics but relying totally on external compulsion; starting from the state and descending from the state to the society" (Laçiner, 2002, p. 11).

However, the poor musicians are unaware of the fact that their tragic end is coming closer when Abuzer, one of the main characters in the film as the chef of the new orchestra, decides to play the "Internationale"<sup>13</sup> for the visiting military council, which he heard while his daughter Gülendam was listening to it. To the audience's surprise, the authorized local military group never understands what the new orchestra is preparing for the council. However, on the day of the welcoming ceremony, it becomes clear what the musicians are playing as a march and they are put in prison for playing the "Internationale." During the clutter and disturbance at the ceremony the guns are fired and Haydar, the young university student whom Gülendam is in love with, is shot dead. The film ends ironically with an ellipsis to the present time, with the scene where we see Gülendam and her daughter watching the "Internationale" being played on television.

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<sup>13</sup> The "Internationale" (L'internationale in French) is a worldwide known communist anthem also recognized by socialists, social-democrats as well as anarchists. The original French lyrics of the anthem were written by Eugene Pottier in 1871. The "Internationale" was sung as the national anthem of the Soviet Union between the years 1922-1944.

There could be important aspects to discuss in the context of trauma cinema considering what happened to Gülendám at the end of the film; Haydar, whom she was in love with, was shot by the police in the chaotic atmosphere of the welcoming ceremony. Not only that, but also her father was taken into custody and the audience was somewhat oriented to deduce from that Gülendám's father lost his life during the torture sessions when he was being questioned on how he learnt to play the "Internationale," and whether or not he was amongst a group of socialist people who were planning to offend the Committee by their protest. As it can be seen, in each case Gülendám ended up losing something; the people whom she loved so much. Maureen Turim (2001) mentions Freud's treatment of the traumatic event, and she underlined the fact that all forms of loss, such circumstances as "death of a love object, betrayal, rape and dismemberment" could cause serious injuries to the psyche (p. 206). To put it in Freudian terms: "Loss of love plays much the same part in hysteria as the threat of castration does in phobias and fear of the superego in obsessional neurosis" (Freud, 1986 [1926], p. 143). Considering this approach of Freud and the interpretations of Turim on this specific issue, one can evidently recognize Gülendám, the main character of the film *Beynelmilel* also received a cardinal wound in

her psyche, having lost both her beloved lover and her father.

Furthermore, especially considering the ending of the film, the audience again may think that Gülendiram feels guilty because clearly she has been the reason why her father has learnt the song "Internationale" and played it for the Committee. Considering these issues, one may take up the discussions "Who is held guilty and who has to pay for it, and who takes the responsibility?" One may think that Gülendiram, as one individual of the society had to pay for everything as it was her own fault what was happening. Therefore, a person making that argument could also state that the film *Beynelmilel* lacks questioning and criticizing the whole system with its shortcomings and limitations, what really took place those days, but rather it accuses one single individual as a result of her actions. However, it should also be noted that seeing the situation the other way around is also possible, meaning *Beynelmilel* could also be thought to be ironically criticizing the general inclination to create guilt complex for individuals which prevents or detains the critiques on a larger scale.

Another point to be made is that whether or not the individual in the film shoulders the guilt or somehow or

other made to accept the infraction. It also has to be noted at this point that the kind of guilt complex Gülendäm faces cannot be regarded as a social guilt, but we can say rather it is an individual emotional guilt. She may feel guilty and regret that she has not told her father what the song "Internationale" really means and for which groups it has been given different meanings. In that sense it can be said that emotional guilt is based upon self-blame.

