



Kültür ve İletişim

culture&communication

Yıl: 27 Sayı: 53 (Year: 27 Issue: 53)

Mart 2024 - September 2024 (March 2024 - September 2024)

E-ISSN: 2149-9098



2024, 27(1): 24-49

DOI: 10.18691/kulturveiletisim.1380499

****Research Article****

Representation of Neoliberal Individualistic Practices in Social Structure: “Sorry, We Missed You” Film Example *

Koray Çankaya**

Abstract

We are witnessing the establishment of practices referred to as "new individualism" in the realm of contemporary neoliberal ideology and culture. The societal manifestation of these new individualistic practices is also reflected in media content. Media functions as a mirror for societal and cultural practices, reflecting the ideological and cultural landscape.

This study analyses the values of new individualistic practices reflected in the film "Sorry We Missed You" from a Western culture-centred perspective. The film "Sorry We Missed You" has been chosen as the research subject due to its examination of Western neoliberal-associated cultural values and related lifestyle practices. The aim is to uncover the realm of values that pertain to new Western individualistic practices within the film.

Keywords: Individualism, film analysis, neoliberalism, postmodernism, mass culture, societal structure

* Received: 24.10.2023. Accepted: 14.02.2024

** Pamukkale University, Faculty of Communication

Orcid no: 0000-0002-9840-7962, koraycankaya@hotmail.de

****Araştırma Makalesi****

Toplumsal Yapıda Neoliberal Bireyci Pratiklerin Temsili: "Üzgünüz Size Ulaşamadık" Film Örneği*

Koray ÇANKAYA**

Öz

Çağdaş neoliberal ideoloji ve kültür alanında "yeni bireycilik" olarak adlandırılan uygulamaların kurulmasına tanıklık ediyoruz. Bu yeni bireycilik uygulamalarının toplumsal yansıması, medya içeriğine de yansımaktadır. Medya, toplumsal ve kültürel uygulamalar için bir ayna işlevi görerek ideolojik ve kültürel manzarayı yansıtır.

Bu çalışma, Batı kültürü merkezli bir perspektiften, "*Sorry We Missed You*" filminde yansıtılan yeni bireycilik uygulamalarının değerlerini analiz eder. "*Sorry We Missed You*" filmi, Batı'nın neoliberal sistemle ilişkilendirilen kültürel değerlerini ve ilişkili yaşam tarzı uygulamalarını incelemesi nedeniyle araştırmanın konusu olarak seçilmiştir. Amaç, filmin içerisinde Batı'nın yeni bireycilik uygulamalarına dair değerler alanını açığa çıkarmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bireycilik, film analizi, neoliberalizm, postmodernizm, kitle kültürü, toplumsal yapı

* Geliş tarihi: 24.10.2023. Kabul tarihi: 14.02.2024

** Pamukkale Üniversitesi, İletişim Fakültesi

Orcid no: 0000-0002-9840-7962, koraycankaya@hotmail.de

Representation of Neoliberal Individualistic Practices in Social Structure: “Sorry, We Missed You” Film Example

Introduction

A connection is established between individualization and industrialization. The process through which humans become aware of themselves as individuals, distinct from being part of a tribe, family, or community member, extends back to stages preceding industrialization. The Enlightenment period envisions the individual as a rational subject guiding life. However, while technical processes such as industrialization and mass production have advanced, they have also had a detrimental effect on individual autonomy and the societal cultural structure. As a result, the concept of the free individual becomes contentious. There has been a shift away from the idea of an autonomous individual towards the individual being viewed as an extension of the homogenous system. Urbanization, which is driven by industrialization, leads to a change in lifestyle, fragmenting family structures and revealing individual lives.

In the context of liberal ideology, individualism and individual enterprise legitimize as thoughts and lifestyles in the modern industrial era, firmly rooting themselves in society. The economic and cultural societal structure unique to the culture of liberal individualism continues to permeate into the present neoliberal world. In the postmodern era, liberal individualistic life has evolved into a new form of individualistic life, reflecting neoliberal characteristics. Individualistic practices are perceived as a natural facet of life, attributing all forms of luck and misfortune, from failures to success stories to individual choices and responsibilities. The focus of narratives concerning societal injustices, losses stemming from dominant powers' domination, unemployment, bankruptcy, failure, and the like, places the notion of individual responsibility at the forefront. This type of neoliberal individualistic mindset fosters an illusion where the individual, as an extension of the system, possesses the power and freedom to sketch any kind of destiny narrative, good or bad.

The system's cultural structure captivates and seduces all minds and hearts, appropriating all ideologies and ideas, which could otherwise be autonomous. In Marcuse's critique of the advanced industrial society, an individual imprisoned by

repressive false needs and incapable of genuine liberation (1990: 6), the generating system creates a one-dimensional universe of life, forging a barren cultural climate where alternatives or originality fail to sprout.

The concept explaining the early modern period's characteristics as a cultural industry, when delineated, shows the logic of consumption transcending production, as exemplified by concepts such as postmodernity, hyperreality, and late capitalism today. There is a direct organic connection between the system's logic and postmodern cultural practices. The postmodern world, within the climate of individualistic, fluid, transient global dynamics, imposes a neoliberal individualistic mentality marked by fleeting consumption economies.

Contemporary mass media, beginning from the 1960s, disseminates the logic of neoliberalism through mass culture, serving as the prime engine shaping this new individualistic mentality. The fuel for this prime engine is the cultural-economic logic of the new capitalist system or the postmodern era.

The cultural logic of societal structure and individualistic practices finds its reflection in media content like cinema narratives. To ascertain the extent to which contemporary societal codes align with postmodern individualistic discourse and practices, and to discern the semblance of societal change, Ken Loach's film "*Sorry We Missed You*" will be analysed. By utilizing the chosen example, this study will examine how the individualistic understanding of the economic-cultural system shapes the transformation of societal structure. The individual practices of characters in the film, serving as a mirror of the neoliberal system, will be scrutinized to elucidate the system's cultural domination.

The qualitative content analysis method is utilized as a film analysis approach. The analysis focuses on understanding societal perceptions by examining how media presents characters under specific conditions. By comparing media content with real-world situations, the study aims to identify the direction in which reality is portrayed. The theoretical perspective explores the evolution of liberal thought conditions from the early modern world to the postmodern world.

