

Istanbul Bilgi University
Institute of Social Sciences
Film and Television Master's Degree Program

DYSTOPIAN REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH
CINEMA

Umutcan ÜNAL
116603002

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İSTANBUL
2018

Dystopian Representation in Contemporary Turkish Cinema

Çağdaş Türk Sinemasında Distopya Temsili

Umutcan Ünal

116603002

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Thwaites Diken

İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih : 12.04.2019

Toplam Sayfa Sayısı: 78

Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)

- 1) Dystopia
- 2) Discourse Analysis
- 3) Misfit Hero
- 4) Estrangement
- 5) Contemporary Turkish Cinema

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

- 1) Distopya
- 2) Diskur Analizi
- 3) Uyumsuz Kahraman
- 4) Yabancılaşma
- 5) Çağdaş Türk Sineması

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ABSTRACT

Any fictional filmic world can be formed as dystopian, regardless of visual features of the place designed before the audience. It means that the fictional worlds with which the audience is familiar can also be evaluated under the concept of dystopia. Therefore, in the first chapter of this thesis, three criteria and some discursive elements, that are used to decide whether a film is dystopian or not, are proposed. In Chapter 2, it is shown that creating realistic worlds, that are almost inseparable from the actual world of the audience, within the dystopian tradition is possible. In the last chapter, three films from contemporary Turkish cinema, that are “*Abluka*” (Alper, 2015), “*Sarmaşık*” (Karaçelik, 2015) and “*Babamın Kanatları*” (Sezer, 2016), are analyzed, based on the criteria and the discursive elements presented in the first chapter. Although all three films take place in *non-estranging* place and time; it is shown that they can still be analyzed within the dystopian tradition, as in the other dystopian films with realistic settings which are presented in the second chapter. It is concluded that *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık* are dystopian films according to the criteria that is proposed, while *Babamın Kanatları* is not.

ÖZET

Her kurgusal film dünyası, seyirci karşısında kurulan mekanın görsel özellikleri dikkate alınmaksızın, distopik olarak kurulabilir. Bu, seyircinin aşına olduğu kurgusal dünyaların da distopya başlığı altında incelenebileceği anlamına gelir. Bu nedenle, bu tezin ilk bölümünde, bir filmin distopya olup olmadığına karar vermede kullanılan üç kriter ve bazı söylemsel elemanlar önerilmektedir. İkinci bölümde; distopya geleneği içinde, izleyicinin gerçekliğinden neredeyse ayrılamayacak kadar gerçekçi dünyalar yaratmanın mümkün olduğu gösterilmiştir. Son bölümde, bu kriterler ve söylemsel elemanlara dayanarak, çağdaş Türkiye sinemasından üç film, “*Abluka*” (Alper, 2015), “*Sarmaşık*” (Karaçelik, 2015) ve “*Babamın Kanatları*” (Sezer, 2016), analiz edilmiştir. Bu üç film *yabancılaştırıcı* olmayan mekan ve zamanda geçmesine rağmen, bu filmlerin distopya geleneği içerisinde değerlendirilebileceği gösterilmiştir; ikinci bölümde sunulan diğer gerçekçi sahneli distopik filmlerde olduğu gibi. Önerilen kriterlere göre *Abluka* ve *Sarmaşık*’ın distopya iken *Babamın Kanatları*’nın distopya olmadığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I want to thank Feride Çiçekoğlu, who has guided me into more specific subjects and encouraged me to write this thesis, and Ayşegül Kesirli Unur who has tirelessly corrected my faults and shaped this thesis into a coherent and structured one. Thanks to them, I concluded a hard and long writing process.

Secondly, I want to thank my classmates who brought up the issue of dystopia, which has turned into the subject of this thesis. They have asked many questions and discussed many aspects about the subject in a free environment, that has been created by Feride Çiçekoğlu in the class, which incited me into write a thesis about it. Also I thank Bilgi Tuncay Özgünen who has showed me the way in film studies.

At last but not least, I want to thank my family who supported me in every possible way throughout the writing process. If they have not believed in me, this thesis would have not been written.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I reconceptualize and redefine the term “dystopia” to analyze the three films produced in Turkey in recent years: “*Abluka*” (Alper, 2015), “*Sarmaşık*” (Karaçelik, 2015) and “*Babamın Kanatları*” (Sezer, 2016). By reconceptualizing, it is meant that the borders of the term are drawn by comparing dystopia with the closest types of fictions which are “science-fiction”, “utopia” and “realism” or “socialist-realism”. With these new borders, dystopia becomes a separate entity; which is needed since it is usually seen as a sub-genre of science-fiction or of utopia or the exact opposite of utopia. Therefore, at the end of Chapter 1, I suggest three criterion and several sub-categories to define dystopian fiction without reference to any of these genres mentioned above.

Dystopia is an “adjectival genre” which is termed by Rick Altman to define group of films which are not at the stage of genre but have a potential to become one.¹ In cinema, dystopia is not “noun” yet, and there is no guarantee that it is going to be one. It is an adjective to a more established and proper film genre of science-fiction. One of the many possible reasons is that the most popular and recognizable dystopian films belong to science-fiction as well, such as “*Metropolis*” (Lang, 1927), “*Blade Runner*” (Scott, 1982), “*1984*” (Radford, 1984), “*Dark City*” (Proyas, 1998), “*Equilibrium*” (Wimmer, 2002) and “*Children of Men*” (Cuaron, 2006). As for literature, best examples of dystopian novels have been written under the science-fiction genre, especially in the second half of twentieth century.² These films and novels, and many others, are called as “dystopian science-fiction”. Dystopia is an adjective here, not a noun. Be it adjective or noun, dystopia is a discourse as every genre is:

Genres are not inert categories shared by all (though at some moments they certainly seem to be), but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations.³

¹ Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. British Film Institute, 1998

² Hillegas, Mark Robert. *The future as nightmare: HG Wells and the anti-utopians*. Oxford University Press, 1967.

³ Altman, pg.101

Therefore, throughout this thesis, I consider dystopia as a discourse which is based on a film corpus centered around certain subjects and shaped by common motifs, techniques, styles and structures. Besides, according to Esin Coşkun, there are no genres at all in the cinema in Turkey.⁴ Much less dystopia, the very existence of the film genres in Turkey is quite questionable, therefore considering dystopia as discourse is more appropriate approach, especially for the films produced in Turkey.

My particular purpose here is to approach the films from a different view. When a film is called as dystopian (or as any adjective), that film enters a completely different area in which the relations, referents, meanings and possible readings that the film offers are not the same anymore. Calling any filmic world a dystopian changes its visuality and brings it new, different perspectives that cannot be detected otherwise. For example; when *Abluka*'s filmic world is called as dystopian, the whole place (including authoritative figures, neighbourhood and people living in it) becomes a character which tries to oppose, repress, destroy, manipulate and erase the individuality of "misfit characters" who are Kadir and Ahmet, the protagonists of the film. The whole filmic place turns into something else that is aligned with other dystopian places, such as extraterrestrial planet in *Dark City*, London in 2027 in *Children of Men* and Los Angeles in 2019 in *Blade Runner*. Also the characters in it are seen from an entirely different aspect. Hamza (authoritative police figure in *Abluka*) is just another oppressive authoritative character, like every dystopian authority, based on Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, and thus he gains different characterization, which is possible to outline only within dystopian terms and by referring to other dystopian authorities. In short, the analysis of the film changes entirely.

This process echoes how Foucault deals with the concept of discourse and approaches to history in general. Foucault sees the discourse (and statement, a fraction of it) as a function that cannot be thought without referring to its users,

⁴ Coşkun, Esin. *Türk sinemasında akım araştırması*. Phoenix yayınevi, 2009. pg.10

referents and other discourses to which that discourse is related.⁵ And all possible meanings attached to any discourse depend on these other entities; and those meanings, therefore, change over time and from speakers to speakers. Just like the discourse operates, labeling a film as dystopian changes the whole interpretation of the film by altering its possible referents, users and relations. And within this new level, unexplored and new readings of the film are possible.

All of dystopian films take place in either future or distant places such as other planets. In other words, in those films, the setting itself is used to defamiliarize the audience. And since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate ‘the realistic filmic worlds in dystopian cinema’; in Chapter 2, I try to show and analyze the ‘realistic’ places in “*Pleasantville*” (Ross, 1998) and “*The Truman Show*” (Weir, 1998), that can be evaluated as dystopias according to my criteria and sub-categories derived from the criteria, to prove that the filmic worlds looking very similar to the actual reality of the audience can be created within the tradition of dystopia. Also in this chapter, I discuss the suggestions and arguments stated by Senem Aytaç who has also studied the possibility of the “here and now” fictions in dystopian cinema.

In Chapter 3, I analyze all three films, *Abluka*, *Sarmaşık* and *Babamın Kanatları*. My methodology is discursive analysis in the meaning of the term as used by Seymour Chatman.⁶ This means that I try to show “expression plane of narrative” of the films. In other words; rather than content, I try to analyze how the films treat their content and how their narrative is constructed. According to Chatman, “discourse is the province of expression in narrative, the form of that expression.”⁷ Therefore, I try to show how the films express their content and in what ways they differ to convey their similar content.

⁵ Michel, Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. AM Sheridan Smith (trans.). London: Tavistock Publications (1972).

⁶ Chatman, Seymour Benjamin. *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Cornell University Press, 1980.

⁷ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, pg.23

Specifically, in the Chapter 3, how *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık* defamiliarize the audience and thus become estranging fiction while *Babamın Kanatları* does not, is going to be analyzed. After removing the necessity of “non-existent society or place” from the definition of dystopia, how it differs from other films taking place in existent societies or familiar worlds needs to be shown. This is why I put *Babamın Kanatları* (which is also produced in Turkey and around the same time with *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*; and it also uses “non-estranging time and space” as its setting) into this thesis, although it is not a dystopian film. Comparing it with the other two (*Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*) provides profound insight into structure of dystopian fiction.

As a consequence, this thesis questions whether a dystopian fiction can be formed without taking place in non-existing societies or in distant time and place by emphasizing how it differs from science-fiction, utopia and realist fiction, both in terms of content and format. Apart from films, the thesis will use references to the literature works because of the nature of dystopia which has been born in literature. The films to be analyzed in the last chapter as case studies are selected only from Turkey for the sake of coherence, but the films “*Relatos Salvajes*” (Szifron, 2014), “*Les triplettes de Belleville*” (Chomet, 2003) and “*The Lobster*” (Lanthimos, 2015) are also suitable for the purposes of this thesis.

In conclusion, I present some suggestions and questions for further studies. These will be about the relation between the developments in science and history, the concept of dystopia and new modes in it, and dystopian films utilizing “too realistic setting” or dystopian “here and now” films.

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUALIZING DYSTOPIA

1.1. SEPARATING DYSTOPIA FROM UTOPIA

The proper way to discuss the concept of dystopia is to focus on definitions formed by various writers and theoreticians. Among many, one of those definitions belongs Lyman Sargent, who clearly defines what dystopia means, in his essay “*Utopia-The Problem of Definition*”. Sargent states that:

Dystopia is a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived.⁸

Despite being quite general and inclusive, what could make this definition problematic is the author’s dependance on how the “contemporaneous” reader or audience perceive the society that they live in to define dystopia. Since there is no unified “contemporaneous” reader/audience and it’s response changes from time to time and from place to place, the definition based on it cannot be stable. Chad Walsh reported that American students saw “*Brave New World*” (Huxley, 1932) as a utopia, because the world depicted in the book offers free drugs and sex.⁹ So, there is no guarantee that the author or director’s intention and the perception of the audience match. Besides, there has been such places and times in the world that there is no chance that people who had been through those periods could see any dystopian fiction “considerably worse”. In short, since the concepts of good and bad are relative, the validity of Sargent’s definition of dystopia based on these concepts is quite questionable.

One aspect of Sargent’s definition is that it does not place any restriction on time and place for dystopia. This is important to indicate since many dystopian fiction from literature and cinema take place in distant future and/or place.

⁸ Sargent, Lyman Tower. *Utopia—The Problem of Definition*. Extrapolation 16.2 (1975): 137-148.

⁹ Walsh, Chad. *From Utopia to Nightmare*. Greenwood Press. (1972).

Examples from literature include “*We*” (Zamyatin, 1924) “*1984*” (Orwell, 1949), *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1951), “*The Handmaid’s Tale*” (Atwood, 1985) whereas; from cinema “*Blade Runner*” (Scott, 1982), “*1984*” (Radford, 1984), and “*Dark City*” (Proyas, 1998) could be added to list.¹⁰

In defining dystopias there is also the “not too distant” concept to describe dystopian fictions that take place in worlds which are too familiar to our actual, “real” world, like “*The Iron Heel*” (London, 1908). However it can be argued that dystopian fictions should take place in distant place and/or time to give the effect of “distance”, to make its points more effectively. Plus, three major dystopian novels (*We*, *Brave New World* and *1984*), which are prominent to define what the concept of dystopia is in the first place, take place in distant future, making this argument stronger.