Another important element to be underlined about the film *Beynelmilel* is brought along with the very ending of the film, where with a flash-forward the audience views Gülendäm and her daughter watching the song "Internationale" played by the Alexandrov Ensemble, the official army choir of the Russian armed forces, on television. When confronted by her little daughter with the question what that is shown on TV at that moment, Gülendäm answers her by saying that is the composition of her father, Abuzer. Some viewers perhaps think that Gülendäm's daughter is yet too young to hear the bitter truth about the song played on TV, and this could seem to be justifying the reason why Gülendäm prefers to tell her daughter a white lie. However it could also be argued that the audience is oriented to think that what Gülendäm tells her daughter as a white lie will be the very final

sentence about that topic, and the impression is given that it will always remain as a big secret what the song "Internationale" really means to Gülendäm, and no other word will be spoken further on the subject matter. This attitude of Gülendäm could also be associated with the fear of communism brought along from the 1980s and perpetuated all through the 1990s, and even today. All in all, in other words, the situation here experienced by Gülendäm turns out to be an "unspeakable" one, because Gülendäm, the innocent young girl of the 1980s, who did not have much opinion about the world and the domestic politics, and read books and texts from the socialist theory just to find favor in her intellectual lover's eyes, now feels that she has been betrayed by the social surrounding which she trusted so much, and she has been forced to learn the grave truth about the world not from the books but by experiencing harsh events. The character Gülendäm whom the audience views shortly at the end of the film is no longer the same Gülendäm the audience has viewed at the very beginning of the film, just like the anthem "Internationale" does not have the same connotations for the audience as it has had in the beginning of the film. As Edkins puts it:

...In what we call a traumatic event... we can no longer be who we were, and the social context is not what we assumed it to be. It is not all powerful; it does not



have all the answers: in fact its answers are flawed... Of course, the language we speak is part of the social order, and when the order falls apart around our ears, so does the language. What we can say no longer makes sense; what we want to say we cannot. There are no words for it (2003, p. 8).

## **5.2. *Babam ve O lum***

*Babam ve O lum* is a film made by Ça an Irmak in 2005. By using the 12 September Turkish Military Coup as the background, the film tells audience the dramatic story of a father, Sadık, and his son, Deniz whose point of view leads the audience throughout the film. The film opens with the scene where Sadık, comes home being drunk and is reproached for coming back home at such a late time by his pregnant wife whose big belly gives the impression that her delivery is really close. In the morning of that night Sadık's wife travails heavily and the couple rush out to go to the hospital. However they cannot find any means of transportation owing to the curfew order that brought along with the 12 September military coupe that took place on the very night. The only joyful event taking place on that night seems to be the fact that Sadık's son, Deniz, manages to survive the unfortunate night. However, even the birth of his son cannot make Sadık a happy father, because from this point on the

dramatic developments start for him. Regrettably, Sadık loses his wife owing to the inappropriate delivery conditions on the street and to the excessive loss of blood. Not only this tragic loss, but also due to his political standing and identity during the 70s, the days of prison and torture now wait for Sadık, while some relatives are taking care of his son. Having come out of the prison, Sadık sadly realizes that he is incurably sick. Upon this bad news, Sadık makes up his mind to go back to the farm of his family on the Aegean coast which he abandoned years ago in order to be able to study at a good university and to get involved with politics actively in a big city. Throughout the film audience is invited to view the experiences of the father and the son on that family farm with its colorful residents; how the new comers try to renew their bonds with the grandfather with whom Sadık is cross with since he has left home to go involved with politics, and how Sadık slowly manages to get Deniz used to living on that farm when he cannot be there for him anymore. Unfortunately the tragic end comes and gives the family a big deep shock with the death of Sadık.

It could be claimed that *Babam ve O lum* is one of those controversial films, just like *Beynelmilel*, on which there have been strong discussion whether or not they

belong to the category of 12 September films. For instance, Hilmi Maktav (2006) criticizes the film *Babam ve O lum* for having "succeeded" to make a film on the 12 September military coup without getting the military involved in it, and without even mentioning the word "putsch" in it, apart from one little scene where a soldier explains Sadık, the main character of the film, why no transportation vehicle is available on the street. Maktav emphasizes that it is certainly left in suspense by whom and why the coup has been staged. Furthermore, he stresses, the audience did not even realize that the tragic events happened as a result of the military coup. It could be claimed that the most significant critique of Maktav on Ça an Irmak's *Babam ve O lum* is that Maktav accuses the director -who already claimed he did not intend to make a political film, but the whole effort was to tell a "story" - of having transmitted an indirect political message by claiming it is a big mistake of people to leave their families in order to pursue their social ideals and aspirations, and the real happiness only comes when one is in homeland with the family, which can be interpreted in the end to be promoting depoliticization (Maktav, 2006, *Vatan, Millet, Sinema* (Homeland, Nation, Cinema), para. 33).