Modern Rational Subject to the New Individual

J.J. Rousseau, a key philosopher of the Enlightenment era, offers an innovative perspective on how the free individual will emerge by critiquing the society he resides

in. Rousseau, in the late 18th century, as the modern world was taking shape, presents his critique of the society he lived in through his work *Confessions* (2002), where he recounts the story of his life. The opening page of *Confessions* clarifies that the story to be told is about the inherently free individual, detached from societal roles and hierarchical relationships. "To my fellows, I wish to show a human being in all the truth of nature, and that human being will be me" (Rousseau, 2002: 11). While proclaiming his uniqueness, Rousseau is also sketching a model for the new free individual. One of the two issues to serve as a basis for Rousseau's claim of being a unique individual is his transient lifestyle; he lived as a vagabond, sought protectors during his exile, and found a wet nurse as a child who later became his lover. Rousseau possessed an insatiable appetite for pleasure. The second issue is Rousseau's departure from the abstract conceptualizations of the early British and Scottish philosophers, dissociating himself from their ideas of the abstract individual, as he placed collective living at the core of societal existence. Rousseau's method revolves around the general will of individuals who come together in a social contract. Through Rousseau, the groundwork was laid for the dream of individualism, which would persist for two centuries, only to prove futile with the advent of the French Revolution (Elliot & Lemert 2011: 68-69).

Rousseau, a natural outcome of the Enlightenment, seeks originality, while simultaneously casting blame on the society he was born into. For Rousseau, society acts not to reveal people's originality but rather as a means to conceal it. The coverings, masks, and veils shading people need to be lifted to understand their true nature, their intentions, and their roles.

Rousseau perceives a sense of alienation from this world. Rousseau's process of confession is a process of unveiling and establishing originality. Through *Confessions*, Rousseau reveals how 18th-century French society's traditions, juxtaposed with the odd confluence of modernity, hinder individuals from reaching their deserved place due to the depersonalization of human identity (Berman, 2011: 95-99). As a primary inspiration for the French Revolution, Rousseau can be seen as advocating the restoration of harmony and equality in society by aligning individual will with humanity's natural state (Çağla, 2007: 176).

Rousseau lived in an environment where the identities arising from feudalism developed and imposed oppression upon individuals. He criticized the traditional societal roles within European society. Social forms such as nobility and peasantry,

exemplified by the aristocratic code propagated from the French court, imposed a deceptive separation and systematically hindered individual emotions, such as through the imposition of codes of politeness. The affected artificial traditions from the French court created a given stratification among the noble and peasant classes, the rich and the poor. Peasants lived repetitive and stagnant lives, adhering unquestioningly to traditions passed down from ancestors, suppressing individual thought or initiative. However, these traditions could be shattered by individual thought. Yet, the sense of social distance and status suppresses the sharing of emotions. People, due to the perceived distance formed by their given positions, become polarized between slaves and masters, rich and poor, devoid of individual uniqueness (Berman, 2011: 101-110).

Before the Renaissance, humans defined themselves within communities such as race, ethnicity, guilds, and families. The reason for the early transformation of Italians into modern individuals is attributed to the form of governance. In medieval Italy, people's consciousness was under a common veil towards the world and themselves. However, in Italy, this veil was lifted, and individuals began to objectively perceive the state and the world. Through this process, individuals evolved into thinking and understanding beings, defining themselves by this attribute (Burckhardt, 1974: 207-208). Burckhardt (1974), offers various perspectives on the development of individualism in Italy, ranging from the necessity to maximize individual abilities during oppressive government periods to the contribution of the exile experience in culturally enhancing human character.

Societal codes, traditions, behaviour patterns, and the cultural relationship forms imposed by the system shape the individual's characteristics. Modernity is also a project of becoming an individual. Within the orbit of the societal, political, and economic system created by modernity, the individual's essence is moulded.

Alexis De Tocqueville, influenced by Rousseau, critiques American society in his work "*Democracy in America*" (1962) written in the mid-18th century, portraying it as a modern prison, which has transitioned into a soft despotism.

According to Sunar, Tocqueville focuses on the foundation of modern society based on individualistic principles and sees individualistic egoism, which drives people to accumulate more and detach themselves from society as the source of soft despotism. Tocqueville believes that despotism in the modern era can only arise within the framework of modern democratic bourgeois society. In this modern society, Weber

later terms the centralizing and encompassing structure around the individual as the "iron cage" of modernity, 60 years later. In this system, the individual becomes more of a customer than a citizen. The pursuit of pleasure and self-interest by individuals, and their disregard for others, lead to the concentration of power in specific focal points within society.

Tocqueville regards equality, isolation, and powerlessness as the three fundamental principles of democratic bourgeois society, which he believes are aligned with the principles enabling the authority of prisons. American democracy has been modelled on the isolated structure of rural areas. Just like the model of isolating prisoners from each other, the American production-consumption system has imprisoned the establishment of social life and forms of urban organization within the focus of individual desires. As a result, isolated individuals become easily controllable by a small minority. This democratic despotism leads individuals to submit to the state apparatus (Sunar, 2019: 103-109).

In Western thought, Enlightenment philosophy led to the secularization of public life by removing magic and myths from the world depicted in the medieval era. With the transformation into positivism and cultural rationalization, old beliefs are fading away. Schroeder explains Weber's concept of the disenchantment of magic as the disappearance of irrational or magical powers through the dominance of knowledge brought about by enlightenment and science (Schroeder, 1996: 165). In the modern sense, the emergence of the rational subject, guided by Enlightenment ideas, idealizes an autonomous individual who governs their destiny through scientific reason and exercises freedom.

Modern society, driven by mass communication tools and consumer ideologies, along with the spirit of neoliberalism, has plunged humanity into a new enchanted world. This situation is evident in the social critiques of Enlightenment thinkers regarding the decline, after two centuries, of ideals of freedom and will for autonomous individuals to have a say in public authority. This can be observed in critiques of mass culture and the culture industry.

