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Fatih Akin's Modern Tragedy of Deprivation: Aus Dem Nichts (In The Fade)

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Abstract

Fatih Akın's cinema takes a clear political stance on the experience of being the other, especially since the director himself, as an immigrant, has experienced being a stranger first-hand. *Aus Dem Nichts* (Parampararça), which is discussed in this article, also stands out as a production about the view of the other. The film's story draws heavily on real events and opens up Germany's long criminal file on xenophobia for discussion. However, Akin does not intend to condemn Germany alone and emphasizes that xenophobia is fundamentally a matter of a lack of empathy. Akın also manages to create a modern tragedy through a narrative in which the issue of deprivation is central. In other words, Akin raises questions about the moral dilemmas of a human being by extending the concept of absence to deprivation. In this article, *Aus Dem Nichts* is analyzed through the method of discourse analysis. When the narrative of the film is analyzed from a philosophical perspective, it is seen that Fatih Akın successfully presents a modern tragedy through 3 main axes emphasizing different types of deprivation.

Keywords: Aus Dem Nichts, In The Fade, Fatih Akin, Xenophobia, Tragedy.

Fatih Akın'ın Yoksunluğa Dair Modern Tragedyası: Aus Dem Nichts (Paramparça)

Öz

Fatih Akın'ın sineması, özellikle öteki olma tecrübesi hakkında net bir politik duruş göstermektedir zira yönetmenin kendisi, göçmen olması sebebiyle, bunu ilk elden tecrübe etmiş biridir. Bu makalede ele alınan *Aus Dem Nichts* (Paramparça) de öteki'ne bakışla ilgili bir yapım olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Filmin hikâyesi gerçek olaylardan ciddi oranda beslenmekte ve Almanya'nın yabancı düşmanlığıyla ilgili kabarık suç dosyasını tartışmaya açmaktadır. Ne var ki, Akın, yalnızca Almanya'yı mahkum etmek niyetinde değildir ve yabancı düşmanlığının temelde empati yokluğuyla ilgili bir mesele olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Akın, yoksunluk meselesinin temelde olduğu bir anlatı

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üzerinden modern bir trajedi yaratmayı da başarmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, Akın yokluk kavramını yoksunluk'a doğru genişletmek suretiyle bir insanın ahlaki açmazlarına dair sorular sormaktadır. Bu makalede, *Aus Dem Nichts* filmi söylem analizi metoduyla incelemeye tabi tutulmuştur. Felsefi bir bakışla filmin anlatısı incelendiğinde, Fatih Akın'ın farklı yoksunluk tiplerine vurgu yaptığı 3 ana aks üzerinden modern bir trajediyi başarıyla ortaya koyduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aus Dem Nichts, Paramparça, Fatih Akın, Yoksunluk, Yabancı Düşmanlığı.

It is a controversial question to which national cinema or maybe more importantly which national identity Turkish origin directors who make films abroad belong. Even for themselves, it is not easy to explain it. Thus, everyone is aware for better or worse, that the question of identity cannot be addressed without paying attention to *border disputes*, especially for people who have to live far from their homeland. For instance, Fatih Akin said in an interview that although he spoke Turkish at home during his childhood, he never stopped thinking in German (Akın, 2017, p. 12). Akin's statement not only implies multiculturalism, but also reminds us of the impossibility of intellectual clarity or conformism that can arise from belonging to only one culture, and helps us to understand the restless existence of immigrant artists with their ethical, political, and aesthetic sensitivities. In the same vein, Akin said in another interview: "Sometimes I feel like a German and sometimes like a Turk. Nevertheless, this has never been a disadvantage for me. Instead of hindering me, it has made me more creative" (hurriyet, 2004). Due to their life on the border, which always keeps them on the periphery of society and makes them experience being the other first-hand, immigrant filmmakers speak their own *accented language* in their films, especially regarding politics.[2]

In Fatih Akin's films in particular, the accented language is very much in evidence and forms the core of his cinematography. Indeed, in almost all of his films, Akin takes a very clear stance and speaks in an insistent yet sincere language about confronting his country Germany, and his homeland Turkey, with their oppressive realities. His films are characterized by the traces of the director's own identity and life experiences. Akin's cinema, in this regard, shows the historical course of Germany in terms of minorities and their struggles. The director's films reveal how migrants, who have been welcomed as guest workers since the 60s, have been seen as refugees or potential terrorists and reduced to a (radical) Muslim identity in the 2000s (Çelik Rappas, 2020, p. 453). That similarly makes Akin an important representative of minor cinema[3] with his films that undermine the labels ruthlessly attached to minorities.

[2] *Accented language* is, here, inspired by the term of *accented cinema*. The term has been used since the 1960s as a generic name for films made by non-Western ethnic origin directors living in the West. Independent and often the autobiography of the director, the products of accented cinema share some common themes and draw attention to the socio-economic inequalities or cultural depressions experienced by the displaced.

[3] The concept of minor was first used philosophically in 1975 by the French thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their work on Kafka. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the fact that Kafka, a Czech citizen of Jewish origin, wrote his works in German is an example of minor literature, since the essence here is that Kafka uses the language of the majority, not his mother tongue, however manages to

In particular, *Aus Dem Nichts* is probably the best example of this. The original German title of the film, *Aus Dem Nichts*, is a phrase referring to absence yet means *for nothing* and emphasizes the meaninglessness and futility of the destruction caused by blind violence. The semantic core of the film is not the physical or spiritual disintegration of a family or an individual, but rather the theme of absence, which cannot be reduced to the mere disappearance of loved ones. Instead, it assumes an ontological nature, exploring the fundamental nature of being and existence. The absence of empathy, the absence of tolerance, the absence of justice, the absence of the possibility to go on living... In this respect, in Akin's film, we are watching a dignified tragedy about how difficult life becomes when some important things are erased from our lives, an ethic-politic statement that recognizes the seriousness of what it says.

