

THE REPRODUCTION OF UPPER CLASS: A TRY OF CLASS CRITIQUE TO 'ÇOĞUNLUK' FILM

ÜST SINIFIN YENİDEN ÜRETİMİ: 'ÇOĞUNLUK' FİLMİNE SINIFSA BİR ELEŞTİRİ DENEMESİ

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ÖZ: Türk sinemasında toplumsal gerçekçilik çizgisi 1960'ların başından 1980'lerin sonuna kadar örneklerini gözlemleyebildiğimiz bir çizgidir. Toplumsal sorunları kendi sinema dilinin merkezine yerleştiren ve sorunların seyircinin zihninde tartışılmasına aracılık eden bu sinema türü, 80'lerin sonunda gücünü yitirmiş ancak 2000'li yılların sonunda örnekleri Türk Sineması'nda tekrardan karşımıza çıkmaya başlamıştır. Türk sinemasının toplumsal gerçekçilik çizgisine dahil olduğunu düşündüğümüz Çoğunluk filminin en önemli noktası, sade ve dingin sinema dilinin yanı sıra, Türk toplumunu sınıfsal bir perspektiften analiz etme çabasıdır. Çoğunluk filmi bize bir Türk üst sınıf ailenin ve ailenin oğlunun hikâyesini anlatırken, muhafazakâr Türk üst sınıfının iç dinamikleri ile aynı üst sınıfın üst sınıftan olmayan kişilerle kurduğu ilişkileri de derinlemesine resmetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makalemiz, senaryo boyunca karşımıza çıkan kişi ve olayları sosyolojik analiz yardımıyla inceleyerek, filmin 'sınıf' kavramına dayalı yapısını irdelemeyi amaçlayacaktır. Film, hem sosyal bilim literatürü açısından Türk toplumunun sınıfsal analizine katkıda bulunmakta, hem de ailenin oğlu Mertkan karakteri üzerinden Türk toplumunun gençlerine bir bakış sunmaktadır. Filmin sinema ve sosyoloji disiplinlerinin kesişim noktasında durması, filmin analizinin her iki disiplinin unsurlarıyla gerçekleştirilmesini elzem kılar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınıf, Türk Toplum, Çoğunluk, Türk Sineması, Toplumsal Gerçekçilik

ABSTRACT: The line of social realism in Turkish cinema is a trend that can be observed in examples from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. This genre of cinema, which places social issues at the center of its language and facilitates their discussion in the minds of viewers, lost its momentum toward the end of the 1980s. However, by the late 2000s, examples of this trend began to re-emerge in Turkish cinema. One of the most significant aspects of the film *Çoğunluk* (Majority), which we consider part of Turkish cinema's social realism tradition, is its effort to analyze Turkish society from a class-based perspective alongside its simple and calm cinematic language. While narrating the story of an upper-class Turkish family and their son, the film aims to deeply portray the inner dynamics of the conservative Turkish upper class and their relationships with individuals outside their social class. Our study seeks to explore the class-based structure of the film through sociological analysis of the characters and events presented throughout the narrative. The film contributes to the sociological analysis of Turkish society from a social sciences perspective and offers a lens on Turkish youth through the character of Mertkan, the family's son. Positioned at the intersection of cinema and sociology, the film necessitates an analysis that incorporates elements from both disciplines.

Keywords: Class, Turkish Society, Çoğunluk, Turkish Cinema, Social Realism

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Introduction and Theoretical Frame

Love stories between young individuals from different social classes have fascinated art and people for centuries. In real life, the union of young girls and boys from different classes, a rarity, forms one of the fundamental plot points in cinema, especially in the melodrama genre. We can argue that *Çoğunluk* (Majority), one of the brightest examples of Turkish cinema in the 2010s, revolves around the relationship between Mertkan and Gül, two young people from different social classes. Despite being aware that their relationship is not purely innocent and naive, its trajectory from a hamburger joint to a municipal park profoundly alters their lives. The screenplay takes us through their journey during and after the relationship, exposing us to various aspects of Turkish society and engaging us with many sociological elements.

The primary subject of the film *Çoğunluk* is the upper-middle class, which is ideologically part of the majority but numerically a minority. When examining this social group, we must recognize and accept that it is simultaneously influenced by Western capitalist modernist elements and conservative elements from Türkiye's pre-modern past. If we refer to Bourdieu's sentences to explain this social group with Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus*: “.. the habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception: and the objective co-ordination of practices and the sharing of a world-view could be founded on the perfect impersonality and interchangeability of singular practices and views” (Bourdieu, 2013:86).

While analyzing the group considered the 'majority' in the film, Bourdieu states also: “The objective homogenizing of group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori, explicit co-ordination.” (Bourdieu, 2013:80).

Bourdieu is underlining the tendency of group (*habitus*) to transfer its own structure and features as reproduction via coherence: “The coherence to be observed in all products of the application of the same habitus has no other basis than the coherence which the generative principles constituting that habitus owe to the social structures (structures of relations between groups - the sexes or age-classes - or between social classes) of which they are the product and which, as Durkheim and Mauss saw, they tend to reproduce” (Bourdieu, 2013:97).

The replacement of the superego, which occupies an important place in Freud's theory, by the group ego (he defines this by the term 'externalization of the superego') is the gateway to this identity and thought.

The individual, who cannot produce a depth of conscience of his own, is highly susceptible to this understanding of authority, which is irrational, imports its rules from outside instead of deriving them from within, imposes pressure, and is very far from the mental structure of individuals, and is prone to integrate with and assimilate authority (Adorno, cited from Freud, 1951:178). The dissolution of the individual within the group to which he/she belongs is observed more frequently in non-Western societies, such as Türkiye. It can be said that Freud's definitions are valid for non-Western societies rather than Western societies.

In his work, Sigmund Freud quotes William McDougall's thought as follows: McDougall says that people achieve with the group a level of feeling which they could never or rarely reach outside the group concept. Losing the limits of their individuality and integrating with the group concept is an experience that gives pleasure to those who do this (Freud, cited from McDougall, 1949:27). It is a great comfort and pleasure for individuals to perform an action or a set of actions that they would not dare or find strength as an individual within the group psychology. However, in a way reminiscent of the concept of conformity in social psychology, the consensus of individuals around specific facts or ideas offers the individual a strength that he/she cannot have when he/she is alone, especially if this group is the majority in society. Being in the majority is convenient, comfortable, supportive, and luxurious. Carl Gustav Jung also mentions the feeling of security that comes from belonging to the 'crowd', as well as the confidence that is created in the individual by the concepts that the majority believes in and wants: in this logic, what the majority thinks is indisputably true, what the majority demands are both necessary and worth wanting, the majority always aims for the good (Jung, 1999:86).

According to Freud, the characteristics of modern 'group' formation are inspired by the times of the 'primitive herd' of human beings. There is a terrible, primitive father who leads the group. The group has an intense demand for 'authority'; in Le Bon's idea, the group wants to 'obey'. The group also aspires to be ruled by a power that has no limits (Freud, 1949: 99-100).

Adorno, too, thinks that the situation in which people love those who are similar and hate those who are different from them has been taken for granted by cultural dynamics. According to him, this situation has been analyzed in Freud's theory as a 'loved ingroup' and a 'rejected outgroup' (Adorno, 1951:128).