Adorno, states that the culture industry creates a system through films, radio, and magazines. Capitalism and the culture industry have shaped social structure, urban planning, and housing. The masses live within a homogeneous mass culture under the yoke of totalitarian capitalist power. While mass communication tools legitimize

ideology, they present an appearance of individuals living independently from societal influences and the system (Adorno, 2011: 47-48)

Horkheimer & Adorno, point out that mass culture leads to the normalization of synthetically produced behavioural patterns. Mass culture deliberately stimulates consumers and keeps them under control, making them dependent on the monopoly's voice telling them what to expect. This situation compels individuals to conform to standards without being able to express their freedoms, subtleties, and sense of trust. The hardships and miseries portrayed in mass communication mediums like films are emphasized as not being real in real life, suggesting that individuals should hide these difficulties. While mass culture highlights polite behaviour and societal appropriateness, it imposes exclusion on those who deviate from the norm. In this process, viewers become more emotionless, rigid, and merciless.

Mass culture suppresses human natural characteristics and subjects them to the power of monopolies. Even street children are prevented from having their styles, as mass culture encourages people to become uniform. Therefore, Horkheimer & Adorno state that mass culture limits people's freedom and differences, forcing them to conform to standards and weakening their emotional bonds. Mass culture suppresses the unique and natural, making individuals conform to a single mould, and a balance between seriousness and entertainment cannot be established within society.

With technological advancements, mass culture homogenizes people by suppressing personal expressions and differences. Beneath the tendency of individuals to conform to mass culture and adopt uniform behaviour lies subconscious pressures. Mass culture directs people as consumers and presents them with repetitive images and messages.

As technological advancements influence society, individuals' modes of consciousness and culture become mechanized, triggering cultural decay. The impact of advertisements and other media tools on society grows, and people become victims of these influences, responding with trance-like reactions.

Mass culture and technological advancements are determined by the economic fate of society, turning culture into an overarching lie and distancing people from reality. Especially, the way advertising billboards' lights in cities drown out the natural light of

the night is a critical example of the consequences brought about by technological advancements, leading to societal control and manipulation.

Mass culture and technological advancements lead society into its corruption, causing individuals to lose their uniqueness and individuality. Society becomes buried in recurring patterns and cultural falsehoods; people need awareness and resistance against these manipulations to truly liberate themselves (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2014: 382-389).

Töre (2002) examines the transformation of the individual in relation to the end of societal structures and the emergence of new societal formations. Social systems over time create different forms of societal existence and shape individuals to sustain their existence. Social structures created by humans can fall under the control of dominant classes and become tools of oppression. Individuals, over time, may alter or diminish their personalities under the influence of societal structures.

The convergence of labour, production, consumption, and distribution constitutes society's foundation. However, capitalist and socialist systems may not fully reflect human qualities, causing humanity to gradually lose its promising ideals.

Today, the capitalist societal system and its resulting society have led to self-alienation and a compelling state of atomization for humanity. Consequently, the end of the capitalist system and its created societal structure has come, and humanity is progressing toward a new societal formation. Social systems and dominance emerged as a result of private ownership of means of production. These systems integrated individuals into societal structures, blurring individual personalities and subjecting them to societal control. Dominant classes, despotic personalities, and various dictatorships have made efforts to break, weaken, and diminish individuals' wills, creating submissive personalities. Through this process, humanity has been oppressed and consumed under societal pressure.

Social structures begin to affect individuals' personalities from the family. Individuals are born as part of a collective (such as a family) and their personalities are shaped by the family. In this process, instead of creating their unique truths, individuals start accepting and defending the truths of the society or community they belong to. Consequently, individuals struggle to form their individual truths and are influenced by societal impositions. As a result, humanity experienced a societal collapse towards the

end of the 20th century, paving the way for the emergence of new personalities. During this process, the factors forming societal structures and influencing individual personalities were exposed, and the heavy burdens on human personality shattered and fell apart (Töre, 2002: 77-81).

The Concept of the Individual Transformed by Postmodernism

It is well known that cultural and social conditions shape individualistic values and character. In the literature, the dimension of the individual and individualism, expressed within the framework of old traditional and early modern concepts, has transitioned to a different dimension in today's consumption-centred world, often referred to as late modern, postmodern, or hypermodern. In accordance with these changing conditions, the concept of individualism is referred to as *New Individualism*, as stated by Elliot & Lemert (2011).

On the other hand, the definition of an individual in the *Oxford Dictionary* is closely tied to the concept of integrity. The terms "individual" and "individuality" derive from the Latin word "individuus", which means "indivisible" or "undivided". These terms entered the English language through Middle French and were first used in the early 17th century (Watt, 2014: 159). According to Elliot & Lemert, the concept of individualism was used by Tocqueville in the 1830s to describe bourgeois gentlemen isolated from the masses who possessed wealth and refinement in America. The notion of individualism needed to be transformed in a direction different from Tocqueville's heroic approach or the threatening form defined by German critics in the 1950s and 60s. Riesman's book, *The Lonely Crowd*, written in the 1950s, examined individualism in terms of the modern individualism formed by a bad conformism of productive entrepreneurial power. The effects of globalization gave rise to new individualism in the 1990s. The impacts of globalization require individuals to respond consistently to risks and regulate their positions according to global risks and consequences (Elliot & Lemert, 2011: 10-12).

Individualism, once aligned with the Enlightenment's notion of common liberation and rationality and the conceptual field of shared indivisibility, has transformed by shifting into a realm of different values. It can be argued that in contrast to the integrative structure of the modern era, the postmodern world establishes a fragmentary individualism unique to fragmentation.

Therefore, postmodernism has fundamentally altered the concept of the individual and the nature of individualism in the contemporary context, reflecting the influences of globalization and the shift from shared values to fragmented expressions of identity.

Postmodernism, characterized by terms such as new capitalism and late capitalism, serves as a guiding concept to understand the transformation of individual characteristics and value domains in the global, fluid, and fast-paced capitalist system. The collective ideological imagination of the early modern period constructed societal and cultural systems based on stable temporal-spatial relationships. In contrast, the postmodern era witnesses the transformation of local community relationships into fluid ones within the context of the global communication system, financial capital, and business models.