Research Method

In this study, the film *Aus Dem Nichts* is analyzed through discourse analysis. As is known, discourse analysis evaluates the film in a textual context and examines the patterns within the discourse established by the film with all its elements. The data on which the analysis is built cannot be independent of the researcher's orientation and explanations (Türkdoğan and Gökçe, 2015, pp. 359-360). Here, an attempt will be made to look at how the prominent themes in the film affect the narrative and lead the viewer to the main idea that is believed to be cinematically-philosophically related to deprivation. To do this, the film will be analyzed in 3 sequences that are independent yet meaningfully related to each other. This is not only Fatih Akin's formal preference but also functions as a compartmentalization that allows for a healthier and more satisfying discourse analysis.

A journey of thought will be undertaken with the film to penetrate the layers of meaning of the narrative as much as possible. Therefore, instead of a separate theoretical chapter being written before proceeding to the analysis of the film, the issue of deprivation has been chosen to be addressed in parallel and simultaneously with the narrative of the film. At times, the fictional elements in the film will also be supported by real events. The aim of doing so is to mirror the functioning practice of the dominant ideology and the prevailing worldview, which is very much in line with the purpose of discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2016, p. 44). By the end of the study, it is hoped that it will be demonstrated that Fatih Akin has succeeded in creating a modern tragedy of deprivation.

Deprivation of Empathy

Aus Dem Nichts presents a three-part structure that confronts us with three basic deprivations. These are, respectively, the deprivation of empathy, the deprivation of justice, and the deprivation of the possibility to continue living. It should be underlined that deprivation is used in the sense of being forcibly kept away from something or

reconstruct this language in accordance with his own orientation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). The concept *minor* was later applied to all branches of art. There is a remarkable point in minor literature or minor cinema. In these works, everything personal is ethic-political and everything ethic-political is personal. Therefore, minor art is of great value in terms of offering a new perspective that can analyze and define the power relations of politics, which in our contemporary world is largely built on identities, in a new and alternative way.

someone. The crucial point is that deprivation refers to the disappearance/loss of what is needed, and in deprivation, there is the presence of strong external coercion for the individual. When defined in this way, it is possible to say that what is called deprivation is a compelling form of absence. That is to say, deprivation implies a notably painful experience. In its coercive form, it creates a crisis where and when it occurs, and cannot be overcome until the deprived thing is obtained –if that is even possible.

The question Akin implicitly asks is quite simple: Doesn't deprivation necessitate the existence of the situation or the people who create it? The director's answer is as clear as the question: Yes, it does. The deprivation, in its social dimension, is made possible by an indifference to be witnessed on a collective scale. In short, Akin will make us bear witness to the fact that an ethos, which arises from the indifference of many people to the feelings and unique circumstances of others, envelops us all. Even though a different type of deprivation forms the backbone of the sequence in each of the three parts of *Aus Dem Nichts*, the basis for all is the same: Being indifferent to the suffering of others, even to their entire existence.

The opening scene begins with actual footage of the wedding ceremony of Nuri Şekerci, a Kurdish immigrant, and Katja, a German woman, in prison. This will be a formal element that Fatih Akin prefers to use at the beginning of each sequence of his three-part film, in which a separate, albeit interrelated subject comes to the fore. By using actual footage, Akin skillfully avoids resorting to trite flashbacks or the excess of dialog and unnecessary side-action sequences to explain some important elements of the plot to the audience. The images of Nuri and Katja's extraordinary wedding ceremony in prison not only captivate the viewer's curiosity but also provide meaning to certain events and words that will later trouble Katja.

In other words, Akin's use of actual images has a twofold function. In this context, in the first actual image, Nuri looks at the camera and says something that, retrospectively, we will realize that it emphasizes something important for the narrative as a whole. Nuri says to the camera, and at the same time to us, the viewer, by breaking the fourth wall, "The moment of honesty!" For the time being, perhaps, we accept this as a man's thought about getting married, on the other hand, as the film progresses, it will become clear that Nuri's statement is a watchword that signifies his firm decision not to get involved in the world of crime again. Indeed, after getting married and becoming a father, Nuri Şekerci, a convicted drug dealer, completely severs his ties with the shadowy criminal world and becomes, as Katja's lawyer Danilo puts it, "an exemplary figure for rehabilitation."

Nuri, who supports his family by working as a translator, paints a portrait of an honest citizen who is accepting to make ends meet every month in order not to return to the world of crime. The fact that Nuri mostly earns money by advising immigrants on their bureaucratic problems with the state is evident from the presence of clients in his office who are clearly not German. The dialog in which Katja and Nuri try to share the only automobile they own reveals that the financial situation of the Şekerci family is not great at all. They have to act quite frugally according to the economic standards of Germany and

it is reflected to the audience by emphasizing that Katja keeps the accounting records of her husband's office as well. In this way, they present an image of a lower-middle-class and diligent family trying to survive, and when considered together with the footage at the beginning of the movie, it gives us the following message: Living honestly and clean is an exceedingly difficult matter, especially in economic terms.