In his article where he discusses the reflections of September 12 in the films made after the year 2000, Hakan Şükrü Do ruöz (2007) comments on the film *Babam Ve O lum* for being unique with its critique on the 12 September military coup, and for using the socio-political of the 1980s purely as a background to his story, which thematizes the hostility between a father and a son. He argues that "the film does not tell the audience anything else about the 12 September than short torture scenes appearing a couple of times, a death (the death of Sadık's wife) caused by the curfew order, and as a result a family falling apart" (Do ruöz, 2007, p. 75). Do ruöz also claims that it is not even clear in the film why the main character has to be put in prison (p. 75).

On the other hand, Do ruöz (2007) also mentions the assumption - originally put forward by Thomas Elsaesser (2002), the international film historian - that excessively sentimental melodramatic films such as *Babam ve O lum* can have one positive effect on the audience: Such films can help people, particularly the victims survived the 12 September, to face their sorrows and mourn on them<sup>14</sup>. Freud (1972 [1917]) also supported the

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed reading, please see Elsaesser, T. (2002). One train may be hiding another: History, memory, identity, and the visual image. In L. Belau and P. Ramadanovic (Ed.), *Topologies of trauma: Essays on the limit of knowledge and memory* (pp. 61-71). New York: Other Press.

same idea by claiming that individuals having experienced traumatic events can only show strength to live the current day only if the process of mourning and melancholy (trauerarbeit) has successfully been performed<sup>15</sup>. The reason why this action of being grieved could help the audience is the idea that it offers a way for them to cope with their trauma (Do ruöz, 2007, p. 71).

### **5.3. The Comparison of *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* in the Context of Trauma Cinema**

The films *Babam ve O lum* and *Beynelmilel*, which have been introduced above and discussed in the context of trauma cinema, could be compared in several aspects such as both including crypto or direct torture scenes by using prisons and jails as the setting, posting the torturers to be soldiers as the repressive state apparatus and having male characters who are seemingly politicized intellectuals caring about Turkey's future; therefore suffering from it, whereas the female characters in the

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<sup>15</sup> For further information please see Freud, S. (1972 [1917]). *Mourning and Melancholia*. New Jersey: Sharp & Dohme.

two films only suffer from the 12 September event indirectly; at the emotional level rather than for political reasons. However, other similar aspects will be compared below, which are thought to be providing a better harmony within the whole research.

It would not be wrong to claim that both films hold the distinction of carrying melodramatic features owing to their interconnected family members and the setting defined as small towns. Both films have a traditional stereotypical father characters in them, who would like to decide for everybody in the family. Another analogy that could be built between the two films is the fact that in both of the films there are main characters that experience a loss of beloved person/persons. And last but not least, in both *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum*, the main characters engrave their experiences and memories left from the days following the 12 September socio-political event as traumatic experiences, which leads them to become spiritually dumb and muted.

It has to be firstly stated that both films bear the two most prominent characteristics of melodrama, as defined by Thomas Schatz (1981) to be melodrama's narrative formula: "interrelated family of characters" and "repressive small town milieu" (Schatz, 1981, p. 151). In