In other statements of Theodor W. Adorno, it can be seen more clearly how the construction of the mass as a monolithic structure by the system brings convenience to the system. Adorno underlines that the coercive principle of equality within a community, while uniting its members against external enemies, simultaneously eradicates the individual differences inside. This leads to the members ceasing to think and feel for themselves. Ultimately, a community emerges where individuals, intolerant of any form

of diversity, become mere replicas of the leader within a chain of command. They take pride in their sameness, considering it a virtue, and thus form a group of so-called individuals (Ahiska, cited from Adorno, 2020:222). Freud and Adorno's parallel underlining that it is much easier to avoid individuality and to be embedded in the masses can be seen as a habit that has remained since the pre-modern period and continues in modern society.

To understand the pre-modern elements of the concept of the majority in Anatolian history mentioned above, we can refer to Niyazi Berkes' concept of 'Oriental despotism.' This concept helps us see the roots of the 'majority' sentiment in the notion of *Çoğunluk* film, tracing back to the Ottoman era, even before our Republic. Berkes frequently emphasized that those who view Ottoman society as feudal are mistaken and argued that this societal structure can be explained by the concept of 'Oriental despotism.' According to Berkes, despotic regimes based on a system of servitude create an inevitable stagnation due to the structural disconnection between the state and society; this stagnation becomes a historical barrier to evolution and progress (Kutluer, 1992:507). Another social scientist studying Turkish society and its Ottoman roots, Sabri Ülgener, states that the tradespeople within the guild organization in the Ottoman Empire had a slow and deliberate philosophy of life, submitted to authority, possessed a traditionalist character, and had an art perspective that was static and closed in nature (Dağ, citing from Ülgener, 2021:122). Dilek Tunalı asserts that 'the transmission of mental stagnation' and 'reaching a communal mindset where common traditions and views are maintained' are the two fundamental notions underpinning the concept of the majority (Tunalı, 2011:181). We can argue that these two concepts that Tunalı mentioned are highly valid and prevalent, especially in non-Western societies like the Turkish one.

Nilüfer Göle underlines that, in modernization processes outside the Western geography, the public sphere has been shaped as a result of the state's modernist practices, whereas the influence of liberal bourgeois ideology on the public sphere is observed in the Western world (Göle, 2000: 22). Şerif Mardin argues that the term "civil society" has different definitions in the Ottoman Empire and the West. According to him, this difference stems from the fact that the Ottoman Empire and the West have vastly distinct social histories. While Western history is marked by various dichotomies and dynamics such as "church / secular powers," "feudalism / bourgeoisie," "bourgeoisie / proletariat," and "local forces / national forces," the social history of the Ottoman Empire can be traced primarily along the axis of "community / state" (Mardin, 2020:23). In the sentences of Göle and Mardin, we can observe claims that the public sphere, capital accumulation, and civil society have been shaped by different dynamics from those in the Western world. Accordingly, the concepts of "class" and "upper class" in the Anatolian geography have followed a historical trajectory distinct from their Western counterparts.

It is possible to follow the discourses developed by the right-wing thought in Türkiye against the concept of modernization or immanent to modernization in the film *Çoğunluk*. Fethi Açıkel is making a sociological analysis of the elements that support right-wing thought while mentioning the existence of communities that are socially, culturally, and symbolically displaced under the pressure of late capitalism and rapid modernization, and lose their material security by losing their possessions. Açıkel emphasizes the desire of the right-wing to blend many elements by underlining its structure which is encompassing a wide range of discursive elements such as: from Turkish nationalism and Islamic motifs to the glorification of pre-capitalist values; from a semi-communitarian view of society to anti-cosmopolitan stances; from an idealized nostalgic view of history to a skeptical worldview, and individual manifestations of inferiority (Açıkel, 2023:64).

The idea, widely accepted by a significant portion of the social sciences community in Türkiye and one that we also endorse, is that a bourgeois class in the Western sense never emerged in the Anatolian region. The technological and economic developments that occurred in pre-modern Europe and later led to the Industrial Revolution did not take place in Anatolia. As a result, an industrial bourgeoisie did not emerge. Of course, we must acknowledge the existence of the owners of agricultural and commercial means of production which controlled the majority of property; however, this upper class was not a bourgeoisie in the Western sense. Therefore, we should consider it a more accurate approach to define the group that controls the means of production in Türkiye as the upper class, rather than using the term bourgeoisie.

In *Çoğunluk*, the discourses and elements can be seen as a sort of parade of the right-conservative ideological phenomena in Türkiye. Ebru Çiğdem Thwaites defines the film as illustrating the power perspective of Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which is supported by the elements of nationalism, conservatism, and militarism, thereby delineating the film's ideological framework (Thwaites, 2020, 168-169). Kemal Deniz and Zuhale Akmeşe argue that the film's screenplay is woven around concepts such as Turkishness, nationalism, military service, homeland, nation, and Sunni Islam (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 90) In addition, notions such as Turkish family structure, gender identities in Türkiye, and the reproduction of conservatism should also be noted.

Deniz and Akmeşe develops the idea that the scenario of *Çoğunluk*, which has the primary axis of 'preservation of class structure', also employs different sociological notions. It appears that the resistance which majority encounters in transmitting the necessary ideological consciousness for the preservation and continuation of its dominant class structure to the next generation, as well as the defense/attack mechanisms which are developed to overcome this resistance, are discussed within the contexts of family dynamics, social relations, socio-economic class, ethnic composition and

gender representations (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 95). According to Semih Göncü and Şükrü Sim, it is possible to claim that the structure in the film *Çoğunluk* reflects a whole society on a micro-scale (Göncü-Sim, 2018:89-90). Using all these concepts in the script in a related and harmonious way makes the film worthy of sociological analysis. Deniz and Akmeşe states that the film depicts the relations and conflicts of young people with family, friends, the state, and various social-cultural layers in the public sphere in the period when they gain a specific format ideologically in social life and draws the central axis of the film (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 87).

'The majority' is a phenomenon shaped by the power (system). According to Meltem Ahıska, the mass, as an entity that cannot be reduced to individual persons, resembles clay molded and shaped by power. The power desensitizes and solidifies those whom it includes with the consolation of being "one of us" (Ahıska, 2020:220). This shaping is not an aimless action; it stems from the fear of mass and the fear of 'identities' that exist in the mass and could cause trouble for the system.

The social behavior that glorifies and entrenches the concept of 'power' is not something invented today; it is a way of thinking that extends from the past to the present. Tunalı states that the relationship between the concept of power and our country's cultural structure is reflected in contemporary Türkiye's social conditions as "belonging, colorlessness, and resistance to perceiving the other" (Tunalı, 2011:178).

Any identity that refuses to join the majority is turned into a minority by the system and ultimately excluded. Tunalı states that any stance that does not dissolve into the majority will be labeled as 'other' (Tunalı, 2011:179). In this context, the concept of 'the other' is a kind of punishment; furthermore, it is an anti-thesis that facilitates the definition of the majority identity and the gluing together of those who join the majority. Ahıska considers the ideology of the upper class as an attitude that targets the 'other' and is built on discrimination and hostility (Ahıska, 2020:225).

Although the image of the social structure, which is controlled by the majority identity, may appear vibrant and splendid from the outside, its foundation is rotten and problematic. Ahıska argues that a construction which is based on denying its own pain, experiences, and testimony has been realized (Ahıska, 2020:219). The majority identity is a problematic identity that is built on top of this disabled social structure, and its flawed nature ignores societal issues with an indifferent perspective.

Under capitalism, the upper class is the ruling class. It is to be expected that the capitalist goals and the goals of the upper class are immanent and identical. The aim of generalizing the interests and ideology of the upper class to the rest of society has been one of the main aims of the capitalist system since the Industrial Revolution. This aim facilitates the ideological control of large masses without property by the social group that controls property. Ahıska draws attention to the erosion of the worker identity in the

process and the upper class' further expansion of its property (Ahıska, 2020:225). It would not be wrong to argue that the upper class, which controls large property, and the middle class, which does not own as much property as the upper class but covers more people numerically, have developed a common stance against the lower class, which is considered a threat to their property and lives.