In the contemporary discourse of success, achievements such as social status or accumulation of capital elevate the myth of individual success rather than being contingent upon social conditions. When discussions turn to those of lower social statuses, the impoverished, and the losers in relation to one's position in society, it is observable that many individuals attribute blame to the losers themselves. Particularly in today's younger generation, one is likely to encounter optimistic narratives suggesting that as long as an individual works diligently, they will somehow control their fate and achieve economic salvation. If we accept that today's individuals, in matters such as their position and success in the business world and social life, hold a perspective centred around the individual within the general trend of society, it becomes necessary to question the reasons underlying the formation of egocentric thought patterns within the given cultural context.

Hood argues that individual opinion is a self-deception. He cites the extraordinary story of Liz, who went from homelessness to Harvard through exceptional effort and achievement, as an example. This is an exceptional case of the American dream. The individualistic perspective, which tolerates policies creating social inequalities, is what gives rise to this narrative of success. Allocating responsibility solely to individuals for success or failure is a fundamental error in reasoning (Hood, 2019: 18-20). Selfhood and personal cultural perception are influenced by environmental conditions. The postmodern climate shifts the nature of the self, transforming it through value structures and perspectives from a context of meaningful, consistent, protected, principle-based

traditions and values to a realm of signs without meaning, as noted by Baudrillard (2010).

Bauman labels the early modern period as “heavy modernity” and the current postmodern realm as “liquid modernity”. The former represents a solid order in which capital constructs a stable, long-term, secure relationship with labour in the form of Fordist production. In contrast, in today's globalized world, capital has detached itself from location and labour force through dynamic global movement, rendering labour insignificant. The primary focus of creators of symbols or ideas enticing consumers with bags and computers is no longer on the productive labour force, but rather on consumers (Bauman, 2005: 42). The fast-paced circulation of capital through computer networks of financial capital, the sudden popularity and subsequent decline of an idea, all negate the centrality of stable, long-term socioeconomic relationships.

The communal culture resulting from globalization and early modern rigid institutions and policies converges with the atomized individualistic culture of the postmodern era, forming the “LCC” (Lowest Common Culture) in Baudrillard's terminology (Baudrillard, 2013: 97). The societal meaning of the past is lost as it transforms from a collective entity to a community of individuals, converging in the smallest common denominator of an individualistic system's commonality.

In essence, postmodernism, characterized by its unique dynamics, has reshaped the concept of the individual and transformed the socio-economic landscape, leading to an amalgamation of atomized individualism within a shared framework. In the context of Turkey, a production-based early modern realm like *Sümerbank*, complete with social amenities such as a factory theatre, health centre, and daycare, where workers viewed the future with equality and confidence, has had to become a thing of the past due to the climate of globalization. The characters and personalities emerging within such structures have given way to individuals whose lives are worn down by uncertainties and risks in the consumerist realm, bringing forth concepts such as *New Individualism* (Elliot & Lemert, 2011) and *Character Erosion* (Sennett, 2016) in the field of social sciences.

The subject and the egalitarian social world image described from the 18th to the 19th century, influenced by classical philosophical thought corresponding to the beginning of the modern world, were defined by stagnant local relationships. However, the new world order, in which everything has reversed and the solid has evaporated,

has transformed the intertwined structure of employer-employee and local neighbour relationships, which were formed due to the binding of production to local structure and the close connection between capital and labour class, into a world where even the most solid things vanish.

In today's context, described as post-Fordist, capital flows to the region with the cheapest labour force globally, or data is produced as ideas in the information economy. For instance, in Turkey, the consistent, secure, and tangible reality (symbolic) ground created by the lodgings and social facilities of a production facility like *Sümerbank*, which was an example of the modernist project, and the communal sense of equality it generated, along with local neighbour relationships, is fading away. The individualistic realm where a neoliberal order has transformed the self is experiencing the slippery slope of simulation and floating realities (loss of symbols and dead indicators) as indicated by Baudrillard (2010).

In the face of the rise of commodities and objects in the fast-paced world, passive and discontented individuals embark on a continuous search for pleasure. Following Weber's approach, objects and commodities with their fetishist aspect are pursued to satisfy the need to "enchant the world which has lost its enchantment." The culture of consumption becomes a metaphor for a return to the magical world of the medieval mindset.

Beck (2011) draws attention to the standardization and institutionalization of individuals' life positions and biographical models. Modernization affects the process of individualization, creating a space for liberation by detaching from traditional livelihood relationships and historical social dimensions. Individuals move away from traditional norms and values to create their individual identities and preferences. Modernization leads to the loss of traditional security mechanisms. Trust in traditional religious and normative guidance diminishes, leading to the breakdown of bonds; this is described as the disruption of enchantment. In summary, modernization introduces new forms of social relationships through processes of individualization, which move away from traditional reference units like family and class, and instead, emphasize individual positions.

Berger & Luckmann evaluate the differentiation dimension of the value domain, which is parallel to the change from traditional values to modern living conditions, a period extending from the 18th to the 19th century and originating from classical

philosophical thought that corresponds to the beginning of the modern world. In advanced industrial societies, value stocks and systems of values become uncertain and ineffective rather than common based on traditional worldviews and value systems. Developed industrial societies emphasize that value stocks and value systems are not shared, but rather each individual develops a unique system of meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 2015: 44-45). Individual features are shaped according to the people and factors surrounding them. The notion that individuals are free to make instantaneous decisions and choices in their life journey is a self-deception (Hood, 2019: 142). According to Beck, individual liberation is framed as freedom dependent on institutional structures such as the market, education, and law. Individualization replaces social reference units like family and class with individual positions (Beck, 2011: 195-198). In opposition to the notion of the individual thought that shapes autonomously in individual consciousness, the model of the individual shaped by postmodern conditions emerges.

Bauman depicts the show *Big Brother*, which can be compared to the Turkish TV show version, *Biri Bizi Gözetliyor* (Big Brother), as a portrayal of life within the uncertainties of the postmodern world. Viewers can perceive the connection between what they consider their flaws or bad luck and the mechanisms governing and organizing their world. In such reality shows, only one member of the team can pocket the money. Instead of collective solidarity among team members, competition to eliminate one another becomes necessary. The strongest and most ruthless must overcome the others to reach the top. The defeated are blamed for their losses and denied the right to sympathy due to their mistakes or misfortunes, creating a harsh world (Bauman, 2018: 93-94).

