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TÜRKİYE'DE SINEMALARDA VİZYONA GİREN YERLİ BELGESELLERİN ANALİZİ (2003-2017)

ANALYSIS OF THE THEATRICALY-DISTRIBUTED DOMESTIC DOCUMENTARIES IN TURKEY (2003-2017)

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ÖZET

Son yıllarda Türkiye'de filmlerin gösterimi bazı açılardan sorunlu teşkil etmektedir. Özellikle bazı filmlerin görünürlüğünün zayıf olduğu gözlemlenmiştir çünkü pazarın çoğunluğuna sahip olan paydaşlar bu filmlerin dağıtımında engeller oluşturmuştur. Talep edilmeyen bir tür olarak görülen belgeseller, ekranda gösterilmek için çok az fırsat bulmuştur. Bu çalışma Türkiye'de 2003 ile 2017 yılları arasında vizyona girmiş belgeselleri inceleyerek dağıtım ve algılanmasındaki motivasyonları araştırmaktadır. Belgesellerin dağıtımını etkilemiş olabilecek bağlamsal dinamiklerin gösterilmesi için içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Veri izin verdiği ölçüde filmlerin dağıtım yolculuğu incelenmiştir. Filmlerin yönetmenleri hakkındaki ilişkili bilgiler de belgeselin dağıtımındaki karar vericilerin süreçlerini keşfetmek için kullanılmıştır. Festival katılımları, davalar ve eleştirel veya toplumsal algı gibi filmlerle ilgili diğer bilgilerden de bahsedilmiştir. Belgesellerin, ifade özgürlüğü problemini büyütebilecek görünürlük sorununun aşılması için çeşitli çıkarımlar yapılmıştır

ABSTRACT

Over the recent years, the exhibition of films in Turkey has been problematic in some ways. Especially, the visibility of certain films has been observed to be poor because the stakeholders who own the majority of the market have created obstacles in distribution of these films. As seen as a kind of *non-demand* genre, documentaries have found few opportunities to be displayed on screen. This study takes a look at the released documentaries of Turkey from 2003 until 2017 and tries to investigate the motivations behind their distribution and perception. Content analysis is used for presenting the contextual dynamics that might have affected the release of the documentaries. The screening journey of the films is also investigated as the data allows. The related information about the directors is provided to disclose possible reasons that encourage decision makers to screen the film. Other types of information about the films such as competing in the festivals, lawsuits, and critical or public perception are mentioned as well. Several implications are offered to overcome the problematic aspect of documentary's visibility that might enlarge the problem of freedom of speech.

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition sector of Turkey's cinema has problematic conditions observed in the last years. The largest exhibitor owns more than half of the film theatre seats in Turkey. In fact, the same company also owns the largest distribution company, which creates a broader issue regarding the fair competition in the two sectors. This issue is linked to the visibility of certain films that can be considered as *no-demand* films by certain stakeholders. When these *no-demand* films are analyzed, it becomes inevitable to observe how documentaries are positioned in this category. The interest of the audience in these films has decreased over the years, which hinders decisionmakers from distributing documentaries. As a result, the situation is under the control of the decisionmakers because they are obliged to choose profitable films. This triggers the crisis of non-visibility for the documentaries of Turkey. On top of it, documentaries have no adequate alternatives to make themselves seen by the viewer whereas fiction films have more chance to be seen on TVs, online platforms etc. The *no-demand* perception endures in those fields too, but it is not the discussion of this study.

Moreover, the monopolization polarizes the genres as well e.g., the number of comedy films dramatically increases as the imbalance goes up. Therefore, it is likely to see less and less documentaries in the film theatres for the following years regarding their proportion of number of documentaries released divided by number of documentaries produced. The non-visibility and *no-demand* issues of documentaries are also political in the sense that they are partly put into these categories as an excuse for their activism or ideological perspective as in the case of *Bakur* [North], which was banned by Ministry of Culture during 34th İstanbul Film Festival (Çetinbaş & Demirel, 2015). Hence, it violates the right to freedom of speech from this point of view. This makes the situation important and that is why there is a need for research as well.