The first sequence, *Family*, as Fatih Akin calls it, is based on the concept of empathy. This is portrayed in a negative light, depicting a world where it is increasingly difficult to sympathize with another person, where everyone is rude to everyone else. The lack of empathy becomes the semantic center of the entire sequence when Katja and Rocco are trying to cross the street and are almost run over by a car that fails to stop despite the red light. The fact that the mother and son, who narrowly escape being hit by the car, swear at the driver together and Rocco says that he learned the astonishingly vulgar words from his violin teacher is a sign of the extent to which rudeness has spread.

In a conversation with his mother, little Rocco directly articulates the main issue of this episode in highly emphasized way: "Empathy!" However, as I tried to explain earlier, this movie is about deprivation. Therefore, the empathy Rocco speaks of is only present in words, not in reality. The depiction of a habitat in which the ability to understand another's feelings and to share them as a form of human solidarity is lost, becomes darker and darker after the terrorist act that took the lives of two members of the Şekerci family.

At this point, it is important to note that the bomb attack we see in the movie is not only fictional. The attack in the movie is almost identical to the bombing in Cologne in 2004. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Fatih Akin brought a real event to the big screen, provided that he changed some details. On June 9, 2004, in an attack carried out by the NSU, a neo-Nazi organization, a handmade 5.5-kilogram bomb exploded on a street densely populated by Turkish immigrants. In this explosion, 22 people were injured, 6 of them seriously, and a barber shop was destroyed by construction nails added to the bomb to cause more damage, similar to what we see in the movie. Still, what happened after this act of terrorism was even worse. For a long time, German law enforcement ignored the possibility of a terrorist attack. After all, in 2011, members of the NSU claimed responsibility for the bombing, yet for various reasons, those responsible for the attacks did not receive the punishment they deserved (Zeyrek, 2021; 2004 Cologne Bombing).

Fatih Akin has been very honest about the lack of empathy he depicts, and he has successfully emphasized that this lack of empathy is not limited to the bombing by the Neo-Nazis and reducing it to an issue of xenophobia specific to radicals, though hating the stranger for no reason has become commonplace for everyone in the world we live in. Therefore, in the movie, we see not only the hostile attitude towards immigrants but also the indifference of everyone towards everyone. For example, Chief Inspector Reetz, who, like Katja, is German, portrays a person who is far from emotional. He has no qualms about asking the following questions in rapid succession to a woman who has just learned that her husband and child were victims of a bomb attack mere minutes ago: "Was your husband a religious man? Was he Kurdish? Was he politically active?" These questions

heard one after the other and, to put it mildly, quite inappropriate in terms of timing, reveal Reetz's inability to see Nuri Şekerci as anything more than a man who lives and dies by the sword.

He, as has been pointed out by the conversation, is deeply hurtful to Katja and her family. Moreover, Reetz is quite uncaring to tell Katja when she wants to see her husband and child for the last time, "They are no longer in one piece, only pieces of them are left, Mrs. Şekerci." with an explicity that borders on pure cruelty. Yet the only thing Katja can think about after receiving the terrible news is sympathy! Therefore, "Do you think they suffered?" she desperately asks her friend Birgit. Birgit, who tries to comfort her with all sincerity, is the only person in the film so far who can truly relate to the victims.

The next day, it would be possible to see the same intolerant language even in the news about the explosion on social media. When we listen to Birgit reading the news at the breakfast table, we see that Nuri Şekerci was convicted of selling drugs. There is a very insidious yet equally effective defense mechanism to justify emotional indifference on a societal scale: Xenophobia and stereotyping. So much so that, as far as we understand from the news report, the fact that Nuri was a Kurdish Muslim is enough to justify the suspicion that the attack was carried out by an Islamist organization, or that the woman in the sketch drawn by the German police based on Katja's testimony was "probably an Eastern European."

Even Katja's mother remains distant towards Nuri, implying, and eventually even outright saying, that her son-in-law was murdered owing to his ethnic identity or his involvement in the criminal world, which she feels he has not left, and that he was responsible for the murder of her grandson. When her mother's words cause even Katja to have a moment of doubt, she feels compelled to go to their old friend Danilo, a lawyer, and ask him if Nuri was involved in anything illegal. From what Danilo tells Katja with sincerity and clarity, we realize that Nuri has indeed been living a clean life for a long time. However, Nuri seemingly still has one major offense, and that is being *the other*.

Yet it is important to remember that the other of the other is always *us*. That is to say, the cruelty shown against those who are perceived as foreigners will surely be shown against us by them. Akin has adopted an honest attitude in this regard and conveyed that marginalization is not limited to Germans through another network of relationships. Nuri's Kurdish parents, who immigrated to Germany from Turkey, are painfully indifferent to Katja, as well. They want to take Nuri and Rocco's bodies back to Turkey for the selfish reason of "feeling close to them." At the funeral, Katja's mother-in-law goes so far as to say, "If you had taken better care of him, my grandson would be alive right now!" Here is an altruistic woman who truly loved her husband and child who, as we will later learn, after she became pregnant with Rocco -in her statement to the police she described the birth of her child as the best thing that had ever happened to her- gave up her career dreams and devoted herself entirely to her family. Therefore, the cruel mother-in-law's words are not only hurtful but also downright unfair.