The culture industry concept of Adorno demonstrates the operation of an ideological legitimation completely detaching the individualistic structure from collective solidarity. The contents of mass communication media shape individualism in a neoliberal ideological perspective, moulding characters in a self-centred direction. The concept of individualism, used by Tocqueville in America in the 1830s, was applied to the bourgeoisie who possessed wealth, refinement, and knowledge. In Europe, according to Adanır, the bourgeoisie, through a transformation in mindset, assumed a leading role in changing the society from which they emerged (Adanır, 2015: 687). Therefore, in contemporary times, the path to attaining capital and power is not limited

to a cultural elite. The notion of capital power, embodied by the saying "I have the money, but I lack the words," is dominant in today's new individualism. Individuals who attain capital power, while contributing to the continuity of the system through a neoliberal individualistic mentality, seem to be influenced by the guidance of mass communication content in shaping their individual mental worlds.

Bauman, referencing a study led by John Goldthorpe at Oxford University, notes that in contemporary times, distinguishing between cultural elites and those lower in the cultural hierarchy is no longer as straightforward as before. Traditionally recognized as the elite, individuals encompass a broad spectrum, consuming both popular culture and high art, earning the designation of omnivores (Bauman, 2015: 4-5). The distinction between the individual as a subject of enlightenment in cultural terms and the present-day new individual in the role of a consumer has dissolved. The guidance of a bourgeois mindset, which would traditionally offer direction to society through a rational imagination in the modern sense, has also diminished.

Methodology of the Research

In this research, the film *Sorry We Missed You* directed by Ken Loach, has been selected as a purposive sample (Neuman, 2020: 431) due to its focus on systemic criticism. Given that the theoretical discourse provides room for interpretation of the research subject, a qualitative content analysis research method has been preferred. In the analysis of the film, the researcher's subjective interpretation plays a significant role in understanding people's actions, social interactions, sense of identity, lives, and events (Geray, 2006: 86-87).

The research aims to scrutinize the systemic ideological dimension of individualistic practices from a theoretical perspective. Social reality is shaped in connection with personal interpretations. Therefore, social reality encompasses subjectivity as much as objectivity and varies according to each individual's perception (Bir, 1999: 6).

The purpose of qualitative content analysis is to unveil the structure of the system. In this regard, the method of content analysis is employed based on the assumption of the theoretical perspective, aiming to infer the intended meaning by uncovering implicit significances within the research subject (Gökçe; 2006: 17).

In the research, what representations are there regarding the functioning of the postmodern neoliberal social system? How are individualistic life practices represented by the characters and under which conditions? How is the connection between the system and the individual constructed in representing values of individual success and failure? By seeking answers to these questions, an attempt will be made to uncover the individualistic aspect of the neoliberal system within the context of postmodern cultural codes.

In the selected sample, the 1-hour and 41-minute film has been analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis to examine the analysis of the system structured by individualistic ideological practices.

Qualitative Content Analysis of the Film *Sorry We Missed You*

Ricky, a character from the working class, represents those who strive to overcome financial difficulties through physical labour-based jobs after becoming unemployed due to the 2008 financial crisis. His wife Abby works as a caregiver for the elderly, sick, and disabled at a company. Their teenage daughters, Liza, and their son high school student Sebastian symbolize a lower-class family struggling to break free from the economic quagmire and debt cycle perpetuated by the capitalist system.

Directed by British filmmaker Ken Loach, *Sorry We Missed You* begins with the phrase "We're not hiring you; you're joining us." The opening scene features Ricky in an interview with a potential employer. Ricky lists various physical labour jobs he has undertaken, such as digging, pouring concrete, and roofing, indicating his history of engaging in different physical labour tasks. He expresses his desire to become his boss and to escape this situation. The interviewer, Maloney, responds with the phrase "You're always someone's, " implying that Ricky would still be under someone's authority. Maloney promotes the idea that Ricky, as an independent contractor, will be his boss and make his own choices. Ricky, who has been waiting for this opportunity for years, expresses his enthusiasm for the agreement they've reached.

The film depicts Maloney, the interviewer, as a representation of the oppressive central power of the system, the capitalist authority. The system imposes the illusion upon self-employed van drivers that they are business owners. During his meeting with Maloney, Ricky states, "I'd rather work for myself." This implies that Ricky believes he is choosing to escape the insecure and uncertain conditions of post-Fordist, post-

modern labour. This notion aligns with Bauman's concept of liquid modernity and Hood's concept of self-deception.

Maloney, the manager of the van drivers, tells them, "You're not hired here. You're joining a team, not working for us. You work with us. You don't drive for us. You provide a service. No employment contracts. No performance goals. Just delivery standards. No salary, only earnings." Maloney's statements suggest that the employer-employee relationship or the iron cage of heavy modernity's suppression of labour has been lifted. The film's theme of post-Fordist liquid modernity highlights the individual's apparent freedom, while simultaneously demonstrating that the individual is coerced by the system's declarations of freedom and their own choices. As the spokesperson of the system, Maloney assures Ricky that he will become a van owner if he works with them, implying he will be the master of his destiny. Maloney's line "You will be the master of your destiny, Ricky" is ironically reminiscent of the Enlightenment philosophy's motto "Dare to know." In this context, the promise of a world where individuals are the heads of their destinies contrasts with the reality of individuals shaped by the system's influence. Ricky's response to this line, "It separates the losers from the fighters, " echoes the ideological belief of the neoliberal system, emphasizing the sacredness of fighting within the system and attributing responsibility for failure to the individual, not the system.

The societal system's pressure on the labour force takes shape through the marketing of hope that success and earnings can be achieved through individual effort. The arising crisis and problems are portrayed as solely the individual's responsibility, rather than systemic issues. Punitive measures, such as withholding earnings or imposing fines, are enforced when the individual's labour falls short of the system's expectations. Ricky, when accepting the job, is lured by the ideological charm of being entirely free in his choices, becoming his boss, having autonomous agency, and achieving a higher social status for himself and his family through hard work.