both films audience views a chain of dramatic events based on families living in small towns. "Melodrama tells stories that are dwelled on 'indoors' (like in a house, in a family) as a physical location," says Suner (2002, p. 190). The family in *Beynelmilel* lives in Adıyaman, a south-eastern province, whereas the family in *Babam ve O lum* lives in a small beach town nearby İzmir, called Seferihisar. It could be said that the families that appear in the mentioned films are traditional Turkish families; meaning a large family consisting more than four people live together in one big house. The positions of the family members also represent the stereotypical traditional extended family; the most outstanding figure appearing to be the father. As identified by Nilgün Abisel (1994), the father character is "the head of the family and the one to use his authority.. He appears with an identity of a gentle and disciplinarian person, who takes all the decisions so long as he stays alive" (p. 80). It would not be wrong to claim that the father figures in *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* considerable overlap with the father definition of Abisel. The most significant decision taken by the father characters (Abuzer and Hüseyin) in the mentioned films on behalf of their children (Gülendam and Sadık) is the same. Both fathers would like to have their children away from the political activism. It could be argued that Abuzer and

Hüseyin take that decision for their children with the protective instincts of a father, because for they consider politics to involve anarchism and rebellion against the state, conflicts, fights and even death. Both fathers fear that their children would try to fight against the dominant ideology and both are fearful that they would be punished heavily for that. One can think that the two fathers in the films could be tolerated when read the following passage taken from Nilgün Toker Kılınç:

With its success in eliminating the dissent, the 12 September has 'taught' the society to fear opposition; the fear was so great that it eventually eradicated the sense of being a dissenter. The most functional method in internalizing this fear was to give the message that being a dissenter would at the same time mean violence, terrorism, dragon's blood; briefly social chaos (Kılınç, 2000, p. 109).

This is why, in one scene of *Beynelmilel*, Abuzer slaps Gülendam in the face, and threatens her by denying her filiations when she attempts to make semi-politic speeches. Similarly, the father Hüseyin in *Babam ve Ölüm* is offended by his son Sadık on the grounds that Sadık left his hometown and went to İstanbul to get involved in politics actively. In this sense, both films dramatize and reflect the tension arising as a result of the conflict between the old and new life styles, which is an element also highlighted in Peter Brooks's definition of melodrama (1976).



Both in *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum*, the main characters as well as sub-characters suffer from individual trauma by the loss of beloved persons, therefore going through self-blame/guilt complex and by the unspeakable disposition of the traumatic situation/memory. Furthermore, another significant similarity in these two films is that not only the characters having relatively active connections to the 12 September events but, also the characters surrounding them suffer badly from the impact of this socio-political event; therefore the tragic experiences cannot be explained with ordinary words, as Edkins (2003) also highlighted in the following passage:

...what has happened is beyond the possibility of communication. There is no language for it. Abuse by the state, the fatherland, like abuse by the father within the family, cannot be spoken in language, since language comes from and belongs to the family and the community (Edkins, 2003, p. 7).

Muteness is a theme occurs usually in Yeşilçam films made in 1960s and 1970s, and in addition, in the films that refer to those films in the following years. According to Suner (2002), this physical handicap motive symbolizes different things in Yeşilçam films and the referring films. In one of her articles Suner argues that the motive of muteness in Yeşilçam melodramas is paradoxically a way of self-expression; meaning,

"tragedies, love, devotion and self-sacrifice, that cannot be expressed in direct language, are represented throughout a film by that physical handicap" (Suner, 2002, p. 194). However, in the films made after 1990s (Suner exemplifies in particular the film called *Masumiyet* by Demirkubuz) the theme of muteness acts as a disclosure motive, representing the unspeakable dispositions, characters withdrawn in themselves and the absolute inefficiency of self-expression (Suner, 2002, p. 194). At this point it would be relevant to argue that the position of the "unspeakable," taken by the characters in the films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* (Gülendam and Sadık's efforts and tendency to suppress the past) is very similar to Suner's analysis of muteness motive, and they are major symptoms of traumatic personalities. Of course, it should be noted that the muteness motive in the films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* is not a concrete but, an abstract one. All in all, regardless of its being abstract, the muteness motive stands for the introvertedness of the traumatic characters that are also unable to face the reality, come to terms with the past and question it.