Yet setting “distant place and/or time” as a criterion for defining what dystopia is is not enough, not just because it is too simplistic, but also by making dystopia sub-genre of science-fiction, it causes disregarding the strong relationship between dystopia and realism and even naturalism. Philip E. Wegner focuses on this relation, which then enables him to see “*Fight Club*” (Fincher, 1999) and “*Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*” (Jarmusch, 1999) as dystopian fictions.

Here, comparing dystopia with utopia makes the qualities of dystopia clearer. Throughout the history, dystopia has been distinguished from utopia by its focusing on “real” world issues in a more overt and realist way. Three canonic works derive their steam from real world systems and experiences: *We* from ultra mechanized and ‘scientific’ systems, *1984* from oppressive and centralized

¹⁰ There are going to be many references to various literature works and theories throughout this thesis. The reason for it is that the concept of dystopia has emerged in literature and how the dystopian narrative is constructed in the first three dystopian novels (*We*, *Brave New World* and *1984*) affects every dystopian film in its discourse. Also, several concepts and approaches used in the theory of dystopia, such as the presence of ‘misfit characters’, are gained by comparing dystopia with utopian literature. The fact that there is no ‘utopia’ as a specific kind of fiction in cinema makes it impossible to use those concepts and approaches without referring to literature.

governments from all around the world,¹¹ *Brave New World* from advanced capitalist countries. This is not to say that utopia has nothing to do with real world experiences but it is to stress the close link between dystopia and history itself.¹² In other words, there is no single dystopian fiction, both from literature and cinema, that does not say anything about history. And focusing on distance from time and place might miss this link because some fictions do not need distant future and/or separate place to make their arguments and that they could be still counted as dystopia.

Yet the boundary between utopia and dystopia is not as clear as it seems. Besides, focusing on how important global scale issues are for them is not enough to differentiate one from the other. Indeed, it could be argued that dystopia has emerged out of the satirical part of the utopia, which immediately refers to one of the principal features of dystopia. Satire, here, means criticizing various aspects of the society or, in Krishan Kumar's words, "the holding up of an unflattering mirror to one's own society".¹³

Besides, considering utopia and dystopia as opposite sides started to change especially after feminist dystopian/utopian novels written in nineteen-seventies, such as "*The Dispossessed*" (Le Guin, 1974) and "*Woman on the Edge of Time*" (Piercy, 1976), which blurred the so called boundary between them. Even with the classical texts this "boundary" is not that clear. As mentioned before, students in US saw *Brave New World* as a utopia. Plus, as for another classical text, there is an ambiguity as to whether "*Erewhon*" (Butler, 1872) is a utopia or dystopia although its structure clearly resembles utopian fictions. As a reaction to this gradually blurring boundary between utopia and dystopia, in the need to define the opposite of utopia, Krishan Kumar introduced the concept, *anti-*

¹¹ On the contrary to what many readers have assumed, purpose of the novel is not just to criticize socialism and British Labor Party, as Orwell clearly stated in his letter to Francis A. Henson (Orwell, George, and Sonia Orwell. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*. Ed. by S. Orwell and I. Angus. Secker & Warburg, 1968)

¹² It would be absurd because since "*Utopia*" [More, 1516], every utopian fiction has contained criticism about history and real world.

¹³ Kumar, Krishan. *Utopianism*. University of Minnesota Press. 1991. pg.26

utopia.¹⁴ *Anti-utopia* is an *attitude* and a tone rather than a genre, which tries to counter the very concept of utopian thought and to show its dark side; but at the same time, in a theoretical way, it helps to conceptualize dystopia as a separate and independent entity with its techniques, subject matters, styles, and motifs; rather than as mere exact opposite of utopia.

There are two useful insights into the structure of dystopian fiction gained by contrasting utopia and dystopia. The first is that the references to real world problems are more direct, and fears and concerns that the artists have about their society and environment are more central in the dystopian works in comparison to utopian works. Although this is a matter of degree between two, it causes the styles and formats applied in them to differ greatly and makes dystopia closer to nineteenth century realism as opposed to utopia. And also dystopia does not always require distant place or time for the sake of estrangement effect, unlike utopia.

Tendency to view place and time in dystopian fictions as distant and separate from the world the audience lives in is actually related to utopian tradition. Since “*Utopia*” (More, 1516), every literary utopian fiction takes place in distant and isolated places, such as islands, and/or in distant times, future or past, as in *Arcadias*, or in alternative worlds as in H.G. Wells’s works. “Utopia is an order simply existing elsewhere (nowhere), contrasted to the actual order by an ironical distance and predicated upon ‘an alternative historical hypothesis’”.¹⁵

As for the second; however the concepts of “good” and “bad” are relative and slippery in Sargent’s definition, these are still needed to fully grasp the content of dystopian works since the primary function of these is to satirize the flaws and problems that the artists see as “bad” in their environment and society. It is true that the worlds depicted in these works are indeed “bad” places but only to the main character from whose point of view the story is narrated and with

¹⁴ Kumar, Krishan. *Utopia and anti-utopia in modern times*. Basil Blackwell (1987).

¹⁵ Somay, Bülent. *The View From The Masthead: Journey Through Dystopia Towards an Open-Ended Utopia*. İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2010. p. 35

whom we, as audience, are identified. We can sense that any dystopian and fictional society or world is not a desirable place to live only through the lenses of the main character.

So, it only takes to introduce a heretic and misfit character, from whose point of view the story is narrated, into the work to convert any utopian fiction to dystopian. The character's feelings, attitudes and opinions are what make the society or world she/he lives in undesirable; otherwise any reader or viewer may want to live any "dystopian" world. Focusing on a character and its situation to make arguments about both fictional and 'real' world is quite central and important for dystopia in two ways.

First of all, it makes dystopia a suitable template both for novel and cinema, that are mostly about stories revolving around individual characters. Secondly, it prevents dystopia from becoming a mere manifest full of ideas about politics, society and culture in general. Utopian fictions have an outsider character but the focus is not on its feelings and situation, rather on the society that an outsider visits. Lastly, it provides the real energy and conflict to the dystopian work. As Keith Booker states, dystopia could be about an energy as in James Joyce's and Franz Kafka's novels, in reference to motifs, styles and techniques that are common and central to dystopian novels and films. Booker states that "Dystopian literature is not so much a specific genre as a particular kind of oppositional and critical energy or spirit."¹⁶

Besides, as for "*Bend Sinister*" (Nabokov, 1947) Booker argues:

Nabokov's emphasis on the poignancy of Krug's individual suffering in *Bend Sinister* goes directly to the heart of what provides the main energy of dystopian fiction in general- not allegorized accounts of specific political structures but dramatized depictions of fictional people in fictional pain that gain power because of their parallels to the real pain of real people in various modern societies. It is, in fact, largely this vividness and particularity that

¹⁶ Booker, M. Keith. *The dystopian impulse in modern literature: Fiction as social criticism*. Greenwood Press (1994).

give dystopian fiction a force that the theoretical ruminations of cultural critics lack.¹⁷

What Booker here tries to argue is that dystopian works focus on their main characters' experiences and feelings rather than possible political, cultural and social connections between the fiction and actual world. Focusing on the individual created in a quite realistic way is what makes dystopian fictions effective. These main characters of dystopian works are called "misfit" or "heretic" and every dystopia has to include these to make their arguments and depict their society and world as undesirable. It does not have to be a character, in some cases this misfit character can be a whole class as in "*Roadside Picnic*" (Strugatsky, 1972). In this science-fiction dystopian novel, "stalkers" (kind of smugglers who take away bizarre objects found in the "zone" which is a sealed place emerged after aliens' visit) are the misfit ones and from their point of view as opposed to official scientists working for government to investigate the zone, we can sense that the zone itself is a dangerous, unknown and mysterious place and that science is desperate in understanding the zone. Focusing on these two different approaches to the zone, we understand that science in general is incapable of making sense of the unknown and solving the problems of humanity or even could be harmful to humanity.

In *Dark City*, for example, the whole city is dystopian in the eyes of Murdoch, the main character of the film who "awakens" and realizes the city is just a laboratory and people's lives are constantly changing. In the eyes of "aliens" who transfer human beings to another planet to find the real meaning of humanity, the city is just an experiment, thus with Murdoch's realization and point of view, the audience is forced to see the city as undesirable. There is no room for interpreting *Dark City* as a place we want to live in unless we are identified with the "aliens". In short, the misfit character or class is what makes the fictional worlds and societies of dystopian works "bad".

As a result, two crucial features of the structure of any dystopian fiction, derived from the comparing dystopia with utopia. First of all, arguments made in

¹⁷ Booker, M. Keith. *Dystopian literature: A theory and research guide*. Greenwood Press (1994).

dystopian fictions about real world issues are more direct and explicit, and the ‘distant and separate place or time’, such as isolated islands or alternative worlds as in utopian literature, is not necessary for a dystopian fiction. Secondly, dystopian works revolve around an individual whose point of view makes the work dystopian. In these texts and films, the focus is on the “misfit” character.

In the next chapter, in order to discuss what makes particular works dystopian, I will focus on the brief history of dystopia and try to compare it with science-fiction and realism; since, in a rough generalization, dystopia derives one of the primary techniques from the former and bears similarities with the latter in terms of content.

1.2. SEPARATING DYSTOPIA FROM OTHER TYPES OF FICTION

There is no consensus on the first dystopian fiction, there are several candidates such as “*The Machine Stops*” (Forster, 1909), *The Iron Heel* and *We*. Putting aside the issue of determining the first dystopian fiction, the significant point is that dystopia is a kind of fiction that appeared in the twentieth century, 400 years after *Utopia*, the first utopian fiction which granted the genre its name.¹⁸ Focusing on this ‘delay’ can provide some important insights about dystopia. Or, in other words, are there any possible reasons why the dystopia emerged in the early 1900s?

There is a famous definition of dystopia that is “dystopia is a fear that utopias can be realized, even fear of utopia’s desirability”.¹⁹ By relying on this definition, it could be argued that appearance of dystopian literature in the early 20th century could be related to the social, political, economic and technological changes that were introduced to the world through modernization processes. As

¹⁸ Although “*The Republic*” (Plato, 380-370 B.C.) could be seen as the first utopian work, what is meant here by “utopia” is a specific literary genre, starting with More’s *Utopia* and with its unique features such as estranged place (whether it is an isolated island, or from future or an alternative world) as a setting and criticizing real world issues in an indirect way; so it is clear that “utopia” has emerged in sixteenth century

¹⁹ Booker. *The Dystopian Impulse*. pg.16

much as being captivating these changes could have brought new fears and anxieties which could have provided inspiration for dystopian novels. The works of the first three dystopian authors, namely Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell reflected the psyche of that time period by emphasizing on those fears and anxieties. Although H.G. Wells's scientific romances can hardly be put into the boundaries of dystopia, the same fears and concerns are also present in his works as in *The Time Machine* (1895).

The fear from machines that could render people idle, worthless and turn them into some kind of unhuman creatures, dominates *The Machine Stops*; and it is the same kind of fear in "*The Matrix*" (Watchowski, 1999). Another example which could be seen as a reflection of the author's or the director's fear of what is going on in the world is *Fahrenheit 451*. Fear that televisions could replace books and that people could stop reading is what pushed Bradbury to write the book. The book was published in 1953, which is crucial since 1950s is when televisions started to dominate entertainment industry and to become one of the most effective mass media.

Examples can be multiplied but the bottom line is that every dystopian fiction carries fears and/or concerns about real world issues within themselves, that lead authors or directors to create in the first place. This idea additionally prepares the ground to argue that every dystopian fiction, no matter how estranging they are, is one way or another about the present of the creator of that fiction. The seeds of flaws in society that artists sense and observe are fuel for their work and this has not changed since the classical dystopian texts that are mostly centered around the clash between individual and authority. Although it can be argued that under the influence of post-modernism, dystopias written during and after 1970s focus on more specific issues such as gender and ethnicity; they also gain power from making argument and critics on problems that are visible in actual societies. As for "*The Handmaid's Tale*", Booker states that:

While Atwood's book is a little vague about the mechanism by which the theocrat of Gilead actually managed to supplant the United States

government, her vision does gain a great deal of energy from the fact that the seeds of her dystopia clearly do exist in the contemporary efforts of the American religious right to enforce its beliefs through political power.²⁰

It is always possible to form a relation between the content of any dystopian work and actual social, political and cultural phenomena.