The story of the film *Çoğunluk*, which takes place in 2010, takes place in the postmodern period, that is, in a time when the 'grand narratives' of the modern period have lost their validity. Tunalı argues that the 'grand narratives' that dominated the modern period lost their validity in the postmodern period, isolating today's individual from the concept of past and future and squeezing him/her into the present. According to him, this leaves the individual aimless and defenseless. A beautiful future, which is the promise of grand narratives, finds its meaning only with a subject that feeds on history, but the reality experienced now is a baseless nihilism (Tunalı, 2011:179). This state of lostness, in which society cannot attribute a purpose, meaning, or value to itself, is also seen in Mertkan, who is configured as a tiny version of society. It is quite possible to predict that the same emptiness will continue as long as the young generation, formed by millions of people like Mertkan, cannot produce a philosophical infrastructure that can produce meaning for itself.

The concept of 'majority', which constitutes the film's title, is a situation that makes us think and needs to be interpreted. The common point in the commentators' interpretations is that the concept of majority, contrary to what its name suggests, has nothing to do with quantity. Gilles Deleuze – Felix Guattari says that it is not the number but the internal relations related to the number that define the concept of minority. A minority can be an infinite number, a large amount (Deleuze-Guattari, 1993:105). Ahıska also underlines that the concept of "majority" does not mean an existing, observable, and countable group; the "majority" may not even be a numerical majority (Ahıska, 2020:222). Karakaşlı states that the majority in the film *Çoğunluk* derives its power not from numbers but from common characteristics and that the most critical unification base is conservatism (Karakaşlı, 2020:138). Türk, on the other hand, evaluates the majority as an ideology: this ideology has a mood, a way of thinking, and a worldview (Türk, 2010:69).

The Main Characters: Mertkan and Gül

The film touches on concepts closely related to Turkish society as it moves through a scenario based on Mertkan and Gül. The character of Mertkan, at the center of the film, is crucial as he helps us to observe and interpret the script and every element in the script from a class perspective. Although the film incorporates many sociological elements such as nationalism, male-female relations, social inequality, space and metropolitan environment, family, masculinity, and patriarchy, it would be realistic to say

that all these elements are shaped under the influence of class dynamics. All these sociological phenomena gain an interpretation and meaning within the class stance of Mertkan and his family.

Mertkan and Gül, the main elements of the film, are ordinary young people who can be encountered anywhere, anytime, and in any way; in other words, they have thousands of similar ones. Mertkan is the younger son of an upper class (contractor) family. He studies in open university education, travels all day with his idle friends, and hangs out in shopping malls. He has no purpose in life, nor does he have a philosophy of life. It is possible to read in his eyes the unhappiness, tiredness, and hopelessness of an average Turkish youth in 2010 when the film was shot. Gül, a young woman of possibly Kurdish origin, has come to Istanbul from Van for her university education. On the one hand, she works at a hamburger shop; on the other hand, she continues her studies.

We can see that their relationship is developed within mutual interests. While Mertkan aims to satisfy his sexual hunger with Gül, Gül wants to add 'finding a rich husband' to 'studying at university in a metropolis'. A young woman living in a poor neighbourhood of the city, probably coming from a low-income family and having to work to sustain her life in the metropolis, wants to take the shortcut of 'marriage', as many women in Türkiye do, and doing so with the son of a wealthy family is an understandable choice in terms of ending her poor past and stepping into a prosperous future.

However, it should not be thought that what drives Mertkan and Gül to each other is only the mutual interests that develop in the first stage. At the same time, the feeling of 'no way out' that both of them experience in the conditions they are trapped in is significant, and although both of them experience a sense of no way out, the type of no way out they experience is different from each other: Mertkan leads a life in good material conditions, but he struggles mentally and spiritually in a way that even he himself cannot define. Gül, on the other hand, leads a life in poor economic conditions. Their reactions to this state of 'no way out' are also different: Mertkan, oppressed by his father's harsh and authoritarian personality, is depressed and exhausted, whereas Gül, despite all her economic disadvantages, is more committed to life, hopeful, and energetic. She studies at the university, works at a hamburger shop, and tries to produce a lover for herself with Mertkan. She is a young woman trying to exist in life against her relatives in Van who consider her studying as 'dishonourable'. Emir Batuş sees the loneliness of young people and their alienation due to the rapid kinesis of the city as one of the central conflict elements of the film (Batuş, 2019:49). Batuş's interpretation underlines that the phenomena of 'loneliness' and 'alienation' are experienced by metropolitan youth, regardless of their class, due to the urban environment they live in.

Pointing out Mertkan and Gül's common and divergent points helps to deepen our analysis. According to Batuş, their commonalities include that they both maintain a negative relationship with their families, are not preoccupied with their appearance, do not use the concept/environment of university as a means of socialization, and experience alienation. If we express some points where they differ, Mertkan's family provides his livelihood while Gül earns her living by working independently. While Mertkan is studying in an open university, Gül is studying formal education. While Mertkan is indifferent to the country's problems, Gül is very interested in these problems. Mertkan has no goals, but Gül has goals (Batuş, 2019:50-51).

Mertkan's initial sexual and sexualized interest in Gül gradually changes its format when he brings Gül to his house and introduces her to his mother and even his father. The more time he spends with Gül, the more it is started to scream at the notice of his friends and father. The space that Gül occupies in Mertkan's life corresponds to a position between a sexual partner and a lover, but their relationship, which has no class infrastructure, is doomed to end rather than last, and so it was. İrem Nas's comment is also in line with our opinion: Mertkan likes Gül, but he cannot resist both his father's nationalist-conservative approach and the sexist insults of his friends; thus, he cannot reciprocate Gül's interest in him (Nas, 2013:38). Doğan Aydoğan also thinks that the reason why he could not protect his relationship was his unformed masculinity under the oppressive character of his father (Aydoğan, 2020:16). Mertkan's masculinity which is stunted and can't establish a healthy relationship with women is the reason why the relationship remains in the blossoming stage and fails to take root.

Thwaites, who draws attention to Mertkan's reply to his friend, who asks who Gül is after greeting Mertkan by saying 'nothing', underlines that 'nothing' is a word that represents Mertkan's all life. Mertkan has never fallen in love with a girl, never opened his inner world to his mother, never experienced public transport, never experienced himself in a job, and never read even a single book (Thwaites, 2020:171). In a similar reflex, Gül's question 'What is your biggest dream?' remains unanswered (Thwaites, 2020:172); it would not be difficult to guess that behind this non-answer is again a vast 'nothing'. According to Özge Nilay Erbalaban Gürbüz, Mertkan has a simple life and makes no effort to give meaning to this simplicity. Meeting Gül is an opportunity for him to overcome the simplicity and emptiness in his life (Erbalaban Gürbüz, 2015:35-36). This statement tells us that Gül is or could be the 'only meaningful layer' in Mertkan's life.