As Katja, unable to tolerate such intolerance and lack of understanding any longer, tries to ease her pain by using the drugs she bought from Danilo, we witness the German police's continued xenophobic stance. The police search the house of the Şekerci family as if Nuri and Rocco were the murderers and not the victims. The police do not want to even consider the possibility that the perpetrators of the attack might have been German. Instead, detectives stubbornly stick to the thesis based on prejudices rather than the facts that Nuri continued to sell drugs and was the victim of a bloody showdown between gangs. Katja asked Reetz who could have carried out the attack and the answer she received was enough to reveal the unreasonable early assumption: "Turkish mafia, Kurdish mafia, Albanians..." In short, the murderer could belong to any of the ethnic groups living in Germany, yet he certainly could not be German! However, Katja had told Chief Inspector Reetz that the woman who had carried out the bombing, whom she had seen and spoken to briefly when she dropped Rocco off at Nuri's office, was "as German as her."

For Katja, who decided to commit suicide, this is as devastating as losing her husband and child: Not being able to convince anyone of what she was saying and having no one to support her except Birgit. In other words, if the terrible loss was a big part of what drove Katja to the brink of suicide, the loneliness she had to feel throughout the process must have been another. Katja's mental breakdown, when she finally feels she has no choice aside from committing suicide, is crystallized through a simple yet effective image. We see Katja bursting into black tears as the rain, which we have seen falling uninterruptedly since the bombing attack, falls on the glass of the empty house and casts a shadow on Katja's face.[4] After hearing from her lawyer Danilo's voice mail that the perpetrators of the attack had been caught and that they were indeed German neo-Nazis, as she claimed, Katja wrapped her slashed wrists with a towel in a last-ditch effort and gave up on dying. From her decision to continue living, we understand that Katja hopes that a course will begin in which she will no longer have to feel as alone as before.

The moment when the heroine gives up on suicide is when we open the door to the second sequence in the movie. In the second sequence, the second deprivation we will witness will appear and we will see how justice is lost in the law as a form of game. Before that, Akin again shares with us video footage of the family's happy moments, elegantly linking two episodes that are independent in terms of plot and tempo. This time in footage (that this footage correspondingly takes on a virtuosic quality since what we see is already a memory) we see Katja repairing her son Rocco's remote-controlled toy car. This image should stick in our memory since it contains a cleverly staged detail and is intense enough to allow for new semantic expansions towards the end of the movie. In other words, these images we are watching will take on new meaning at the end of the movie.

[4] I would like to emphasize that this shot is a perfect example of a crystal-image that combines the actual and the virtual. It is again possible to describe the first episode as an example of film noir, with its dark interior shots, dark or pale color tones, incessant rain and the gloom/tension that completely dominates the night scenes.

Deprivation of Justice: A Play Called Law

Most of the second sequence, titled *Justice*, consists of trial scenes. The deprivation that Akin conveyed through the dialogues of the characters in the first part is now transferred to a spatial level. The bright and cold colored courtroom, the robes worn, the articles of law read out... The courtroom, which presents us with a sterile "heterotopia of crisis" with its details, is extremely successful in showing how easily the line between impartiality and indifference can be crossed in the technical world to be projected to the audience. We are about to witness how the court's effort to remain impartial results not in justice for the victims, but in indifference.

It is necessary to briefly touch upon the concept of crisis heterotopia. For this, we must first clarify what heterotopia is. Heterotopia is a concept borrowed from medical science by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and refers to the form of concrete space that "really exists" as an alternative to utopia, which can be defined as "a perfect place that does not exist." Accordingly, utopias are unreal spaces; since they embody an ideal, they cannot be brought into existence in the fullest sense, just like the ideal they point to. Heterotopia, on the other hand, is fully real, and like any order of reality, it contains its flaws, contradictions, crises, and ultimately even meaninglessness. Where utopia is ahistorical and universal, heterotopia is historically and contextually shaped. Crisis heterotopias, according to Foucault, are private, sacred, or forbidden places reserved for individuals in crisis. Heterotopias are specialized spaces where people experiencing extraordinary circumstances are isolated or have to stay until they overcome the crisis, and thus they become places where the other is sheltered (Foucault, 2005, pp. 295-296).

Now, it is believed that the courtroom, which is thought to be presented as a completely heterotopic space in the film, is equally the basis of the mise-en-scène of this episode by working in two ways. First of all, the courtroom we see is not a utopian place where justice will be served (in the sense of an ideal coming to fruition), but a real place where the game of law will be played, and to the extent that it is real, it will be a place of limited functioning. The words of the judge presiding over the trial, "This court deals only with facts", implicitly express that we will be confronted with concrete yet highly problematic reality rather than perfect ideals. On the other hand, again as a typical heterotopia, this courtroom, with its bright light colors and sterile indifference, resembles a kind of clinic where Katja, who has been going through a very serious crisis since the loss of her family, is confined, rather than a courtroom that will be troublesome for the accused, and functions as a type of crisis heterotopia.

In this context, Fatih Akın seems to want to open up the question of what justice is and invite his audience to think about whether it is the same thing as law. The law exists so that justice can be done, but at the same time, it is obvious that the technical/quantitative nature of law is not enough to bring about justice, which often corresponds to an intuitive/qualitative concept, is it not? As endeavored to be put above, there is tension between the ideal and the reality, and there is no mutual inclusiveness between justice and law, which are often naively assumed to be symmetrical, that there is a reciprocity

between them. Akin will subtly emphasize this asymmetry between law and justice in chapter two.

Moreover, the interpersonal cruelty we saw in the first part of the movie is a purely technical issue this time. One of the most compelling scenes, in which the forensic doctor explains how the victims died, is the best example of the cruelty born out of specialized indifference. This is how we understand why Danilo, the day before, had advised Katja not to attend the next day's hearing, considering that it is not an easy experience for a mother to listen to how her husband and son died, in all the disturbing details. It should be underlined that this is a very challenging scene even for the viewer, it is precisely in this way that we, as the audience, can establish the empathy that the law cannot establish with Katja.