Ricky's choices are constrained within the given structure of the system, where all decisions are limited by the system's predefined options. For instance, when Maloney asks Ricky, who has agreed to the courier job, whether he'll bring his van or purchase one from them, Ricky's response of wanting to consult with Henry first reflects his apparent freedom to decide. Maloney acknowledges this, saying, "You let me know. Like everything else, it's up to you, Ricky."

In the film, Ricky debates with his wife Abby about whether to lease the company's van or buy their own. Abby, realizing there's no other option but to sacrifice her car, which she uses to quickly reach distant patients, for a courier van and incur debt, expresses her dissatisfaction with their limited choices. She argues, "But you'll be working 14 hours a day, 6 days a week. I won't see you. We won't see each other." Ricky counters with a vision of expanding the agency after a year, emphasizing the need to take risks to escape the uncertain world of renting. This mirrors Beck's notion of the risk of society's destruction of traditional relationships and the transformation of the individual through work conditions, bankruptcies, and indebtedness. Ricky's desire for a stable and consistent life in the turbulent flow of liquid modernity is evident in his words, "We don't want to be staying around. We need a deposit of a thousand pounds for the van."

Sennett explains the erosion of character and the cultivation of a culture of individualism through the restructuring of time in neoliberalism. In the neoliberal system, power sustains its dominant structure through flexible time. Flexible behaviors are considered traits of a free character according to early economic and freedom thinkers. While individuals were free in proportion to their ability to change in the past, the current economic policies are reversing this situation. The old bureaucratic centralized control structures have produced ambiguous new control and power structures in the postmodern era. The fundamental transformation of institutions involves the creation of hidden power systems through flexible specialization in production and the intensification of power without centralization. This transformation aims at flexible change, targeting the bureaucratic routine in today's context, to the extent that continuity between the present and the past is disrupted (Sennett, 2016: 49-70).

The film demonstrates a representation of the despotic nature of modern society, which Tocqueville criticized in 18th-century America, where success was based on accumulation-driven individualism. Tocqueville analyzed early modern society based on individualistic foundations. He observed that people, distancing themselves from society, imposed individualism leading to a soft despotism based on accumulation. Such despotism, according to Tocqueville, characterizes the modern democratic bourgeois society. In this system, the concept of citizen is replaced by the customer. The focus on individual interests and indifference towards others lead to the

concentration of power in the hands of specific dominant forces. Throughout the film, Maloney illustrates the exploitation of labour through the perspective of individualism and a competitive mindset, which are representative of the dominant system. The narrative unfolds around the hope of accumulation and winning, highlighting the concept of exploitation on the workforce.

On Ricky's first day on the job, he learns the courier system from Maloney, who emphasizes the importance of delivering packages within specific timeframes. Maloney informs Ricky about the bottle Ricky will need for urinating on the job, leading to Ricky's misunderstanding and irritation at the suggestion. While presenting the illusion of freedom, the capitalist system deprives the labour force of basic rights, even the right to urinate. The individual becomes a noble fighter, but ultimately, these ideals remain empty rhetoric. The system offers a sense of freedom while erasing the family, imposing a world of speed, movement, and risks. The flexible characteristic of the postmodern era, marked by the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and the transformation in welfare states, results in the disappearance of labour and individual rights. The rights, which are inherent in labour, position individuals in roles that entail taking on risks related to work in their lives. Individuals' lives are increasingly vulnerable, directly tied to the precarious nature of working conditions. In this context, the dynamics of ideological collective living conditions, such as neighborhood, solidarity, and family relationships, are vanishing from social reality. In this regard, postmodern working and living conditions impose a flexible working model that not only undermines the dialectics and ideologies in a Marxist sense but also establishes a new individualistic understanding in place of social reality, serving as a summary of the end of ideologies. This situation can be clearly observed in the film as well.

Abby, unable to use her car, relies on the bus to reach her patients. She compensates for the time lost during her commute by leaving voice messages for her children Liza and Sebastian. Abby's messages reflect her struggles to find time for her family due to her job-related time constraints. The film later portrays Sebastian's rebellious behaviour, including tagging graffiti with friends and getting into trouble for stealing three £15 spray cans from a store. The capitalist system's working conditions systematically dismantle even the smallest unit of society, the family. In addition to the atomized structure of the fragmented family, couriers are also devoid of the sense of community, home, and family solidarity in their work lives. Maloney

demonstrates to a courier that there is no tolerance for even the slightest deviation from the rigid rules and mercilessness of the system. Due to a justifiable reason, a courier has arrived late after hitting someone's side mirror parked outside, and Maloney demands an explanation. Maloney questions, "Why didn't you get it fixed last night?" The courier responds, "It happened this morning, right in front of my house. What could I do? It's not my fault." Maloney's response is unequivocal: "Find a replacement. Give me two hours, that's all I ask." He reiterates, "Why should I wait for two hours? You know the rules. Either start or find someone else." The courier pleads, "Come on, don't do this! I've been working non-stop for 14 days! Have some understanding. I asked for just two hours! You're suffocating us." Maloney retorts, "Because you're always whining. Always coming up with excuses and stalling on the phone. You delayed three deliveries last week." The system forces a competition akin to Bauman's example of the game show "Big Brother." It presents a harsh neoliberal world where there's no assurance, tolerance, or compensation for the unfortunate events that befall the losers, let alone any pity.

Maloney gathers all the drivers and offers the difficult yet lucrative route of the courier who requested two hours to fix his mirror to the other drivers, and Ricky accepts this route. This scene mirrors the competitive ideology of the game show and the competitive neoliberal practice. Individualism overrides collective solidarity in this context. Ricky apologizes to the courier from whom he takes the route, but the system's rigid imposition of compulsory choices cannot be overshadowed by Ricky's individualistic practices.

Furthermore, the subtext places the burden of both luck and misfortune squarely on the individual, without considering environmental, unexpected crises, accidents, or events. This narrative unloads everything onto the individual's shoulders without recognizing the impact of external and systemic factors.

Similar to Adorno's assertion that mass culture compels conformity by erasing individual freedoms and trust, we can see a parallel in the capitalist system's grip on the labour force. Thus, the labour force is subjected to both the mass culture's standardizing influence and the system's encroachment, rendering humanity in an atomized state, immersed in an unreliable climate.