In both *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* the main characters Gülendam and Sadık experience a loss of beloved person/persons. Gülendam in *Beynelmilel* loses her

true love when he is shot by the police during the chaotic atmosphere that breaks out at the ceremony. She experiences the bitterness of sorrows and deep grief upon her father's being arrested and put in the prison. Similarly, in the film *Babam ve O lum*, in the very first scene Sadik loses his wife owing to lack of means to reach the hospital; therefore the pregnant woman gives birth on the street with the help of her husband. Unfortunately she dies as a result of excessive blood loss. The little boy Deniz manages to survive that grieved night; however the curse of losing the beloved persons continues and in the end of the film he loses his father, too.

At this point it could also be argued that the positions of Gülendám and Deniz differ from each other in the sense that Gülendám has perhaps something to feel guilty of and therefore, regret what has happened, because she has had the chance to tell her father about the march music "Internationale," whereas Deniz is yet a very young boy who has not done anything similar to what Gülendám has. However, it should also be kept in mind that Gülendám is not aware of the fact that her father likes the song "Internationale" so much, and believes it to be the song of the spring and decides to play it with his fellow musicians for the council coming to visit them in their

city. In this aspect, she cannot be considered to have committed a crime being full purposefully, in spite of the fact that it could be assumed that she suffers from guilt complex and self-blame in the following years.

It should also be noted that there is another very important character in *Babam ve O lum* apart from Sadık and Deniz; and that is Sadık's father called Hüseyin with whom Sadık has come cross with owing to his doughty aspiration and resolution of going to a big city in order to study at the university and get involved actively in politics. In short, Sadık has outlined his life in the specific way he wants rather than following the wishes of his father and pursuing the kind of career he constructed for him.

It could be argued that one of the most tragic and striking scenes of the film is the one where the father Hüseyin stands in front of the gate of his farm, mourning and lamenting for his dead son, pounding on his own chest while crying out loud, "He died because of me! I have killed him!" This very scene is like a vivid proof of the fact that Hüseyin the father feels he is responsible of what has happed to his son, Sadık, and therefore he is the one to blame for his death. This guilt complex and

self-blame of Hüseyin is already familiar to us owing to Gülendám who has been introduced and studied above.

It can be stated that the main characters in the film, Sadik in *Babam ve O lum* and Gülendám in *Beynelmilel*, are being forced "by themselves" not to think about the traumatic experiences they as well as their families and beloved persons go through in the period following the 12 September, because they would like to completely forget about it. However, the case fires back; meaning as strongly the characters try to forget about the events, the more and deeper they are doomed to remember them and have their bad memories engraved in their subconscious. As Pennebaker and Banasik also underlined in their text:

When people do not want to or cannot openly talk about an important event, they continue to think and even dream about it... Ironically then, actively trying not to think about an event can contribute to a collective memory in ways that may be as powerful if not so than events that are openly discussed (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997, p. 11).

According to Pennebaker and Banasik (1997), silent events and the unspeakable disposition of traumatic events are more deeply embedded in individual memories. The two scholars stated that studies have shown that suppression of unfavorable thoughts and experiences is quite unlikely. They quoted an instance from Wegner's study in 1989, in which he argued that people being told to avoid

thinking of an object attempted to think about that specific object as subsequently as those who are explicitly told to contrive about it<sup>16</sup>. That is to say, "in short, when people are told to avoid talking or even thinking about an important event, that event becomes more deeply ingrained memory" (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997, p. 10). Furthermore, it could be argued that in both *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum*, both main characters Gülendäm and Sadık try to escape from the locations where they have gone through the most unfavorable periods of their lives during the aftermath of the 12 September military coup, which could be regarded as proofs justifying that they do want to forget about the past and the traumatic event. However the more they escape, the more they would get into the trap of the past. "You can take a Chinese girl out of her Chinese quarter but, you cannot take the Chinese quarter out of the girl" (the director Wang, qtd. in Suner, 2002, p. 177) says one of the characters in the film *Dim Sum* (a film thematizing the life of Chinese immigrants in 1985, made by Wayne Wang), which falls very appropriate in the current discussion context.

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<sup>16</sup> For further information see Wegner, D. M. (1989). *White bears and other unwanted thoughts*. New York: Viking.

