



Personal And Independent Filmmaking: Elia Kazan's America America

Kişisel ve Bağımsız Film Yapımı: Amerika Amerika

Besna AĞIN ERGÜN¹

¹Istanbul Üniversitesi, Radyo TV Sinema, Doktora Öğrencisi, İstanbul
• besna.agin@uskudar.edu.tr • ORCID > 0000-0002-1591-0352

Makale Bilgisi/Article Information

Makale Türü/Article Types: Tez Özeti/Thesis Summary

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 23 Şubat/February 2023

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 12 Nisan/April 2023

Yıl/Year: 2023 | **Cilt-Volume:** 8 | **Sayı-Issue:** 1 | **Sayfa/Pages:** 103-119

Atıf/Cite as: Ağın Ergün, B. "Personal And Independent Filmmaking: Elia Kazan's America America".
Middle Black Sea Journal of Communication Studies, 8(1), May 2023: 103-119.

PERSONAL AND INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING: ELIA KAZAN'S AMERICA AMERICA

ABSTRACT

As the independent production increased and factory-like production receded in 1950s, filmmakers were soon in greater control. The studios could no longer dictate all the terms and were forced to meet halfway so that both sides could profit. However, filmmakers were still dependent on the studios when it came to finance and distribution. Elia Kazan, being a former Hollywood contract director, became one of those independent filmmakers and established his own production company. By the time he first got to Hollywood in the mid-1940s, producers were already dominating the film industry. Kazan, believing the director should come first and be independent in financial, politic and aesthetic terms at all costs, refused to be a studio-contract worker. He was determined to assert greater control over the films he made, and his way of filmmaking would be less about profits and more about gaining artistic freedom. He produced and directed all his subsequent films of the 1950s and 1960s. In this study, one of these films, *America America* will be analyzed through analysis of narrative. As Kazan became more personal and independent; the director's ability to define the aesthetic and narrative spines of the text and the sub-text became evident. Hence, it is possible to say that the mise-en-scène started to come forth in Kazan's films starting with *America America*.

Keywords: Independent Filmmaking, Personal Filmmaking, Elia Kazan, America America, Film Studies.



KİŞİSEL VE BAĞIMSIZ FİLM YAPIMI: AMERİKA AMERİKA

ÖZ

1950'lerde bağımsız yapımların sayısı artıp bu tarihe kadar piyasaya hakim olan seri film üretimi gerilediğinde, yönetmenler kısa sürede kendi yaptıkları filmler üzerinde daha fazla kontrole sahip oldular. Stüdyolar artık eskiden olduğu gibi tüm şartları belirleyememeye başlamış ve her iki tarafın da belirli kârlar edebilmesi için yönetmenlerle ortak bir zeminde buluşmak zorunda kalmışlardı. Fakat yine de yönetmenler finans ve dağıtım söz konusu olduğunda hala stüdyolara bağımlıydı. Eski bir sözleşmeli Hollywood yönetmeni olan Elia Kazan, bu süreçle birlikte bağımsız bir film yönetmeni olma yolunda ilk adımlarını attı ve kendi yapım şirketini kurdu. Yönetmenliğin finansal, politik ve estetik açıdan bağımsız olması gerektiğine inanan Kazan, Hollywood'un ve stüdyoların sözleşmeli bir çalışanı olmayı red-

detti. Kazan, yaptığı filmler üzerinde daha fazla kontrol sahibi olmaya kararlıydı ve sinema anlayışını kâr üzerine değil, sanatsal özgürlüğünü kazanmak üzerine kurmaya başlamıştı. Bu çalışmada Kazan'ın bağımsızlaştığı ve kişisel üretimler yapmaya başladığı 1950'lerden itibaren yaptığı filmlerden biri olan *Amerika Amerika* filmi dramatik çözümleme yöntemi ile analiz edilecektir. Kazan daha da kişisel ve bağımsız hale geldikçe yönetmenin metnin ve alt metnin estetik ve anlatsal omurgalarını tanımlama yeteneği belirginleşti. Dolayısıyla *Amerika Amerika* ile başlayarak mizansen ve görsel dilin Kazan'ın filmlerinde öne çıkmaya başladığını söylemek mümkündür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağımsız Film Yapımı, Kişisel Film, Elia Kazan, Amerika Amerika, Film Çalışmaları.