Akin now makes another breakthrough and makes it possible for us to look at the film with a new philosophical theme: What we are witnessing is dehumanization. Apart from its political implications[5] -Fatih Akin will again refer to the ethical-political side of the concept, albeit implicitly- dehumanization, which can be defined as the removal of human emotions or the inability to display human characteristics, begins to manifest itself well with the forensic expert's testimony. In the face of the dehumanization she witnesses, Katja reacts humanely and attacks Edda Möller, one of the murderers. In response to this reaction, the presiding judge says: "I understand your emotional reaction and anger, but this court only looks at the facts!" As mentioned above, in a technical/sterile environment, reality has to remain a purely factual matter, independent of value. There is another very important detail in the film in which dehumanization is visualized, and it will appear later on and will have the power to single-handedly determine the semantic dynamics of the film. This detail is that Katja has not menstruated since the loss of her husband and child. When Birgit, who we know to be pregnant at the beginning of the movie, comes to visit Katja with her son Fritz after giving birth, we learn that Katja's menstrual cycle has been interrupted after the loss of her family. This is not an ordinary detail, but a powerful allegory that crystallizes dehumanization. Katja's inability to menstruate during a monstrous murder followed by an investigation and court proceedings that disregard human emotion is a clear indication of her dehumanization.

The only exception to the dehumanization in the trial scenes is when Jürgen, the father of the murderer André Möller, empathically offers his condolences to Katja and apologizes on behalf of his son. Jürgen's both taking responsibility for his son's wrongdoing and expressing solidarity with the relatives of the victims should be read in this light. Furthermore, Jürgen's statement that his son's action was senseless and cowardly will be better understood in the film's finale. Katja and Jürgen smoke together outside the courtroom, once again emphasizing the sympathy between these two sad people. In this scene, we realize that it was Jürgen who reported his son André and daughter-in-law Edda

[5] In its political aspect, dehumanization is a situation in which a group sees the other as a non-human being and treats it accordingly in an effort to justify the hatred it directs towards those who do not belong to it. In dehumanization, targeted people are belittled, excluded and even monstrousized on account of their unique characteristics (Aksu, 2022). In this way, the evil done to those people is legitimized.

to the police. Although Jürgen comes to the fore as someone who cannot remain indifferent and stands against the dehumanization of strangers by his son and daughter-in-law with his moral sensitivity, his efforts are not enough to bring back what has faded.

With another detail in the court scene, Fatih Akin takes a political stance and indirectly demands that Germany confront its past while emphasizing the ethical-political context of dehumanization. Nikolas Makaris, the Greek hotelier who perjures himself for Edda and André Möller, testifies falsely that the couple was on vacation in their hotel when the bombing happened. When Danilo says that Makaris is a member of Golden Dawn, a far-right party in Greece, Makaris' response reminds us of the terrible truth of recent political history. Golden Dawn is a "democratic party, democratically elected and entered parliament", just like the German National Socialist Workers' Party (NASDAP), which entered the political scene in 1929 and came to power through democratic elections. Founded in 1993 and producing political discourse based on far-right extremist views, the Golden Dawn Party constitutes the Greek pillar of a global neo-Nazi network, even if the party officially denies this. The fact that its supporters wear uniforms reminiscent of military attire, that the party emblem is a stylized Swastika and above all that its leader Nikos Mihaloliakos gave the Nazi salute in the Greek Parliament in 2012, should be enough to understand that Golden Dawn is doctrinally very closely related to the German National Socialists.

It should be noted that the Golden Dawn Party has been implicated in many violent incidents, which makes sense since violence is the *lingua franca* of global fascism. "Fascism sees violence as an inherent necessity of politics and argues that any political regime cannot be free from violence. Moreover, Fascism's affirmation of violence goes beyond accepting a necessity. In a sense, Fascism glorifies violence as it sees it as the condition of existence for the emergence of higher humanity" (Küçükalp, 2018, p. 86). Dehumanization underlies the violence that fascists see as a political instrument and ruthlessly show against those who are not their own. The other is an inferior being because they are not as human as we are, and any kind of disposition over them belongs to us since we are superior to them. This is the logic of the discourse that fascism produces along the axis of dehumanization and violence. However, as Makaris points out, like its German sibling NASDAP, Golden Dawn is a purely legal organization that has managed to enter parliament through democratic elections, even sending representatives to the European Parliament (Aslan, 2018, p. 48).

This is the moment when Fatih Akin expects us to reflect on the famous "paradox of democracy." Although the paradox of democracy was first articulated explicitly by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century, many political scientists and thinkers who lived before or after him have addressed it in different aspects (Özkan, 2020). The common problem in all of them is that democracy, which is based on the will of the majority, can be abolished by the will of the majority. Democracy is an ambivalent regime with the potential to bring those who are not in favor of democracy to power. If they become the majority, and as such, democracy carries the threat of weakening or even abolishing itself altogether. For this reason, history is full of dictators who, after coming to

power through elections, suspended democratic practices or banned them altogether. What is even more interesting is that defending democracy, at times, in the name of protecting it, may entail certain restrictions and practices that are incompatible with the pluralism of democracy. Then it becomes difficult to claim that those who defend democracy are democratic.