This paper analyzes the domestic documentaries that are theatrically-released in Turkey from 2003 to 2017. The analysis of the films includes their contents, directors and perception by the scholars, critics, and society. The number of theatrically-released documentaries and their features would be used as tools to depict the problematic context of domestic documentaries in terms of their visibility, which also raises some questions about the politics of the distribution and exhibition sectors. Could there be a political context for the distribution of documentaries due to their influence on social change, public disclosure and collective memory? What kinds of documentaries get a chance to be distributed and screened in film theaters?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Turkey's portion of the domestic films is one of the highest in the world. According to the Box Office data of 2013, Turkey has the highest shares of domestic films in Europe by 58 percent. This can be seen as an advantage for the domestic film production although it brings about critical issues regarding the theatrical distribution and exhibition of domestic films. Turkey's film industry is not fairly functioning, which hauls the film production towards a more commercially dominant environment which creates the problem of visibility. This problem emerges the question of the visibility of documentaries in such an environment. Obviously, documentaries usually have more political discourses than fiction films and it is inevitable to link the issues of theatrical distribution and exhibition to Turkey's current political context. As Nichols (2010) points out:

Actions rely on values, and values are subject to question. Lives, as well as concepts and categories, are at stake. Understanding, like critical perspective, leavens explanations, policies, solutions. Documentary film and video constitutes a tradition that has addressed exactly this point, sometimes imperfectly, sometimes eloquently. It moves forward in relation to all the work that has gone before, addressing issues, exploring situations, engaging viewers in ways that will continue to instruct and please, move and compel. Its history belongs to the future and to those efforts yet to come. It is these future works that will enlarge an existing tradition and contribute to shaping a world we have yet to create. (p. 252)

Therefore, documentaries have the capability to influence social changes that are sometimes undesirable in the eyes of authorities. It is not surprising to observe the absence of any solution or regulation by the governments. If the existing mainstream media is considered, independent documentary production might be one of the last mediums allowing the freedom of expression in the field of media in Turkey.

The authorities can enjoy a significant peace of mind when the documentaries are not as visible as other types of films together with the unfair distribution for all kinds of films. This can be better than censorship due to the fact that there are no prohibitions addressed by the authority, but the nature of the industry has built it by itself. Therefore, they might try to avoid responsibility of such problems whereas they take advantage of it. Of course, there are some agit-prop documentaries like *Gelibolu* [Gallipoli] that supports the nation-building ideologies, and thus the authority in general (Döker, Trevino, Örnek, & Örnek, 2005). However, the majority of the theatrically-released documentaries are not similar to this. The domestic documentaries of the first decade of the last century travel around themes like remembrance, collective memory, identity politics and awareness (Akbulut, 2010, p. 124). Therefore, it is possible to point out an opposing voice in the recent documentaries that were theatrically distributed.

A study from South Africa discusses the challenges in the distribution of domestic documentaries (Grunenwald, 2013, pp. 71-79). The study suggests a need for theorization in distribution together with the training of the industry professionals who are specialized in distribution. However, it might raise some questions to assign the role of distribution to professionals to solve the challenges especially in Turkey. The professionals are already equipped for their work but their perspective towards the documentaries differs from the case of South Africa. For instance, another study from Mexico links the challenge of theatrical distribution to the neoliberal economy (Pérez Tejada, 2009, pp. 197-198). This argument also fits into the mindset of Turkey's decision makers, especially the commercial actors because the defensive attitude towards rejecting a documentary becomes more than legitimate and the result is a natural response of concerns about profit. In addition to that, another study depicts the problems of women documentarists in India and the one of the interviewees, Sehjo Singh, complains about the difficulties in distribution of her films – “How do you expect me to do everything – I direct, produce, raise fund, finally I have to distribute my own films! Do I work or network?” (Gupta, 1998, p. 38). According to an episode from a TV program by Can Candan (2012), Feryal Saygılıgil expresses her arduousness after finishing her films. She mentions that filmmakers are trying to market their own films and sometimes they even request from people to screen them, which is not ideal and energy consuming for independent documentarists. According to the study, the situation is even worse in Columbia due to the fact that only one documentary had a theatrical release in 2011 whereas there are 3000 domestic documentaries produced in the last half century, but the essence of this problem differs from Turkey in the sense that 96% of the municipalities do not have film theaters (Patino, 2014, p. 39-40).

On the other hand, the situation can be similar even in the high-income countries like Canada. The study indicates that lots of film industry stakeholders are marginalizing documentaries as seen in the case of the debates about whether documentaries deserve the place in a “Feature Film Guide” for cinema of Canada which was discussed in Prately's *A Century of Canadian Cinema* (Winton, 2007, p. 124). The same study gives examples about the success related to alternative digital distribution channels of documentaries like torrents. The author connects the visibility issue of documentaries to the cultural hegemony and neoliberalism. This argument is constructed onto the writings of Bourdieu, in which he describes a matrix of cultural and financial forces that form a larger discursive hegemony described as “The Tyranny of the Market” (1998). However, there are already several ways to overcome the obstacles. For example, two theoretical frameworks like the coalition model and the horizontal networking logic facilitated by digital technologies are utilized for documentaries to bypass traditional media gatekeepers such as theatrical distributors and exhibitors, and thus they can contribute to grassroots political action (Whiteman, 2004, p. 51; Juris, 2005, p. 189; Christensen, 2009, p. 77). A popular example of alternative

distribution and exhibition strategies is the case of Robert Greenwald and Brave New Films that tried to mobilize their own screenings and post-screening discussions against the mainstream distribution channels in the USA (Haynes, 2007, p. 1).