Dystopia places concerns and fears about developments in 20th century in its center and also satirizes real world issues. This is one of the most important features of dystopia, which also makes it slightly different from utopia and more related to realism and naturalism. This feature is also the reason why Suvin defines dystopia as a socio-political sub-genre of science-fiction.²¹ Or, by the same logic, Somay's criteria for distinguishing science fiction from dystopian novel emphasizes this side of dystopia, Somay says that:

I propose a criteria or distinguishing science fiction from dystopian novel: Extract the incredible/fantastic from it; if the remainder is still a novel, it is a dystopian novel.²²

Booker also argues the same, by explaining the diverse attention that is paid, to social and political critique as the main difference between science-fiction and dystopia.²³ The same conclusion presented before is reached again: every dystopian fiction is a satirical comment on the actual reality of the author or director. But how we could differ dystopia from other fictions that are centered around similar subjects and matters making direct criticisms on actual social, cultural and political issues, such as 19th century realism in literature and socialist-realism in cinema, a cinema that puts the actual political and social matters in its center and deals with them in a realistic and satirical way.

Using the categorizations developed by Somay, who also adopted the one from Suvin, would be useful since it is done for the same purpose, that is deciding

²⁰ Booker. *Dystopian Literature*. pg. 81

²¹ Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of science fiction: On the poetics and history of a literary genre*. Yale University Press, 1979.

²² Somay. *The View from the Masthead*. p. 57

²³ Booker. *The Dystopian Impulse*. p.19

the most appropriate kind of fiction for dystopia to fit in. It begins with the two major mode of art, namely *mimetic* and *fantastic*. Somay explains that:

The mimetic mode stems almost directly from the bodily or verbal narration of the events of everyday life, from reiteration of the familiar. The narrator and the listener/spectator are supposed to share a common world, complete with a paradigm and syntax. It is an aesthetically elevated reformulation of the methods of dealing with the already-explained in the artist's here and now... The fantastic, on the other hand, is an attempt at a discovery of methods of dealing with the unfamiliar.²⁴

The categorization goes further with the distinction between *estranging* and *domesticating* fiction. By referring Bloch's term *Verfermdungseffekt*, Somay explains *estranging effect* as:

To remove any thing, person or action out of its symbolic context to be able to look at it sideways in order to be able to catch a glimpse of the Real. Estranged texts, therefore, in Suvin's sense, are *estranging* rather than *estranged*: they estrange us, the reader/spectators to the apparent self-evident-ness of familiar objects and force us to see them in a new (and strange) light.²⁵

How a text or a film in our case estranges us from the world of fiction is focused next in Somay's categorization. He states that,

Conversely, any domesticating/familiarizing mechanism, that is, any artistic device that tends to represent the already existing state of things and affairs as "self-evident", absolute, immutable, "natural" or divinely ordained, can be nothing but non-cognitive; it hinders, obscures or mystifies, and in the last resort, encloses its readers/spectators in a state of submission.²⁶

Consequently, Somay creates a matrix that puts all concepts that can be used to draw a line between dystopian and other fiction works.

	THE MIMETIC	THE FANTASTIC
ESTRANGING	"realistic" and naturalistic literature	folktale, the Gothic, sci-fi and fantasy
DOMESTICATING	sub-literatures of "realism" and naturalism	myth, sub-literatures of the Gothic, sci-fi and

²⁴ Somay. *The View from the Masthead*. p. 5

²⁵ Somay. p.12-13

²⁶ Somay. p.21

		fantasy
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Two crucial things that this matrix illustrates are that not all science-fiction is estranged, which is the main difference between Somay and Suvin as he asserts, and also “realistic” fiction can be both domesticating and estranging. Former point is especially important for this thesis since almost all the famous and acknowledged dystopian films are also science-fiction or at least involve *novum*²⁷, the term introduced by Suvin as a feature of science-fiction,²⁸ as in “*Metropolis*” (Lang, 1927), *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Dark City*, “*Brazil*” (Gilliam, 1985), “*Westworld*” (Crichton, 1973), “*Children of Men*” (Cuarón, 2006). This obviously means that there are science-fiction which are not estranging, as in post-apocalyptic fiction. Therefore, according to the latter implication, it seems reasonable to look for dystopian fictions, especially from cinema, that are estranging and non-science-fiction or in other words fictions that belong to upper left box of the matrix above. And this is exactly what Senem Aytaç tries to do in her MA thesis, investigating the existence of mimetic and estranging dystopian cinema, as going to be discussed later.²⁹

As Somay argues, *Brothers Karamazov* and works from Franz Kafka can be considered as mimetic and estranging literature. Somay explains that:

I have already stated that *the mimetic* is a re-representation, a representation of something already symbolized. This, of course, by no means precludes the possibility that mimetic art is capable of estrangement; to the contrary, especially in the sense of *ostranenie*, that is, defamiliarization, mimetic estrangement is at least as capable of cognitive liberation as is fantastic estrangement.³⁰

All in all, any fiction’s being mimetic is not itself sufficient criterion to determine whether or not it is dystopian. Yet, by the definition, any dystopian

²⁷ According to Tom Moylan, *novum* means that “a fictional novelty, innovation capable of breaking open the prevailing hegemonic hold on reality” (Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. Westview Press. 2000. pg.45)

²⁸ Suvin. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*

²⁹ Aytaç, Senem. *The Present as Nightmare: Dystopian Sentiment In Contemporary American Film*. MA Thesis. İstanbul Bilgi University, 2003.

³⁰ Somay. p.22

fiction has to be estranging and this feature is what makes it different from the domesticating realistic and naturalistic fiction before 20th century (majority of the genre actually); although, as argued before, there is a strong relation between them in terms of content, concerns and criticisms about real world issues. This also means that in cinema, apart from the socio-political sub-genre of estranging science-fiction from, the estranging fraction of realistic and naturalistic fiction can also be called as dystopian. As for being the central subject matter of this thesis, how dystopia estranges the audience from the world of fiction without presenting ‘dystopian setting’, which provides the *novum* throughout the history of dystopia, is going to be discussed when analyzing the films selected from recent epoch of Turkish cinema.

Since *estrangement* is the primary part of the discourse of dystopia, the term needs to be clarified and expanded. Many scholars who work on dystopia resort to Suvin’s definition of *cognitive estrangement*, which is actually defined in relation to science-fiction genre. The concept is nevertheless useful for the dystopia as well, especially when dystopia is considered as a socio-political sub-genre of science-fiction.

In his essay, “*On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre*” (1972), Suvin borrows the definition of *estrangement* from Bertolt Brecht’s term *Verfremdungseffekt*, stating that “a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar”³¹. Suvin utilizes this term to make it *formal framework* of the genre, but at the same time he adds an adjective *cognitive*, by which he differentiates it from the ones used in other genres such as myth and fantastic. Suvin explains that

Where the myth claims to explain once and for all the essence of phenomena, SF posits them first as problems and then explores where they lead to; it sees the mythical static identity as an illusion, usually as fraud, in the best case only as a temporary realization of potentially limitless contingencies.³²

³¹ Suvin, Darko. *On the poetics of the science fiction genre*. College English 34.3 (1972)

³² Suvin, Darko. *On the poetics of the science fiction genre*. College English 34.3 (1972): 372-382.

The emphasis here is on the dynamics since, according to him, science-fiction deals matters as if they are changing and thus science-fiction's approach is *cognitive* and *scientific* as opposed to myth's or fantastic's. It can be said that science-fiction considers the estranged, or *novum* in a sense, as an empirical reality and thus tries to investigate it in a manner of *scientific* method. In his approach, what is being changed and what provides unfamiliarity is the *glance* or *light* rather than the estranged object itself.

For example, in *Children of Men*, the *novum*, other than film's taking place in 2027, is that in filmic world, giving birth has stopped eighteen years ago. In the film, it is seen how people react to this phenomenon, how it affects this world and their lives, in short the complex and fruitful relation between this *novum* and the whole human population living in this future world. Or, as in the film *Blade Runner*, the whole generation of replicants provides the estrangement but the *cognitive* part is how this future world deals with them and also the new meaning of humanity with the introduction of replicants. To sum up, in this understanding, it is reasonable to argue that science-fiction, and also dystopia, considers and treats the estranged element as if it happens in our empirical world.

In his essay, Suvin also argues that *estrangement* part of the notion immediately separates science-fiction, as a literary genre, from 18th and 19th centuries realism and naturalism. Yet these genres can also be estranging, which reminds us of close relation between dystopia and realist literature. The *cognitive* part, on the other hand, differs science-fiction from myth and fantastic in general. Therefore it provides the genre with a unique way of representing social, political and cultural issues. All things stated about *cognitive estrangement* within science-fiction can also be applied to dystopia. Therefore any dystopian fiction has to estrange its audience in a cognitive way, which means that it has to deal with its estrangement item by focusing on how this item affects its fictional world. Otherwise, in Suvin's words, that item would become like a *flying carpet* which we believe it exists in an alternative world but do not understand its mechanics,

meanings or possible effects it would produce upon the fictional world in which some magical carpets can fly.

To look at the concept of *estrangement* from a different point, there is a useful term “*absent paradigm*” developed by Marc Angenot. In his words:

In contrast to realistic fiction, SF is a *conjectural* genre in two respects. Its aesthetic goal consists in creating a remote, estranged, and yet intelligible "world." The narrative about such a world itself requires a conjectural reading. It does not call for the reader to apply the norms, rules, conventions, and so forth of his empirical world, but instead assumes a paradigmatic intelligibility that is both delusive and necessary. The reader, in the act of cognitively coming to terms with the text, shifts from the unfolding (syntagmatic) sequence of the plot to an "elsewhere"- to the semantic paradigms, and hence to the immanent practical or theoretical models, which are supposed to confer meaning on the discourse. From a semiotic point of view, then, SF characteristically is fictional discourse based on intelligible *syntagmatic* rules which also govern, and are governed by, delusive *missing paradigms*.³³

According to him, since science-fiction includes an alternative and unfamiliar world, there has to be some missing or absent parts. Because of this obligation, absent paradigm is a criteria for distinguishing science-fiction from other types of fictions, such as realist one as mentioned in the quotation. These missing paradigms occur because the reader cannot fully have the paradigm surrounding any sign (*syntagm*).

In fictions other than science-fiction, the environment that assigns signs to specific meanings, i.e. syntagm, is provided by the immediate world of the reader. On the other hand, in science-fiction, the syntagm of the fictional world and the reader's one are not fully overlapped; which, as a result, creates *absent paradigms*. Thus the activity of reading of these texts differ. Angenot explains that

The reader of a realistic novel proceeds from the general (the common-place, the ideological topos) to the particular (the specific plot governed by this ideological structure). The SF reader follows the reverse path: he induces from the particular some imagined, general rules that prolong the author's

³³ Angenot, Marc. *The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction (Le Paradigme absent, éléments d'une sémiotique de la SF)*. Science Fiction Studies (1979): 9-19.

fantasies and confer on them plausibility. The reader engages in a conjectural reconstruction which "materializes" the fictional universe.³⁴

While the fictions that are both science-fiction and dystopia are read, this reversed path provides the reader with fresh eyes on the matters with which the reader is already familiar. This is related to Suvin's *cognitive estrangement* that provides a fresh look on the matters we are already familiar with. The general rules related to different and new paradigms of the science-fiction work estrange and affects reader's relation with the paradigms that he or she is already familiar with or that he or she fully knows. The distance created by *absent paradigms* gives a science-fiction or dystopian work its quality and makes them different from realistic fictions. Angenot states that

The author could, of course, try to explain systematically every datum, but this would be tedious and contrary to the "rules" of the genre. SF novels are elaborated in a way that makes them resemble a Hall of Mirrors in an amusement park - a labyrinth of glass which disorients the passersby strolling through it. An immanent aesthetics of SF is implied here: if the mechanical transposition of "this-worldly" paradigms is sufficient to account for every narrative utterance, we have a witless, even infantile, type of SF. If, on the contrary, a maximum distance is maintained between the empirical and the "exotopic" paradigms, although the alien rules tend to organize themselves into a consistent whole, the reader's pleasure increases.³⁵

However, assuming there is no *absent paradigm* in other types of fiction, especially realistic one, is problematic. More accurate approach would again be the "extent" as in the case between utopia and dystopia in terms of criticizing actual historical matters.³⁶ Therefore, in realistic fiction the room for *absent paradigm* is relatively small in comparison with the one in science-fiction.

To sum up, the main difference between the realist literature and dystopia is the *cognitive estrangement* or a noticeable *absent paradigm*, with few exceptions, such as Dostoevsky's works, that can be estranging within the boundaries of realism. Yet these exceptions, as Booker argued, can be still viewed

³⁴ Angenot. p.15

³⁵ Angenot. p.16

³⁶ In general, the so called "differences" between different type of fictions can be better considered as "degrees" between them, instead of evaluating them as distinct sets that have nothing in common.

as dystopian works or at least texts that have dystopian energies and thus can be investigated by referring to classical dystopian novels and films, also to dystopian subject matters.