The tension, therefore, has to do with the extent to which a state of law will tolerate an organization that seeks to overthrow the rule of law, and where to draw the line. To what extent can freedom of expression and action be expanded and, perhaps more importantly, what should be done when the expanded space for expression and action inevitably begins to stifle the space for expression and action of others? This is not an easy question to answer, and, due to its inability to remain at the ideal level, it becomes less of a real question and more of a thought exercise. Yet pondering about this problem is by no means trivial. On the contrary, it is vital to find an acceptable point of contrast between freedom and security. As we can see, Akin invites us to an intellectual endeavor on an enormous scale through Makaris' short answer.

The climax of the court scenes is the part where Katja is heard as a witness. Akin begins to present this scene with a shot plan with perfect defamiliarization. We see Katja, who is about to take the witness stand, from an overhead camera and with a God-like gaze. This shot is meant to suggest that what is about to unfold will be a kind of Judgment Day for Katja, rather than a legal victory in which Nuri and Rocco will be vindicated. Indeed, it is Katja's life and choices that are laid bare by the defense's questions during her testimony. Defense attorney Haberbeck (Johannes Krisch) uses the drugs Katja used to numb her pain, which was found by the police during a house search, as leverage to argue that she is not qualified to testify. Haberbeck even goes so far as to say that Katja was a drug addict and therefore even the prosecution's accusations make no sense. Unfortunately, Haberbeck's statement, even if it is not the truth, is true within the technical structure of the law and leaves Katja and Danilo helpless.

Danilo's response to these words reveals the ludic (playful) character of the law and largely ends our and Katja's faith in justice through the law: "I loathe having to play the defense's game!" Indeed, at a certain point, the court becomes a game played and won by the defense.[6] Soon the acquittal decision of the court panel is justified in the following words: "Today's acquittal is not based on the court's belief that the defense is innocent, however, the evidence presented leaves reasonable doubt about their guilt." The bloody murderers, who were well known to everyone that they had carried out the bomb attack and killed two people, were acquitted based on the principle of "*in dubio pro reo"*, which is a Latin legal phrase meaning "the accused benefits from the doubt". With this principle, if there is a suspicion that the defendants are guilty, they are presumed to be innocent by the presumption of innocence, which can be expressed as "everyone is innocent until proven guilty" (Yenidünya, 2004). Thus, even if the defense fails to prove the innocence of the

[6]As can be clearly seen in scene, the floor of the courtroom is meaningfully reminiscent of strategic games such as checkers or chess.

defendants in real terms, it wins the legal struggle thanks to its language and logic game. So much so that the German court even had to pay compensation to the Möller couple for having tried the defendants in pre-trial detention. It is not for nothing that Haberbeck's face, when he secures the acquittal of his clients, is deliberately staged with a smile. The disgusted expression on the defense lawyer's face, who rejoices like a child in the joy of winning a game, is distinguished both as a sign that justice is lost in the game of law and as an element that allows us to justify Katja's decision to pursue justice on her own.

Deprivation of Survival: A Modern Tragedy, Not a Story of Revenge

A Lacanian detail we see just before the beginning of this sequence is remarkable since it brings the viewer into the semantic focus of the final section of the film. Katja is looking in the mirror at the tattoo of a samurai under her left breast, which we recognize from the beginning of the movie. Just before she lost her family, Katja had told Birgit that the tattoo was not yet complete and that she had promised Nuri that she would never get another tattoo. This detail, which we perhaps did not pay much attention to at the time, is now of great importance in two ways. Firstly, Katja's incomplete tattoo has become an allegory of her severed (incomplete) bond with her family. Secondly, we see that Katja has the missing tattoo completed as the first thing she does after the conclusion of the trial, which, when considered together with the Lacanian mirror metaphor, clearly indicates a radical change in Katja's character. Katja becomes a tragic warrior figure, a samurai, who will pursue justice that is not realized through the game of law. When the two meanings are considered together, we can infer that the completion of the tattoo does not bode well for Katja.

In the final sequence, which opens with actual camera shots as in the previous two standalone sections, "the sea" is manifested as a metaphor for death and gives the final section its name. This time it is possible to see a more direct correlation between the flowing images and the axis of meaning of the sequence. After the bombing, the uninterrupted rain was a visual element referring to separation. Now the water, with its vastness, becomes a direct symbol of death, while death becomes a tragic territory that can make it possible to reunite separated family members. From this perspective, the actual footage of Nuri and Rocco trying to persuade Katja to go into the sea is quite meaningful. As the footage ends with Katja getting up from her seat to enter the sea, we are not yet aware that the family will soon be reunited, albeit on a symbolic level.

For now, we follow the journey of a woman on a quest for revenge. Following the murderers of her family to Greece, Katja encounters the global Nazi network, as described earlier in the film. One detail catches our attention: The name of the hotel of Makaris, a member of the Greek Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party, is emphasized as *Old Dream*. Akin wanted us to see the name of the hotel. In my opinion, the interesting name of Makaris' hotel refers to the fact that fascism, the idea of Aryan racial superiority fueled by xenophobia and the dream of a homogeneous (pure) society based on it is a very old, even

eternal ideal in the plain sense of the word.[7] Indeed, it is possible to find the roots of xenophobia and fascism, which are based on xenophobia and hatred of the foreigner, much deeper than the political ground, at the psychological level, and for this reason, its traces can be traced back much earlier than modern political ideologies (Keskin, 2011, pp. 11-14). However, the eternity of fascism is not only a matter of its historical antiquity but also of its prevalence.