METHODOLOGY

The theatrically-released documentaries are manually extracted from the online database of Box Office Türkiye as they do not provide the choice to select genres to list the films. This study consists of films that are released from 2003 until 2017 because their exposure level allows more meaningful qualitative analysis, meaning that the documentaries of the last three years are excluded due to inefficient level of exposure to conduct document analysis. They are analyzed and then certain films are removed from the list due to lack of information about their release. The first film of the list is *Hititler* [The Hittites] which was released in 2003 and it is the first theatrically-released documentary according to Box Office Türkiye (Kaygısız, Kaygısız, & Örnek, 2003). This information cannot be confirmed only with the data of Box Office Türkiye albeit there are no such alternative online sources. Therefore, the filmography is critically dependent on the database of Box Office Türkiye. Indeed, some of the films were not categorized as documentary but the list is supported by adding few theatrically-released documentaries by a survey of domestic film festivals. Ten particular films that were particularly chosen to have a more diversified forms the sample of this study. Chronologically, the study consists of *The Hittites*, *Crossing the Bridge*, *The Play*, *Mustafa*, *On the Way to School*, *The Last Season: Shawaks*, *Ecumenopolis: City Without Limits*, *My Child*, *Haziran Yangını* [The Fire of June, own translation], and *Cat* (Christian, Klaus, Andreas, & Akın, 2005; Dündar & Dündar, 2008; Eskiköy & Doğan, 2009; Esmer, 2006; Günay & Azem, 2012; İnce, Çetinbaş, & Candan, 2013; Kaygısız et al., 2003; S. (Producer) Koçer & Öz, 2009; Hacır, 2015; Wuppermann & Torun, 2017). Categorization of the documentaries might provoke simplification even though a basic grouping would better off the intention of this study which is to draw the overall framework of the theatrically-released documentaries. Therefore, several groups are defined, and some documentaries might fall under more than one group. These groups are designed in terms of the commonalities that form some clusters. The literary sources are found out through the journals and databases including dissertations. The secondary sources like newspaper articles, film blogs, video interviews, and any other relevant online sources are studied for content, director, perception, and critical analyses. Online platforms like FilmLoverss, Beyazperde, biamag and other film blogs and newspaper supplements are scanned to reach these sources. Online video and TV platforms are also investigated for interviews with the filmmakers. Finally, the distribution phenomena among these documentaries will be presented as a result of the analyzes.

RESULTS

The analyses are following the order that is given in the previous part. However, the overall analysis of the whole list together with the groups is made primary to the individual analysis of the films. The list of all the theatrically-released documentaries from 2003 to 2020 is provided in this study (see Appendix). There are 50 domestic documentaries that are theatrically-released in Turkey since 2003 and this is the earliest year found through this research. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there would be earlier documentaries especially when the information is strictly dependent on the data source (Box Office Türkiye). There are some films without any information related to their box office figures and tickets. Unfortunately, there are no alternative open sources for obtaining these data.

The first group is the documentaries of the women directors. There are 14 released documentaries directed by women which correspond to approximately 28 percent of the films. The time interval of the study consists of eight documentaries directed by women filmmakers as follows: *The Play*, *Sidewalk Sisters*, *Ünye de Fatsa Arası* [The Gap Between Ünye and Fatsa, own translation], *Two Locks of Hair: The Missing Girls of Dersim*, *Müslüm Baba'nın Evlatları* [The Sons of Papa Muslum, own translation], *Tepecik Hayal Okulu* [Tepecik School of Dream, own translation], and *Cat* (Alkan, 2011; Alkaya, 2009; Berke & Sağlam, 2015; Esmer, 2006; Gündoğan & Gündoğan, 2014; Saraçoğlu, 2014; Wuppermann & Torun, 2017). When the number of tickets sold for these films are compared to the whole list, they get only 1,8 percent share. Hence, it is apt to claim that the theatrically-released documentaries in Turkey are highly malestream. Furthermore, only few of them can be identified as feminist documentaries. *The Play* is one of them and it will be analyzed separately in the following discussions. *Two Locks of Hair: The Missing Girls of Dersim* tells the life Dersim victims in the aftermath of the massacre. The protagonists are women who were given away after the massacre to the military families when they were kids. This documentary has feminist subtext, but they are not directly transmitting a feminist narrative. *The Play*'s narrative can be considered as a direct feminist narrative from certain points but it is also debatable and this opens up a divergent discussion about how to define a documentary as feminist but this is not a central question to this study.