1.3. APPROACHING DYSTOPIAN FICTION

From the knowledge that are gathered from separating dystopia from utopia and establishing the difference of dystopia from science-fiction and realist fiction, three criteria emerged for any fiction to meet in order to be called dystopian.

1) What makes any fiction a dystopia is the presence of a misfit character (in some cases, a bunch of characters or a whole social class). Rather than the setting, mise-en-scene or the world in which the fiction takes place; the relative position and situation of the heretic as opposed to its environment and society are the means through which director/novelist shows the flaws and problems of the world the audience/reader lives in. Therefore the focus is on the characters and their experiences, feelings and opinions. This quality is the main difference between utopia and dystopia, and at the same time it, again, makes dystopia closer to realist literature than utopia is.³⁷

There are two reasons for putting forward the situation of misfit character in a fictional topos as a criterion to determine whether a work is dystopian or not: First of all, it is less dependent on the reader's/viewer's response than other approaches such as the mise-en-scene and the creator's intention; and thus more stable. Secondly, in this framework, any place can be considered as dystopian regardless of its depiction.

³⁷ This is not to assert that mise-en-scene cannot be referred to when determining dystopian arguments of the film. Above all, dystopia is a place, deriving from the Greek word *dus-topos* which means "bad place". Any element in the dystopian place, therefore, can be used as a satirical device referring to our world. For example, in "*Brazil*" (Gilliam, 1985), the inner places are designed as crowded, small, stuffed with bulky, outmoded technological devices leaving very little space for people; which is a direct reference to modern individual's feeling of being trapped in the city and society. It also refers to the machines' being dominant in our modern and technological lives. Therefore, in cinema, it is possible to make satirical arguments just through mise-en-scene.

2) It satirizes the flaws and problems of the creator's present world. Dystopia is always about the present, no matter how estranging and distant it can be. As mentioned before, it is not to argue that non-dystopian works are independent of the artists' actual social, political and cultural environment. Rather, it means that the dystopian works put the *satire* in their center, since criticizing is the purpose of their existence in the first place.

By this quality, dystopia can be differentiated from science-fiction in general. Besides, by means of this quality, dystopia can be related to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries realism in literature; which affects and fuels it in many ways.

3) It estranges viewer/reader from the work itself, creates a distance between them (in other words, it includes a noticeable *absent paradigms*), which helps to turn the familiar into an unfamiliar and thus to bring out new perspectives on the receiver's end. And it does so in a *cognitive* way. By this quality of dystopia, a realistic or social-realistic films can be differentiated from dystopian ones.

These three criteria have to be met by each and every dystopian film or novel. With these three, it can be determined whether any fiction is dystopian or not, and at the same time they show what kind of a fiction dystopia is and where it stands vis-à-vis utopia, realism and science fiction.

Before going into the analysis of the usage of the setting in dystopian imagination, it is useful to mention some of the common features of the content and discourse of dystopia, that could be taken as sub-categories of the main three criteria that are listed above. These sub-categories could be considered as some dominant tropes that many dystopian film and novel refer to.

• **An Individual versus The Powerful Other:**

An individual is the protagonist with which we are identified and from whose point of view we see the fictional world of a work. He/She is a misfit,

heretic character who senses serious flaws inherent in the society or in the immediate environment. Throughout the novel or film, we follow the process of him/her awakening. This process, however, is usually far from being conscious, rather it resembles a dream. He/she tries to make sense of new feelings and thoughts that are not compatible with the status quo, regardless of the character's intellectual and educational level. That misfit protagonist character does not have political power and is childish. This prevents the fiction from having an authoritative and all-knowing tone. At the same time, it also makes identification with the main character easier since reader/viewer is also like a child in a fictional world that reader/viewer does not know very well because of *absent paradigms*. Whereas Winston Smith in *1984*, D-503 in *We*, Bernard Marx and John the Savage in *Brave New World*, Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, Shevek in *The Dispossessed*, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon*, Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Deckard in *Blade Runner*, Murdoch in *Dark City*, Theo Faron in *Children of Men*, John Preston in *Equilibrium* could be shown as examples from cinema.

On the other hand, a powerful and authoritative other is the one who generally controls the system, world or society and who can decide on behalf of itself and of others, in some cases for the sake of society as with the state in *Brave New World*, in others only for the sake of itself, as with INGSOC (ruling party of Oceania) in *1984*.

This authoritative and powerful figure could be called as "other" because its shape has changed throughout the history of dystopia. In first three novels, it is the state; after feminist approaches joined the genre, it is patriarchy; after nineteen-eighties and neo-liberalism, it was gigantic companies as in *Brave New World*; at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is technology and machine, as in *The Machine Stops*, "*Player Piano*" (Vonnegut, 1952) and *Metropolis*; in some cases it is the ideologies, such as consumerism as in "*Kingdom Come*" (Ballard, 2006). It is notable, here, that all of these powerful others are "heroes" of various utopian works.

However, all of them, be it a father figure or a self-centered one, cannot stand individualistic, free, uncontrollable ideas and tendencies. Therefore they try to repress and destroy “misfit dystopian protagonist”. Regardless of their representation, they function in the same way and play the same role in dystopian novels/films.

Almost every dystopian fiction is centered around the clash between these two figures, an individual and the powerful other. In Tom Moylan’s and Raffaella Baccolini’s words, “dystopian text is built around the construction of a narrative of the hegemonic order and a counter-narrative of resistance.”³⁸

• **Areas Including Subversive Energies:**

Through these areas, misfit dystopian protagonist can express its incompatible thoughts and feelings, also can discover new meanings and insights about his/her own world. Therefore, these areas are either forbidden, or manipulated by the powerful other for the sake of order and itself. According to the powerful other, if an individual does not have an access to these areas, he/she cannot actualize his/her unique selfhood which is hard to control. Or, if these areas are controlled via censorship and are used for the purposes of authority, then it is possible to mold any individual into a “proper citizen” that is compatible with the order and easy to control.

When considering the history of dystopia, these areas could be art, history, religion and language itself. For instance, in literature, John the Savage in *Brave New World* contest the official ideology of Mustapha Mond by referring to Shakespeare’s work, although he does not understand them completely. In the world of the book, on the other hand, all kinds of literature that belongs to an era before the World State based on consumerism and conformism was built, are forbidden since they can arouse subversive feelings.

In dystopian cinema, personal history and memory are considered as what make individual unique and human, as with Deckard in *Blade Runner* and

³⁸ Raffaella Baccolini, Tom Moylan. *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Routledge (2003) p.5

Murdoch in *Dark City*. In this understanding and these films, regain full access to memory means to obtain individuality and humanity. Therefore memory provides an area in which people can resist the hegemony. By the same logic, losing memory means losing individuality and to be defeated by the system.

- **Embeddedness:**

As mentioned in the quote from Moylan and Baccolini, dystopian fictions, both from literature and cinema, always open *in media res* as if we are already familiar with the estranged world of a fiction; in other words as if there is no *absent paradigm* in a dystopian fiction. Therefore, it creates estrangement effect on the reader/viewer who does not get any explanation about how the paradigms of that world, which differs greatly from its own reality, work; and who is as confused as the misfit protagonist. At the same time, this technique makes the dystopian fiction more *realistic* as opposed to utopian ones that involve always isolated places or alternative worlds to which an outsider voyages. It also reinforces the feeling of “being trapped” from which the misfit protagonist suffers; which shows the close relation between format and content in dystopian works.

- **Exaggeration:**

It is the most common technique used in dystopia. It is crucial in two ways. First of all, it is an effective technique to provide an estrangement effect. Excessive usage of violence, as in *A Clockwork Orange*, or keeping people under surveillance all the time via microphones and cameras, even in wilderness, as in *1984*, makes the distance between the reader/viewer and the work, that is always already existent, even larger.

Secondly, it directly demonstrates the close relation between the dystopian fictional world and author's/director's own empirical presence. Everything that is exaggerated in dystopian novel or film, has roots in our reality. Via exaggeration, that familiar “root” becomes strange and unfamiliar, thus viewer/reader gains fresh, critical and new glance upon that “root”; which is the whole purpose of *defamiliarization* and dystopia.

Based on the three criteria and the following sub-categories presented above, in the third chapter, the films selected from the recent epoch of Turkish cinema are going to be analyzed and decided whether they are dystopian or not.

The other source of *defamiliarization* or *estrangement* is the time and place in a fiction, and since the question of this thesis is how a dystopian fiction can be estranging without resorting to distant places or time, it is reasonable to investigate the usage of setting in dystopian imagination.



CHAPTER 2

DYSTOPIAN IMAGINATION IN FILMS

This chapter focuses on discussions of the criteria and its sub-categories that are introduced in the first chapter over examples from dystopian films and literature. These discussions provide more indepth knowledge about dystopia and prepare the ground to analyze the case studies from Turkish cinema in this framework. This chapter deals with the question whether it is possible for a fiction that takes place in its creator's own empirical world and tells its story in a realistic way can be estranging and thus labeled as dystopian work.

To answer this question we need examples both from literature and cinema that are mimetic and estranging at the same time, in Somay's terms. According to Somay and Booker, Dostoevsky's works, especially *Brothers Karamazov*, fall into this category. There is no doubt that his works fueled dystopia, even Somay argues that dystopia has emerged out of the failure of utopia facing *Grand Inquisitor* figure of Dostoevsky.³⁹ It is an archetype of authoritative figure which precedes many dystopian authorities such as Zamyatin's Benefactor, Orwell's O'Brien and Bradbury's Captain Beatty. All of these characters take it upon themselves to decide what is best for the society they rule and according to them, masses only want happiness instead of freedom and the knowledge which the rulers possess is burden to them. They consider this "burden" of knowing as a sacrifice that they have to make for the benefit of their people and they are the only unhappy ones.

Other examples could be "*The Iron Heel*" (London, 1907) and "*Darkness at Noon*" (Koestler, 1940). Both of these novels take place in fictional worlds that are quite similar to the readers', although the former sets it's time in near future. *Darkness at Noon* narrates a story from Stalin era of Soviet Union after World War II, but it never uses the names of Soviet Union, Bolsheviks, Lenin or Stalin. Even though the book refers to several actual places such as France and

³⁹ Somay. p.88

Belgium, also to fictional works of the reader's reality, for example Dostoevsky's "*Crime and Punishment*" (1866); Koestler prefers not to refer to any name related to Soviet Union. Instead he wants the reader to form the relation. Nevertheless, the relation's being quite obvious hinders effect of the *estrangement* but the very presence of non-referentiality makes the work closer to other dystopian fictions. The non-referentiality of the book is also important for my thesis since *Abluka* uses the same technique, which I will mention in Chapter 3 when analyzing the films.

Other than these two novels, the fictional worlds created in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* are not much different from the United States of nine-teen seventies in cultural, economical, social and political ways. Putting aside the fact that these two mix dystopian structure with utopian ideals, which makes them *open-utopias*, using Tom Moylan's term⁴⁰, rather than proper dystopias; the great resemblance between the actual surroundings of the both authors and the fictional worlds of the novels is noteworthy. They can be assessed as steps towards the quite realistic settings with the least *absent paradigms* possible in dystopian tradition.

Apart from these examples from literature using non-estranging settings, that look similarly or exactly like the reader's reality, to create dystopian worlds; it is not easy to find this type of examples from cinema since many films designated as dystopian take place in distant future or place. To list well-known ones: *Metropolis* utilizes futuristic setting; *Blade Runner* and "*Blade Runner 2049*" (Villeneuve, 2017) take place in future and non-existent, post-modernist and futuristic city; in *A Boy and His Dog*, dystopian place is an underworld, paradise-like city built after World War III and IV that make Earth a wasteland; *Dark City* in an alien city from another planet which is constantly being changed by it's rulers; *Children of Men* in year 2027 London under the control of tyranny rule; "*District 9*" (Blomkamp, 2009) in a closed zone dwelled by extraterrestrial

⁴⁰ Moylan, Thomas. *Scraps of the untainted sky: Science fiction, utopia, dystopia*. Westview Press, 2000

beings; *“Elysium”* (Blomkamp, 2013) in Earth which becomes desert-like place in year 2154; *“Equilibrium”* (Wimmer, 2002) in an Orwellian city from future; *“Her”* (Jonze, 2013) in a near future where artificial intelligence is way more developed than today; *“Le cite des enfants perdus”* (Jeunet, 1995) in a dreamy, surrealistic and fictional city; *“Sleeper”* (Allen, 1973) in 200 years in future; *“Soylent Green”* (Fleischer, 1973) in a world in 2020; *“Logan’s Run”* (Anderson, 1976) in 23rd century; *“Fahrenheit 451”* (Traffaut, 1966) in an oppressive society from future; *“Alphaville”* (Godard, 1965) in a space city on another planet, *Brazil* in a retro-futuristic city looking like the one in *Metropolis*; *“Gattaca”* (Niccol, 1997) in a not-too-distant futuristic city looking sterile, technological and unnatural; *“A Clockwork Orange”* (Kubrick, 1971) in a futuristic, dark and oppressive city; *“V for Vendetta”* (McTeigue, 2005) in a futuristic, tyranny and bleak Great Britain; *The Matrix* in a futuristic wasteland where machines live off of human beings.