INTRODUCTION

From 1947 to 1960, the American film industry underwent a vast transformation. In the 1950s, it was severely challenged by the introduction of new technologies and the rise of television. Although there were several attempts to bring the audience back to the theatres, such as Cinerama, Cinemascope, etc. the studio system was still collapsing. Furthermore, because of the political chaos of the early 1950s with “McCarthyism” and HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) investigations, Hollywood studio films were restricted on subject matter. It was dangerous for a filmmaker to employ social issues in films; even pointing to the concern for social problems would cause serious trouble. In 1952, Kazan made a comment that people working in the film industry were afraid of doing their very own jobs (Lev, 2003, pp. 11-20). Ten years later, things changed the opposite way and the decline of the studio system led to the rise of independent production and new overseas productions. In this period mostly described as “transitional”, the star system was strong, there was a strict control over screen morality and Hollywood was still a part of the classical studio era, which began in 1920. However, at the end of the decade, the circumstances began to change, and independent production became the standard, while screen censorship loosened. The studio system was shaking up and the period was to become transitional as Lev fairly described. The five “major” Hollywood studios (MGM, Paramount, Fox, Warners, and RKO) and two minor studios (Columbia and Universal) were all struggling with substantial industry changes but some of them made their way back into the market successfully. Independent production was soon to become the order of the day; the trend toward this order already began to accelerate in 1950 and 1951 (Lev, 2003, pp. 20-35).

It was not until *East of Eden* (1955) could Kazan's films be entitled "An Elia Kazan Production". By the time he first got to Hollywood in the mid-1940s, producers already were dominating the film industry. Kazan, believing the director should come first and be independent in financial, politic and aesthetic terms at all costs, refused to be a studio-contract worker. He started writing, and molding scripts, doing the casting and costuming, directing and producing (Cornfield, 2009, pp. 278-291). Despite Kazan's efforts and some freedom he gained after the great success of *On the Waterfront*, the question rises whether an independent filmmaker can be independent at all. What does this much-used but rarely defined term actually mean? Even though there is much discussion on the definition of independent filmmaking, this passage of Peter Lev's gives a thorough point of view:

"In historical context, the phrase independent production refers to a move away from a factory-like system where all aspects of a production are handled by studio employees and toward a flexible, free-lance system where the personnel and other elements of a production are assembled for each individual film... Studios no longer control every aspect of a film's production, but they do generally provide the crucial elements of financing and distribution... Independent production was never entirely independent; it was always a negotiation" (Lev, 2003, p. 25).

As the independent production increased and factory-like production receded, in few years, filmmakers were in greater control. These independent filmmakers included Elia Kazan, Alfred Hitchcock, John Huston and Billy Wilder who formed their own production companies and declared creative control. The studios could no longer dictate all the terms and were forced to meet halfway so that both sides could profit. However, filmmakers were still dependent on the studios when it came to finance and distribution. The more free filmmakers became, the more tied down to studios they were, for they now had a direct financial responsibility and more to lose in monetary terms (Mann, 2008, pp. 10-25). Elia Kazan, being a former Hollywood contract director, established his own production company but unlike the other producers, his priority was aesthetic, not finance:

"According to Kazan, his primary motivation for forming his own company was less about profits and more about gaining greater artistic freedom, which for him meant the right to find and develop a suitable screenplay and to maintain "final cut" (authority over the final edited version of the film). Determined to assert greater control over the films he directed, starting with *East of Eden*, Kazan formed his own production company, Newtown Productions, in 1956, which he saw as a forum for autonomous filmmaking removed from the capitalist clutches of the studios and through which he produced,

as well as directed, all his subsequent films of the 1950s and 1960s. These included... *Wild River* (1960) and *America America* (1963)" (Mann, 2008, p. 156).

The rise of independent filmmaking played a substantial part in reformist filmmaking along with influence of Italian Neorealism. This gave opportunity to independent filmmakers like Kazan to explore new aesthetics and experimental ways of showing reality. Lisa Dombrowski in her work *Kazan Revisited* (2011) explains how location shooting served as a form of realism, especially in postwar films. Location shooting allowed Kazan to work freely from studios' domination in an aesthetic way out of studio and into the life. *Panic in the Streets* (1950) was the first film for Kazan to liberate himself from studio but still, not from the production entirely. He made the whole film outside of the studio, talking to John Ford and getting his advice for the locations. It opened up a new way of thinking, which Kazan believed the only way he could make films was to get closer into the life (Dombrowski, 2011). Kazan linked location shooting with the "obviously natural and dramatically realistic effect attained in so many foreign films" (Neve, 2009, p. 26). Most of Kazan's films are seen in the context of social-problem films.

It is noteworthy to remember although films were mostly conservative in 1950s there were also film noir, social problem films and Method Acting. Method Acting is crucial in the way that it brought a completely new perspective to acting and helped the diversity of films to increase. The more the pressure was, the more break away took place. Two opposing forces continuously battled and there was the seed emerging fracturing conservatism in aesthetics and politics (Lev, 2003).