In other words, we must realize that this old dream is not seen on a purely individual scale, on the contrary it is the expression of a fundamental desire shared collectively. The ideology of fascism can take on a collective aspect precisely by displaying dreamlike characteristics. Fascism has a "dual strategy of unleashing violence and staging the imaginary". On the one hand, it keeps renewing its narrative of ahistorical and even irrational mythological themes with a vulgar romantic imagination, while proclaiming that a Golden Age of purity and homogeneity in every sense is/should be coming soon. On the other hand, he tries to underline that the individual and mass sacrifices to be paid for the golden dawn to be born are necessary and that the acts of violence that underlie most of the sacrifices he demands are legitimate (Keskin, 2011, p. 17). We cannot say that his efforts were in vain; as we have seen in the pre-World War II world, fascism can go from being a peripheral ideology to becoming the mainstream of politics. In this context, we have to accept that the old/evil dream embodied in the name of Makaris' hotel has been and will continue to be seen not only by the couple Makaris and Möller but also by many more people than we think.[8]

When Katja reaches the Möller couple after following Makaris, a dialog she eavesdrops on leaves no question both in her and the viewer's mind as to the identity of the killers. André Möller's words "If that Turkish whore comes here, I'll blow her head off and bury her with her family!" provide the viewer with conclusive proof of the guilt of the accused. However, Attention is to be drawn to the fact that the proof of the Möller couple's guilt comes to light not through the legal game played in court, but through the efforts of Katja pursuing the case on her own. At this point in the movie, a shift will be seen. This time, materials are collected by Katja to build a bomb, and ironically, it is managed to be built with the information obtained from the court minutes. Additionally, another detail in this scene that is considered quite powerful in its meaning is observed. Some of the parts needed to make a bomb are removed by Katja from a remote-controlled toy car, a similar scene (inverted as if forming an axis in a mirror) that was seen in the actual footage at the beginning of the second sequence. In these images, as we remember, Katja fixes her son's remote-controlled car and makes Rocco happy. Here, the symmetrical balance of life and death is nested in this quite powerful metonymic image. Katja, who gave happiness to a child symbolizing life and the future by fixing a toy, now breaks it to make a bomb that will cut people off from life.

[7] The word *old* means obsolete or outdated, as well. We can interpret this as Fatih Akin, whose hostility to fascism is well known, taking the opportunity to point out that the Nazi ideology is an outdated worldview.

[8] Here the concept of *dream* clearly refers to the subconscious. Thus, it should not be difficult to sense the collective dimension of fascism.

The next day, when Edda and André Möller go out for a run, Katja leaves a bomb under the couple's caravan, however at the last moment refrains from detonating it. This is not because she is afraid, but because she doesn't want to be a murderer. To put it more poetically, our heroine doesn't detonate the bomb as she doesn't want to become someone who dreams the same with the murderers. Katja's hesitation is projected on the screen from an overhead angle, leaving Katja between the bifurcating tree branches. When she catches sight of a bird that keeps crashing into the window of the killer's caravan, Katja chooses life over death and walks away with the bomb. It is important to emphasize that she is on the side of life since immediately after, Katja starts menstruating again. As already mentioned, the metaphor of menstruation is now once again in front of us as a representation of life and remaining human. However, Fatih Akin is not making a simple revenge movie, nor is he seeking to make a drama with a relatively happy ending. It does not seem possible for Katja to continue living in this way and we observe that she has now turned into a tragic figure. It is neither possible for her to be a murderer nor to live with murderers. It is this moral dilemma that determines Katja's tragedy. As long as the most fundamental characteristic of the tragic figure is that the value conflicts cause unbearable pain (Coşkun, 2017, p. 37).

As Ioanna Kuçuradi underlines, what determines tragedy is "disharmony", that is, the necessity and inevitability of the destruction of one value for the realization of another. When one sees this necessity, or rather when one grasps this inevitability, one is at first frozen (Kuçuradi, 1966, pp. 46-48). Is this not precisely the pause Katja experiences in her first attempt? For her, being a murderer and getting justice for her lost husband and child are two conflicting values: Justice will only be served if she becomes a murderer, just like those who took her family away from her. Katja becomes a tragic heroine the moment she hesitates and pauses when she realizes this terrible truth:

> The tragic is fermented in a moment of pause. Tragedy is precisely in that pause. It is the moment when one says yes and no to something. The tragic hero is in between as if caught in the moment. One cannot always live in the in-between, no one can afford it. One can only get out of the situation one is in by taking action. That's when the tragic hero does the inevitable. Not what the law dictates, what the prohibition requires, what society wants, or anything else, but what is inevitable. The action that is inevitable for her... (Coşkun, 2017, p. 38)

In her phone conversation with lawyer Danilo, when he talks about appealing, it is clear that Katja has another plan; she is about to take the inevitable action as described above. The law has ordered her killers to go free, Danilo has asked her to come to his office and apply for an appeal, and society has demanded indifference. Katja, however, has rejected all this as a moral imperative and is about to take the only action that makes sense to her. Her long gaze into the dark sea the night before will soon make sense. However, Katja is not a cold killer who cannot sympathize with anyone else. Therefore, her second act to kill the Möller couple becomes a suicide attack.

It is to be stated that, from the structure of the scene, it is highly probable, even certain, that Katja came face to face with the killers André and Edda inside the tiny caravan before the bomb was detonated. This confrontation, which is not explicitly shown yet probably

took place, is the other element that distinguishes the Möller couple's and Katja's bombing attacks. While the former is a cowardly and unprovoked act of blind violence, as André's father Jürgen emphasizes during the trial, Katja's suicide bombing is not an act of terrorism, at least in the eyes of the viewer, a just execution. Katja's behavior is distinguished as a tragic turn in the Aristotelian sense, a "morally dignified act" (Aristotle, 1987, p. 22). With the movement of a crane, the camera pans from the burning caravan to the sky after the explosion and ends the film with a long shot of the dark sea in a continuous motion. The whole family meets in the dark sea, fading away.