The audience is not familiar with all of these places, worlds and societies from the films listed above. As in the Sargent’s definition of dystopia quoted at the beginning, these are non-existent societies. The other feature connecting these films is that all of them belong to science-fiction as well. In other words, in all of them, time and place are used to *estrangle* the viewers and to create a distance, an *absent paradigm*, between the filmic world and the reality of the viewers. What this thesis is focused on and asks is whether it is possible for a film to be dystopian without using non-existent societies and places or in other words whether there are films that are non-science-fiction and dystopia at the same time.⁴¹

⁴¹ It is relatively straightforward to designate the science-fiction films that are not dystopian; which means that films lacking social, political and cultural criticism to our presence, in a literary term films lacking *satire*. Many popular Hollywood science-fiction films go into this category such as *“Jurassic Park”* (Spielberg, 1993). Again, the issue here is a matter of extent since many interpretations related to our social, political and cultural problems can be made from these kinds of films, in accordance with the notion that artistic work cannot be separated from the social environment of an artist. Yet it is apparent that the popular science-fiction movies are not centered around the satire, rather their focus is on the protagonist’s journey, or on the thrill and tension created by confrontation human beings with monstrous and enigmatic creatures.

2.1. DISCUSSING *PLEASANTVILLE* AS A DYSTOPIAN FILM

One example partially fitting into this category is the fictional Pleasantville town in the United States from nineteen-fifties, from *Pleasantville*. In the film, David Wagner (Tobey Maguire), an asocial, teenager protagonist, is addicted to TV show, which is a classic family comedy, showing ordinary and simple lives of residents of the small town Pleasantville. He has an older sister, Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon) who is a stereotypical teenager girl, and in contrast to her brother, she is popular and social. One night, as they fight over which TV show they are going to watch, the remote control is broken.

With the new magical remote control which they get from a mysterious repairman, the two are transferred to the world of the TV show, which looks, on the surface, perfect, ordered, sterile, happy and flawless. Yet after they start to live among the residents and become part of the community, they discover the quite oppressive and conservative side of the town, which shows no tolerance to any deviation from the order. In the end, except one place under the control of conservative major and his followers, the whole town and people in it turn colorful, which is a sign of becoming free, unique and open to new possibilities and challenges.

David and Jennifer are proper misfit characters to this environment, with their individualistic and liberal mindset, opposing the town authority and strict lifestyle. Under their influence, people of the show start to change, claim their qualities that do not fit to the town's society and pursue their own passion. As they deviate from the order, the film itself starts to become colorful part by part. Before the siblings' arrival and starting to affect people, the whole town is in black and white. The director demonstrates the change of town people's life towards more free and independent one, by making the film colorful; which shows the impact of content on format.

The first scenes becoming colorful are after Mary Sue (Jennifer's new character in the show) has sex and starts to affect people around her. This,

actually, refers to a dystopian tradition that is encountered in several works, that is a female character's being ahead of others in terms of political consciousness and also providing the rebellious energies to the society and especially to the protagonist, generally via love affair, thus converting him or her into a heretic. In many other dystopian fictions such as *Fahrenheit 451* and *Blade Runner*, love and sexuality are the areas where subversive energies can flourish, energies that authorities do not demand since they are threat to status quo.

In *Pleasantville*, art is censored and controlled by the officials and perceived as a platform that could flourish subversive energies. In the film, Bill Johnson (Jeff Daniels, cafe owner and Betty's lover) becomes colorful via his art, and his new paintings are not welcomed, as a result he is positioned against the town authority.

Moreover, the books in the library are blank until David and Jennifer narrate the stories to people; which also refers to literature's potential for being destructive to the system. Therefore, in one scene, the books are burnt by the supporters of town customs and its ordered lifestyle, reminding of similar scenes from *Fahrenheit 451* in which books are banned and possession of them is illegal.

That sexuality, love and art are areas involving subversive energies for misfit characters to express their thoughts and feelings is a common and dominant feature among dystopian fictions, thus I will refer to this issue in the next chapter when analyzing *Abluka*, *Sarmaşık* and *Babamın Kanatları*.

Since *Pleasantville* refers to these common dystopian subjects, has misfit characters and is able to estrange the viewers by coloring the black and white world of town and including novum (magical remote control that can transfer people to the fictional world of TV shows), the town Pleasantville is a dystopian place from the point of view of David, Jennifer and characters who start to be seen in colour after the siblings' arrival, such as Betty and Johnson. The important aspect about the town is that it is not much different from the actual suburbs in the

nineteen-fifties in the United States, with their focus on sterile, conservative, strict, ordered life.

In other words, the room for *absent paradigm* in this town is smaller in comparison with the science-fiction dystopian films that I listed before. It is not possible to argue that this town does not have any *absent paradigms* since the audience believes that it is a town with people who believe that nothing exists out of the town, never see a color except white and black, and do the exact same things at exact time every day. Also its perfection before the siblings' arrival makes it a bizarre place whose paradigms are different from ours. However the town of Pleasantville is quite close to the ones which the audience knows in detail from TV. So the film is a step towards non-estranging settings including far less *absent paradigm*.

2.2. DISCUSSING *THE TRUMAN SHOW* AS A DYSTOPIAN FILM

The other dystopian example taking place in a familiar place and time, is "*The Truman Show*" (Weir, 1998) in which a TV show broadcasts every second of Truman Burbank's life (Jim Carrey). Truman who has a regular, normal life is unaware of the fact that his life is being broadcasted live on TV.

Truman has a normal life until bizarre things start to happen such as a mysterious object's falling from sky without leaving any trace, pouring rain only on Truman and his car radio broadcasting every second of his actions at that moment. These incidents eventually lead him to get suspicious and paranoid about the possibility that his life is fake. After being prevented from getting out of the island he lives in by the "actors" working for the TV channel (since the island is a fabrication, there is nowhere to go); Truman, finally overcomes his fear of being in the sea (stemming from the death of his father in the sea) sails away, reaches the boundary of this fabricated island, contacts the director of the show, Christof (Ed Harris) and leaves "the scene".

The film refers to several long lasting topics of dystopian tradition. First, the issue of *surveillance*, that is keeping the society under control all the time by

using technology such as cameras, as in *1984*, or by having people report each other. Watching society all the time is not just for controlling, it also destroys individuality and freedom. Without privacy, there is no chance for citizens to be themselves. It makes the whole society into a single unit that is more easy to manage. In the film, Truman becomes an object upon which millions of people gaze, but more importantly which is controlled in every way.

Secondly, the film criticizes TV industry for lacking any comprehensive and artistic content, thus numbing viewers. People watch only the routine of Truman's ordinary life. This is the same criticism made in *Fahrenheit 451*. In the book, TV is the main entertainment, which people seem to be addicted to. And the shows they watch do not require any intellectual effort. In one scene, Montag, after coming home, asks Mildred, his wife, what were in the shows she watched today. She cannot remember and explain what she saw because she acts as if she has taken drugs when watching tele-screens. People watching Truman's show are like Mildred, staring at TV screen without interpreting. The very last scene of the film emphasizes this critic. After the transmission is cut due to Truman's leaving, two guys watching TV immediately try to find new channel, asking "What else is on? Where is the TV guide?", and they do not say a thing about the show; which highlights TV shows' being superficial and temporary.

Apart from these connections with dystopian tradition, Truman is a proper misfit character, trying to figure out bizarre happenings around him and to find a way out of this fabricated island. And he is the only one who is not aware of the fact that his life is totally controlled and watched; which puts him in a different and unique position. He, in a way, fights against the authority represented by Christof who controls everything and considers the island as a perfect, safety environment for Truman, reminding of Dostoevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*. Yet, actually, he does everything for the sake of ratings and the show itself.

Because of all these reasons, *The Truman Show* is a dystopian film. However both the fabricated island and the world outside of it look so familiar to

the United States in the nineteen-nineties that *absence paradigm* of the film's world gets smaller. There is a novum that is a fully fabricated island, looking exactly real, with its climate, waters and sky; that partially provides the estrangement effect. Nevertheless, the setting of the film is another step towards quite realistic dystopian settings with which the audience is familiar.

2.3. DYSTOPIAN FILM WITH REALISTIC SETTING

As for cinema, the possibility of dystopian fiction with too realistic setting has been investigated before. Senem Aytaç examines the fictional dystopian settings from cinema that are not put in distant future or place, arguing that American suburban society in the nineteen-nineties is constructed as dystopian place in five films that are "*Short Cuts*" (Altman, 1993), "*The Ice Storm*" (Lee, 1998), "*Happiness*" (Solondz, 1998), "*Magnolia*" (Anderson, 1999) and "*American Beauty*" (Mendes, 1999).

When describing dystopia in cinema, she relies on the place (topos) and mise-en-scene:

The aim of dystopian literature is to create a new topos in the reader's mind and to present it along with the narrative of the novel; therefore the experience of reading a dystopian novel is very much like visiting an unknown landscape, while making available comparisons with the familiar. It presents us the estranged and the familiar simultaneously in order to force us to make connections between our world and the new one. Science fiction cinema does so too, but it actually creates these new worlds for its spectators, realizing the imagined topos on screen through the use of the medium's possibilities. Thus, the distinguishing and defining element of dystopian cinema is obviously its visual elements, which builds its worlds for the eyes of the spectator. In short, the use of mise-en-scene is the defining element of dystopian cinema, distinguishing it from the literary tradition. The mise-en-scene replaces the use of language in dystopian tradition to estrange and familiarize the spectator.⁴²

First of all, it is important to be reminded here that dystopia and science-fiction are not the only ones that create new topos before the eyes of audience or reader; even the most "realistic" fictions do so. However the *absent paradigm* occupies a much more larger space in the former ones. In other words, the

⁴² Aytaç. p.19

paradigms in a world created in “realistic” fictions are more closer to the ways audience/reader perceive its immediate present; which diminishes the effect of estrangement in a great amount. Secondly, rather the topos itself, the relative position and situation of misfit protagonist in that fictional setting are what make any film dystopian; since the audience’s perception of any topos vary from location to location, from society to society and from era to era, as Aytaç also indicates:

The society depicted can be judged according to the “here and now” of the reader as well, which may result in different judgments along the continuum of utopia/dystopia. The interpreter, in reference with the fears, anxieties of his age and according to his apprehension of his own, may perceive the authors’ world as better or worse.⁴³

Although it can be argued that the main character’s situation in a dystopian topos is also dependent on receiver’s perception and thus cannot be put forward as an objective criterion for designating a fiction as dystopian; what we should focus on when analyzing the dystopian films is still on the characters and their relative position. Through them, the directors make all the satirical points about the world the audience lives in. In addition, this quality of dystopian fictions that is focusing on a misfit individual is what makes them suitable for the genre of novel in the first place, at the same time what makes them closer to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries realism in literature than any non-dystopian science-fiction (which, obviously, means any science-fiction lacking *satire*) and utopia as a literary genre are. Aytaç is also aware of this quality of dystopia:

Dystopian fiction makes us aware of its current situation, by constraining us to the individual in opposition to the society. The hegemonic system becomes dystopian in the eyes of the reader/spectator through identification with the characters. It is the hero of the novel that creates the dystopian vision, like Winston Smith in *1984*, D-503 in *We* or Deckard in *Blade Runner*. In fact, this is one of the primary conditions that separate utopia from dystopia.⁴⁴

This approach works for the cinema as well. With the very presence of heretic character, any place can be constructed as dystopian, not just depressive,

⁴³ Aytaç. p.16

⁴⁴ Aytaç. p.53

futuristic, crowded, technological, decaying, greyish, bleak and beehive-like cities with monumental buildings as in *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*, “*Akira*” (1988, Ôtomo) and *Dark City*. It is this approach that makes it possible to see “realistic” and estranged fictions under the light of dystopia such as the films Aytaç picks for her thesis.

For example, in *American Beauty* familiar American suburb appears as a perfect, modern and utopian place on the surface. However, in the eyes of Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), the protagonist who is having a mid-life crisis, the place becomes hellish when considering his detached relationships with his family and environment deprived of any intimacy and affection, his pointless career (he starts to work at a fast food shop after quitting his job), his repressed and unrealized feelings towards young women and men, his indifference to symbolic elements of American society (and other capitalist societies as well) such as material wealth and career, and his feeling of being trapped. All of these negative effects on an individual that can be attached to American suburban life (or to any closed capitalist system) become visible through him and his position in that suburb.