It should also be noted at this point that the suppression and/or inhibition of the traumatic experience is not only enforced by the inner self but, also by some political powers and ideologies. Ömer Laçiner (1990), the chief editor of the monthly journal *Birikim* and also a socialist author, argues that the governments that came to power after the 12 September military coup and the military itself have used this traumatic socio-political event as a strategy quite often. That is to mean, the period before and after the event have been defined by the ideological powers as a state of insanity, which has to be buried in the past and not remembered at all (Laçiner, 1990, p. 4). It could be argued that it has the same effect on individual subconscious, in that suppression gives rise to the engraving of the bad memories. However, somehow different from the suppression practiced by the inner self, ideological repressions would add to the acquisition and shaping of the collective memory more effectively. Pennebaker and Banasik also emphasize this assumption in the following passage:

Emotionally charged events about which people actively avoid talking will continue to affect individuals by increasing their rate of thinking and dreaming about the events. Political repression of speech about an occurrence, then, will have the unintended consequence of consolidating collective memories associated with the repressed event (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997, p. 17).



## 6. CONCLUSION

The 12 September military coup has certainly been a traumatic socio-political experience in Turkish history, and it has had uncountable impacts and influences on social, political and economic life of Turkish society.

As underlined by Cüneyt Arcayürek (1990):

...the military interventions have appalled the state entirely. It has weakened the faith of the society in the regime, government and in their own rights. It has caused inequalities and injustice and has created an atmosphere of anxiety and fear... This has to be called the shock impact of the interventions (Arcayürek, 1990, p. 521).

As the military would have also concluded as a result of the military takeover of the 1980, "anarchy, terror, demolition and separatism have been suppressed; but it became only possible through also the suppression of democracy. This is the price the society had to pay" (Arcayürek, 1990, 523). Each member of Turkish society could be seen as a victim of the traumatic event, because

the perpetrators have not been objectively judged and brought in front of the court. This experience is a big process, and the society continues bearing its products in all possible fields of life, including cinema. As long as the trauma of the 12 September is not recognized and confirmed by the society itself, the analysis and observations are doomed to remain as individual endeavors and experiences.

Both *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* have been criticized by some film critiques and academics for not having been able to tell the real story of the 12 September military coup in Turkey. However, this critique would not be enough to drive a conclusion about the two films, as it will be expanded below.

These negative discussions on *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* mainly result from the fact that both films carry melodramatic features as the dominant filmic character. That is to say, the two films primarily focus on the individual and/or familial experiences of the film characters and use the 12 September only as a background time or setting in which the stories take place rather than dealing with the traumatic socio-political event itself. Therefore, many believe that *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* have failed to make an appropriate

critique of the perpetrators of the event, and to make an objective analysis, which is anticipated to bring along the most possible favored result of coming to terms with the past.

Particularly the pseudo-happiness or, at least, feelings of relief reflected in the ending of the films -such as children growing and remembering only as a childhood memory what happened to them and to their family at that specific time period in the past, founding one's own family (like it is the case in *Beynelmilel*) and children taken under the wings of family members of secondary kinship (as it is the case in *Babam ve O lum*) are criticized to give audience the impression that all the tragic and traumatic events are left in the past, at the time they happened; therefore one should think about the future that is coming with all its hopes, instead of focusing on the problems which occurred in the past, and have not been solved yet. The 12 September has been locked away into the past with the endings of the films; thus the perpetrators can remain obscure. This is perhaps caused by the very nature of the melodrama, where the audience expects a comforting end.

E. Ann Kaplan (2001) also brings along this issue and claims that in trauma films bearing melodramatic

features, the audience is "positioned" and interpellated in a certain way, which would perhaps activate their empathetical or ethical feelings, yet, would not include any potentially negative results which would terrify them and make them lose hopes about the future (p. 204).

Kaplan stresses:

...in melodrama, the spectator is introduced to trauma through a film's themes and techniques, but the film ends with a comforting closure or 'cure.' Such mainstream works posit trauma (against its reality) as a discrete past event, locatable, representable and curable (p. 204).