Mertkan's character and mood are constantly described in negative terms: Karin Karakaşlı emphasizes that Mertkan has nothing of his own: no real anger, no sense of belonging, not even the slightest curiosity (Karakaşlı, 2020:136). Thwaites sees 'indifference' as the word that best describes Mertkan's psychological state (Thwaites, 2020:167). Karakaşlı emphasises Mertkan's cowardly and passive personality by asserting that the fear is

embodied in Mertkan as an animalistic instinct, and the action which Mertkan knows best is to fear. Mertkan fears from life most; he also fears from crying, talking, touching, death, military service, his father, more or less everything (Karakaşlı, 2020:137). Tunalı draws a picture of Mertkan's problematic mental state by stating that the phenomena of indifference, numbness, apathy, and aimlessness, which are post-traumatic emotional disorders, overlap with the character 'Mertkan' in the film (Tunalı, 2011:179). Tunalı, at the same time, by referring to Slavoj Žižek's concept of 'post-traumatic subject' (Tunalı, 2011:179), says that the problems of the whole society are shown through a single person in Mertkan's psychological problems. This analysis of Mertkan expresses a discourse of the character and the place that spreads to the general through the character and other people. The personal depression experienced by the character points to social depression, and the personal phobic disorder to social confinement and entrapment (Tunalı, 2011:179). Thus, Mertkan is the embodiment of society on an individual.

Thwaites evaluates the two most prominent features of the cultural structure he is in, reflecting on Mertkan as his 'lack of will and his inability to dream' (Thwaites, 2020:174). The fact that his inability to find an exit in the film's later stages leads him to self-destruction (Thwaites, 2020:174) is again related to the same 'lack of desire to live a life'. Despite this, his father is highly determined to keep him in life and keep him in line: Thwaites says that his father's authority over Mertkan wants to discipline him, first by sending him to the construction site in Gebze and then to the armed forces (Thwaites, 2020:174). The necessity of this upbringing from the father's perspective stems from the obligation that, when the time comes, his property must pass to Mertkan and his brother. As long as Mertkan does not die before his father, this obligation of being the person his father/family desires will weigh on his shoulders like a shadow, never leaving him. Being the heir to a property of considerable size that many people would find appealing is, in fact, the very thing that renders his life most helpless and makes it impossible for him to find meaning of his own life.

Mertkan, as an urban young man, is a typical example of his generation. Deniz and Akmeşe states that Mertkan embodies a youth that cannot move beyond the consumption relationships imposed by mass culture and mass media, has no political tendency, lacks social values and ideals, and is lost within his individuality (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 87). Deniz and Akmeşe also highlights that Mertkan, who benefits from the pleasures and luxuries provided by the city as a financially well-off young person, leads a life that lacks concerns and goals, merely passing the time and consuming it, with an empty and contentless existence (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 91). The philosophical void that Mertkan experiences is a situation shared by many young people in Turkish society and is mainly, a psychological condition defining upper class youth like Mertkan. Despite their unparalleled economic privileges compared to the rest of society, the upper class fails to

provide its youth with a purpose, a goal, or a life philosophy. Spending their days with alcohol drinks, sexuality (which, in the case of Mertkan and his friends, is also not experienced healthy), shopping malls, discos, and similar elements, upper class youth find themselves in a state of great despair. This despair arises from the contentlessness of these elements and the weariness brought on by their daily repetition. The primary reason for this, we believe, is that the upper class is structured solely around concrete, material, and predominantly economic elements. Far from contributing to or developing the mental and spiritual dynamics of the young people emerging from within it, the upper class aims to keep them as distant as possible from intellectual and emotional activities. It subjects them to a hedonistic consumption cycle and offers them a life directed by their physical needs (for instance, the concept of sexuality). The class does not desire intellectual pursuits due to the fear that they would undermine class practices; emotional inclinations, on the other hand, are contrary to the ruthless human profile desired by capitalism; in capitalism, people are either harsh or sarcastic. They either cruelly crush others or constantly laugh with a mocking expression. Love, in the upper class understanding, is a hollow, fake concept permitted only if both parties belong to the upper class. It is a game to provide emotional legitimacy to the class-based union of two people from the same economic conditions.

The intellectual emptiness of the upper class and its transmission of this emptiness to its youth can be clearly observed in the dialogues between Mertkan and Gül. In one of the scenes highlighted by Batuş from the film, when Gül says, "What kind of contractor are you? You don't even have a single book on architecture on your shelf," Mertkan responds, "There is no need for books; there are two architects in the office; they draw the projects." In another scene, when Gül gives a book to Mertkan, he replies, "I have never read a book in my life." Although Mertkan is a university student, both dialogues prove his detachment from the concepts of education and learning (Batuş, 2019:49).

According to Batuş, young characters in contemporary Turkish cinema believe a university education is unnecessary to attain a profession. They have entered university due to societal actors beyond their own will (such as family and social environment), and they do not view university life from a scientific and academic perspective; instead, they lead a life based on pragmatic philosophy (Batuş, 2019:58). The shift of life away from scientific and ethical values towards pragmatism is one of the most significant proofs that capitalism has penetrated Turkish society more deeply. Capitalist logic, which prioritizes interests over values, is initially realized by young people.

Both the sexist insults based on sexuality from her friends and the politically charged insults from her father are undoubtedly rooted in a class-based character arising from Gül's poverty. For Mertkan's friends, Gül is merely a 'sexual object' to be employed for their sexual needs. To her father, Gül is not even a candidate for sexuality; she is akin to someone who brings

him his hamburger at the fast-food restaurant, whom he never looks at, leaves the "enjoy your meal" phrase unanswered and essentially treats as an enslaved person or robot. Nas states that Gül's characteristics of being 'Eastern,' 'poor,' and a 'waitress' do not align with any norms Mertkan has learned throughout his life (Nas, 2013:38).

It is also possible to see Gül's perception of Mertkan as an attempt to end her loneliness. According to Batuş, Mertkan is more like a harbour for Gül where she can stay safe in a big metropolis like Istanbul. This aspect is more critical than the lover aspect (Batuş, 2019:49). Torun, on the other hand, argues that Gül's effort to produce a relationship with Mertkan is Gül's attempt to join the 'majority' (Torun, 2017:160). Ahıska interprets Gül's choice as a choice that makes this young Kurdish woman familiar with the majority, i.e. reaching a higher economic life level by marrying a handsome man (Ahıska, 2020:228-229). The fact that a poor person of Kurdish origin and female gender erases all the disadvantages she has by marrying the son of a family that has been rooted in the city will both help Gül to become rooted in the city and prevent her from returning to the geography where she grew up. Gül's endeavor to move from a 'minority identity' to a 'majority identity' can be understood when considering her circumstances.

Teaching Class Manners and Practices to the New Generation

One of the critical points that we can highlight about the film *Çoğunluk* is its realistic depiction of how a class instills its practices, philosophy, and behavior models in its young members. The transmission of class formation and practices must be based on specific values. These values are sometimes nourished by social norms and sometimes supported by ideological discourses. Deniz and Akmeşe argues that the discourses developed by the dominant classes in society have two primary purposes: one is to oppress other classes and marginalize them as a result of oppression, and the other is to transfer the ideology of the class to the young members of the class (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 86). The class transfers its routines to every young member of the class, both to guarantee the future of the class and to reveal the difference between itself and the lower classes. The class needs to teach the class stance to the young generation members of the class (family) from an early age so that the young members can assimilate the class philosophy and apply it in daily life, thus maintaining class cohesion.

This class-based structuring is demonstrated through the film's protagonist, Mertkan. According to Deniz and Akmeşe, Mertkan conflicts with the ideological actors in the film, especially his father, but this conflict is not a conscious choice. The 'false consciousness' that envelops Mertkan at the end of the film is an inevitable situation for his integration into the system (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 88). Eren Yüksel states that concepts such as ethnic hierarchy, class-based exclusion practices of the middle class, and masculinity practices are taught to the male child during the transition to adulthood (Yüksel, 2013:51). In our personal opinion, all the facts that the

film includes in its script are shaped by the control and influence of the concept of class, just like other criteria of social life. For example, the fact that Gül is Kurdish or a woman becomes a point of contempt in Kemal's eyes is related to the fact that Gül is a poor young woman who is working in a hamburger shop; of course if we assume that Gül, as a person from the city of Van, is of Kurdish origin, (which the film makes the audience feel indirectly even if it does not explicitly state this). If Gül had come from a wealthy Kurdish family, even if her being Kurdish was disliked, her being Kurdish would easily become a secondary characteristic that could be pushed to the background, and her being a woman, like Mertkan's mother, would be honoured by being the woman and mother of an upper class family. Gül's poverty easily renders her ethnic identity or woman identity to something that can be used against her.