The second group is the most watched documentaries which might be referred as the documentary blockbusters. Another interesting fact is that the first two most watched documentaries are about historical figures or events and these films are *Mustafa* and *Gallipoli* (Döker et al., 2005; Dündar & Dündar, 2008). The first documentary is about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and it will be examined in the later discussions. In addition to this, these two documentaries get 57 percent of the entire ticket sales of the list. Only two documentaries get more viewers than the other 48 films. The easy formula for

“appealing” documentaries seems to be part of this trend, meaning documentaries about historical figures and events are perceived as “watchable” in Turkey. It is important underline the significance of the director at this point. *Mustafa*’s director, Can Dündar, is a popular journalist who can make his films visible through media whereas Tolga Örnek, *Gallipoli*’s director, is a well-known filmmaker who is also the director of the earliest film of the list, *The Hittites*. There is also another documentary, *Menekşe’den Önce* [Before Menekşe, own translation], which was made by a famous journalist again and there are lots of articles published about this film (Kurt & Yalçın, 2013). Even a basic search can culminate in extensive amounts of information about this documentary whereas the most of the theatrically-released documentaries receive far less attention than this. From this point of view, the filmmaker plays a significant role on the distribution of the documentary whereas the visibility also increases especially in the cases of famous directors.

The last group is the documentaries that screened in the film festivals. Festival circuits pave the way for visibility since it causes an attention from the press. Therefore, lots of documentaries in the list are screened in the film festivals. Some of them are screened in the major international film festivals like Berlinale and Cannes. It increases the probability to be distributed in Turkey. *Young Wrestlers* is a significant example of such films (Akdağ, Dehzad, & Gümürhan, 2016). It was screened on just three locations and there is no box office information. It is Mete Gümürhan’s debut and it won an award in Berlinale. These could be the motivations of the distributors to screen it. Otherwise, it would not get a chance to be released. As a matter of fact, the film was screened in Başka Sinema which chooses films from international film festivals and creates an alternative space against the monopolized mainstream film distribution and exhibition.

4.1. The Hittites

According to Box Office Türkiye, *The Hittites* is the first theatrically released documentary in Turkey. As stated by its synopsis on IMDb, the film is about the rise and fall of Hittite Empire that existed about 3500 years ago in what is now Anatolia. The film is made with the support of large companies that makes it exceptional with its relatively higher budget compared to other documentaries (Candan, 2006, p. 2). Even though it was not screened in any film festivals, it could get the chance to be theatrically-released. Furthermore, it was the debut film of the director, and the duration of the documentary is two hours which is surprising for the distributors to choose it at a time when documentaries were almost not released at all. *The Hittites*’s content also increases its chance to be chosen by those distributors or sponsors because it is about ancient history of Hittites which is taught in almost every primary school in Turkey. According to a review, the film was distributed by Özen Film

which was the leading distributor of the period, and the critic emphasizes the fact that they want to see more documentaries on the silver screen (Özer, 2003). The film also has stars (e.g., Haluk Bilginer as the King and Jeremy Irons as the narrator) in its cast which contributes to its visibility. The shooting took 141 days and mainstream domestic TV channels like Kanal D and CNN Türk were the promotion sponsors of the documentary whereas three premieres were held in Los Angeles, İstanbul and Ankara (Milliyet, 2003). All in all, it is obvious that there was a significant financial support behind this documentary.