In one scene, while Ricky is delivering packages in his van, he answers his daughter Liza's questions about the handheld computer he uses. Ricky states, "If I step

away from the van for two minutes, it starts beeping. The customers always know where I am. They're tracking every package. Front door, back door."

Here, the delivery computer transforms into a technical instrument of authority, mirroring Horkheimer & Adorno's argument that technological advancements and processes in mass production corrupt society and the structure of human consciousness, determining economic destiny.

In the later scenes of the film, due to the relentless nature of their work, Ricky and Abby cannot attend school when their son Sebastian gets into a fight and the principal calls them. Sebastian is suspended from school for 14 days. Abby and Ricky argue about Sebastian's situation, but the dialogue shifts from the issue regarding his school to Ricky's complaints about his constant running around all day, not having had a meal yet, and working tirelessly. Abby's inability to have her car and her exhaustion from waiting at bus stops and riding buses to work also become the subject of the dispute. In reality, the underlying issue of the argument is the family's internal problems exacerbated by the system's relentless pressures. While family members discuss their individual problems, the hidden subject of the argument is the neoliberal system itself.

Ricky approaches Meloney, stating he is a hardworking and decent person, and requests a week off to resolve his family problems. Meloney responds by mentioning four other drivers who have faced similar issues: one driver's wife threw him out of the house, another driver's sister had a stroke, another needed hemorrhoidal surgery, and yet another's daughter attempted suicide. This illustrates that every family has numerous problems, according to Meloney. In Elliot & Lemert's (2011) explanation of new individualism, today's individuals find themselves in a tableau where they cannot pause and catch their breath in the face of risks and problems within an unrelenting established order and are compelled to pay the price. The film's depiction of labour conditions aligns with the conditions of the new individualistic way of life.

When Ricky asks Meloney for permission to take time off to resolve family issues, Meloney's response provides a depiction of the egocentric nature of the system. Maloney mentions how he has created the most productive warehouse by absorbing all complaints and anger, forming a protective shield around it. He claims that it's the best because it satisfies the handheld computer dictating delivery routes. Maloney tells Ricky that customers at the delivery points wouldn't care if Ricky got into an accident; all they care about is the price, the delivery, and the product in their hands. Referring

to the handheld computer, he says, "It's competing with all the other little black boxes in this sorry country. And it's the one making the decisions on contracts. Deciding who's going to live." With this statement, he indicates the mechanical and automating structure of the system prevails over individual autonomy and problem-solving. The presentation of the handheld terminal as a divine command takes on the symbolic role of legitimizing the system and work ethic.

Sennett's observation, with reference to Weber, regarding the work ethic, explains this situation. Weber's concept of worldly asceticism, as we see, was the secular application of the theology developed by Luther, which focused on the individual. The individual trapped in the pains of worldly asceticism struggles to gain power over oneself. Furthermore, the purposeful individual seeks to legitimize their actions.

On the other hand, in the context of character erosion discussed by Sennett, the concept of flexible time is explained as follows. Flexible specialization is the complete opposite of the production system embodied in Fordism. Rather than simplifying, the corporate structure becomes even more convoluted. In modern organizations moving towards intense focus without centralization, the dominance of the summit is both powerful and amorphous. Although this structure promises more freedom to the worker, in reality, a flexible working culture only weaves a new control network. Flexible working times do not resemble the annual calendars where workers know what to expect in the future.

Even if flexible working times are presented as a reward to an employee, it places them in the palm of the company. Various controls have been developed to regulate the work of non-existent individuals; some monitor employees through the Internet. Even though flexible-time workers can choose their workplace, they do not have control over the labour process. Even if the job becomes physically decentralized, the power over the worker becomes more direct (Sennett, 2016: 49-70).

The dependence on corporate structures and the dictation of flexible work contracts and methods, as described by Beck for individual emancipation, are evident here. Through this handheld computer, the system's ruthless nature becomes apparent. The harsh sovereignty established over individuals indicates that they are subject to a living condition of individual struggles and an erosion of early modern

values such as family structure and social class, and their life space is surrendered to new individualistic values.

The system coerces Ricky with the promise of hard work and upward mobility, while simultaneously pressuring him. On the one hand, it entices him with the prospect of improving his social status through hard work, but on the other hand, his family begins to fall apart due to his excessive work. The absence of parental attention essential for his children's future success, as well as the disruptions in their education, lead Ricky and Abby to become an unhappy couple. When Ricky asks Meloney for permission to resolve his family's problems, Meloney's response epitomizes the system's egocentric structure. He tells Ricky that taking two consecutive days off would ruin distribution statistics, resulting in a fine.

In the film's final scenes, Ricky is assaulted by thieves who steal his packages and break his handheld computer. While Ricky is in the hospital, Meloney calls and informs him that insurance will cover the packages, but not the stolen passport (£500) and broken handheld computer (£1000). This illustrates that in the face of misfortunes, responsibility is placed squarely on the individual. In contrast to the statement at the beginning of the film, "It's your decision, you're the master of your fate, " Ricky, despite his injured state, tearfully goes to work in his van early in the morning, even before knowing the results of his hospital treatment, and despite wanting to prevent his family from going to work.

Conclusion

In contemporary times, the neoliberal system encodes the dreams of success, wealth, and prosperity onto individuals through the perspective of new individualism. It utilizes the logic of new individualism as a tool of pressure on individuals to establish its standards based on values such as competition, speed, and individual responsibility serving its hegemonic understanding. The dominant structure of the system employs the ideological values of individualistic competition, speed, and fluidity as instruments of exploitation.

Like Rousseau's vision of an individual fading in the conditions of the societal structure of the 18th century, the sought-after authentic and free individual envisioned by him, and the situation where he criticizes the inherent identity and roles inherited from medieval traditions, are now actualized in contemporary neoliberal living

conditions. The conditions of life portrayed by the characters in the film resemble the objects of investigation that the pioneering philosophy of the Enlightenment criticized within its era.