Conclusion

Ingeborg Bachmann, one of the leading writers of contemporary Austrian literature, has an internationally famous saying: "Fascism begins in the relationship between two people" (1983, p. 144). Bachmann's words, uttered in an interview, have become famous and turned into a motto over time. Although they are usually not quoted in their entirety, only this last part is used. However, the whole of what the Austrian writer said is even more meaningful, especially in the context of this article: "Fascism does not begin with the first bombs, it does not begin with the terror that can be written about in every newspaper. Fascism begins in the relations between people, between two people" (1983, p. 144).

Aligning ourselves with Bachmann, we can say that even if the military and political form of fascism is perhaps its most dangerous form, it derives its power from the hostility and moral indifference of one human being to another. For the same reason, to think that fascism is a disease peculiar to a society with an already tainted past and that the aforementioned hostility could never reach frightening proportions in countries other than Italy or Germany is a comforting consolation, yet completely meaningless. The lack of empathy, which can begin as indifference to the existence of others and lead to dehumanization, is an anthropological curse for human beings before being a political choice.

In his book, *The Information Bomb*, the French philosopher Paul Virillio (2021) writes about his Japanese friend who said, "The reason I cannot forgive the Americans is that Hiroshima was an experiment, not just an act of war." Virillio's friend is not wrong to be unforgiving and implicitly draws our attention to something. Worse than the act of war itself is the dehumanization that justifies the violence, which suggests that the other is not as human as we are and therefore we should rest easy. Indeed, today we know very well that many Nazi officers, while committing horrible crimes against humanity, did not harbor any ill feelings towards the victims, but were simply indifferent towards them. They were not cold-blooded murderers obsessed with violence, who throughout the war inflicted only death on Jews, the mentally or physically disabled, homosexuals, and Gypsies. Rather, they were indifferent bureaucrats who managed to carry out their orders without thinking that they had a moral obligation to others.

Deprivation is the key word in Akin's film, and in the first two chapters of the film, the director manages to portray our lack of empathy not through stereotypical political discourse, but rather through obvious details on an interpersonal scale. Deprivation, unlike absence, refers to the disappearance/disappearance of what is needed for its

existence, and in deprivation there is also the presence of an external compulsion for a person. When defined in this way, it is possible to say that what is called deprivation is an enforced form of absence. In other words, deprivation implies a very painful experience, different from absence, which is neutral in itself. Deprivation, in its coercive form, certainly creates a crisis at the place and time where it arises, and it is impossible to overcome this crisis until the deprived thing is obtained.

The question that Akin asks implicitly is quite simple: does this painful form of absence make the presence of the situation or people who create deprivation necessary? The director's answer to this question is also clear to the extent of his question: Yes, he does, and deprivation, considered in the film with its social dimension, is again possible with indifference to be witnessed on the same scale. In short, Akin will keep us witnessing an ethos that arises from the fact that many people can be indifferent to someone else's feelings and the original situation is enveloping us all. Even if a different type of deprivation forms the backbone of that sequence in all three parts of Aus Dem Nichts: being indifferent to the suffering of others, even to their complete existence.

Of course, as a person of Turkish descent living in Germany, it would be impossible to erase from Akin's memory the Solingen massacre, the aforementioned Cologne attack, or the harassment he suffered repeatedly in his youth, most importantly, how the perpetrators were protected by law enforcement and the law. This is precisely why the first two chapters of the movie rely on real events for their narrative; in a sense, they do not go beyond re-enacting them, nor do they need to. For outsiders, reality is worse than fiction. Particularly in the second part, when we witness how justice is denied in the courtroom, we realize that it is not only Nuri and Rocco who fade away but also the justice that will establish a culture of coexistence.

As Akin depicts the impossibility of living together in a world where justice does not prevail through Katja's inability to live, the film takes on the character of a modern tragedy. Here, it must be said that it is believed that Akin takes the tragic event in the sense that the best thing that can happen and the worst thing that can happen occur in the same moment and event, and as the basic human condition. In this respect, Katja's actions in the third part are merely the making visible of her effort to save the death of her family and herself from being in vain. While Katja's first suicide is only a dramatic element in terms of mise-en-scène, the second one has a moral dimension, like all the actions of the tragic heroine. Katja's self-sacrifice is necessary for justice to be served "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth", and this is precisely what is tragic. Therefore, if she had detonated the bomb on her first attempt, Katja would not have been able to avoid becoming a murderer and the movie would not have been able to avoid becoming a story of revenge. However, our heroine's act of suicide saves her from becoming a mere ruthless killer and keeps her human, making her story all the more tragic. We see a woman who cannot take someone else's life without taking her own.

Fatih Akin has one more last word to say, and these words do not belong to fiction. In the end, the director says that between 2000 and 2007, the German National Socialist Group killed 9 people with a migrant background and a policeman, and carried out bombings. In

a final statement, the director underlines boldly: "The reason behind the attacks was that the victims were not German." Akin concludes his film by reminding us once again that there is no big difference between the fictional story he tells and reality, and asks us to think long and hard about the senselessness of the violence. As mentioned above, most of the time, reality is even worse than fiction.

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