Kazan's ambivalence towards America is another aspect of the dominating narrative in his films. Although he is very much sentimental about America, he is also quite critical of American myths and establishments. Kazan had both emotions; he loved America and resented it to a great extent. He loved it because he believed that if it were not for America, he would be another rug seller in the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, as was his father. He resented it because he clearly saw how corrupted American institutions were and how its imperialist and capitalist power ruled the world by myths and lies in the name of democracy (Dombrowski, 2011). This notion is another source of ambivalence in the way that it tries to find a way to reveal hidden reality; hidden so it seems, but also quite obvious. As can be seen in *America America*, America is salvation for many immigrants but one has to give up everything he has or does not have in order to start a brand new life, with again, nothing. Stavros made it all the way to America but he did bring his Anatolian Eastern soul to West. Like Stavros, being an Anatolian immigrant, Kazan belonged with both Eastern and Western culture and his experiences were shaped accordingly. He had social and moral ambivalences that can especially be seen in *America America*. In the study, how personal and independent filmmaking

intertwined and affected one another will be discussed through analysis of narrative . In general, narrative film analysis focuses on the narrative structures in a film and takes the film itself as “text.” In the study, techniques such as mis-en-scene, camera angles, and references to other films and film history will be compared and analyzed.

PERSONAL AND INDEPENDENT: AMERICA AMERICA

America America won an Academy Award for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration and two Golden Globes for Best Director and Most Promising Newcomer (Stathis Giallelis). It also received three Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Screenplay and Best Director. Kazan wrote, directed and produced his own film and at long last achieved independence from the studio system. He left behind the collaborations with well-known writers in his films such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and William Inge, and chose an increasingly personal approach. This achievement began with *East of Eden*, Kazan’s first production, and continued afterward. However, *America America* had serious financial problems in production and marketing. As mentioned earlier, Kazan was eager to make his films independently, but as the producer walked out on the project last minute when the shootings already started, he had to turn to majors for some budget on production and distribution. All the majors rejected it because it was not an easy sell. In the mid-1960s, an uncomfortable film in black and white, with a main subject on minorities in Anatolia with no stars would not attract any attention. After Warners agreed to finance the film for the sake of the director’s previous profits to the company, Kazan made sure that he would have the rights to cast, to edit, to write the screenplay and work with the crew he wanted. Basically, the film would be financed and distributed by Warners but they would not have any rights on the artistic side. Warners left Kazan to his own devices and lost a million and a half dollars on it (Ciment, 1973: 146). Although a few critics and Kazan himself considered *America America* one of the director’s best films, Kazan’s film career - critically and financially - started to decline after the release of the film. Distancing himself from the studio system made Kazan’s films more personal and private, which did not raise the audience’s attention as his earlier films used to. According to Richard Schickel, the hardship Kazan went through actually served the film:

“*America America* is one of those rare films—the works of John Cassavetes are like this—in which the difficulty of the production is warped into the very grain of the film and becomes an earnest of its authenticity. This palpable reality is so strikingly unlike what we expect from American films, generally so slick and easy in manner, that we begin unconsciously to root for the filmmakers struggling against their obvious difficulties” (Schickel, 2006, p. 396).

America America is based on Elia Kazan's real-life story and it is the first screenplay he wrote by himself. It is the director's most personal work in the way that its subject matter came from Kazan's own life. Harmonizing documentary and fictional elements, documentary style is dominant in the film given the true events and its choice of cinematography; use of black and white, handheld shots, extreme long shots of the scenery, vivid images on board ship, extreme close ups of human faces, back streets, daily life of Constantinople and the Italian neo-realist elements. He uses a non-professional actor for the lead role to play his uncle Joe Kazan and "returns to his own American take on the Italian neo-realist tradition" (Neve, 2009, p. 191).

Kazan's immigrant experience lays the basis for *America America's* subject matter and there are only few elements, which have no reference to the real experience of him. Although the film's main focus is Kazan's uncle Avraam Elia Kazanjoglou's – later to be known as Joe Kazan – journey from Anatolia to America, the film also stays close to the social dynamics of the local culture. Joe Kazan immigrates from Greece and Anatolia to the United States alone, like thousands of other Greeks at the beginning of 20th century. This serves to the representation of historical background and the authenticity of scenery. The film begins with Kazan's voice-over narration and it announces the impending changes in Anatolia:

"My name is Elia Kazan. I am a Greek by blood, a Turk by birth... and an American because my uncle made a journey. This story was told me over the years by the old people in my family... Anatolia was the ancient home of Greek and Armenian people. But 500 odd years ago, the land was overrun by the Turks... and from that day the Greeks and Armenians lived here but as minorities. The Greek subject people. The Armenian subject people. But the day came, here in Anatolia, as everywhere there's oppression... when people began to question."