However, it should be noted at this point that the trauma representation is also already a problematic issue, particularly when the genre is melodrama and/or a comedy owing to the fact that those genres mostly require a comforting end (Kaplan, 2001, p. 204) or rendering certain situations humorous and funny; therefore justifying the prerequisites of the traumatic event thematized in the film, by making it into something laughable (Zizek, 1999, *Laugh Yourself to Death: The New Wave of Holocaust Comedies*, para. 8 & 9). Furthermore, the category of 12 September films is yet an unclear issue. Besides, film critics, who has made a critique about *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* and claimed that these films do not fulfill the requirements of a good 12 September film, have themselves never defined what a good 12 September film should be like, and what it should

include or exclude. It would not be wrong to argue that the critiques about *Beynelmilel* and particularly *Babam ve O lum* have remained on the level of "how a 12 September should not be." This situation should not be depreciated, though, because they certainly create a cinematic field for the discussion of trauma; therefore they should also be paid attention and analyzed to contribute into the studies in this field. In this sense, revealing and analyzing the unfavored characteristics of a real 12 September film should also be appreciated, because it may possibly lead to the discovery of a clearer, more visible and explicit definition for the "12 September films" as a separate category. Kaplan states:

Trauma can be approached (if not known) only through its figuration by either its victim, by those witnessing it, or by artists undertaking its telling. Forms such as cinema may be especially appropriate to figuring the visual, aural and non-linear fragmented phenomena of trauma-to performing it. Trauma analysis aims to distinguish and understand trauma landscapes -their politics, aesthetics and impacts. Since memory, fantasy, history and cinema cannot escape the effects of cultural and individual trauma, cinema scholars must develop analytic forms appropriate to illuminating trauma's impacts (Kaplan, 2001, pp. 204-205).

It would not be wrong to conclude that despite also carrying melodramatic features, the film *Beynelmilel*, due to its well-characterized tinge of irony and critique on the narrow-mindedness of the military logic; thus the 12 September as the product of this logic and understanding,

managed to acquire a better position in the category of so-called 12 September films, than the film *Babam ve O lum*, which bears the characteristics of melodrama and tells the audience about the tragic story of two fathers and sons in the post-12 September period. On the other hand, *Beynelmilel* also tells the audience a tragic story; the separation of two lovers with the background of, again, post-12 September period. In the end, it would not be wrong to emphasize that both films appear to be victimized by critiques because of carrying melodramatic features, which leads the audience focus on the tragic stories rather than the reason of the tragic events, which is in this sense, the 12 September military takeover.

The two films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* can be regarded as trauma films, owing to their main themes and the characters' bearing features of traumatic individuals. It is true to a certain extent that trauma stories are told throughout the mentioned films on the individual level, taking the 12 September event as a background. However, this attitude and tendency is not unique to films but, it can be observed within the society itself, as it has been argued above. The films *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum*, despite the critiques pointing at the shortcomings of them, also contribute

into the discussions of the 12 September military coup by creating a cinematic field for analysis and observations. The characters in both films represent good examples of the society members on the micro level by showing how individuals experience traumas and how these accumulate in years and produce collective traumas, on which members of the society prefer not to talk but just to forget and try to burry in the past, creating a vicious circle in itself.

Therefore, it could be argued that each opportunity of remembering and analysis is vitally significant for the recovery of this trauma. The culture of remembering should be flourished and expanded. Endeavors on this way should never be quit or retarded, because they are necessary for the elimination of a violence culture and for flourishing of a peaceful society in which democracy is a fundamental element. As stressed by Sancar:

...such kind of an abandonment would at the same time mean to resign from the goal of becoming a 'normal' society rescued from the government mentality that announces itself as the titleholder for disregarding the human and human rights when found necessary, from grudge-lynch culture and from the threat of mass conflicts and massacres and would mean to resign from the struggle of democratization of the political culture (Sancar, 2005, p. 27).