The concept of 'military service,' one of the notions touched upon in the film, is one of the invisible yet crucial stages of class construction. According to Deniz and Akmeşe, the class structure in which Mertkan was raised considers military service as one of the stages of completing the process of masculinity. That is why military service is significant in the discourses of male dominants. These stages consist of concepts such as military service, marriage, and taking over the job (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 91). Concepts that appear unrelated at first glance, such as money, military service, and family, become interconnected through the discourses of masculinity. According to Yüksel, concepts such as having a family, doing military service, earning money, and working are masculine values that act as a garden in which middle-class codes are nurtured and developed. Through the discourses of the family father, the concepts such as 'serving the nation and country' and 'hegemonic masculinity' help legitimize middle-class codes (Yüksel, 2013:52). The concepts prioritized by Mertkan's father within the capitalist system and his cultural framework differ. According to Batuş, the notions of military service, work, and money are far more important to his father and his circle than education and university (Batuş, 2019:48-49). The step-by-step realization of the stages of military service – taking over the job – marriage is necessary to transfer upper class property to the next generation. The male child first proves his physical/biological adequacy in the military, then demonstrates his competence in the working life by taking over the job, and finally proves his social and sexual adequacy by getting married (starting a family and having children). Thus, capitalism does not worry about transferring the family's property to the next generation; the new generation has proven that the male can carry the property and, when the time comes, transfer it to his child (son). However, this situation does not yet apply to Mertkan and his peers: According to Deniz and Akmeşe, Mertkan, and his friends have not yet fully assumed the role of representatives of the system, but they thoroughly enjoy the benefits of the patriarchal order. They lead a carefree life with the resources provided by their families, such as money and cars (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015:93).

The composition displayed by Mertkan's father, Kemal, is just another representation of the right-conservative-nationalist and capitalist upper class identity that exists in in Türkiye. This structure, a blend of capitalism in Türkiye with conservative discourse and lifestyle, has a right-wing intellectualism and a right-wing lifestyle that requires it to be labelled as 'conservative'. According to Göncü-Sim, Kemal's philosophy of life attaches great importance to power relations. He dislikes criticism and sees no problem in resorting to violence. He is patriarchal and can marginalise. He is aggressive and intolerant towards outgroups. It lacks pluralism and has no legal basis. It feeds on a highly authoritarian understanding (Göncü-Sim, 2018:89-90). Nas, on the other hand, sees Kemal as someone who commodified and oppressed his wife; Kemal is also a racist, conservative, militarist, and materialist personality (Nas, 2013:37). Kemal's aggressiveness, his hierarchical understanding of human relations and his competitive identity in business life are in line with the expectations of the upper class from which he comes from (Yüksel, 2013:52). Kemal's aggressive personality stems from the capitalist culture to which he belongs. Batuş thinks that the motto of the film's prologue, 'you should learn to crush,' is also the advice of Kemal, who becomes rich through neo-liberal policies (Batuş, 2019:49). According to Yüksel, competition, hierarchy, and exclusion are natural part of hegemonic masculinity practices. Like other young men from the conservative-upper class, Mertkan is taught all these practices with a military discipline (Yüksel, 2013:51). In our opinion, the concept of competition in Yüksel's sentences refers to capitalism, the concept of hierarchy refers to class hierarchy and the concept of exclusion refers to the exclusion of classes/people who are perceived as lower than oneself. The downloading of all these concepts to Mertkan as a package emerges as a requirement of class interests and structure. Göncü-Sim states that class-based power relations shaped within capitalism pose an obstacle to the understanding of a democratic society (Göncü-Sim, 2018:89-90). This is a view we also find to be true. The class-based power relations constructed by Kemal and those like him are far from a democratic culture that is grassroots-based, pluralistic and respects individuals' rights.

The transfer of class values from one man to another would not be surprising from our perspective because the male is the bearer of property. Property forms the economic dimension and the 'infrastructure' of the class. However, there is also a cultural and 'superstructure' dimension: teaching the class's socio-cultural values acts as a 'glue' for preserving and transferring property to the next generation and is extremely important. In the film, the 'class bearer candidate' is Mertkan, but the current bearer of the class is his father, Kemal, and one of Kemal's roles and duties is to prepare Mertkan to become the Kemal of the future.

Kemal acts as an informal teacher for Mertkan. According to Deniz and Akmeşe, this education encompasses a curriculum that spans from masculinity practices to lifestyle, social relationships to class values. Once

the curriculum is completed, the class expectation for Mertkan is to take his father's place (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 89). Although the upper class is numerically a minority in society, the conservative upper class, in particular, is in complete agreement with the conservative ideology held by the majority of society in terms of values and lifestyle. Thus, the conservative upper class differs from the general society only in terms of 'economic' means. However, as the dominant class, it serves as the source of the conservative ideology that intellectually guides most of society.

There is also a spatial dimension to Kemal's disciplining of Mertkan: Thwaites highlights that Mertkan is taken to the office during the day and to the sauna at night, where his father meets with other business people (Thwaites, 2012:167), this effort is to familiarize Mertkan with the spaces of the upper class. Tunalı views the sauna, mosque, construction site, and police station depicted in the film as 'male' spaces controlled by a patriarchal mindset (Tunalı, 2011:180).

Yüksel asserts that the losses and costs incurred by the male actor while performing his masculinity role, or his complete failure to perform it, generate a masculinity crisis. Yüksel also states that the patriarchal society's expectation of hegemonic masculinity performance drives the individual man to a mentally and spiritually troubled state (Yüksel, 2013:46-47). Türk views Mertkan's situation as an oscillation between "being like his father" and "not being competent enough to be like his father" (Türk, 2010:68). Ahıska, in describing the process surrounding Mertkan, tells us that masculinity presents a structure which is composed of fears (Ahıska, 2020:227).

Mertkan, introspective, passive, and crushed under his father's ego, is far from the toughness required to lead an upper class family and manage a commercial enterprise. As Yüksel has pointed out, he is a male individual who is far from being able to play the role he is expected to. He suffers from psychological distress because he believes he cannot meet his family's and class's expectations. His family is also disappointed because their son did not turn into the man they hoped for. Mertkan and his family experience a mutual dissatisfaction over Mertkan's failure to 'become a new Kemal.'

Yüksel's other claim is that one of the most significant obstacles preventing a boy from becoming a subject is the extreme authority exercised by the father (Yüksel, 2013:49). In the film *Çoğunluk*, we observe an excessive and uncontrolled paternal power (Yüksel, 2013:49), and opposite this power stands Mertkan, who is in a highly controlled and helpless position. What a patriarchal father fails to understand is that he is the primary reason for his child's helplessness and the fact that he never considers his child to be sufficiently 'manly.' He constantly complains about his child's helplessness and timidity, yet by keeping him under his wings, he hinders the development of his character and does not allow him to fly with his wings. The primary cause of the helplessness and timidity he complains

about is entirely himself! To surpass the oppressive personality of such a father, one either needs to have a more dominant character and confront the father to overcome him or possess a political and cunning personality to manage the father's authoritarianism. Since Mertkan possesses neither of these traits, it is inevitable that he will feel stifled under his father's control.