4.2. Crossing the Bridge

The acclaimed director Fatih Akın directed the second documentary in the list, and it was screened in Cannes Film Festival. Hence, it is not surprising to have this film at the second place because it seems that the decision-makers were trying to act in a risk-free environment in terms of their profit. On the other hand, this is the first film that has information in box office Türkiye as a Turkish documentary. More than 36 thousand tickets were sold but it is important to underline the fact that an international company was the distributor and in fact it is one of the world's largest companies, Warner Bros. According to Box Office Türkiye, it was also theatrically-released in the USA and its gross is 70 thousand US dollars which is a remarkable box office figure for a foreign-language documentary in the USA. Therefore, the popularity of the director and its screening in the Official Selection of Cannes influenced the distribution of the documentary. Besides, these also gave it a chance to receive attention from the press and academia. Demir (2016) examines Fatih Akın's cinema while mentioning the documentary as:

Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul (2005), a documentary film, has importance by reason of creating an unusual cinematic city. The film offers a great opportunity to observe the conflicts and contrasts of Istanbul through its sounds. In addition to that, sounds or music themselves may be useful to gain insight into the spatiality of the city. For this reason, the documentary film plays a crucial part in this work. (p. 2)

Thereupon, it also obtained positive reception as observed in this study. There are numerous critical reviews that mostly assigned high ratings to the film. Herein, it is timely mention the film's cast which consists of various famous singers. The narrative is built upon the songs and these artists appear in those songs. Therefore, the content could be seen as crowd-pleaser from this perspective.

4.3. The Play

The third film is the first documentary from the list that is directed by a woman filmmaker. This is not the sole difference of this documentary. The content is significantly different than the other films

of the study. Actually, it is the second documentary film after Öz's (2005) *Uzak* [Distant] that has non-historical and unpopular figures or events. Moreover, Pelin Esmer was neither a well-known director nor a popular journalist (like Can Dündar and Soner Yalçın) at that time. It was indeed her second film and there was no strong financial support behind it. Therefore, *The Play* could be the first unexpectedly released documentary of the study. However, it was also screened and won several awards in the film festivals, and this contributed to its distribution. For *The Play*, almost 8 thousand tickets were sold which could be lower than its special screenings.

The story follows the preparation of an amateur play comprising a fully women cast from a rural area of Turkey. The play is a collective work of these women and a teacher. Their efforts can be read as a rebellion against the brutal patriarchy of the country. That is why the film could be considered as a feminist documentary. In one of her interviews, Pelin Esmer talked about her motivation for this film by saying that she was searching for a visual way to tell the sociology (Esmer, 2005). According to Kirel (2009, pp. 154-157), *Oyun* [The Play] is about unseen women of the rural Turkey, who also have mediocre and quite difficult daily lives. Kirel also defines *Oyun* as a feminist documentary in her study. She also talks about how the documentary made the “unseen” visible, but she suggests alternative exhibition networks for such films to reach the correct and broad audience. Consequently, *Oyun* was perceived quite positively by both the critics and academia even though it could not reach high number of tickets. It is important to highlight that only seven copies were distributed. Thus, the theatrical release was limited.

4.4. Mustafa

Mustafa is the most theatrically watched documentary in Turkey with the ticket sales of more than 1.1 million. The director, Can Dündar, is a quite popular journalist who had other popular documentaries that mostly aired on TVs. His journalist identity is a remarkable advantage to increase the visibility of the film. It is also an attractive factor for distributors to choose. This could also be the motivation of Warner Bros. The content is familiar enough since it is about a historical figure. However, there are lots of other portrayals of Atatürk throughout the cinema of Turkey, but *Mustafa* gained the most attention. Why was this documentary popular? Akter & Incirlili (2017, p. 85) calls the other cinematic portrayals as “re-presentations” of the previous work of mainstream media and conventional history whereas *Mustafa* is another “representation” of Atatürk that differs from the mainstream representations. This divergent attitude of the documentary could be the reason for the court case against it. This exemplifies the strength of the ideological apparatus in terms of how citizens react to the different discourses about the well-known political figures and events. Aside from the political discussions,

Mustafa tries to depict a heroic figure with its ordinary life and mistakes. Thus, it lowers the God-like personas to the eye level just to make them seen by people because the owners of those personas are also humans. Therefore, this documentary can be identified as a different kind of historic documentary compared to other stereotypical ones.

4.5. On the Way to School

Another popular documentary is *On the Way to School* which is the second most watched film of the study with more than 93 thousand ticket sales (Eskiköy & Doğan, 2009). In this case, there are two directors who were not popular before this film, and they are also not popular journalists to ease the distribution. In fact, this is the debut film of the directors. Nevertheless, *On the Way to School* created numerous discussions among the film critics and scholars. The film won two awards from the major domestic film festivals in Ankara and Antalya together with other international prizes. However, its domestic success is not significantly correlated with the festivals since it came out just after the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival and it received the award in Ankara next year. The press did not pay much attention even to its selection to the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam which is referred as ‘Cannes of documentaries’ (Sönmez, 2009). The content of *On the Way to School* might be the triggering factor for such number of viewers. It narrates the journey of a new Turkish teacher who travels to Eastern Turkey where the mother tongue of the people is Kurdish. Mother tongue-based education is a renowned problem in Turkey for years. When the political context towards the Kurdish region is taken into account, it becomes timely to consider the perception of *On the Way to School* as “authentic” among the elites of Turkey. This authenticity is doubled with the film’s debated position whether being a fiction vs. non-fiction film but it actually is a documentary (Çiçek, 2011, p. 8). There were lots of reviews and even a book that categorized it as a fiction film or sometimes as a docudrama (Altan, 2016). Unfortunately, the genre appears to be the most argued point of the documentary.