As the narration flows, the film introduces the audience Stavros Topouzoglou, the protagonist, whose burning desire is to get to America. He is a determined young man whose only aim is not only to survive but also succeed and chase his "big plans". His also big Greek family of ten members has also high expectations of him; they are aware of that the subject people are no longer welcomed in Anatolia and a greater danger is approaching. Their only chance to survive is to get out of the country and start a new life in another land. Stavros will be their savior; every value the family has is tied on the back of a donkey and entrusted to their eldest son. He is sent to Constantinople to become partners with his cousin's rug business and earn enough money to bring his family members one by one to Constantinople. On his way throughout the film, Stavros undertakes whatever comes with the only aim to

take his family to America. He kills, gets beaten, carries hundreds of kilos, almost dies and sells himself for money.

Stavros is played by an unknown actor new to motion pictures, Stathis Giallelis, who in real life, had similar personal experiences to Stavros's. When Kazan first met Stathis, he could not speak English but just like Stavros, he wanted to get to America. The director turned him down in Greece, nevertheless, Stathis arrived in New York City with thirty-five cents in his pocket. As he told about his past and traumas to Kazan, the director realized how much Stathis and Stavros had in common and was convinced to give the part to Stathis. Although he auditioned flamboyant stars in France and England, he found them too 'actorish' and believed they were not the right ones to fit in. Stathis, however, looked like he was made for the part and carried the essence of Stavros with his considerable determination (Young, 1999, p. 277). Just as in Method Acting, Stathis was expected to trigger the real feelings he already had with his past experiences. The rest of the actors were Jews and Greeks because Kazan believed that they all knew what oppression meant and that would contribute to film and reality. In several scenes, the extras were locals or workers as in the case of Ellis Island scene; they were real refugees. To stress out the reality effect, Kazan stated that if he had shot that scene in Hollywood, it would've been dead (Ciment, 1973, p. 153).

In the beginning of the film, Stavros wants to run away and go to the United States of America before his parents send him to become partners with his cousin's rug business in Constantinople. Stavros's first attempt to leave his home village is trying to get money from his grandmother. She lives like a savage upon a hill in a house out of rocks she made herself. His grandmother puts a knife in Stavros's hand which belonged to her husband and says that he will need it more than money for the journey. But Stavros gets furious, the only thing he wants is money; he searches for it frantically while his grandmother watches him and then says she has kept it under her clothing. Stavros holding the knife in his hand, gives her a threatening look but she calls his bluff. Stavros is not that tough yet -not in the beginning- he is still his father's boy, obedient and timid. His grandmother is only testing him if he is man enough determined to take the money on her and whether he is different from his father. The knife symbolizes manhood and determination; later it also becomes his savior when he kills a bandit with it to stay alive.

Just like the knife itself, throughout the film several objects (props, items) are filled with meanings and from the very beginning, they become motifs. Some objects as motifs are recurrent elements in the film while others contribute to one particular scene. On his way down the mountainside, Stavros meets a young man named Hohannes, who is determined to get to America even if he has to walk there barefoot. Stavros feels ashamed and weak when Hohannes says he will get there with the help of Jesus on foot and with nothing. Stavros is not as brave as he is, not

even close; he suddenly takes off his shoes and gives them to Hohannes. The shoes now represent Hohannes's ticket to America; the same shoes will be Stavros's ticket to America in the end, as if it was once to Hohannes. Stavros only then will get the chance to get rid of the land he has been oppressed by for so long. The shoes represent salvation and also fill the time gap, ellipsis in narration. During the film, if an object is given to someone at a particular time and place, it reappears in entirely different places after time has passed. The objects help us to understand the turn of events and how the character involved with it changed.



Figure 1. Stavros looking at his grandmother's picture on the wall.

As Stavros gets ready for his journey from Greece to Constantinople, the family prepares to give him every value (objects) they have. His mother gives him a precious necklace that belonged to her mother, which Stavros' sister was supposed to wear in her wedding. She shows the picture of their grandmother on the wall wearing the necklace to all her children and Stavros is caught between a rock and a hard place: the picture and his family. He is responsible for even his ancestors; his grandmother looks as if she is watching him whether he will be worthy of the necklace or not (Fig. 1). Another precious item his mother gives to Stavros is a coat which belongs to his father. The mother has sown the money and necklace into the lining jacket and tells Stavros to keep the coat on even when he sleeps. It represents his last chance if things go wrong and that he will be carrying his family with him. The coat becomes a constant reminder that his family is waiting, and he is the one to save them.