Even the most unrealistically paradise looking place can be depicted as dystopian one, as in *Edward Scissorhands* (Burton, 1990). The film takes place in a town which looks quite colorful, perfect, sterile and ordered, as if it is from a cartoon. Yet, in the eyes of Edward (Johnny Depp) who is created by a man, The Inventor (Vincent Price), before his hands are completed (reminding, of course, Dr. Frankenstein from “*Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*” [Shelley, 1818]) and who lived in an isolated castle for years, this town is anything but a utopia. He starts to live among town people after meeting Kim (Winona Ryder).

At first he is accepted by the society until he is blamed for some accidents and forced to live in the castle again. He represents the other, with his black costumes as opposed to colorful ones people of the town wear, his bizarre appearance because of his scissor hands and make-up, his artistic inclinations and

anti-sociality. All of these qualities position him at the opposite side of what the town society stands for. The people of the town, however, turn him into an object that is interesting for them at first but then that is something harmful they want to avoid. They first exploit his talents in exchange for accepting him to their community. At the end of the film, they treat him like a monster. The relationship between the people and Edward resembles the one between humans and uncanny, monstrous, exotic creature; lacking an affection and empathy. Therefore, the discourse of the film is that being different and unfamiliar is like being a monstrous object that people are interested and afraid of at the same time, in a “modern” society, however perfect and comfortable the conditions of living are.

The fictional place’s being able to turn into dystopian one with the presence of misfit character regardless of how it is depicted, is the very reason that we can evaluate “realistic” topos in films or in novels, that are very similar to the author’s/director’s empirical world, as dystopian and can relate them to other well-known, classical dystopian fictions. However, it can be also argued that dystopian fictional worlds have been getting closer to actual time and places since the classical dystopian novels taking place in distant future, especially after the nineteen-seventies, as can be seen in *The Dispossessed* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Aytaç also argues the same and relates this tendency seen in dystopian tradition to actual historical events of our world. Yet, it should be noted that using worlds from “elsewhere” in dystopian imagination has not stopped after the nineteen-seventies, especially in cinema, as in *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Children of Men* and *The Matrix*.

Determining the reason why “too realistic” worlds started to emerge in dystopian imagination both in literature and cinema requires a comprehensive and broader historical work, and thus it is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is notable here, however, is the very existence of these “realistic” worlds in the discourse of dystopia that are very similar to creator’s and viewer’s immediate present. And as the examples above show, it is possible to form non-estranging settings and to estrange the viewers or readers at the same time. The time and

place are not the only elements of fiction that can be put into use for a distance between the fictional world and the viewers/readers.

After presenting the three criteria of dystopian fictions and some features of dystopian discourse, and then showing various dystopian examples from literature and cinema that can be evaluated as the steps towards even more realistic fictions in dystopian tradition, I can now analyze the three films from recent Turkish cinema, with settings that are almost inseparable from today's Turkey.



CHAPTER 3

ANALYSES OF FILMS

3.1. ANALYSIS OF *ABLUKA*

*Abluka*⁴⁵ is the second film of director Emin Alper whose first film is “*Tepenin Ardı*” (2012) which also includes the elements of satire and can be evaluated under the topic of dystopia. However *Abluka* has more and direct criticism to the political environment of the world and thus touches more dystopian issues (especially in terms of the problematic relationship between the state and the individual) as opposed to *Tepenin Ardı*.

The film starts with Kadir (Mehmet Özgür) on screen, staying in a room, then witnessing apparently a bombing attack which we do not see. He sees this attack through a doorway that limit his vision greatly. He gets only a limited amount of idea of what is happening outside. He does not know who attacks who or why, or even where the attack occurs. This scene is crucial in several ways. First of all, it foreshadows the relative situation of Kadir and Ahmet (Berkay Ateş), his little brother, in the neighbourhood under a blockade, in a sense that they never have chance to comprehend and to know what is happening around them, which partly leads them to go mad in the end. Secondly, this scene represents the situation of audience who also has a limited knowledge as to what is happening. We do not know which neighbourhood they reside (somewhere in İstanbul), why it is under blockade, what “crime” they commit and to what they are opposed. We are in the same position as the brothers in. This “lack of knowledge” contributes the estranging effect as I argue later. And thirdly, this scene reminds of the information issue in many dystopian texts and films. That is the unbalanced position between the ones holding power and the others. Due to lack of information, classical dystopian misfit characters cannot grasp the mechanics of the world they live in. They are prevented from accessing historical records, work of arts and any source of “information” that could help them to

⁴⁵ Although the English title of the film is “*Frenzy*”, it actually means “blockade” in Turkish.

reach the so-called truth. The only channels they can get are controlled and manipulated by the authority. In short, this scene reminds of the situation of dystopian characters in terms of understanding their environment, and thus it is directly related to the discursive element that is called as “An Individual versus The Powerful Other” in the first chapter.

After this scene, we see a conversation between Kadir and a police chief Hamza (Müfit Kayacan). Hamza offers Kadir that he can get released on parole, if he gathers information about the activities of people living in the neighbourhood under blockade. With this offer, Kadir becomes depended on Hamza and the authority he represents; which leads to dedication, fear and finally to paranoia in time. Kadir accepts the offer and settles in the neighbourhood.

Ahmet also lives in the same place and two brothers reunite after almost twenty-five years during which Kadir is in prison. Ahmet works for the municipality by killing the dogs in the neighbourhood. He introduces his older brother to his friends, Meral (Tülin Özen) and Ali (Ozan Akbaba) who help Kadir to settle in the apartment which is above their own apartment. The first day they meet, Kadir and Ahmet are invited to dinner in their home. In dinner scene, we learn Ahmet is left by his wife and child, and lives on his own now.⁴⁶

Kadir takes lessons in police department, learns the scent of materials and various methods used in making bombs. In one of the class scene in which the instructor (Mustafa Kırantepe) teaches the different kinds of bomb; his whole attitude, voice and style are as if he teaches an ordinary subject; although he gives an information about how many people can be killed with this or that bomb. His cold manner towards the subject matter reminds of how people in dystopian fictions get used to violence around them; as in *1984* in which people do not react to bomb attacks. His indifferent attitude, therefore, underlines the violence that becomes a *normal* phenomenon; which is, at the same time, one of the film’s criticism.

⁴⁶ As we see later in the film, being left and unable to establish a bond with others partly shed light on the relationship between him and a dog which he tries to kill and fails.

Based on what he learns in these lessons, Kadir searches the garbage cans to find the materials used in making bombs, and also starts to get to know the neighbourhood with Ali's help. In time, he builds suspicion that he can be watched by the residents. He also gets suspicious of his brother, thinking he might get involved in a romantic relationship with Meral; without realizing the fact that he actually projects his interest for Meral onto his brother. On the other hand, Ahmet establishes a bond with a dog that he fails to kill before. He takes the dog in his house, takes care of and feeds it. Since he is not allowed to have a dog because of the rules of municipality he works for, he avoids everyone and becomes paranoid, suspecting that the dog might be taken away from him. Apparently, there is a strong connection between this environment of the film full of suspicion, mistrust, fear, paranoia and other dystopian films; such as *Blade Runner* in which *replicants* need to hide their true identity to survive, in the exact way that Ahmet and Kadir try to do. However, as can be seen in the rest of the film, this constant struggle causes them to lose their touch with the reality.

When there are bomb attacks in somewhere outside the neighbourhood, the pressure and tension start to rise. Police interferes in the area in a more direct way. As a result, Kadir learns that Meral and Ali are also members of the so-called "organization" which is responsible for the blockade but which we do not have any information about what their goal is and what they are opposed to. The impact of this frantic and rampant process on two brothers is great. While Kadir desperately tries to show his worth to Hamza and the authorities, and believes his little brother is kept captive by Meral and the organization; Ahmet paranoically isolates himself and the dog from the outside world, changes the structure of his house, believing his older brother and superior try to kill his dog.

Towards the end, Kadir causes the police to make an operation to the building in which Ahmet lives, believing that he is saving his little brother. Yet, when the police comes, Ahmet opens fire at them, thinking they come for the dog, and gets killed as a result. Out of feeling guilty, Kadir goes to Hamza with a knife in his belt. However, he becomes absolutely powerless when he confronts Hamza.

He gets beaten and humiliated by Hamza, cannot even touch the knife. This whole scene is an obvious visual representation of the hierarchy based on “power” in Foucauldian sense of the term. Reminding of the bleak end of *1984* (suggesting there can be nothing done against the system and the ruler elite), Kadir is so powerless and desperate in front of Hamza that he does not have a chance to oppose and to stand up against him; in other words he cannot touch the knife that could harm Hamza. This whole scene is also directly related to “An Individual versus The Powerful Other”.

After this scene, Kadir goes to his brother’s house in which he accepts condolences offered by various people we do not see before. Then, in the final scene; outside the building, in a ritualistic atmosphere, he is executed by the organization, although we do not see him dying.

To start my dystopia analysis, I first focus on misfit dystopian characters in the film. Kadir and Ahmet perfectly fit into that character type, if not the whole population of neighbourhood. Yet, obviously, the focus is on the two. Like almost every dystopian main character, both of them are dissatisfied with their environment, lose the sense of reality, have troubles with forming an identity, are manipulated, controlled and devastated by the authority, try to come to an understanding about what is going on around them, feel powerless, lonely and desperate, fear the authority they are depended on, and become detached from the outside world day by day. On their part, the source of most of these feelings is the secrets they are holding back and living double life; which leads to fear and gradually to paranoia. Kadir’s dedication to his secret job and taking it too seriously, and Ahmet’s affection for the dog and considering it as his lost family make this whole process and their paranoia even more severe. And the fact that they are brothers makes it more tragic, since they do not know their secrets and cannot help each other. Plus, in time, they start to get suspicious of each other, fearing that their secret might get revealed. Here, family member’s getting suspicious of each other reminds of how INGSOC has children report their “heretical” parents.

All they can do is to cling to their secrets and hide it from everyone else, which make them delusional and paranoid in the first place, to form a kind of identity. Therefore, their situation is paradoxical. Their absolute powerless position against the ones that represent authority, makes the identity issue more problematic, giving the feeling they mean nothing to the rulers. Two scenes in the film are exact visual representation of their powerlessness in the social hierarchy. I already mentioned the “knife scene” above, the other is the one in which Ahmet is reprimanded by his superior who thinks Ahmet is responsible for stealing the dogs they kill to sell their meat and earn money. On the other hand, Ahmet cannot defend himself, even cannot form a meaningful sentence. He becomes a defenseless, pitiful creature in front of the superior, making him look like the dogs he and his crew kill for the municipality. In short, both Kadir and Ahmet do not even exist as human beings in the eyes of the authority. Considering their paranoia, loneliness, desperateness and dissatisfaction with the things as they are, the neighbourhood in the film is a dystopian place for them; and since we as audience are identified with them, *Abluka* presents a dystopia.

As an interesting aspect, their secrets fall into “the areas including subversive energies”, which is outlined in the first chapter, as well. Kadir’s love for his brother Ahmet, his interest for Meral, the close relationship between the dog and Ahmet are beyond the control of authority, although they are not powerful enough to oppose it. Instead, they are hidden and not articulated, as clearly visualized by Ahmet’s rebuilding his house to open a section which is not known and seen by anyone, including his superior. As an another example, in his delusion, Kadir helps Meral to escape from neighbourhood, which is “illegal” in the film. In short, the love, which cannot be touched by the authority, causes the brothers to act in a ‘heretical’ way.

As an another feature of the dystopian *misfit* character, Kadir suffers from memory voids. In various dystopian films, such as *Dark City* and *Blade Runner*, memory or personal history is considered as the only unique part of our identity; in other words it is the only phenomenon that makes us individual, separate from

the masses. Manipulating or distorting it means that humanity and identity are lost. It is what differentiates *replicants* from “real” human beings in *Blade Runner* and what Murdoch tries to find throughout the film to gain his humanity in *Dark City*. In the same manner, Kadir tries to learn what happens to his other little brother, Veli who we never see. He asks Hamza to find him by looking into the police records. Since Veli is important piece for his personal history, reaching him means completing his history and thus his identity. Several times, he thinks he sees him on the bike, whose face is covered by some kind of veil; therefore he can only see the eyes. Kadir can never be sure whether the man on bike is actually Veli or not, and thus never complete his personal history and individuality.

Second part of my dystopia analysis is about the estranging effect or defamiliarization. *Abluka* accomplishes this very quality of dystopian fiction in two ways: first one, as I mentioned above, is by intentionally holding back information and forming big voids in the filmic world. Ali Şensöz argues the same:

We cannot get clear information as to what absolute truth is although, with an editing trick, we see the same events twice from different perspectives by going back to same period of time of the story. Even though the audience thinks it attains omniscient perspective by seeing scenes occurring at the same time in different places; it never reaches to the truth itself.⁴⁷ (my translation)

Second one is about damaging the so-called reality of the film, making the audience unsure of whether what they see on the screen is actually happened. By taking the effects of political violence on both Kadir and Ahmet to the limits beyond our empirical world’s standards⁴⁸, the film causes it’s main characters to lose their touch with reality (in other words, makes them delusional); therefore the audience cannot take what is seen on the screen for granted. That leads us to question the actuality of every frame and makes a great distance between the filmic world and the audience’s immediate physical world; in other words that *estranges* the viewers from the work of art to make them more aware and

⁴⁷Şensöz, Ali Deniz. “Şehrin Ardında.” *Altyazı*, Nov. 2015, pp. 26–28.

⁴⁸ This is the technique listed as “Exaggeration” in the first chapter.

skeptical about the political, cultural and social phenomena that the film sees as flawed.

As for the first technique, *Abluka* gives no information about the location and the time. We do not know where this neighbourhood is, why it is under blockade, which crime they commit, why they are named as “terrorist”, and more importantly why they are opposed to the authority. Other than they are in İstanbul and speak Turkish; we do not know anything about both this place and the people live there. Although only the viewers who live in Turkey can detect the accents, these are mixed enough to make it impossible to match the people in the film with any ethnic minority in Turkey. Even we do not know whether they are minority or not. It is possible to argue that the whole country, assuming there is one, is ruled by blockading the society. Bottom line is that our knowledge about the place and society in *Abluka*’s world is very limited.

This is the same technique used in “*Gölgesizler*” (Ünal, 2009), based on the novel by Hasan Ali Toptaş with the same title. In this film also, the name and location of the village, main place of the film, are unknown; which strengthens the reading of both the film and the book that the whole village and villagers only exist in the mind of the main character, who at the same time is the author. This is the self-reflection of the film that is reminding the audience of fictionality of the work, preventing it from being engrossed in the work. Although, this technique does not serve the self-reflectivity in *Abluka*, it creates the distance between the fiction and audience in both films.

With these two techniques elaborated above, *Abluka* succeeds at defamiliarizing the viewers and thus becomes suitable to be considered under *estranging fictions* as in Somay’s diagram, to which dystopia belongs.

The last item in my criteria for dystopian fiction is *satire*, which is the main and crucial aspect of the film. As mentioned before, the whole film is about the enormous impact of political violence on the individuals who, as a result, become paranoid, suspicious of everyone including close relatives; and eventually

lose their sense of reality. As a result of living in constant fear, Kadir and Ahmet gradually resemble animalistic creatures, trying to protect what is most valuable to them, and to form an identity. Yet, the threat from the authorities represented by Hamza and municipality, is ceaseless and thus leaves no space for them to feel secured and powerful. There is no way out of this devastating process of psychological torture coming from the authorities; which causes Kadir to wander in the streets without noticing his environment and Ahmet to hide behind the wall that he builds in his own house.

In one of the most powerful scenes of the film, as a response to recent bomb attack in the city, police forces that patrol in the neighbourhood pass by the window of Ahmet's house. In this scene the camera is inside the house, allowing us to be identified with Ahmet and to feel his fear. From inside, through the window, we see and hear huge police vehicles passing by; huge enough to cause the windows to tremble. Camera focuses on the window, we do not see Ahmet anymore, in fact we are him now. We, as the audience, are in the same house with him and see the window in the exact same way he does. The window trembles until it cracks. Although the noises the police vehicles make are so loud, we can still clearly hear the cracking. Other than the sound, in this scene, outside the house is so bright because of the streetlights and the headlights of the police vehicles; on the other hand the inside where Ahmet and the audience are located is quite dark. With this contrast, the audience feels cornered and oppressed, as Ahmet experiences in this neighbourhood.

With the "crack", Ahmet realizes that there is no safe place that is not affected by the authority. Even his house, which is the only place he can experience affection and safety, can be transgressed and damaged by the political powers, represented by the police vehicles. *The powerful other*, political authorities in this case, can reach and affect every location, even the most *personal* ones. As the "crack" scene foreshadows, there is nothing Ahmet can do to prevent others from transgressing into his personal boundaries, as in the scene in which he gets killed by the police force, trying to protect his dog. The rifle and

the inner structure he built in his house are useless when it comes to protection for him and his dog. And the more tragic part is that he does not even know why the police attacks his house.

As these two scenes clearly depict, Ahmet is absolutely powerless and desperate in the face of the authorities. This powerless, desperate, frightened, lonely and confused “individuals” created by the authorities that hold political power forms the basis for the satire of the film. In the scene in which the camera zooms in on Kadir’s face after he leaves Hamza’s place where he gets beaten up, the whole effects of the political violation on the individuals can be clearly seen. His facial expression is all about desperation and fear, as if it summarizes those “individuals” consumed by the authorities.

Beside these individuals and effects of the political violence on them, the film also shows how corrupt the whole system is. The scene, in which Ahmet’s superior explains the policies of the municipality about stray dogs in the neighbourhood on television, directly refers to the corruption of the municipality. In an Orwellian sense, the reality is distorted and manipulated by the authorities for their own sake, since they actually kill dogs instead of putting them in animal care institution, which is the opposite of what is presented on the television. Also, the scene, in which Kadir is investigated by Hamza and his other two co-workers, clearly shows how the authority lacks compassion and concern for others. Three officers’ carefree attitude and them joking with each other make the whole scene more poignant by contrasting their carelessness with the direness of the situation in the neighbourhood where people get killed. With this scene and by representing the officials in a sarcastic and almost funny way, *Abluka* challenges our perception of dystopian ruler figure shaped by various, if not all, novels and films such as *V for Vendetta*, 1984 (both novel and film), *Dark City*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Dispossessed*. Clearly, Hamza shares many traits with the stereotypical ruler figures such as lack of compassion for others, selfishness, hunger for power, being close to the alternative ways and ideas, and not hesitating to manipulate others; yet, as opposed to the stereotypical dystopian rulers, the way

he is represented in this scene is caricaturistic. Therefore the whole situation of Kadir in front of him becomes more tragic.

Both the corrupted, grotesque rulers and the enormous effects of political violence on individuals are what *Abluka* tries to criticize since it sees them as crucial problems inherent in oppressive societies. Although the filmic place is in Turkey and all characters speak Turkish, these critics can easily be extended to any society, be it fictional or historical; as in every dystopian work. Having met three criteria of my dystopian analysis, *Abluka* is properly a dystopian film which uses time and space in such a realistic way and the film gives the impression that the story could take place in anywhere and in anytime. In this regard, Ali Şensöz argues:

Abluka tells a story that could happen in east or west of the country, in Turkey or in any other country.⁴⁹ (my translation)

On the other hand, attaching the term *dystopia* to the film is also intended by the director himself who asserted *Abluka* is a dystopian and allegorical story:

Of course, the story has allegorical aspects. As a matter of fact, you inevitably go into this area while narrating a dystopian story.⁵⁰ (my translation)

Aylin Sayın also states the same aspects of the film, that is *Abluka*'s being a dystopian place in which the *dispossessed* is terrorized by daily politics.⁵¹

On top of that, designating the time and place as “too realistic and familiriazing” does not mean that the neighbourhood in *Abluka* is deprived of the connotations derived from the filmic places and times in other dystopian films such as *Children of Men*, *Dark City* and *Blade Runner*. As in these three films; the dark atmosphere, greyish tone, such sharp contrast between light and shadow that reminds of *film-noir* aesthetic, deprived and poor conditions of the neighbourhood in the film are directly related to inner state of Ahmet and Kadir who are

⁴⁹ Şensöz, Ali Deniz. “Şehrin Ardında.” *Altyazı*, Nov. 2015, pp. 26–28.

⁵⁰ Alper, Emin, et al. “Distopik Karabasan.” *Altyazı*, Nov. 2015, pp. 21–25.

⁵¹ Sayın, Aylin. “*Abluka*: Bir Paranoyaklaşma Hali.” *Yeni Film* 39-40 (2016): 51-53.

terrorized by the political violence and confused due to the lack of information and the manipulation by authorities. As an example, every time Kadir thinks he sees Veli (his second brother), it is night time and both of them are in the dark partially lightened by the street lights. Also, delusions that both Kadir and Ahmet have (such as the scene in which Kadir helps Meral to escape from blockade and the scene in which Ahmet thinks there is someone on his roof) take place in night time. Therefore the dark atmosphere reinforces the fact that these are delusions. On the other hand, sharp contrast between light and dark throughout the film underlines their confused state by leaving “the truth” in the dark. In short, as in every dystopian film, the place in *Abluka* supports the dystopian matters and the situation of characters in that world. In other words, it becomes a significant part of the whole narration, as one of the functions of the “place” in cinema.⁵² That the place turns into a character and supports the narrative is especially significant, considering that historically, design and usage of the place in Turkish cinema is not sufficient in terms of dramatic structure, especially in the era called as *Yeşilçam*.⁵³

All in all, by being defamiliarizing, satirical and having a misfit characters at the same time, *Abluka* is a proper dystopian film. As opposed to its science-fiction counterparts, it does not utilize estranging, distant time and place. Instead, it takes place in a too realistic and familiarizing setting.

3.2. ANALYSIS OF *SARMAŞIK*

Sarmaşık, which means ivy in Turkish, shot in 2015, is the second film of the director Tolga Karaçelik. The film takes place almost entirely in a merchant ship, except the opening scene in which we are introduced to every character in the film. The main place's of the film being the ship and focusing on the relations among crew on the ship remind of another Turkish film called “*Gemide*” (Akar,

⁵² Çam, Aydın. (2016). *Sinemasal Mekanlar ve Sinemasal Mekanların Çözümlemesi*. sinecine, (7), pp.7-37

⁵³ Eşli, Ö. M. “*Türk Sinemasının Felsefi Arka Planı: Sinemayı Felsefeyle Düşünmek*.” İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları (2012). pg.167

1998). Although the latter can hardly be designated as dystopian since it lacks strong estrangement effect, the two resemble each other both in terms of content and style; most importantly of enabling the analogy between the ship and Turkey, or any other country with authoritative leading figures, and dependent and opponent citizens in general. Berke Göl argues the same:

Sarmaşık presents a text which is surely available for reading it as country allegory. The requirement of keeping order under extraordinary circumstances; hierarchal structure that falters in time; power struggle among seamen; religiosity of one, rebelliousness of other, Kurdishness of other and the fact that destiny of all of them depends on each other... (my translation)⁵⁴

This allegory provides the basis for the satire for both films. With the satire plus the estrangement effects and classical dystopian opponent character (or characters), *Sarmaşık* is a proper dystopian film, as I try to analyze and to show.

As we learn in opening scene, the new members of the ship's crew, Cenk (Nadir Sarıbacak) and Alper (Özgür Emre Yıldırım), are from the lower classes of the society, who consider the ship as an isolated island away from the land that represents the problems and dangers for them. In a sense, they come to ship to escape from the society with which they cannot get along. However, considering what they are going to go through in the ship; the two, especially Cenk, cannot fit in the ship's society, with its authoritative captain figure Beybaba⁵⁵ (Osman Alkaş), rigid rules and purposelessness, either. That refers to one of the bleakest suggestion of dystopia which argues that the problems and flaws we observe in actual societies are not about systems, structures or historical conditions, instead they are caused merely by human nature. In other words; humans are inherently flawed and wicked, thus the developments in politics, economics and/or social circumstances can hardly be answers to our dissatisfactions and dreads in modern societies, since they are not related to our surrounding. The real issue here is much

⁵⁴ Göl, Berke. "İktidar Alabora." *Altyazı*, Dec. 2015, pp. 42–44.

⁵⁵ In a roughly translation, it means Mr. Father in Turkish. It reminds of dystopian tradition of calling authoritative rulers as male family names, as in *Big Brother* in 1984. In terms of the context, it serves the purpose of softening harsh connotations attached to rulers and of trying to form strong bonds between the ruler and the ruled. On the other hand, in terms of the discourse of the text or the film, it also refers to the patriarchal structure of oppressive societies.

more deeper. Although utopia and dystopia are secular concepts by their nature⁵⁶; this view of dystopia directly refers to the myth of fallen man in Christianity; which states the same: Human beings are sinner and thus need religion's guidance. And thus every system built by the humanity is doomed to fail.

The situation of newcomers to the ship, therefore, reminds of this gloomy dystopian view. They are always unfit and feel entrapped, thus they need to fight their environment for their own sake and freedom, regardless of their whereabouts, be it land or sea. As long as they are among people, they are like classical misfit dystopian main characters. In addition to them, the end of the film imply that the other members of the crew join in their, especially Cenk's, discontent and despair with the situation they are in and the authority represented by the captain, after going through many quarrels. Considering their situation and the bleak dystopian view; in the eyes of Cenk and Alper (and also of the others, except the captain) it is proper to think of the ship in *Sarmaşık* as a dystopian place. Obviously, it needs to meet the other two requirements for dystopian fictions I posited before to be called as dystopia.