On the Way to School is not choosing any sides about its political context. Thus, it can be referred as an apolitical documentary with a political subject. Therefore, the film does not cross the “borders” of the elites of Turkey so that the audience can absorb the Turkish modernity and Orientalized Kurdishness all together (Demir, 2014, p. 2). There are articles that examine *On the Way to School* as a story of an ideal teacher who brings civilization, education or other norms of modernity into the region (İlbuğa & Sepetçi, 2017, p. 23; Akcan & Polat, 2016, p. 310). Özçınar (2011, p. 6) defines the film as an example of accented cinema. These perspectives give the motivation of the elites who praised this film even though *On the Way to School* had lots of problematic aspects about political issue that it narrates.

Anyhow, these were not widely discussed at all. As a result, *On the Way to School* became the third most-watched documentary in the film theatres of Turkey.

4.6. The Last Season: Shawaks

The first Kurdish film in the study is *The Last Season: Shawaks* that tells the story of nomadic Shawak community in Eastern Turkey. This film is similar to *The Play* in the sense that it depicts the life of ordinary people living in the alienated region of Turkey. The difference from *The Play* is that Kazım Öz is directing his camera to his own community (Candan, 2016, p. 15). Although the documentary does not transmit a direct political message, there are few scenes that can be read as a subtext of a political stance. It is a self-representation and thus the suppression behind the lives of Shawak community is inevitably observed throughout the film. Hence, the box office figures are moderate due to the fact that there is a bias towards Kurdish documentaries in the mainstream media of Turkey. Therefore, there were limited literary sources, press attention and film reviews about this film. The festivals and awards could not create much difference for *Son Mevsim: Şavaklar* in Turkey which portrays the societal barriers in front of the Kurdish documentaries.

4.7. Ecumenopolis: City Without Limits

The next film of the study is censored by the authorities and this case leads to a new discussion about the censorship in Turkey. Besides the naturally built walls of neoliberal economies, censorship stays as a backup force that punishes the works resisting against the cultural hegemony or state in general. The special screening of *Ecumenopolis* was prohibited by the district governorate which claimed that the screening would worsen the already busy traffic of Enez (Günel, 2012, p. 20). This incident reveals the anxiety of the power authority towards political films. As *Ecumenopolis* portrays the horrific aspects of the gentrification, the district governor could have seen some possible threats about the film. However, the film was theatrically-released before the special screening in Enez but this might not change the potential threat for some authorities.

This documentary also got an average number of tickets compared to the other films of the list. It won several awards in Turkey and abroad. However, the direct political content makes its distribution journey more difficult as similar to the other cases. There is a study about *Ecumenopolis* that examines the film within the concept of Henri Lefebvre and the author mentions that *Ecumenopolis* is a visualization of the relationships of practice-space-representation in İstanbul. Thus, it could catch the spirit of pre-Gezi period and in a way the film can be read as initialization of Gezi resistance (Erkılıç & Bayraktar, 2015, p. 132).

4.8. My Child

The next film of the study is the one and only LGBT documentary of the entire list. Unfortunately, the screening was overlapped with the Gezi resistance and one of the two copies of the film was distributed to a film theater in Taksim. For this reason, the ticket sales could be seen as fewer than expected because the film was screened in several festivals and won an award in Thessaloniki Film Festival. It also received notable press attention and there were lots of film reviews mostly gave positive ratings to the film. The director also tried to screen the documentary at the parliament, but the authorities did not allow the screening inside the assembly. Afterwards, several MPs attended to the screening in the nearest film theater, meaning most of the MPs are not interested in transphobia and homophobia in Turkey. The documentary positions itself as a family movie in order to underline its narrative being the parents of LGBT individuals. Thus, it allows empathy that might be functional for the society to overcome the biases or to question the hatred. The director still tries to organize and attend to the special screenings. He also tries to increase the visibility of the film with subtitles in various languages. This is achieved through DVDs and online platforms so that the alternative post-theatrical distribution channels are utilized for increasing the visibility.