According to Batuş, Mertkan, in his problematic relationship with his father, has to design his life according to his conservative father but also tries to resist the masculine culture (Batuş, 2019:48-49). Nas argues that Mertkan's confrontation with his own entrapment and realities would create an ego conflict. She attributes this to Mertkan's inability to develop a stance and perspective on life outside of his father's and surroundings' expectations (Nas, 2013:37). Aydoğan states in the film *Çoğunluk* that the man is helpless in expressing himself, and his silence is associated with an authoritarian culture. Aydoğan also evaluates Mertkan's helplessness and that of his brother, albeit to a lesser extent, against their father Kemal as 'lack of will' and 'silence,' positioning their father's harsh and dictating speaking style on the other side of the dichotomy (Aydoğan, 2020:16). There is a profound difference between Mertkan and his brother in terms of their relationship with the system. Tunalı says that his brother has realized the most guaranteed way to join the majority: he is an engineer, married, has children, and in these aspects, he is the model that the system wants to see. However, Mertkan, without any infrastructure or reason, has tried to transition to a different order (Tunalı, 2011:181).

Ahıska argues that Mertkan becomes the same as his father but does not identify with him. He emphasizes that this sameness is achieved by leaning more towards the rules and class ties of the existing social order (Ahıska, 2020:227-228). To ensure the continuation of the class, it needs a new generation because it reproduces itself through the new generation. In this reproduction, although time, people, cultural customs, and places change, the only thing that remains unchanged is the preservation and increase of property. The preservation of property is an inevitable reality for the continuation of capitalism. The class's desire is very clear: it wants another Kemal to be produced. If Mertkan can fulfill the requirements of this reproduction and meet its expectations, he will be accepted as a new Kemal; otherwise, the system will find another Kemal to manage the company in his place. The existence of Kemals is essential for preserving, continuing, and increasing property. Mertkan's future in the upper class depends on how much he becomes the same as his father.

Deniz and Akmeşe states that class structure, social environment, and the concept of family are influential in determining the roles of men and women and play a role in fixing these definitions (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 93). Among these sociological concepts, the family is the closest and most tangible phenomenon to the individual: even if the individual is not directly confronted with the existence and impact of other concepts, the concept of family inevitably makes itself felt. As the carrier actor of property, the family

institution is also the most fundamental tool for integrating new generations into their society.

The concept of 'family' is inherently problematic and traumatic. According to Yıldırım Türker, the family is like a license to live. It makes life miserable for those outside it but serves as a shield for those within. It is an identity that must be protected, a structure invented to incorporate the individual into the herd and keep them there. It is a concept that inhibits the individual's desires and imagination for different worlds. In reality, the family is an accident; throughout life, the individual tries to protect themselves from this accident without sustaining a fatal injury (URL-1). Ahıska believes that the family structure produced by the capitalist-upper class logic is based on the concepts of 'lifelessness,' 'indifference,' 'lovelessness,' and 'boredom' (Ahıska, 2020:226). Tunalı, from her own perspective, states that the conservative family is uncomfortable with and in conflict with identities positioned at the point of 'the other'; such as 'the cleaning lady, the girl from Van, the construction worker from the southeast and the taxi driver' (Tunalı, 2011:182).

According to Deniz and Akmeşe, although the concept of family is a negative factor for the individual in many cases, the way out of the family they grew up in is presented to the individual as 'starting their own family.' His brother's advice to 'get married and free yourself,' using his own marriage as an example, suggests that the way to escape the yoke of a hegemonic father is to become a family head/father/husband oneself. This thought is also present in Gül: she sees marriage as a means of liberation from relatives who cause her distress through the concept of 'tradition.' In other words, the remedy for concepts like 'father' or 'tradition,' which poison the life of a young individual, paradoxically, is again the family institution itself (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 90). The system uses the family as an instrument that touches and shapes the individual at a molecular level, making the family institution functional and essential for the system. In conservative thought and in the upper class, the family is an inevitable beginning and an expected end.

Class Contempt, Class Hatred and Otherizations

Class-based disdain is a concept that immediately draws attention in the relationships established by the upper class with the middle and lower classes. One of the first examples of class distance and condescension is experienced between Mertkan and Şükriye, who has been coming to their house for cleaning since Mertkan was a child. As a child, Mertkan pushes and shoves Şükriye, and his father reprimands Şükriye when she mispronounces Mertkan's name. When Şükriye dies in a traffic accident during Mertkan's adulthood, both his father and Mertkan say, 'May she rest in peace' and move on. Şükriye is doubly disadvantaged and insignificant in both Turkish society's stratification and in the eyes of Kemal and Mertkan because she is both poor and a woman. Class-based contempt is repeated for another

female character in the film, Gül. Mertkan's friends describe Gül with words like 'disgusting woman', 'communist', and 'gypsy'; Mertkan's father is particularly worried about the relationship between Mertkan and Gül turning into marriage and Gül becoming a permanent part of the family.

The aggressive and disdainful attitudes of members of the upper class towards individuals who are not from their class stem from their meticulous efforts to preserve class boundaries. This state of aggression is repeatedly manifested through various criteria such as ethnicity, gender, location, and masculinity. For Kemal, with his nationalist, likely Black Sea origin, conservative-right perspective, Gül, who is from Van and likely of Kurdish origin, is merely a potential terrorist who must be disparaged. It is noteworthy that Kemal, the property owner, does not base his disdain for the propertyless Gül on her poverty but emphasizes her geographic origin or family background. Instead of directly saying, 'I don't want her as my daughter-in-law because she is poor,' he chooses the indirect and evasive route by saying, 'I don't want her as my daughter-in-law because she is Kurdish.' Although Kemal's hatred appears to be directed at Gül being from Van and possibly of Kurdish origin, it is clear that this is merely an ideological guise, and the real reason is class-based discontent.

According to Deniz and Akmeşe, the upper class constantly conflicts with people they consider to be beneath the social class they belong to. This conflict is perpetuated both through physical violence and verbal expression. Class-based contempt repeats itself in various scenes and on different occasions: Mertkan's complaint about the smell of Şükriye, who comes to clean their house; Kemal's reprimanding tone with two different taxi drivers; Mertkan's interactions with workers at the Gebze construction site; and the way Mertkan's parents question Gül's family's job and hometown. These reflexes aim to repeatedly emphasize their class superiority over those they see as beneath them (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 91-92). Yüksel mentions that the exhibited attitudes are a 'display of superiority aimed at excluding differences' (Yüksel, 2013:51); in the mindset of Kemal and similar people, different classes are not a social reality or outcome but a social threat.

Karakaşlı also states that a comprehensive narrative of fascism is inherent in the film *Çoğunluk* (Karakaşlı, 2020:139). This statement aligns with Bachmann's thought, which holds that fascism is an inherent element in the relationships between people (Karakaşlı, cited from Bachmann, 2020: 140). Karakaşlı further mentions that in the domains of school, family, and the broader society, the absence of any condition in a person's life that others have is sufficient for it to be perceived as a threat (Karakaşlı, 2020:138). It is possible to speak of an invisible fascism that has infiltrated and settled into social relations in everyday life.

The class reflex here can be interpreted in two ways: one aspect is the sensitivity shown in excluding those who are not from one's own class and not admitting them into the class; the other aspect is the effort to maintain

superiority over the class or classes considered to be lower. In both cases, class maintains its conflictual nature as a social group, thereby confirming Marx's concept of 'class struggle' in his own theory. In the upper class, which controls property, there is a deep sense of distrust towards the propertyless class. This suspicious and distrustful attitude is particularly evident in Mertkan's father, Kemal. Hasan Bahadır Türk states that Kemal's discontent towards those who are not from his class is based on the concept of 'our neighborhood,' where the two fundamental elements are property and security; in the film *Çoğunluk* the narrative of security and conformism is also significant (Türk, 2010:71). Gül's attempt to infiltrate the upper class through Mertkan, as someone who does not belong to the upper class, is thwarted by Kemal's intervention. As the owner of property in the film, Kemal is, as might be expected, the most prominent and strict defender of his class. The class consciousness that has not yet formed in Mertkan but is expected to develop in the future is precisely this. After all, to be able to protect the property that will be passed down to him from his father in the brutal capitalist system, he must possess this consciousness: either he will gain this consciousness and rise to a position where he can protect the property, or he will lose all or a significant part of the property over time. This merciless consciousness of class preservation is a characteristic that capitalism demands from all property owners.

Deniz and Akmeşe states that classes with higher economic status also have priority in determining their living areas. Thus, class differentiation also differentiates living spaces from one another (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 92-93). Alongside the manifestation of class differences in people's minds, the concrete and 'space-based' aspect of this difference is also evident between Mertkan and Gül. While Mertkan lives in Bahçelievler, Gül resides in Kuştepe. Tunalı interprets Mertkan's first visit to Gül's house as the first time that, Mertkan steps outside the boundaries which are set for him by the authority to which he belongs. In the street of the house, on the stairs of the house, and inside the house, Mertkan is experiencing a space entirely unfamiliar to him (Tunalı, 2011:183). According to Deniz and Akmeşe, the question that Mertkan's father asks him about what he was doing in Kuştepe reminds Mertkan of the geography to which he belongs. The geography to which one belongs also signifies the boundaries of the class structure of which one is a part (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 93). Indeed, the theft Mertkan experiences in Kuştepe can be seen as a class-based punishment for violating the boundaries of his territory.

Thwaites considers the 'Turkish' and 'male' identities as the dominant habitus; in contrast, the 'Kurdish' and 'student' identities through Gül, the 'worker' identity through construction workers and taxi drivers, and the 'female' identity through the mother, Gül, and Şükriye each form separate 'minority' habitus. Thwaites states that the lack of interaction between Mertkan's habitus and Gül's habitus makes their relationship highly problematic, which is reflected in the film's narrative (Thwaites, 2020:169).

In the film *Çoğunluk*, women, in parallel with their position in the patriarchal Turkish society, face a form of degradation based on the concept of class. The three women in the film are Gül, Nazan, and Şükriye. Due to their differing social class positions, the behavior they receive from others and the behavioral patterns they develop are distinct from one another.

Another notion to which marginalization can be applied, apart from gender, is ethnic identity. Gül, who is poor and from Van of Kurdish origin (likely), is in a disadvantaged position from both perspectives. In Tunalı's perspective, the 'otherizing' of Gül throughout the film is primarily based on her Kurdish origin; whether Gül is of Kurdish origin or not, Mertkan's friends constantly label her with words like 'Kurd, gypsy, communist.' This emphasis on her being Kurdish makes her vulnerable to being associated with the PKK terrorist organization and forms a natural opposition to concepts like military service, homeland, nation, and nationalism, thus facilitating the position of her as the 'other' (Tunalı, 2011:183). The same disadvantageous situation applies to the workers at the construction site in Gebze where Mertkan visits. Likely of Kurdish origin and poor, these workers are helpless and humiliated in the presence of Mertkan. Thus, the identity of being 'poor and Kurdish' becomes suitable for exclusion and degradation when juxtaposed with the identity of being 'rich and Turkish' because the Kurdish identity is a minority in society and is vulnerable to oppression by the Turkish-majority identity. In fact, by being associated with poverty, Kurdish identity becomes prone to subjugation: the fact that a majority of those of Kurdish origin are poor and that a significant portion of people experiencing poverty are of Kurdish origin makes it easy to translate class-based disdain into ethnic degradation. As Thwaites also emphasizes, the primary reason behind Kemal's wealth is the labor of Kurdish or Eastern-origin individuals who sweat over the buildings he constructs, yet Kemal never wishes to share the life he has with them (Thwaites, 2020:170).

Methodology and Findings

Our study is employing sociological film analysis technique because the sociological content of *Çoğunluk* film needs the examination and explanation of this approach. Eren-Aktan states that sociological film analysis prioritises sociological elements: "Sociological film analysis provides a critical lens for examining the reciprocal influences between film and society. Utilizing this approach, we can thoroughly examine how films engage with various social issues, including gender roles, power dynamics, economic structures, and ideological themes" (Eren-Aktan, 2024:4).

Another perspective claims that sociological analysis contains not only social but also cultural and political notions: "Sociological film analysis is a method of examining films to uncover the social, cultural, and political dynamics within them. This approach allows you to see beyond the plot and characters to understand the broader societal influences and implications" (URL-2). According to this perspective, sociological analysis contains two

sub-analysis ways: "Content Analysis: This involves systematically analysing the content of a film to identify patterns, themes, and biases. By examining elements such as dialogue, setting, and characters, you can reveal underlying social messages. Contextual Analysis: Understanding the social, political, and historical context in which a film was made is crucial. This technique helps you understand why certain themes and representations were chosen and how they reflect the society of that time" (URL-2).

Sociological analysis is essential for outlining the class dynamics of the relationship between Mertkan and Gül, which is the core dynamic of the film, as well as the class-based perspective of Mertkan's environment towards Gül. It is also essential for understanding how Mertkan's class, particularly his father's political perspective, is reflected in the script. The attitude of Mertkan's father and his class towards Gül can also provide insights into the political values of the conservative middle-upper class.

As a Turkish film, *Çoğunluk*, holds a very different position and depth than other Turkish films made during its time. The unique nature of the film, which we have tried to analyze throughout our writing, has been met with admiration by many intellectuals. For instance, Türk states that the film shows us the big picture of society through ordinary people who are not thought about, the forgotten ones, and those left behind by society. While doing this, it follows a path with high awareness. However, it never resorts to slogans (Türk, 2010:68). Karakaşlı, on the other hand, believes that the society that the audiences return to after leaving the cinema is precisely depicted in the film. She suggests that the vicious cycle in which the audiences are trapped in real life is already described in *Çoğunluk*, from which they seek escape (Karakaşlı, 2020:133). The point that these statements bring us to is not only the success of *Çoğunluk* in reflecting Turkish society but also the necessity of recognizing the film as one of the social realist films in Turkish cinema. Tunalı states in the film *Çoğunluk* that the father character dissolves his own social stance within a communal structure and that his eldest son adapts to the system by following in his father's footsteps. He also adds that Mertkan's anti-system stance, which is not based on a specific ideology or political position, eventually succumbs, and Mertkan is also forced to join the system (Tunalı, 2011:181).

The concepts of 'uniformity' and 'otherization' gained more intensity in society when the film was made, compared to the past. According to Torun, *Çoğunluk* illustrates how othering the different one to express the 'self' and being uniform as depoliticized have become widespread and valid in society (Torun, 2017:160). This reflex is observed when the concern of the class that controls property to protect its ownership becomes even more pronounced. While the upper class protects its property, it does not neglect to construct ideological supports for this action. Erbalaban Gürbüz states that the intersecting paths of Gül, who is from a lower economic class, and Mertkan, the son of a conservative, nationalist, upper class family, help us understand the typology of Turkish society. The film *Çoğunluk* true to its name has a

story that examines the everyday life, thoughts, and structure of the majority (Erbalaban Gürbüz, 2015:278). Ayşe Lucie Batur argues that the film's title reminds us of the end of the film because everything we have watched represents the majority of society. The film's call to the audience is towards self-confrontation: in the final dinner scene, besides the mother, father, and child, the audience is also seated at the table. Batur believes that placing the audience at the table causes an 'alienating identification' (Batur, 2011:6). Like many films within the social realism movement in Turkish cinema, which should also include *Çoğunluk* as a recent link in the chain, it follows a path that disturbs the audience and prompts them to think. The audience is aware that the story being told is their own. However, at the same time, they are uncomfortable with all the harmful elements within the story—likely because they have not confronted them until now. Thwaites states that the mental structure defined as 'majority' in the film can only be defeated if the inequalities created by representative democracy and the free-market economy are recognized as a problem (Thwaites, 2020:177). It is likely that this mental and social phenomenon called the 'majority' is closely related to, and even rises on the shoulders of, two concepts brought by bourgeois democracy: 'representative democracy' and the 'free market,' especially in the context of Türkiye.

The promotional text of the *Çoğunluk* states that in the first instance where Mertkan experiences discrimination, he submits and conforms to the majority (2010, *Çoğunluk*, DVD); in fact, Mertkan bows his head and is forced to do so. This act of submission stems from his inability to break free from the class structure he is a part of. Mertkan is defenseless against life due to the philosophical emptiness instilled in him by the upper class to which he belongs. His father, who also possesses this emptiness, attempts to fill it with his authoritarian and harsh demeanor; however, Mertkan lacks harshness. Tunalı, on the other hand, argues that from the beginning and fundamentally, Mertkan possesses a stance that is not aligned with the 'majority.' According to her, like the taxi driver, the construction worker, or the cleaning lady in the film, Mertkan carries the identity of the 'other' for a certain period (Tunalı, 2011:179). This condition gradually eroded due to the class-based discipline imposed on him throughout the film, and by the end of the film, Mertkan has been 'won over' by the majority. Ahıska states that we witness how the 'majority' is produced as Mertkan grows up. This process not only shows us the formation of the majority but also illustrates how a young person is made a part of the majority (Ahıska, 2020:223).

The only situation threatening the process is his relationship with Gül, which is removed from Mertkan's life through a 'class-based' intervention. Nas believes that his father's directives greatly influence Mertkan's decision to end his relationship with Gül and his ability to overcome the discomfort that this decision causes in his conscience. After breaking up with Gül, it is again his father who plays the leading role in Mertkan's acceptance of the simple life that his father lays out before him (Nas, 2013:39). Nas states that

the situation presents Mertkan with only two choices, with no third option: Mertkan will either side with the minorities and accept defeat, or he will join the majority by the expectations of his class (Nas, 2013:37-38). Deniz and Akmeşe also attributes the strengthening of Mertkan's 'anti-hero' stance at the end of the film to the elimination of the deficiencies in his allegiance to his class (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 94).

His relationship with Gül means, at least for his family and class, a 'class deviation' in Mertkan's process of replacing his father in the future. Mertkan is aware that as long as he continues his relationship with Gül, he will be gradually punished, and even if he marries her, he will ultimately be excluded from his class and family. His father has already shown the first step of this punishment process by sending him to the construction site in Gebze. The fact that Mertkan is sent to the construction site in Gebze by his father before his military service is a punishment imposed on Mertkan by the class he belongs to for his 'forbidden love' with Gül, which violates class values. He completes his imprisonment in a house that does not have the facilities he had in his father's house, realizes his class purification, and returns to his home in Istanbul to rejoin his nuclear family consisting of his mother, father, and himself. These three people come together around the meals cooked by Mertkan's mother, Nazan, and once again construct the Turkish right-wing conservative traditional upper class family in practice and the minds. Karakaşlı declares that the process of class discipline for Mertkan, who returns from his isolation in Gebze to the family dinner in the film's final scene, has ended. According to her, Mertkan is now ready for use as a product of the power apparatus. With a ceremonious return to the family table, it is as if he takes pride in being acknowledged as a man by his father and sits at the family table. The process is complete for Mertkan (Karakaşlı, 2020:137).

Gül represents a potential meaning for Mertkan's "meaningless" life. At the same time, she is the only choice he has made independently, without his father's will. Through the "Gül choice," Mertkan develops a subconscious resistance against the class from which he comes. Perhaps due to his personality, Mertkan has never adapted to the role his class expects him to play or the philosophy his class wants him to embrace. The family dinner table at the end of the film does not signify that he has accepted this role and philosophy but merely proves that he has submitted to it. He neither internalizes nor can internalize the "upper class" role assigned to him by his class; however, he also lacks the willpower and qualifications to realize any other way of life or role outside his class.

The situation, which we mentioned as "the only choice he made independently and without his father's will," actually reveals a desire for subjectification. Both Mertkan and Gül have violated the roles assigned to them by the class structure of capitalist society and made choices that society does not expect from them. According to the system, Mertkan has dared to engage in a relationship with a girl from a class that is positioned below him by the system. In contrast, Gül, again, according to the system, has

had the audacity and impertinence to be involved with a boy from a class positioned above her by the system. The fact that both Mertkan and Gül violate what the system deems appropriate for them shows that they reject their roles and positions. In Karakaşlı's perspective, individuals who do not accept objectification pay the price for their efforts to become subjects (Karakaşlı, 2020:133).

Similarly, Ahıska argues that the objectification of the subject occurs with the extinguishing of the subjective aspect of the self (Ahıska, 2020:224). In this societal structure, which supposedly grants individuals freedom, it is evident that the most significant constraint on individuals comes from the class to which they belong. There are no issues as long as that one dissolves into the social structure set forth by the system as an object; however, attempting to become a subject and violating the role assigned by the system marks the beginning of a significant problem for the individual.

Viewing Mertkan as a more miniature society or society as a bigger Mertkan, allows us to construct a parallel between the concepts of Mertkan and society. According to Deniz and Akmeşe, the transformation in the social structure is reflected in Mertkan on a micro level (Deniz and Akmeşe, 2015: 88). Mertkan, who is practically interning "to become a man of the right-wing, conservative, nationalist upper class", until he takes over the management of the mean of production (the company), sees every event which he experiences and witnesses as an opportunity to prepare himself for his future profile better.

One of the achievements of the film *Çoğunluk*, according to Ahıska, is that it triggers the anger we feel from our inability to hold on to various possibilities of life and love (Ahıska, 2020:231). This anger is deeply buried in our subconscious, one that we are often unaware of. Mertkan takes out all his frustration from losing Gül as a result of the pressures from the class he belongs to on the Kurdish workers employed at his father's construction site. This reflex, which develops unconsciously in Mertkan, stems not only from seeing those workers as relatives who have taken Gül back to her hometown but also from the simmering, volcanic anger within him—anger he harbors toward his class and father, who have taken Gül away from him but which he cannot express. The film *Çoğunluk* gains its cinematic value and depth by shedding light on the defeats both Mertkan and we experience—defeats over which we have no control and sometimes not even the chance to resist.

As A Consequence

Mertkan, although he does not seem like the majority, is actually a majority. He is an extension of the non-upper class majority within the upper class, which is a minority in number. He is a bundle of troubles that represents society's troubles on himself. He is nothing more than an unfortunate example who gets out of bed every day and gets defeated repeatedly in the life in which he is involved. Although his father's efforts to 'make him a man' in particular are a futile effort for Mertkan, who will never

be able to be a upper class man at the level which his father wants, Mertkan's story, which does not end at the family table where he sits at the end of the film, but instead begins right there, has long-term importance for both Turkish cinema and in terms of showing us the tragedy which all Turkish youngs share to a greater or lesser extent.

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