Societies that cannot face their histories, the tragic and traumatic periods in the past in particular, are doomed to live with that pain forever. Cinema is a medium

that can be functionalized to create chances to come to terms with the past. *Beynelmilel* and *Babam ve O lum* are also a part of this utilization of the cinematic medium; thus they deserve consideration.



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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### FILMS ANALYZED

#### **BABAM VE O LUM (2005)**

**Y:** Ça an Irmak. **S:** Ça an Irmak. **G. Y. :** Rıdvan Ülgen. **M:** Evanthia Reboutsika. **O:** Fikret Kuşkan, Çetin Tekindor, Şerif Sezer, Yetkin Dikiciler, Binnur Kaya, Ege Tanman, Özge Özberk, Halit Ergenç, Erdal Tosun, Bilge Şen. **Yapım:** Avşar Film (Esi Gülce, Şükrü Avşar). Renkli. 35mm.

#### **BEYNELMİLEL (2006)**

**Y:** Sırrı Süreyya Önder-Muharrem Gülmez. **S:** Sırrı Süreyya Önder. **M:** Aytekin G. Ataş-Sırrı Süreyya Önder. **O:** Özgü Namal, Cezmi Baskın, Nazmi Kırık, Meral Okay, Oktay Kaynarca, Umut Kurt. **Yapım:** BKM Film (Necati Akpınar). Renkli 35 mm.

## APPENDIX B

### 12 SEPTEMBER TURKISH FILMS

<i>Yol</i>	Şerif Gören	1982
<i>Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim</i>	Erden Kıral	1983
<i>Öç</i>	Mesut Uçakan	1984
<i>Sen Türkülerini Söyle</i>	Şerif Gören	1986
<i>Dikenli Yol</i>	Zeki Alasya	1986
<i>Ses</i>	Zeki Ökten	1986
<i>Prences</i>	Sinan Çetin	1986
<i>Ya mur Kaçakları</i>	Yavuz Özkan	1987
<i>Sen De Yüre inde</i>	Şerif Gören	1987
<i>Sevgiye Yer Aç</i>		
<i>Su Da Yanar</i>	Ali Özgentürk	1987
<i>Kimlik</i>	Metin Gülgen	1988
<i>Av Zamanı</i>	Erden Kıral	1988
<i>Bütün Kapılar Kapalıydı</i>	Memduh Ün	1989
<i>Kara Sevdalı Bulut</i>	Muammer Özer	1989
<i>Sis</i>	Zülfü Livaneli	1989



<i>Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar</i>	Tunç Başaran	1989
<i>Darbe</i>	Ümit Efehan	1990
<i>İkili Oyunlar</i>	İrfan Tözüm	1990
<i>Suyun Öte Yanı</i>	Tomris	1991
	Giritlio lu	
<i>Uzlaşma</i>	O uzhan Tercan	1991
<i>Bekle Dedim Gölgeye</i>	Atıf Yılmaz	1991
<i>Hoşçakal Umut</i>	Candan Evcimen	1993
	İçöz	
<i>Bir Sonbahar Hikayesi</i>	Yavuz Özkan	1993
<i>Çözölmeler</i>	Yusuf Kurçenli	1994
<i>80. Adım</i>	Tomris	1995
	Giritlio lu	
<i>Babam Askerde</i>	Handan İpekçi	1995
<i>Gerilla</i>	Osman Sınay	1995
<i>Gölün Bitti i Yer</i>	İsmail Güneş	1998
<i>Eylöl Fırtınası</i>	Atıf Yılmaz	1999
<i>Vizontele Tuba</i>	Yılmaz Erdo an	2003
<i>Babam ve O lum</i>	Ça an Irmak	2005
<i>Eve Dönüş</i>	Ömer U ur	2006
<i>Beynelmilel</i>	Sırrı Süreyya Önder	2006
<i>Zincirbozan</i>	Muharrem Gülmez Atıl İnaç	2007
<i>Fikret Bey</i>	Selma Köksal	2007
	Çekiç	
<i>O... Çocukları</i>	Murat Saraço lu	2008