In a recent article, *My Child* is analyzed based on coalition model coined by David Whiteman and the model evaluates documentaries together with their entire production and circulation processes and their involvement in the public discourse in contrast to their pure textual evaluation (Koçer, 2015, p. 223-224). Coalition model is also utilized for reaching out broader audiences and it helps spreading the discourse into the popular spheres. In another article, *My Child* is referred as a useful tool for the trainings of psychological counselor (Kağnıcı, 2015, p. 91). In conclusion, the film gained significant amount of attention from the academia, press, and film critics. Consequently, the coalition model also functioned to distribute the cause of the film even though the theatrical distribution could not reach a satisfactory level as in cases of other documentaries.

4.9. The Fire of June

The Fire of June is the one of the most political documentaries in the list of theatrically-released documentaries. It examines the murder of a Gezi protestor, Ethem Sarısülük, in Ankara and it narrates the following court cases together with the personal interviews with Ethem's family and other interrelated people. According to a film review, *The Fire of June* transmits this tragic injustice without agitation (Hacı, 2015). The academic sources are rare about this documentary since it is a new film.

The Fire of June is the least watched documentary in the study. It was screened in seven film theatres of Başka Sinema (Özkaracalar, 2015). The film won an award in Canada International Film Festival before its release in Turkey. On the other hand, it was selected for İstanbul Film Festival but Gürkan Hacır withdrew his film from the competition after the censoring of *Bakur*. This might have affected its performance after the theatrical release because it would receive some attention during the festival screenings and then the theatrical release could have been more attractive for some people. Yet, this is not a surprising number for documentaries released in Turkey's film theaters because there are documentaries like *The Sons of Papa Muslum* which got almost hundred ticket sales even though it was about a famous iconic singer, Müslüm Gürses, and his fans.

4.10. Cat

Cat is the second documentary of the study that is directed by a woman and this is the debut film of the director. The film is about the seven stray cats of İstanbul. *Cat* had its first theatrical release in the USA and then it was released in Turkey. It became the third highest-grossing foreign language documentary of all times in the USA. This international success provided an enormous attention from the world's media giants like Guardian, NY Times, Indiewire and several others. *Cat* also appeared in the best films list of Time and Indiewire. The screenings in the festivals and several awards doubled the fame of *Cat*. This attention made *Cat*'s theatrical release inevitable in Turkey although it failed as in the case of the US release. Nevertheless, it is one of the highest-grossing documentaries in Turkey, but the box office seems relatively low when compared to the ticket sales in the USA. The content makes the film consumable especially in the USA because it keeps everyone's nose clean. The subject is also appealing to the Western culture when it is considered under the notion of Occidentalism. It is an authentic experience for Western audience to see cats on the streets by the virtue of their hyper-sterile cities, in which there are no stray animals living in. Although there are few political graffiti appearing at the background of some scenes, the film is not political. These are making it a risk-free choice for both the distributors and audience. The documentary became popular in Turkey as well and it might open up a debate about a potential relationship between *Cat* and cat videos that are usually consumed as procrastination.

IMPLICATIONS

Erkılıç & Toprak (2012, p. 15) examines the role of internet on the distribution and exhibition of documentaries. They compare the effect of digitalization on other sectors like music and it is investigated that cinema's digital distribution channels are not as improved as other fields, but this depends on the regulations and the type of the work as well. Even though it was stated that there were no corporate

online distribution or exhibition networks in Turkey, several domestic platforms (e.g., puhu tv, blutv, Exxen, Gain) were established after the publication of this article. There are also branches of online platforms from abroad (e.g., Mubi, Netflix, Amazon Prime). The digital distribution and exhibition are more practical than conventional methods by the virtue of easy access and low-cost operations. Therefore, digital distribution is more likely to surpass the biases, profit concerns, political barriers, and hegemonies of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, certain films are produced for silver screens regarding their technological features like cutting-edge sound and image quality. Watching films on TV screens, mobile phones, or computers makes these extremely costly features unnecessary, which also infers that their technical specs can be lowered to the level of TV productions. It might also lead to a disruptive innovation when the online distribution and exhibitions channels become predominant. On the other hand, the existing gatekeepers of the mainstream media could dominate the online platforms as well. The two domestic examples of online broadcasting channels (puhu tv and blutv) belongs to conglomerates rather than new entrants whereas a similar case is also examined in UK (Sørensen, 2012, p. 741).

The mainstream TV sector is not an alternative for the documentaries in today's context of Turkey. Documentaries are employed as a tool for penalizing TV broadcasters by forcing them to air documentaries instead of the penalized program. The power authorities have already established a monodic mainstream media which also have its reflections in the theatrical distribution and exhibition. It is timely to claim that the overall framework of this monodic media manufactures consent through the political economy of mass media. Hence, the anti-democratic acts of the government could be legitimized by utilizing the entire media (Chomsky & Herman, 2010). At this stage, documentaries become a potential medium to resist against fascism and it also enables the universal right to freedom of speech. All in all, the democratization of film production contributes to this cause whereas the same should be achieved for the distribution as well.

CONCLUSION

The distribution of films is not underlined like the production, and it is not as visible as the exhibition. Therefore, it is sometimes referred as the invisible art that explains the enigmatic process carried out by the professionals of the industry while not receiving much attention from the researchers and other professionals from the industry (Sin, 2007). Throughout this study, the invisible art and its relationship with the theatrically-released domestic documentaries tried to be investigated by analyzing the ten selected documentaries released from 2003 until 2017. This study focuses on the following questions: (1) What kinds of documentaries are distributed in Turkey? (2) What could be the reasons

that made these documentaries distributed? and (3) Why were certain documentaries watched by the crowds whereas some of them couldn't reach enough viewers? The analyses indicate that some ex-ante factors play a significant role on the distribution of the documentaries. Filmmaker's identity, festival circuits, content, and press attention are the four factors examined in this study. These factors have the capability to affect the visibility regarding the political economy of the film industry. Hence, they can also impact the distribution journey of a documentary. There were similar cases in different contexts as reviewed in this article. Those studies draw a similar attention to the importance of distribution while there is still limited amount of study about this issue.

There might be several alternatives to tackle with the issues related to visibility and theatrical distribution of documentaries in Turkey. The guerilla filmmaking (enabled with the democratization of film production) seems to be the most viable method when it is combined with the digital distribution of documentaries, but this can work under the assumption that the political context would be similar as of today. On the other hand, the coalition model can also provide the visibility and alternative channels of distribution. The data source could create various limitations to this research as there are incorrect categories in terms of the film's genre. The selection of the documentaries in the study is not designed to be representative of the whole list even though the attempt was to have diverse range of films. Hence, there might be limitations about representativeness regarding the study. Future research is needed to analyze more documentaries and draw more alternatives for both theatrical and post-theatrical distribution.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The exhibition sector of Turkey's cinema has problematic conditions observed in the last years. The largest exhibitor owns more than half of the film theatre seats in Turkey. In fact, the same company also owns the largest distribution company, which creates a broader issue regarding the fair competition in the two sectors. This issue is linked to the visibility of certain films that can be considered as no-demand films by certain stakeholder

This paper analyzes the domestic documentaries that are theatrically-released in Turkey from 2003 to 2017. The analysis of the films includes their contents, directors and perception by the scholars, critics, and society. The number of theatrically-released documentaries and their features would be used as tools to depict the problematic context of domestic documentaries in terms of their visibility, which also raises some questions about the politics of the distribution and exhibition sectors. Could there be a political context for the distribution of documentaries due to their influence on social change, public disclosure and collective memory? What kinds of documentaries get a chance to be distributed and screened in film theaters?

Methodology

The theatrically-released documentaries are manually extracted from the online database of Box Office Türkiye as they do not provide the choice to select genres to list the films. The study consists of films that are released from 2003 until 2017 because their exposure level allows more meaningful qualitative analysis, meaning that the documentaries of the last three years are excluded due to inefficient level of exposure to conduct document analysis. They are analyzed and then certain films are removed from the list due to lack of information about their release.

Results and Conclusion

Throughout this study, the invisible art and its relationship with the theatrically-released domestic documentaries tried to be investigated by analyzing the ten selected documentaries released from 2003 until 2017. This study focuses on the following questions: (1) What kinds of documentaries are distributed in Turkey? (2) What could be the reasons that made these documentaries distributed? and (3) Why were certain documentaries watched by the crowds whereas some of them couldn't reach enough viewers? The analyses indicate that some ex-ante factors play a significant role on the distribution of the documentaries. Filmmaker's identity, festival circuits, content, and press attention are the four factors examined in this study. These factors have the capability to affect the visibility regarding the political economy of the film industry.

The selection of the documentaries in the study is not designed to be representative of the whole list even though the attempt was to have diverse range of films. Hence, there might be limitations about representativeness regarding the study. Future research is needed in order to analyze more documentaries and draw more alternatives for both theatrical and post-theatrical distribution.