Figure 2. Stavros on a bollard waving hands and shouting at shipmen to see him.

When Stavros finally arrives in Constantinople, he is penniless. A bandit called Abdul deceives him along the way and Stavros has lost everything. He looks around trying to get to know the city and sees harsh working conditions of hamals¹¹. Just behind the hamals, who are a foreshadowing of his future job, there is a ship ready to depart for America and there are two Americans on the deck. He climbs up on a bollard and tries to make himself heard as he shouts ‘America, hey America!’ (Fig. 2). The shipmen simply are not aware of him, as no one was throughout his journey. Within the context this can be interpreted as ‘even the shipmen on board do not hear him, let alone America’. He is up on the bollard and can see everything below clearly, while still, he is positioned under the shipmen. The camera is handheld and shaky; the shot is unstable. It is as if Stavros will fall of the bollard; in fact, he will fail several times on his way to fulfill his dream of America. America is not a land of total freedom as in the dreams of Stavros and he learns it in a tough way; he realizes that nothing differs in any country, any city for poor people like him.

The fact that Kazan tried to make the film “feel like a legend” (Cornfield, 2009, p. 220) succeeded in several ways and that especially helped with the ambivalence. The story is as real as it could get, but it also gives the feeling of a legend to the audience as the story is too dramatic to be true. The film reveals its power at this point, anything real has to be molded and presented by getting rid of the crude reality of storytelling along with supporting elements (Andrew, 1976, p. 47). These elements, including costumes, lighting and objects as motifs, create the prevailing aesthetics in *America America*. The ambivalent legacy in *America America* can be seen in the way that a modern epic is told as a legend and at the same time it is realistic: it is a legend with its aesthetics, while it is realistic with its content. The film is not about an illusory success story in which the protagonist is a hero who

¹¹ A porter, bearer or servant in Middle Eastern countries.

embraces and defeats all, instead, it is a story of a determined immigrant who is trying to find his way against difficulties.

After seeing his cousin's rug business is not doing well at all, he is offered to be introduced to the daughter (Thomna) of a wealthy merchant, Aleko Sinnikoglu, since now he has no money left to invest in the business. Stavros storms off and starts working as a hamal instead; eating garbage to save money. He goes through real hardship, he even gets shot and is piled onto a wagon with corpses. When he is saved by falling off the wagon, he crawls back to his uncle with his last strength. Only then he accepts to marry for money to Thomna Sinnikoglu. Thomna is a young and innocent girl of wits and sensitivity; she understands that Stavros is different, and she does not know how to deal with him. When Stavros's future father-in-law strikingly describes how a wealthy life Thomna and Stavros will lead, Stavros feels like a bird in a gilded cage (Fig. 3). Thomna's wishes and dreams are equal to his father's whereas their happiness is Stavros' pain and confinement. That is the sharp ambivalence of life and death; whenever he is wealthy, he is far from troubles but as much as he is in a comfort zone, he is not free.



Figure 3. Stavros is in suspense and looks uneasy while Thomna places her trust in her father and looks at him in open admiration.

Stavros starts working in Thomna's father's (Aleko) rug store. One day, a rich rug importer from America and his wife Mrs. Kebabian (Sophia) come to the store. Sophia, who was born in Anatolia and brought to America twenty-five years ago when she got married, is introduced to audience. Aleko introduces Stavros to Miss Kebabian as his future son-in-law and inheritor of the rug business, despiingly saying that Stavros's dream is to go to America. But Mrs. Kebabian feels the urge to protect Stavros by saying 'people have done it before' while Aleko says 'but not a boy like this'. Stavros is ordered to help Sophia with the packages to home.

After they arrive, Stavros asks her about America and she shows him magazines, newspapers, pictures and articles on the land. Stavros is deeply engrossed in everything Sophia tells and shows him about America. Likewise, Sophia is interested in Stavros; a young handsome man filled with youth and dreams. She sees Stavros standing in front of the mirror trying on a straw hat, which becomes a symbol of his passion for America (Fig. 4) and later, it will be Sophia's last gift to him. Stavros reminds Sophia of her lost dreams and youth; while Stavros is looking at the mirror with hope and desire, she is also looking at herself and trying to figure out if there is any desire left (Fig. 5). The mirror as an object unifies the two characters and they both reflect their passions on the mirror. It is the ambivalence of desire together with the use of hat as a meaningful object; Stavros sees his rosy future while Sophia sees her lost youth and past. She realizes how America turned her into a miserable lady whereas Stavros believes America will grant him happiness.



Figure 4. Stavros putting Mrs. Keabian's hat on to see if he looks like an American.



Figure 5. Sophia watching herself in the mirror to see if she has any youth and beauty left in her.