The order that Tocqueville criticized as the source of soft despotism in 18th-century America, where modern democracy isolates individuals from society and instills individualism and the pursuit of gain, has evolved into an even more advanced form in the contemporary neoliberal system. Tocqueville's principles of democratic bourgeois society-equality, isolation, and powerlessness-echo the principles serving prison authority. This comparison comes to mind while considering the film's depiction of force of labour. The main characters in the film, representing the working class, are not collective but isolated from each other. They are equally powerless in the face of the ruthless nature of the system.

The hidden dominant power in the film, apart from the shareholders of capital and distribution companies, as well as the figure of Meloney representing them, reinforces their sovereignty over exploitation through the individualistic, ambitious, and competitive culture of the labour class, combined with isolated living conditions distant from collectivity. In the film, the early modern bourgeoisie, armed with capital and mindset, had the power to transform society. In contrast, the hidden subject of the dominant capitalist system in the film, the shareholders of the courier distribution company, are represented in a fractal structure invisible. The absence of a class-based socio-cultural and economic structure in the neoliberal system seems to indicate a deadlock of a system even more retrogressive than the conditions fostering Enlightenment thought.

As a critique of the system, the film portrays a realistic projection of neoliberalism through aspects such as flexible work, a culture of fabricated contracts, and the binding nature of technology instead of being a tool for emancipation. By reflecting contemporary living conditions with a socially realistic spirit, the film reveals the workings of new individualistic practices within the framework of Enlightenment philosophers' observations, neo-Marxist literature, and postmodern approaches to the impositions of the new individualistic practices by the system.

References

- Adanır, Oğuz (2015). *Eski Dünyaya Yeni Bir Bakış Kitap* (2nd ed.). Ankara: Doğu Batı.
- Adorno, Theodor. W. (2011). *Kültür Endüstrisi Kültür Yönetimi*. Çev., Elçin Gen, Nihat Ülner ve Mustafa Tüzel. (6th ed.). İstanbul: İletişim.
- Baudrillard, Jean (2010). *Simülakrlar ve Simülasyon* (5th ed.). Çev., Oğuz Adanır. Ankara: Doğu Batı.
- Baudrillard, Jean (2013). *Tüketim Toplumu*. Çev., Hazal Deliçaylı ve Ferda Keskin. (6th ed.). Ankara: Doğu Batı.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2005). *Bireyselleşmiş Toplum*. Çev., Yavuz Alogan. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2015). *Akışkan Modern Dünyada Kültür*. Çev., İhsan Çapcıoğlu-Fatih Ömek. Ankara: Atıf.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2018). *Kuşatılmış Toplum*. Çev., Akın Emre Pirgil. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Beck, Ulrich (2011). *Risk Toplumu Başka Bir Modernliğe Doğru*. Çev., Kazım Özdoğan- Bülent Doğan. İstanbul: İthaki.
- Berger, Peter. L. ve Thomas Luckmann (2015). *Modernite, Çoğulculuk ve Anlam Krizi Modern İnsanın Yönelimi*. Çev., Mustafa Derviş Dereli. Ankara: Heretik.
- Berman, Marshall (2011). *Özgünlüğün Politikası Radikal Bireycilik ve Modern Toplumun Ortaya Çıkışı*. Çev., Nursel Yıldız. İstanbul: SEL.
- Bir, Ali Atıf (Ed.) (1999) . *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Anadolu Ü. Yay. No: 1081.
- Burckhardt, Jacob (1974). *İtalya'da Rönesans Kültürü*. Çev., Bekir Sıtkı Baykal. Devlet Kitapları
- Çağla, Cengiz (2007). *Tocqueville ve Özgürlük*. İstanbul: Belge.
- Elliott, Anthony ve Charles Lemert (2011). *Yeni Bireycilik Küreselleşmenin Duygusal Bedelleri*. Çev., Başak Kıcır. İstanbul: SEL.

- Geray, Haluk (2006). *Toplumsal Araştırmalarda Nicel ve Nitel Yöntemlere Giriş İletişim Alanından Örneklerle*. Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi.
- Gökçe, Orhan (2006). *İçerik Analizi Kuramsal ve Pratik Bilgiler*. Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi.
- Horkheimer Max ve Theodor W. Adorno (2014). *Aydınlanmanın Diyalektiği Felsefi Fragmanlar*. Çev., Nihat Ülner-Elif Öztarhan Karadoğan. İstanbul: Kabalıcı.
- Hood, Bruce (2019). *Benlik Yanılsaması: Sosyal Beyin, Kimliği Nasıl Oluşturur?* Çev., Eyüphan Özdemir (2nd ed.). İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- IMDB, (2019). *Sorry We Missed You*. August 18, 2021, from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8359816/>
- Loach, Ken (Yönetmen). (2019) *Sorry, We Missed You* [Film].
- Marcuse, Herbert (1990). *Tek Boyutlu İnsan ileri işleyim Toplumunun ideolojisi Üzerine İncelemeler*. Çev., Aziz Yardımlı. (2nd ed.). İstanbul: İdea.
- Neuman, W. Lawrence (2020). *Toplumsal Araştırma Yöntemleri Nitel ve Nicel Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Çev., Özlem Akkaya. Cilt II (8th ed.) Yayınodası.
- Rousseau, Jean Jack (2002). *İtirafılar*. (2nd ed.). Çev., Kenan Somer. Ankara: Doruk.
- Schroeder, Ralph (1996). *Max Weber ve Kültür Sosyolojisi*. Çev., Mehmet Küçük. Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat.
- Sennett, Richard (2016). *Karakter Aşınması Yeni Kapitalizmde İşin Kişilik Üzerinde Etkileri*. (10th ed.). İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Sunar, Lütfi (2019). *Alexis de Tocqueville- Modern Çağın Çelişkileri Karşısında Bir Düşünür*. Çev., Barış Yıldırım. İstanbul: Ketebe.
- Tocqueville, Alexis (1962). *Amerika'da Demokrasi*. Çev., Taner Timur. Türk Siyasî İlimler Derneği
- Töre, Teslim (2002). *Birey, Toplum, Sistem ve Globalizm*. İstanbul: Alan.
- Watt, Ian (2014). *Modern Bireyciliğin Mitleri - Faust, Don Quijote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*. Çev., Mehmet Doğan. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi.