Bracketing Religions: A Phenomenological Analysis of Theological Origin and Social Construction of Religions in the Context of PK Movie

Dinleri Paranteze Almak: PK Filmi Bağlamında Dinlerin Teolojik Kaynağı ve Sosyal İnşasının Fenomenolojik Bir Analizi

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Abstract

Cinema functions as a rich data store for researchers in understanding and interpreting unique characteristic components of a society such as language, culture, tradition, religion, etc. The subject of this study is to question the realities of a multicultural social life with reference to PK movie. There is a set of problems such as what the basic motivations of religious groups are, whether a person could be independent of cultural/environmental factors, and how the theological and sociological perceptions of religion differentiate, etc. The aim of this paper is to trace the steps of the construction of social and religious reality experienced by an alien's own consciousness. This study combines sociology of religion with cinema through a phenomenological approach. Everyday realities perceived through an alien by suspending stocks of knowledge (externalization) enable us to apply the phenomenological approach to the study. As a result, this alien tends toward the society as a stranger and contributes to criticize it objectively.

Keywords: *Sociology of Religion, Cinema, Multiculturalism, Social Constructivism, Phenomenology, Stranger.*

Öz

Sinema, bir toplumun dil, kültür, gelenek, din vb. gibi benzersiz karakteristik bileşenlerini anlamada ve yorumlamada araştırmacılar için zengin bir veri deposu işlevi görür. Bu çalışmanın konusu, PK örneğinden yola çıkarak çok kültürlü bir sosyal yaşamın gerçeklerini sorgulamaktır. Çalışmada dini grupların temel motivasyonlarının neler olduğu, kişinin çevresel faktörlerden bağımsız olup olamayacağı, teolojik ve sosyolojik din algılarının nasıl farklılaştığı gibi bir dizi problem ele alınmaktadır. Makalenin amacı uzaylı bir karakterin bilinci ile tecrübe edilen toplumsal ve dini gerçekliğin inşasının adım adım izlenmesidir. Çalışma, din sosyolojisi ile sinema disiplinlerini fenomenolojik yaklaşım kullanmak suretiyle bir araya getirmektedir. Bilgi stoklarını askıya alarak (dışsallaştırma) bir uzaylı aracılığıyla algılanan gündelik gerçekler, çalışmaya fenomenolojik yaklaşımı uygulamamızı sağlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak ise, uzaylı karakter bir yabancı olarak topluma yönelir ve onu objektif bir şekilde eleştirmeye katkıda bulunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Din Sosyolojisi, Sinema, Çokkültürlülük, Sosyal İnşacılık, Fenomenoloji, Yabancı.*

INTRODUCTION

As productions of cinema, films function as a substantial data source for observing any society. It is mostly possible to witness the stock characters, traumas, values or taboos of a particular society in a film. From this point of view, the inclusion of culture, tradition, religion, gender and ethnicity in films, which can be considered as components of a society, may inevitably bring some consequences in its wake. Therefore, films, on that sense, have the quality of reflecting the society, namely reality. Conspicuously, Diken and Laustsen point out the intersection between the filmmaker and the sociologist by underlining the aspect of "revealing the representation of social life"[1]. Thus, it is possible to notice the society's transformation, mentality and reflexes as well as conducting social analysis through films. In fact,

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[1]   Bülent Diken – Carsten Bagge Laustsen, *Filmlerle Sosyoloji* (İstanbul: Metis Publication, 2008), 23.

using films as a tool of analysis is an attempt to identify the society.[2] The interaction between cinema and society basically serves an opportunity to understand the background of that particular social structure. Accordingly, Bilici underlines that cinema, in modern times, contains a fundamental socialization and identity mechanism within itself rather than being a soft entertainment tool.[3] In a similar manner, Kracauer stresses the reality aspect of a film and distracts fantasy from reality by saying "movie directors have all times rendered dreams or visions with the aid of settings which are anything but realistic."[4]

In the context of cinema-social relations, it could be said that the directors, who take all responsibilities at every stage of the film, build their films through the eyes of a social/cultural anthropologist who examines society in details. Güçhan, analysing the correlation between cinema and society, articulates that the creator of the cinema transfers what he sees and experiences through an evaluation filter. Moreover, the director inserts his own worldview, sometimes leading thoughts, feelings and interpretations in the film through an artistic act.[5] So, there is an interactive relationship between the society in which the director has been grown up and addressee mass. Tarkovsky elucidates this interaction as a contact. According to him, this contact between the director and audience is "unique to cinema in that it conveys experience imprinted on film in uncompromisingly affective, and therefore compelling, forms".[6] In other words, in addition to reflecting a particular society's world of thoughts, films turn into a power of reconstructing the society. In that sense, films turn into a means of signals which are concretion of objectivation. Therefore, the movie helps us to trace the steps of phenomenological social construction of society. The fact that the method of this paper is a qualitative analysis based on the phenomenological paradigm could be explained by this interaction between film and the society. First of all, for phenomenology's definition, Wallace and Wolf quote a reference from The Encyclopedia of Sociology as follows: "a method in philosophy that begins with the individual and her/his own conscious experience and tries to avoid prior assumptions, prejudices and philosophical dogmas. Phenomenology thus examines phenomena as they are apprehended in their 'immediacy' by the social actor".[7] Therefore, while the experience of the individual is of great importance in the phenomenological approach, the individual

2   Diken – Laustsen, *Filmlerle Sosyoloji*, 17.
3   Muhammed Veysel Bilici, "Hollywood Filmlerindeki Apokaliptik Temalar: Sinema, Popüler Kültür Ve Din", *Milel ve Nihal İnanç Kültür ve Mitoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4/2 (August 2007), 140-141.
4   Siegfries Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 35-36.
5   Gülseren Güçhan, "Sinema-Toplum İlişkileri", *Kurgu Dergisi* 12 (1993), 54.
6   Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Tarkovsky The Great Russian Filmaker Discusses His Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 179.
7   Ruth Ann Wallace - Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1995), 241.

must also suspend all external factors during her experiences. Wallace and Wolf elaborate on phenomenology through a stranger/an alien analogy:

> *Phenomenology asks us not to take the notions we have learned for granted, but to question them instead, to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world. In short, this perspective asks us to assume the role of the stranger, like a visitor from a foreign country, or our extraterrestrial visitor mentioned above. Phenomenological sociologists study how people define their social situations once they have suspended or "bracketed" their learned cultural notions. The basic proposition states that everyday reality is a socially constructed system of ideas which has accumulated over time and is taken for granted by group members. This perspective takes a critical stance with regard to the social order, and, in contrast to functionalism, it challenges our culturally learned ideas.[8]*

It could be distinctly observable that an alien analogy applied for purifying the mind from established patterns is quite compatible for our sample film. The alien protagonist appearing in the heart of the film can bravely take a firm stand and exhibit a critical attitude, as he is not subjected to the cultural concepts, which the audience hesitate to suspend. This is completely because he is independent of all cultural norms and he can suspend learned cultural concepts even under any circumstances.

The film enables us to trace the social learning[9] steps, which is accepted as a result of socialization and acculturation because it could mostly be considered in terms of social construction based on the phenomenological paradigm. The director not only handles daily realities of society as reinforcers for social learning but also presents them to the audience in a satirical way. In other words, daily realities of society are viewed as externalization in Bergerian terminology. Berger, formulizing a sociological dialectic model, which is externalization, objectivation, internalization, describes externalization, namely culture, as "an anthropological necessity" and adds that "Man, as we know him empirically, cannot be conceived of apart from the continuous outpouring of himself into the world in which he finds himself".[10] At that very point, the director and a social anthropologist meet on common ground, which is externalization. It could be elaborated as follows:

> *Human existence is essentially and inevitably externalizing activity. In the course of externalization men pour out meaning into reality. Every human society is an edifice of externalized and objectivated meanings, always intending a meaningful totality. Every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world.[11]*

Culture, which had already been formed long before the director and his society, is an ultimate outcome of externalization. Moreover, this long existing culture can

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8   Wallace – Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 241.
9   Robert H. Lavenda - Emily A. Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010), 17.
10   Peter Ludwig Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1966), 10.
11   Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 37.

be embodied through objectivation. Strictly speaking, the process of externalization, objectivation and internalization transforms an 'individual' into a 'member' of a particular society. What is more, this culture is a means of continuous inheritance from generation to generation.

The 'art-cinema' norms, as Bordwell stresses, could be accepted as a bridge between the audience and the director. "The film is assumed to be a vehicle for the director's vision of life, conveyed chiefly through symbolic actions and objects".[12] The vision of life perceived by the director is conveyed to the audience. However, this vision is mostly shaped by the director's understanding before it is conveyed. The product of the vision of life turns to be an objectified material. Therefore, the director observes the society/culture and converts it into a product, which serves an objectified product for society. As for our sample film, Hirani, the director, not only tries to make sense of events and facts within the institutionalized and complex multicultural structure of Indian society, but also reveals that the ongoing cultural transfer determines the boundaries of social and religious groups. What is thought-provoking about the film is most probably its plot and protagonist. The director puts an alien's struggle and survival at the centre of a multicultural society. Tragically enough, this alien is completely unaware of socialization process of Indian society. The attempt to understand the society through the eyes of the protagonist, who is adorned with neutral and critical qualities, allows the director to act independently of certain prejudices and preconceptions. The director's method can be considered as an effort to read the entire society, especially by addressing the beliefs and worldviews of subgroups in society. Therefore, the director both reflects the intention to apprehend a multicultural and multi-religious social structure with an empty mind in the context of world-related concepts and conveys the stages of social learning to the audience in a tragicomic tone. Hirani neither confirms nor denies the reality of outer world; however, he "bracketed" the preconceived notions as an act of "phenomenological reduction".[13] In other words, the director, like a phenomenological sociologist, suspends learned or namely externalized cultural concepts and recites the plot through the eyes of an alien. Thus, he could talk over stocks of knowledge and experiences, which is culturally acquired, by purging mind from deep-rooted daily realities and social thought systems.[14]

Rajkumar Hirani, one of the leading writers, directors, producers and editors of contemporary Bollywood, released his film *PK*, a successful example of the satire, in 2014. In this satiric movie, we could claim that the director reveals the society's

12   David Bordwell, *Ozu and The Poetics of Cinema* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 117.
13   Helmut R. Wagner (ed.), *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 6.
14   For more information Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

perception of religion by underlining the theological ground of religion. The film humorously criticizes 21ˢᵗ century India from economic, social, political, religious and cultural aspects. Besides his distinctive and original cinematographic perspective, the fact that the starring character of the film is Aamir Khan makes a significant contribution to the film and its popularity.

1. BEGINNING ADVENTURE OF HUMAN BEINGS, SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF GOD AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The opening scene of *PK* begins with the space scene and offers a universal perspective. The shooting angle focuses gradually from the universe to the Earth, in fact a specific local region, named Rajasthan, in India. A spacecraft, floating closer in a cloud, leaves one of its crew members on derelict land, which gives the impression of *in the middle of nowhere*, to scrutinize the life in the Earth and moves away. Therefore, it could mostly be possible to associate the opening of the film with the beginning adventure of the human beings. As in many religion and origin myths, landing of alien reminds the audience of the first human being descended from heaven to the Earth[15] because of his sin. In other words, this scene addresses to the audiences' socially learned religious or mythical concepts, which enable them to develop intimacy with the film. The alien, who has come to the world 'naked' both physically and culturally, symbolically loses his connection with the sky/heaven when a local thief has stolen his necklace, which is in fact a remote control, a tool essential for him to communicate with the spacecraft. Strictly speaking, just like Adam, who was taught "the names of all things",[16] namely educated and intellectual, the alien is cognitively well equipped but quite naive in terms of world-related experiences. Thus, the alien, as Adam himself, has to survive on his own. In the course of the film, the similarity between the alien who is constantly seeking for God and Adam who is continually praying to God for forgiveness turns to be significantly remarkable.

In fact, the character is portrayed as naked and defenceless both physically and culturally at the opening scene, which highly resembles a birth, becomes more of an issue of the phenomenological approach applied to the film. The qualities of a stranger, his experience process of the new society and consequently comprehending this new society by bracketing socially learned concepts, which are all described by Schutz under the heading of *Stranger in the Community*, comply fully with the basic understanding of the phenomenological approach.[17] The film begins with a

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[15]   The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Adapa", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Retrieved July 20, 2020); *Jewish Virtual Library* (Retrieved July 20, 2020) Gen. 1:27; *Jewish Virtual Library* (Retrieved July 20, 2020) Gen. 3:23; *The Qur'an* (Retrieved July 20, 2020), al-Mu'minun 23/12; *The Qur'an* (Retrieved July 20, 2020), al-A'raf 7/24.

[16]   *The Qur'an* (Retrieved July 20, 2020), al-Baqarah 2/31.

[17]   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 87-93.

note stating that it will most probably take six thousand years to count the stars in just our own galaxy. Although there are countless places the alien can come to, his arrival to the Earth and directly to India is actually the humorous atmosphere that director Hirani wanted to present at the very beginning of the movie. More importantly, it could be assessed that India, thanks to its long established multicultural social structure, is most probably one of the best places on the Earth for an alien to be accepted easily. From alien's perspective, such a complicated society is, on the one hand, quite a difficult system to analyse and comprehend quickly. On the other hand, this multicultural structure provides him with some advantages such as identifying differences in a heterogeneous society. The intricate multicultural structure that has emerged as a product of externalization offers a wide range of questions for alien, namely stranger, by bracketing social realities. Moreover, theological implications underlined at the beginning of the film symbolically shape the beginning of the alien's worldly life on a theological ground. When the film is viewed from the point of view of the alien character, complex theological foundations and multicultural structure are on the main axis of questioning. In other respects, from the director's point of view, both theological and sociological religious grounds are the subject of criticism by being bracketed.

The "first contact" of the alien character with an earthling also takes place at the very beginning of the film. The first earthling whom the alien has encountered is a thief, and by stealing the alien's necklace through which he can communicate with the spacecraft, the thief has dropped the alien in great despair. The association of the first contact with a sin also enables us to analyse the film theologically. It is because the first sin, namely the original sin,[18] which causes world experience after the

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[18]   In The Holy Qur'an the original sin is explained in detail as follows: ´Allah said,` "O Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat from wherever you please, but do not approach this tree, or else you will be wrongdoers." Then Satan tempted them in order to expose what was hidden of their nakedness. He said, "Your Lord has forbidden this tree to you only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals." And he swore to them, "I am truly your sincere advisor." So he brought about their fall through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise. Then their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and ´did I not` tell you that Satan is your sworn enemy?" (*The Qur'an* (Retrieved October 17, 2020), al-A'raf 7/19-22.); In The Old Testament the original sin is explained as follows: Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which HaShem G-d had made. And he said unto the woman: 'Yea, hath G-d said: Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?' And the woman said unto the serpent: 'Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, G-d hath said: Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.' And the serpent said unto the woman: 'Ye shall not surely die; for G-d doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as G-d, knowing good and evil.' And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles. And they heard the voice of HaShem G-d walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of HaShem G-d amongst the trees of the garden. And HaShem G-d called unto the man, and said unto him: 'Where art thou?' And he said: 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I

creation of the first human being, could be confirmed in both mythological and religious sources. Similarly, in the film, it is a remarkable quality that the incident leading to the world experience is associated with a sin. While it is unfortunate that the alien establishes its first contact with an immoral earthling, it is also a great event for him in terms of understanding the social structures, the search for God and religious groups, which are the main subjects of the film. As a matter of fact, the alien takes a journey to search of God after the theft and individually realizes his own religious experience. Therefore, the tragic case of theft has guided the fate of the alien in the world and in the course of the film, as well. Hirani's representation of the first contact, which takes a significant part in social sciences literature, reveals an anthropological reality to the audience. Kimura states that first contact refers to the first encounter among different groups or individuals. "Generally, it is a concept in cultural anthropology, which implies the contact between two different cultural groups. In science fiction (SF), it is a major theme exploring meetings between humans and extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI)".[19] Based on this, as well as helping the alien seek for God, experience religion and socialize, the first contact with the earthling is the first meeting of two different cultures. In addition, the first contact leads the alien to socialization the process of which reveals the phenomenological conceptualization of the alien.

The search for God, which is one of the main themes of the film, comes to the fore when people direct the alien as "God knows!", "Ask God!", "Pray to God", etc. during the chase for necklace, namely control device. Upon being convinced that he could only find his device with the help of God, the alien gives up questing for his necklace but sets himself searching for God. He is so confused about the pursuance of God that he wants those who see God to contact him by printing leaflets that say "MISSING If found please contact. PK". As audience, we could witness the tragic, but still comic, incidents that the alien has to undertake during his process of seeking God one by one through flashbacks when he narrates them to a journalist called Jaggu. During his journey in search of God, the alien realizes different religious groups and their understanding of God, their socialization processes, rituals, dynamics and symbols. Therefore, social life in the world is getting gradually difficult and complicated for him.

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hid myself.' And He said: 'Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' And the man said: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' And HaShem G-d said unto the woman: 'What is this thou hast done?' And the woman said: 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.' And HaShem G-d said unto the serpent: 'Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou from among all cattle, and from among all beasts of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life (*Jewish Virtual Library* (Retrieved October 17, 2020) Gen. 3:1-14).

[19]   Daiji Kimura, "Anthropology of "First Contact"", *Challenges of Space Anthropology 2014-2015* (2015), 45.

The sophisticated understanding of God of particular religious groups could not solely be explicable by religious motives. As Subaşı points out, "religious perceptions of traditional societies are considerably provided through the guidance and accompaniment of religious discourses and they are also a pivotal factor of understanding the world and God".[20] Hence, belonging to a specific religion enables a person to be shaped within the framework of certain principles, values and perceptions. In other words, a follower of any religious group forges a close bond with the symbols, perceptions and identity of this particular group. The search of God in the film explicitly displays that each religious group constructs their own perspective utterly in a different way. Further to this difference, each group has their distinctive perception of God, which cannot be imagined independent of cultural effects, and they all differ from each other. It would be convenient to refer to Akyüz and Çapçıoğlu at this point. They underline prevalence of religion as follows: "Although it is quite possible to separate cultural areas from each other due to their specific subjects and contents, religion can penetrate in all cultural areas through the mentality it creates in individuals".[21] Therefore, it gradually becomes harder to distinct the line between religion, together with perception of God, and culture. The audience, in fact, witness the ceaseless effort of the alien, who discovers that each group is subordinate to its own God and that different rituals are performed for each God. To his surprise, he comprehends that religious groups have built their sui generis perception of God in a multicultural structure as a product of externalization.

After being beaten many times the alien notices that this world do not have one God. There are so many Gods. Each God has different procedures and rules. All Gods have built their own community. People name these institutionalized communities with certain rules as religion. Moreover, each community has different managers. People are subordinated and loyal to only one particular religion, namely community. At the same time, people only fulfil duties and obligations ordered by their own managers. The more the alien learns, the more confused he gets. The alien, in the course of the film, begins to think that people were born with religion's marks on their bodies showing to which religious group they belong. He realizes that he is mistaken when faced with the fact that there is no such marks on people's bodies. Consequently, he comes up with the idea that he should worship every God in every religion until he could find his. One of his monologs takes place at this point as follows:

> It's getting hard to find out my religion. Now I can do just one thing. I will worship every Gods in every religion. One of Them must be the right one. And will hear to what I want.[22]

20   Necdet Subaşı, *Din Sosyolojisine Giriş* (İstanbul: Dem Publication, 2014), 25.
21   Niyazi Akyüz - İhsan Çapçıoğlu, *Ana Başlıklarıyla Din Sosyolojisi* (Ankara: Grafiker Publication, 2012), 49.
22   Scripts, "PK" (Retrieved June 9, 2020).

Thereby his unceasing desire of searching of God turns into an adventure of individual religious experience. According to Berger, "Society not only determines what we do but also what we are".[23] The society determines the alien as PK (drunk) because he does not comply with the norms of any groups, understand their symbols or belong to any of them. Therefore, PK, due to the society's attitudes, turns into a *dramatis persona*[24] just to keep pace with it and more importantly, survive among them. *Role theory*[25] is a method that PK has unconsciously applied during his adventure of religious experience and search of God. By role-playing, he worships every God in expectation of finding his own. The reason why PK applies to role theory could be explained by his unawareness of a phenomenological socialization process. In fact, he is ontologically in the middle of the world. Such a very complex cultural-religious structure requires a leap for him for adaptation because he is lack of cultural and religious codes and experiences. In other words, PK is in accord with the world ontologically; however, he is not yet adaptable to the world epistemologically.

It could be possible to draw a parallelism between PK's religious experience adventure and pilgrim's journey. The reason is that the pilgrimage and ordeal experienced during this journey metaphorically point out individual's introspective religious acquisition. It could be claimed that the journey during which the audience bear witness to PK's growth in maturity is the substantial part of the plot rather than the destination. In the course of the journey, PK may have religious experience, namely numinous state of mind,[26] for this growth. Towards the end, his maturity could be explicitly observed through a dialog with one of religious managers, Tapaswi, upon a tragic bomb attack:

> Tapaswi: What is this thing? God said that. This is His broke down's drum. But he said, it's his property. God said, build a temple, and he said, Don't make temple. Who should we listen? Is it God? Or, this guy? Wearing a yellow helmet, and gave these out. See this, look here. First he said, God is missing. Then he called God a fraud. Tomorrow he might say. That God has died. Boy, what do you want? A world which doesn't have God? Are you so desperate To hurt people's feelings? Some people do not have bread to eat. Some don't have roof to stay. Those people don't even have friend to talk to. Everyday how many people kill themselves, do you know? Wrists cut, hang neck on fan, why? Because they do not have hope. If God come forward, put tikka in forehead, put some thread around their hand, it will give them some hope to live. So who are you to deny this hope from them? And if you, really want to snatch God from those people's lives, Tell me, what do you want to give them instead? You always said these wrong number, wrong number. So tell everyone here now, what is the right number?

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23   Peter Ludwig Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 93.
24   Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, 93.
25   Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, 94.
26   Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 7.

> *PK: You're exactly right Tapaswi. There's one time, when, I too, could not find food to eat. I don't have home to stay. I cried a lot. I don't even have friends. I only had one thing. God. Everyday I thought tomorrow will be better. God will show me some way out. I agree. That putting faith in God, one can find hope, The difficulties will go away, courage will come, we'll get strength, But I have one question. Which God should I believe in? You all say that, it's only one God. I say, no. There are two Gods. One is the one who created us all. The other one is the one created by people like you. We know nothing about the God who made us all. But the God people like you made, is exactly like you. Liar, pretending to act, giving false promises, meeting rich people sooner, letting the poor neglected, happy when get praised. People are afraid to even say a word. My right number is very simple. The God who created us all, put faith in Him, and the God that people like you created, the duplicate God,. Destroy it.[27]*

The understanding that PK has achieved as a result of his own individual religious experience by performing prayers as diverse as praying and bathing in the Ganges, being baptised and rolling on the ground, wearing different talismans and jewellery, and praying to all known Gods is the presence of a transcendent God above the Gods of religious groups. The director refers to two distinctive grounding of religious understanding by stressing rituals: theological and sociological understanding of religion. Lavenda and Schultz question what gives rituals power.[28] The answer is related with the authorization of rituals which comes from outside of this authority. Namely, this outer authority could be a state, society, God, the ancestors or even traditions. Although PK does not have any idea about the meaning of these rituals, he performs them properly under the directions of the authority of the groups. Therefore, his acts could be evaluated as a supportive argument for sociological grounding of religion. On the other hand, each ritual which the audience witness through flashbacks is conducive to refer to Durkheim's understanding of ritual. Instead of ordinary actions, rituals are mostly accepted as formed actions through a consciousness and an intense socialization. They together construct social life. [29] In other words, religion is through and through a social institution and an integrity of actions. Religion is social; therefore, religious attitudes, rituals and actions cannot be discussed out of social context.[30] So, rituals are one of the outstanding factors of socialization process. Through these rituals, PK could articulate with collective consciousness of the society. Moreover, he could individually observe how religious groups marginalize members of other groups since he attends each group's rituals, namely socialization process. In addition to these, director Hirani analyses symbols and rituals through a critical discourse. He presents that the line between religious rules and social rules is being blurred by underlining that the religion constructs itself under the effect of social life. The director remarks that it is quite inseparable whether one's action is motivated by social rules or religious

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27   Scripts, "PK".
28   Lavenda - Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, 73.
29   Köksal Alver, "Emile Durkheim ve Kültür Sosyolojisi", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi* 3/21 (2010), 204.
30   Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. K. E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

necessities. The religion seems to be under culture's shadow; however, what is even more criticized is that each religious group, by building thick walls around itself, does not allow any common point with other groups. The director lucidly emphasizes that they have common purpose theologically, but they differentiate themselves with strict understanding in social life. Thus, Hirani, with references to the religion's sociological grounding that replace its theological grounding, points to the break of religion from its theological context and its transformation into a reconstructed reality. This disengagement is phenomenologically reconstructed in accordance with necessities, desires and behaviour of the religious/local/cultural groups. Even, it is possible to deduce that these groups adapt themselves to the period so that they could reconstruct its understanding.

2. STRANGER IN THE COMMUNITY[31] AND CRITICISM OF FORMAL PIETY

The essential reason why PK is so critical and could stay critical throughout the film lies in the fact that he is not a member of any community. He is not even from the Earth. Just like a new-born infant, PK is portrayed as a child-like person who curiously tries to learn the language, culture, traditions, etc., namely socialization. Abhijat Joshi, who is co-author the script with Hirani, has a similar view of the film and PK:

> *P. K. is a comedy of ideas about a stranger in the city, who asks questions that no one has asked before. They are innocent, child-like questions, but they bring about catastrophic answers. People who are set in their ways for generations, are forced to reappraise their world when they see it from PK's innocent eyes. In the process PK makes loyal friends and powerful foes. Mends broken lives and angers the establishment. P. K.'s childlike curiosity transforms into a spiritual odyssey for him and millions of others. The film is an ambitious and uniquely original exploration of complex philosophies. It is also a simple and humane tale of love, laughter and letting-go. Finally, it is a moving saga about a friendship between strangers from worlds apart.[32]*

By underlining its comedy of ideas aspect, Joshi foregrounds PK's attitude and style that lead people to inquire their religious belief and social rules. PK is often compared to a child, which enables him to discover many social and religious concepts by asking mostly absurd questions. According to Berger and Luckmann, from the very beginning a child is incorporated into social relationships which develop in regular, direct and reciprocal actions.[33] Although a child has bodily and conscious capacities inherent to the human species, she is not capable of action in the full meaning of the world. As children understand that other people's actions are determined by schemes of experience that are drawn from society's reservoir of

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[31] Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 87-93.
[32] IMDb, "Plot" (Retrieved June 9, 2020).
[33] Peter Ludwig Berger - Thomas Luckmann, *Modernity, Pluralism and the Crisis of Meaning* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1995), 18-19.

meaning, they progressively learn to comprehend the actions of its counterparts and their meaning. In other words, a child is born not only into communities of life (Lebensgemeinschaften) but also into communities of meaning.[34] Therefore, similar to a child, PK gradually learns people's actions, scheme of experience, and becomes a member of both communities of life and meaning. His journey is a kind of socialization process. Moreover, that Joshi highlights PK's stranger identity could be read as justifying his questioning. Indeed, a person coming from Indian society could not be so influential and humorous to criticize his own society. In other words, PK aims to inquire about the society by suspending its daily experiences and socio-cultural acceptances.

It is symbolically and sociologically important for PK to approach the society. PK could be mostly recognized as a stranger in the society in accordance with Schutz's description of the stranger in a society. According to Schutz, "the stranger, becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group".[35] It is obvious that the society to which PK has approached does not have a critical characteristic. For instance, PK could not hide his astonishment when he finds out that the vendors have made God sculptures themselves and he questions whether God created men or men created God. This example reveals that PK is really a new member trying to adapt himself to the group. PK could easily question God because he is independent of the authority of any social groups. Moreover, his previous experiences have no validity in the new group anymore. Inasmuch as the stranger is new among the members, "he is a man without a history".[36] Indeed, PK could not adapt his previous experiences to this new society. That is why he is mentioned as drunk, mad, lunatic, etc. and nicknamed PK.

It is undeniable that the strangers would approach to and read a new group with their previous cultural codes and life experiences. They interpret the new environment with their usual understanding. PK also attempts to perceive his new social environment by applying his previous stocks of knowledge which he has inherited socially in his own community. The understanding of God being shaped during his search of remote control with the directions of people such as "God knows", "Ask him", "Only God can help you", etc. does not comply with the perception of God of his previous group:

> Who is this Bhagwan? That can help me. I see that everyone mentioned his name. After what I saw, I was freaked out. The people of this world, made him as pictures. They themselves made a place for Him in one place. There are even streets in His house. Hundreds of thousands of people

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34   Berger – Luckmann, *Modernity, Pluralism and the Crisis of Meaning*, 20.
35   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 87.
36   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 88.

> *go to Him. He solve everyone's problems for a small amount of charges. This kind of magic didn't exist in my world. I could not believe it. But I thought I should try it once or twice.[37]*

PK has never experienced such an incident until then; nevertheless, this is a common practice and understanding among this new group of people. So this monolog symbolizes his astonishment together with routines of these groups. Since he could evaluate these routines from an external perspective, he is critical. At the same time, he is bewildered because nothing he has encountered matches with any scheme of experience in his mind.

According to Schutz, "the approaching stranger is about to transform himself from an unconcerned onlooker into a would-be member of the approached group".[38] Therefore, all obscurities and cultural patterns of the approached group tend to be known as social facts for the stranger. Moreover, "the stranger has to face the fact that he lacks any status as a member of social group he is about to join and is therefore unable to get a starting point to take his bearings". [39] The fact that he is lack of a status is an important factor which enables him to criticize the groups harshly. It is somehow unfavourable for him not to have a reference point because he does not have any cultural patterns of the approached communities. Therefore, throughout the film, PK is able to criticize, vilify and satirize religious and social groups as independently as he wishes because he belongs to none of Indian groups. PK can organize a mentality which is independent of attachment, shyness, blindness to the group, and fanaticism.

The approached group, namely cultural pattern, "is not a shelter but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation, not an instrument for disentangling problematic situations but a problematic situation itself and one hard to master"[40] for the stranger. PK's adventure as a stranger is portrayed so vividly that the audience witnesses each tragicomic incidents he has experienced through flashbacks while he is narrating them to Jaggu in jail. In other words, we, as the audience, know and sympathize with his process of acquiring worldly experience.

In the film, three types of conflict[41], which a protagonist could experience in a literary work, are apparently observable during his worldly adventure. It could be

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[37]   Scripts, "PK".
[38]   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 88.
[39]   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 90.
[40]   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 93.
[41]   The chief character in a plot, on whom our interest centers, is called protagonist, and if the plot is such that he or she is pitted against an important opponent, that character is called antagonist. (…) and the relation between them is one of the conflicts. (…) In addition to the conflicts between individuals, there may be the conflict of a protagonist fate, or against the circumstances that stands between him and a goal he has set himself. (Meyer Howard Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 234.) In our

uttered that each conflict he has experienced during his search of remote control transforms him from a *stranger* to a *survivor*. PK, who approaches to the society as a stranger and constructs his blank slate, becomes a survivor thanks to experiencing religion together with finding practical solutions for daily realities. Besides, the practical solutions that he has acquired after long-period observation enable the director to put forward how symbolic culture is functional and prevalent in India. It could be clearer from Lavenda's and Schultz's expression:

> To depend on symbolic culture is to depend on learning for survival, but it is also much more. Symbols stand for objects, events, and processes in the wider world. But because their link to these phenomena is purely by convention, that which the symbol stands for can never be specified once and for all.[42]

Therefore, PK also learns symbolic culture to survive. One of the most satiric examples for this situation is his solution of sticking God figures on his cheeks as a precaution against slaps, which is both a humorous and cunning step. Such solutions point that he turns to be an earthling practically; however, he is still a stranger theoretically.

Schutz also mentions objectivity of the stranger and asserts that "he is not bound to worship the 'idols of the tribe' and has a vivid feeling for the incoherence and inconsistency of the approached cultural pattern".[43] This feeling leads him to need to acquire full knowledge of the approached cultural pattern and in-group self-assessment. Just like Schutz's stranger, Hirani's PK also tries to acquire full knowledge of rituals and practices them to attain God. Strictly, PK could impartially self-evaluate the group because he is a stranger to this cultural pattern. PK performs a wide range of rituals from going to the temples to rolling on the ground, from offering milk to Gods to bathing in the Ganges, from being baptized to performing salat. While doing all of these, his main motivation is to gain the original and authentic knowledge of belief. Consequently he could reach a critical point of view to question each of these religious practices. PK's critical point from Schutz's evaluation could be detailed as follows: "Only after having thus collected a certain knowledge of the interpretive function of the new cultural pattern may the stranger start to adapt it as the scheme of his own expression".[44] Together with this, it could be substantially characterized by the concept of *marginal man*, which Schutz borrowed from Park and Stonequist. "Then the stranger remains what Park and Stonequist have aptly called 'marginal man', a cultural hybrid on the verge of two differ-

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sample film, the protagonist, PK, is depicted in conflicts with the antagonist, Tapaswi; with circumstances which are religious groups; with fate, namely himself during his search of God.

[42] Lavenda - Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, 22.

[43] Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 93.

[44] Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 91.

ent patterns of group life, not knowing to which of them he belongs".[45] Feeling stuck in between two cultural patterns, PK could be likened to a culturally biracial individual. He is biracial and this reality never hinders him from questioning the approached cultural patterns.

While PK could be categorized as a *marginal man*, it is possible to define the discourse that marginalizes him as fanaticism of formal piety. Certain symbols of groups could be principally considered as a sign of attachment and identity in a multicultural structure. It is clearly observed that people do not have a biological basis of differences from birth which could lead religious differences; however, these differences spring from cultural, namely externalized, basis. With this aspect, symbols turn to be an anthropological categorization especially through attire, ornaments and colours.

In an iconic scene which refers to and satirizes the categorical symbols of religious groups, Hirani examines PK's mentality, which would be considered as quite marginal in the eyes of society, by bracketing stocks of knowledge and realities. In this scene, PK's belief and a religious group are brought up for discussion by Tapaswi, a master rhetoric and manager of a religious group, upon PK's strategic intend for revealing the truth about the wrong number.[46] Thereupon Tapaswi's interrogation, PK, as ingenious as Tapaswi, comes to the temple with four other people. Despite the fact that each of them is a member of a religious group formally, they are actually in disguise.

> *PK: Tapaswi, call your God now, you want to know what's my religion, right? But first, ask Him what is His children's religion.*
>
> *Tapaswi: What the hell are you doing here?*
>
> *PK: Call Him, ask Him, ask Him.*
>
> *Tapaswi: I don't have to call God for this. Even I can answer this. This is Hindu, Christian, this is Sikh, this one of the Jains, And this girl is from your nation.*
>
> *PK: Guys, please tell Tapaswi your names now.*
>
> *Sukhwinder Singh: Hello, my name is Sukhwinder Singh.*
>
> *Abbas Ali Yaqub: Assalamualaykum, I'm Abbas Ali Yaqub.*
>
> *Veer Jain: Hello, I'm Veer Jain.*
>
> *Christopher D. Souza: Hi. I'm Christopher D. Souza.*

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[45]   Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 94.
[46]   In the film someone is constantly calling Jaggu thinking that it is hospital's number. At the end, Jaggu responds that the person whom he is calling has died for kidding. Upon hearing this conversation, PK thinks that managers of religious groups contact with wrong number and are misled by the responder just as Jaggu does. The one who responds the managers fools them by benefiting their fears and anxieties. Although PK believes that Tapaswi is fooled at first, he realizes that Tapaswi himself is also a part of this wrong number situation.

Jhaggat Jhandni Sahni: I'm Jhaggat Jhandni Sahni.[47]

Even this unique instance obviously shows that the backbone of social grouping is based on formal piety. Hirani the director, focusing the close relation between the identity revealing symbols and prevail perception in the society, highlights the deep-rooted mindscape of the society, which Schutz phenomenologically defines as "stock knowledge on hand".[48] Distinctive characteristics of a particular group are ingrained in a long period and turn to be identification of this group. The society forms a symbolic language and is in communication through it. For example, a Muslim can recognize another person of the same group who carries similar symbols with non-verbal but symbolic language. Followers of the same groups have learnt their group symbols during socialization through social learning and transfer them to the next generations for ages. It shades into a kind of obstacle for people to interrelate meaningful relations with the society if they are not included in a group. In addition, incarcerating a group within its borders by marginalizing it in multicultural circumstances most probably inclines them towards blindness to the in-group criticism while declining tolerance for other groups' members. What is narrated in a humorous and witty tone throughout the film is that religiosity is reduced to formalism and superficiality. In other words, Hirani harshly criticizes not theological religious perception but sociological one through his film. For, PK solely aims to find his remote control but is caught up in many and many troubles due to the fact that he does not know anything about group symbols.

Intrinsically, each religious group's discourse is based on experiencing the sacred, namely *the idea of the holy*; however, in practice it almost always turns into a sort of complicated functionalism. By way of example, when a Hindu goes to the temple and practises rituals, he could perform the activity of experiencing the sacred. Nevertheless, in reality, the requirements such as going to the temple, buying sculptures of Gods, providing objects that are offered to the Gods, donating money, etc. all push individual experiences into the background but instead highlight functional aspect of religion. Therefore, body of rules, as a natural consequence of functionality, distract the follower from essence of the ritual. By concentrating on the form instead of essence of the ritual, the follower gradually turns into a formal pious who is absolutely afraid of God's wrath. PK is at the centre of this established order as a marginal man. Attempting to understand such complexity with a simple, maybe primitive, mind, PK thinks that religion, in a sense, turns human life into an unsustainable state and makes daily life increasingly difficult and unbearable. In short, perception of God and religion created by religious groups push people into formal piety eventually.

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[47] Scripts, "PK".
[48] Wagner, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 15.

What PK fervently and theatrically opposes is that appearance/form could not be a standard for a group belonging under any circumstances. As a matter of fact, he easily transforms a person first into a Sikh than into a Hindu and finally into a Muslim with small changes in his appearance. With the great help of this scene, the audience could observe Hirani's deconstructionist point of view. Hirani suddenly portrays the centuries old process, which includes sequences such as cultural codes formed over decades, social groups formed by cultural codes, minds and perceptions formed by social groups, consolidation of culture by transferring formed perceptions to generations, is ridiculous, meaningless, absurd and questionable. The argument put forward by Hirani to defend his view that external appearance, in other words symbols, cannot be a divine sign of belonging to a group, is that local/group/cultural God could only be at the back of it. The source of these differences must be the local/group/cultural God himself. The 'real' God has not made any differences. If the real God had wanted to make differences, there would have been differentiating signs on people's body. However, there is not any kind of biological differences on human body indicating one's religious group. On the contrary, people are inevitably shaped in accordance with the culture in which they were born and experience socialization processes of externalization, objectivation and internalization. Moreover, these cultural codes pass through generations. Strictly speaking, while God created human beings equal on theological grounds, with the socialization process, ironically enough, people try to differentiate themselves in the eyes of God.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it could be deduced that the cinema cannot be confined within the boundaries of entertainment industry by recording with certain technical features. On the contrary, it widely offers anthropological and sociological interpretations in itself. Films eventually are the concrete version of the directors' reconstruction of phenomenological perception. Regardless of the socio-cultural background of the director and how he has constructed his mentality, in his film, we can state that he has created a materialized product by kneading the data he has acquired during his socialization process. In our sample film, we observe that the director Hirani handles his society as a social anthropologist, scrutinizes the social and religious structures thoroughly, and while doing these, he places an alien character on the main axis of the film in order to act independently of any cultural factors. Hence, the director who is able to put the stock of knowledge in parenthesis could criticize the society and its institutions as a whole in a satirical tone.

With reference to this article, it could be pointed out that the most striking aspect of the stranger's/alien's quality is to being an extraordinary example of *cultural ignorance* of the cultural patterns of approached group. The director reveals the

process of transforming an individual into a member of a religious/cultural group by following all stages of social learning step by step. During his pursuit of the process, Hirani suspends practices which change into daily realities with the help of the protagonist. While the director uses the stocks of knowledge of the society in the film, he also criticizes the religious perceptions based on theological and sociological grounding thanks to the naive ignorance of the stranger. The director provocatively conceptualizes the theological grounding of religion as "God who created us" and the cultural/sociological/group grounding of religion as "God created by us". Based on this difference, Hirani puts the daily realities, practices and rituals into question, each of which holds the members of society together, create their identities, provide belonging and offer them a certain point of view. The director asserts that especially sociologically institutionalized religions together with perceptions of God harshly damage theological understanding of religions. He repeatedly emphasizes that even sociological religion complicates the world adventure of human beings; plus, renders it unliveable and meaningless.

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