After Sophia gives Stavros money to buy the ticket for America, he runs into Hohannes in the ticket office. He and seven other boys are going to be taken to America by a businessman to shine shoes for two years without pay. Stavros, seeing how clean Hohannes managed to stay, detests himself thinking that he killed, became a hamal and male whore. In the very next scene with a jump cut, echoing French New Wave practice, Stavros is without his moustache (Fig. 6). The first time Stavros grows moustache is after his near-death experience and before his acceptance to marry Thomna. This short period of having moustache is shown together with Stavros trying to save money to buy the ticket to America and his need to look more masculine and fit in with the rich people. But after he gets the money he needs, he gets rid of the moustache which represents his old life that is about to fade away.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Stavros is speaking to Thomna for the last time.

In the next scene Stavros is speaking to Thomna for the last time and says to her he will go to America 'no matter how' (Fig. 6). At first, he crouches, as if he is ashamed of Thomna's innocence and goodwill but then suddenly rises during the dialogue between them (Fig. 7):

Stavros: What is right or wrong is for the rich. You can afford it, I can't.

Thomna: You come from a good family.

Stavros: Yes, who are now waiting for one piece of good news at last. One piece of good news!

Thomna: But your father Stavros...

Stavros: I don't want to be my father; I don't want to be your father! I don't want that good family life, that good family life! All those good people they stay here and live in this shame. The churchgoers who give to the poor, they live in the shame. The respectable ones, polite ones with good manners! But, I am going! No matter how. No matter, no matter... I am going! I told you to come here because I wanted to speak of the truth before I left. The truth of what I am, so you don't go on thinking about me.

...

Thomna: What will happen to you?

Stavros: I believe... I believe that, in America... I believe that I will be washed clean.

As they speak, Stavros rises and bristles with rage and Thomna has to block the light coming through the window in order to see him. It can be interpreted that light represents the truths and Thomna is not strong enough to see Stavros' truths yet (Fig. 7). In the next scene, Stavros crouches again; he knows he will never find anybody like Thomna (Fig. 8). The characters are entangled in contradictions during the sequence: Stavros is determined to go to America, but he is also grateful to Thomna and feels ashamed to leave her. Thomna understands Stavros and sympathizes with him, but on the other hand, she does not want to lose him. The ambivalence of actions and feelings emerges as the contradictions are unmasked.

America America has the episodic plot structure; it has series of stories linked together by the same character and theme (Schickel, 2006, p. 396). The story is told as if in chapters and the meaningful bridges between them are usually cut which compels the audience to infer the intervening events. Kazan expresses that he had to "weigh Stavros' life as a whole and still point events toward the culmination, the final resolution of that experience." He says that in order to dramatize Stavros' entire life, he chopped the bridges up (Young, 1999). The film runs close to three hours and despite its length, dramatic incidents overlap with the rhythm of the film; it does not include redundant dialogues and misleading impressive scenery to fulfill the time. Because Kazan had to cover a lot of ground, he cut the bridges, which tie scenes together. These abrupt transitions astonish the audience and create a sense of wonder. According to Haden Guest, "the film inaugurates and exemplifies the new formal complexity with its use of expressive, often ironic abrupt cuts and Soviet-style "intellectual" montage (Dombrowski, 2011, p. 192).

Kazan stated that he followed the example of Bertolt Brecht's epic theater in which the action is broken up into powerful chapters. Mainly, he leaves Anatolia, goes to Constantinople, gets married there and goes to America to work as a shoeshine boy. Like in Brecht's works, episodic approaches can be seen, but also Kazan keeps the unity of subject and theme is held together (Young, 1999, p. 275). For instance, in Stavros's goodbye scene to Thomna (Fig. 6, 7, 8), he says that he believes in America where he will be 'washed clean.' In the very next scene, there is a cut to a wave breaking and Stavros is shivering on the ship's deck to America. This cut helps create the continuity, makes transitions and ellipsis meaningful. Abrupt cuts and the pace of the film diminishes disadvantages of a very long movie, also reminding of French New Wave practice (Neve, 2009, p. 154). Using alternating rhythms throughout the film, Kazan also stages alternating emotions that creates the sense of ambivalence:

“I wanted every episode to have a different feeling... I played with tempo for the first time. When a tempo is uniform it begins to seem slow. When the rhythm is the same it becomes monotonous even in fast-moving things... If you alternate a slow scene and a fast one, the fast scene seems faster, and the slow scene seems deeper. In *America America* I alternated violence and tenderness” (Ciment, 1973, p. 154).



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.

Stavros has an inner conflict and reveals his dark side; he is facing his final moral crisis.

Apart from alternating rhythms and emotions, “Kazan repeatedly juxtaposes contrasting images and sounds in the film to emphasize the disjunction between Stavros’s reality and his dreams” (Dombrowski, 2011, p. 191). In the scene which American health department officials come on board to examine the immigrants whether they have any kind of disease, Hohannes has a terrible chronic cough and is afraid he will not be allowed into America. At that point, Mr. Kebabian, who knows about Sophia and Stavros, informs the shipmen to send Stavros back to Constantinople as he has no permission to enter the land. In the corridor, Stavros is at one end and Hohannes is at the other. Stavros wishes he were in Hohannes’s shoes for he has a sponsor and therefore be allowed into the country. For a minute, Stavros wants to turn him over to take his place, but he cannot go that far (Fig. 9). While the health official checks Hohannes, Stavros wants to hear him cough (Fig. 10, 11) although in the previous scene he encouraged Hohannes to cover his ears and told him to remember that the coughing was only out of excitement. Without any dialogues, Stavros’s face and the sound of the imaginary cough brings forth the ambivalence. Stavros has an inner conflict and reveals his dark side; he is facing his final moral crisis.

The next scene opens with Stavros and Hohannes on the deck. Without any hope left, Stavros has made up his mind to swim to America. Suddenly, first-class passengers appear on the deck with a classical music band. Class divisions are made clear as Stavros is fighting to death for his life and first-class passengers are there only to have fun and dance. Stavros goes mad and starts dancing frantically; it is his dance of death before the swim. Hohannes as a morally right figure in the film, witnesses everything in Stavros’s life and especially on the deck. Aware of his

health condition, Hohannes wants to help Stavros and moves over to the rail, takes off his clothes and shoes and jumps into the ocean. Those shoes were once Hohannes's ticket to America and now it is again Stavros's ticket. The pair of shoes on the edge tells Stavros can now take Hohannes's place as a shoeshine boy. The object is again a motif and also acts as a flashback. As Young posits, Kazan structured this part of the film similar to Rossellini's *Paisà* in which the last sequence is about objects telling the audience what has happened (1999, p. 285).

When the ship arrives port of New York, Stavros is renamed as Joe Arness inside the immigration center, losing his already lost identity and becoming another minority in another land. The last thing Stavros does in the film is to throw a quarter tip up in the air and catching it in the shoeshine parlor where he now works. He goes after the money; if he will be 'washed clean' or not is not clear; it is ambiguous. A quarter (coin) as an object represents Stavros's transformation from a naïve young boy into a cynic man.

At end of the film, the audience is called into a question: what is good and bad if most bad is done in the name of good? Stavros kills in order not to be killed, he hurts himself so that the others will not get hurt and sells his body so that he can go to America. The ambivalent good and bad helps create a "convincing visual testament to immigrant lives and experiences of the turn of the century" (Neve, 2009, p. 154). In the name of many other immigrants, the first thing Stavros did on the ship to America was to take off his fez and throw it in the ocean. That was the symbol of leaving oppression behind and starting a new life.

CONCLUSION

With *America America*, Kazan advanced his skills to create a visually stronger cinema in which he graduated from "being a director of dialogue to a director of pictures" (Ciment, 1973, p. 62). In addition, while his earlier films framed famous Method Acting performances, his last works express the character's relationship with environment through staging, movement and composition. It is not the stars who attract the audience's attention the most, on the contrary, acting becomes another cinematic element contributing the same amount to filmic equilibrium. As the acting rather than stardom also becomes an aesthetic tool just as important as other elements, the films grow more unpredictable and the director's ability to define the aesthetic and narrative spines of the text and the sub-text become evident. Hence, it is possible to say that the *mise-en-scène* starts to come forth in Kazan's film starting with *America America*.

In the mid-1950s, when studio system collapsed, independent production became the standard of the day within the American Film Industry. The production moved away from a factory-like toward a flexible, free-lance system and the studios

could no longer control every aspect of a film's production (Lev, 2003). Kazan's persistent efforts to free himself from the studio system and Hollywood's total control over his films won through only when he received Academy Awards, ironically, by Hollywood again. The financial and critical success of *On the Waterfront* allowed Kazan's break away from Twentieth Century-Fox and embark upon independent filmmaking with Newtown Productions. Kazan's understanding of independent filmmaking was less about profits and more about gaining greater artistic freedom. For him, the right to develop a screenplay he wanted to shoot and to maintain "final cut" was crucial. However, filmmakers were still dependent on the studios when it came to finance and distribution. At the height of his fame and powers (1950-1961), he formed his own production crew and started to make films that reflected his creative vision. During the 1960s, his films developed a personal approach and he started writing his own scripts as well as producing his own films.

Nevertheless, Kazan knew he could not have it both ways; starting with *America America* (1963), Kazan's downfall began. In the mid-1960s, a disturbing black and white film about minorities in Anatolia with no stars did not attract any attention. As his films took an autobiographical direction, they became more ambivalent, and the ambivalence would soon be equal to financial failures. It is important to point that Kazan was famous for his works in the fifties, not after 1960s. His films after 1960s are the films with which Kazan had critical and financial failures, but they are also his most ambivalent and creative works. His final phase includes four films, respectively, *America America*, *The Arrangement*, *The Visitors* and *The Last Tycoon* that are his most neglected films in film studies, compared to his former successful films such as *On the Waterfront*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *East of Eden* and *Splendor in the Grass*.

It is also possible to say that Kazan's late films are disruptive and critical because they self-consciously draw attention to experiences and real life events that constitute realistic narratives. *America* and *Tycoon* are self-conscious films in the way that the first one deals with American dream critically and the latter with Hollywood. Thomson stated that Kazan along with few native directors made films that "so persistently dealt with American problems and subjects, or that were so absorbed in the American regard for sincere intensity of performance" (2014, p. 1256). Moreover, Kazan's films were appreciated universally too; the more he leaned on individuals, the more universal his films became. The psychological states and emotional complexities of his characters made it possible to touch different cultures as well as the narratives that took their materials from real life events. A film allowing the images "talk" and dominate rather than words; a direction consisting of "turning psychology into behavior"; an intense narrative enriched with ambivalences; themes of social injustice, survival, tyranny, family pressures; use of particular props as motifs and symbols; metaphors as foreshadowing contributed to universality in his works.

To surpass the common question, “Are you for or against Elia Kazan?” (regarding House Un-American Activities Committee investigations) and add a new perspective to literature, this study has focused on Kazan’s artistic view as well as the economic dynamics shaping his films. Particularly in *America America*, it can be observed that Kazan’s evolution of his films is parallel to his personal evolution as an individual. In 1940s, 50s, and early 60s; Kazan’s commercially and critically acclaimed major films challenged commercial demands of the studio system in several ways. He chased freedom in art and believed that the cinema was a medium for artistic expression. He offered brave films that carried powerful artistic visions despite the specific obligations of Hollywood products.

REFERENCES

- Andrew, J. D. (1976). *The Major Film Theories*. Oxford University Press.
- Ciment, M. (1973). *Kazan on Kazan*. C. Williams (Ed.). London: Secker & Warburg.
- Cornfield, R. (Ed.). (2009). *Kazan on Directing*. Vintage Books.
- Dombrowski, L. (Ed.). (2011). *Kazan Revisited*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Jones, D. R. (1986). *Great Directors at Work*. University of California Press.
- Kracauer, S. (1960). *Theory of Film*. Oxford University Press.
- Lev, P. (2003). *History of the American Cinema: Transforming the Screen 1950 - 1959*. C. Harpole, (Ed.). Charles Scribner's Sons.
- MacCabe, C. (1976). Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure, *Screen*, 17(3), 7–28.
- Mann, D. (2008). *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Michaels, L. (1985). Elia Kazan: A Retrospective, *Film Criticism*, 10(1), 32–46.
- Neve, B. (2009). *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider*. I.B Tauris.
- Nichols, Bill (1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana University Press.
- Perkins, V. F. (1972). *Film as Film*. London: Penguin Books.
- Schickel, R. (2006). *Elia Kazan: A Biography*. Harper Perennial.
- Sklar, R. (2001). *Film: An International History of the Medium (2nd ed.)*. Prentice Hall.
- Stam, R. (2000). *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Stam, R. & Miller, T. (Eds.). (1999). *A Companion to Film Theory*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Thomson, D. (2014). *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film (6th ed.)*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Turner, G. (Ed.). (2002). *The Film Cultures Reader*. Routledge.
- Williams, C. (Ed.). (1980). *Realism and the Cinema*. Routledge.
- Young, J. (1999). *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films (1st ed.)*. Newmarket Press New York.

FILMS

- Rossellini, Roberto (Director). (1946). *Paisà*. Organizzazione Film Internazionali (OFI).
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1950). *Panic in the Streets*. Twentieth Century Fox.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1951). *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Charles K. Feldman Group, Warner Bros.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1954). *On the Waterfront*. Horizon Pictures.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1955). *East of Eden*. Warner Bros.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1960). *Wild River*. Twentieth Century Fox.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1963). *America America*. Athena Enterprises, Warner Bros.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1972). *The Arrangement*. Athena Productions.
- Kazan, Elia (Director). (1976). *The Last Tycoon*. Academy Pictures Corporation.