After newcomers join the crew and meet the others, the captain sets a meeting, in which he announces that the company, which owns the ship, goes bankrupt, therefore they cannot go into harbor or go anywhere because of the law. As a harbour law, six members of the whole crew need to stay in the ship until it gets a new owner. Therefore they do not know how much long they need to stay. When the whole crew learns the situation; Cenk and Alper, decide to stay in the ship with the others who need to stay compulsorily such as Nadir (Hakan Karsak) who is in charge of the canteen and food supply and Kurd (Seyithan Özdemir) who is a mechanic. Cenk and Alper's main motivations here are earning money

⁵⁶ In the eyes of Christianity and the church, heaven and hell cannot be actualized on Earth. They are beyond this physical world and the social structures created by humankind. Therefore, seeking and trying to create perfect social, economic and political conditions on Earth or insinuating hell while depicting societies is meaningless.

without working and avoiding various problems, such as poverty and jail, waiting for them in the land.

At first, they manage to run the ship without dispute; as the captain tries to maintain his authority by forming allies with İsmail (mechanic, Kadir Çermik) and Nadir, hoping to get information from the crew (with which he does not share anything) and to not to lose his alleged control, without getting too much involved with the others. He stays, eats and spends time alone in his isolated and separated room, which underlines his authoritative and *superior* position. He thinks that the ship needs to be operated in the way that it has been before; and that the order and the hierarchy should be maintained. He asks Nadir and İsmail to spy on and to be friend with Cenk and Alper, the newcomers; which reminds of the detection technique used by INGSOS in 1984 by having children talk behind their parents.⁵⁷ The purpose here is to gather information about the ruled to control them, reminding of the Foucault's concept of power based on information.⁵⁸

However, as the time passes by and the food supply starts to decrease, Cenk and Alper start to get bored and fall into the emptiness and despair. They start to question the situation they are in, how much longer they need to stay and when they are going to get paid. Yet, they cannot get in touch with the captain. He does not say anything about how the financial and legal situation of the ship, although he is the only source of information. In this sense, the film touches one of the most classical dystopian argument, that is the rulers manipulating the ruled either by producing false information or by hiding and distorting facts. Therefore, the misfit dystopian main character(s)' duty can also be seen as trying to reach the facts about the world they live in. Here, the captain does the same as Big Brother, Benefactor and Mustapha Mond do in their dystopian societies. He hides information from other five characters for his own sake. As we learn in the scene that Nadir overhears the telephone conversation between the captain and someone

⁵⁷ Encouraging people to inform on others who act in a *heretic* way can also be encountered in other dystopian texts and films. For example, the fact that every citizen lives in rooms made of glass that can be seen from outside in *We* serve the same purpose.

⁵⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The subject and power*. Critical inquiry 8.4 (1982): 777-795.

from the management of the company, Beybaba wants to stay in the ship longer for his personal gain, even though all of the crew can get paid immediately when they leave. Yet he tells the others that if they leave the ship, they lose the pay check.⁵⁹

After Nadir tells Cenk and Alper what he hears, they get suspicious of Beybaba, of what he does and does not say to them and thus start to ask questions. The tension between two sides⁶⁰ is increasing until an explosion scene in which Beybaba yells at them, hits them and bosses around when he learns that they cook a meal which Nadir does not know it is in the ship's storage, and that the machinist goes missing. In this scene, also, we see a hammer thrown behind the captain although we do not see where it comes from or who throws it; which generates a void. The reason why the captain shows overreaction in a violent way is that he worries about losing control over the crew. His obsession with the control directly points to the authoritative dystopian rulers who see the strict control of society as the only way to rule them. To them, if there is no control and order, then the society falls into a chaos; which is the same argument said by Beybaba to Nadir.

Then the crew starts to fall out with each other, with the captain doing nothing to prevent any violence from occurring. They fight and quarrel with each other until Cenk goes mad, takes drugs, hits İsmail in his head (although we do not see the hitting moment) and Nadir tries to kill himself. After these violent scenes, we see an ivy spreading all over the ship and many snails on the deck. In the final scene, however, we see all the crew (except the captain and the mechanic) on the deck, giving an impression that they are going to act against the captain.

Considering his obsession with power, control and order; the techniques he uses to hold the power, his isolated position and relatively luxurious life

⁵⁹ Again, the whole power struggle here between the crew and Beybaba is outlined in the item "An Individual versus The Powerful Other" in the first chapter.

⁶⁰ Beybaba and İsmail are on the one side, Cenk and Alper on the other; while Nadir is indecisive between them and Kurd is missing. The actual tension is between Cenk and İsmail.

conditions; acting only on his own self-interest under the pretext of favoring others and the order of the ship; Beybaba is a classical authoritative dystopian ruler. On the other hand, there are the others (especially Cenk and Alper) who are not happy with the whole situation, feel constrained and manipulated and fall into despair at the end. With the purposeless and empty life, the scarce food supply and poor living conditions, the uncertainty of future, and finally an indifferent and tyrannic captain; the *society* on the ship, in the eyes of the crew, is a dystopian one. Although Cenk is the most active, unrestful and *heretic* one among the others; they all experience this dull, empty, unsafe, poor and oppressive life. That is the reason why the ivy winds them up without touching the captain and also why they feel a need to act together to do something in the end. Therefore, the crew, as a whole bound by the ivy, represents the classical misfit dystopian character that is sketched before.

After showing that the first requirement of dystopian fiction is met, we need to look at how the film estranges the audience from the work. The scene in which Nadir thinks he sees Kurd falling off the ship is the first one that creates a distance between the audience and the film. After this scene, Nadir sees Kurd couple of times but he cannot reach or communicate with him; which makes him think that he loses his mind. Therefore, we also cannot be sure whether he actually falls off the ship or he goes missing. The reality of filmic world starts to shatter. With Nadir, the audience also loses its sense of reality, and cannot learn what happened to Kurd. After Kurd's presence is called into question, it is possible to question everyone's presence in the ship, since the actualness of what is seen on the screen cracks. This state of being unsure about the reality of *Sarmaşık* makes the audience distant from the work of art.

Secondly, obviously, the images of ivy and snails serve the same purpose, damaging the taking of the film's fictional world as our concrete, physical, daily life. Although these images can be considered as the products of distorted minds of the crew due to losing touch with outside world and having lived in an isolated place for almost two months, they are actualized and become tangible objects.

Rather than what they represent (there are many possible ways to read them), what is important here is that by entering the physical world to which they do not belong they damage the audience's perception of the reality of the filmic world. These images remind the audience of the fact that they are actually seeing a fictional film which is something else than what they experience every day. In other words, by having the ivy and snails come into existence, the film succeeds at estranging the audience. From another perspective, it is not plausible not to question the reality and the tangibility of the ship in which the whole crew is on the verge of madness, as Berke Göl suggests:

In company with dark shadows, voices coming from another world, fear and regrets; everyone in 'country' is on the edge of madness. The opening sequence, which feels that the crew comes together accepting the nearly mysterious call, gains another meaning with this fantastic touch. While nightmares, delusions and claustrophobia make the film a ghost story, *Sarmaşık* proceeds full speed ahead towards an ending which is open to different interpretation. (my translation)⁶¹

This whole fantastic and ghostly structure of the story with the images of ivy and snails creates the distance between the audience and the film. Plus, the great voids in the film contribute this whole structure and thus the distance. Aylin Sayın argues the same:

Again, unlike the film *Gemide*, the tension comes from the things that are unseen and missing (from off-site). The unknown story of Kurd, the fact that we cannot see where the hammer comes from, screening the flowing blood instead of the moment in which İsmail is hammered in his head, shadows in dark, uncanny voices. The film leaves blanks for the audience to fill in. In the words of Karaçelik, we keep watching the film when it ends. (my translation)⁶²

Therefore, these voids and the structure creating the distance mentioned above are the reasons why *Sarmaşık* is a defamiliarizing fiction while *Gemide* is not; and thus is closer to dystopian tradition than the other.

⁶¹ Göl. Berke, *ibid.*

⁶² Sayın, Aylin. *Sarmaşık: Bir Memleket Metaforu*. Yeni Film 39-40 (2016): 44-45.

Finally, as I said before, forming an analogy between the ship and a country⁶³ provides the basis of the satire in the film. In this sense, the ship is a country with its oppressive ruling class (represented by the captain), minorities (represented by Kurd), opponents (represented by Cenk and Alper), conservatives (represented by İsmail) and neutrals (represented by Nadir). Decreasing and limited food supply in the ship equals to deteriorating economy and poor living conditions for the ruled. This country metaphor constitutes the discourse, in the Seymour Chatman's sense⁶⁴, of the film. Therefore, it is possible to read the incidents in the film as a criticism to real problems seen in actual countries.

In this sense, for example, Kurd's gone missing can be interpreted as neglecting minorities and denying their culture, identity and historical presence. Throughout the film, all of the crew use slang and swearwords, shout and scream to each other all the time, instead of talking and discussing matters in a respectful and civilized way. That refers to lack of communication and rivalry between the socio-economical classes in a society. Especially obscenity and rudeness of the language used in the ship represent the problems inherent in a patriarchal society. The fact that they do not get any help from the land is related to poor and needy countries' being neglected by the rest of the modern world. At the same time, the excessive usage of swearing by the crew belongs to an "area including subversive energies" as listed in the first chapter. As in these areas, how the crew talks and which words they choose when they talk about the situation and Beybaba himself cannot be controlled by Beybaba. As with Nadsat language in *A Clockwork Orange*, by swearing and using different kind of language, Cenk and Alper oppose the authority.

As for the other critical comments of the film, purposeless and idleness felt by the crew are the same issues for the masses in the modern societies in which

⁶³ Clearly, the first thing that comes to mind is this country's being Turkey since the ship is from Turkey and the whole crew is Turkish except Kurd who is from minority in Turkey. Yet, generalizing the analogy to any place makes the arguments of the film more efficient and suitable for the dystopian tradition.

⁶⁴ Chatman, Seymour Benjamin. *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Cornell University Press, 1980.

the religious energies lose their effect on people. As a specific criticism, the distorted relationship between İsmail-Nadir and Beybaba is a version of what can be observed in the underdeveloped or colonized countries where exploited and manipulated people still feel bonded with their rulers instead of rising against them.

All of these criticisms, inferred from the analogy mentioned above, about real world issues establish the satire (and also the discourse of the film) that is strongly incorporated in the film. Instead of criticizing directly, the director of the film prefers this analogy to make his arguments over positioning the characters in an actual country such as Turkey; which creates a distance between the audience and the film.

As can be seen, the three requirements of being a dystopian fiction are met. At the same time, the film uses the place and time in a familiar way, instead of distant places as in space or alternative worlds and of distant futuristic time. Thus, it is a dystopian film with familiar setting.

3.3. ANALYSIS OF *BABAMIN KANATLARI*

Babamın Kanatları (2016) is the first fictional feature film of Kıvanç Sezer who has directed several documentaries and short films before this film. It might be argued that his being also a documentary director affects the quite realistic tone of *Babamın Kanatları*, especially in comparison to *Sarmaşık* and *Abluka*. Whatever the reason might be, this quality of the film is crucial in the sense that it hinders the estrangement effect which is essential for any dystopian film. Because of this “too realistic” tone of the film which leaves no room for defamiliarization, *Babamın Kanatları* cannot be called as dystopian film; although it has similar concerns and arguments and thus touches the dystopian tradition on many aspects.

The film opens with a close-up of İbrahim’s (Menderes Samancılar) face. İbrahim learns that he has a cancer and cannot work anymore if he gets treatment. Then the film cuts to the footages of gigantic and greyish buildings and

skyscrapers that look like so tangible, magnificent and concrete. These footages highlight the helpless situation of İbrahim by creating a contrast between his small situation and enormousness of the buildings; set the tone of the film which resembles the one in *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*; refer to the materialistic structure of the filmic world in which there is no room for sympathy and feelings⁶⁵; and finally inform the audience that the story of the film takes place in İstanbul.

He goes back to the construction site where he works. At night, he speaks with his family via internet. In this scene, it is revealed that his family belongs to a minority group of Turkish society, specifically Kurdish, and his family stays with their relatives in the apartments that the government built for the earthquake survivors in Van. Yet these apartments are not free and İbrahim's family need money to pay housing loans to get their own flat, which worsens İbrahim's situation even more since he is the only one who can supply the money. Unlike *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*, the references here are direct. İbrahim and his family speak Kurdish and the earthquake in Van actually occurred in 2011. Therefore, the audience is informed that this film is about the social and economical problems that the minorities in Turkey are actually experiencing. This directness between the filmic world and historical realities of Turkey moves the film away from *estranging fictions* and thus the dystopian tradition.

Meanwhile, some workers complain that they do not get paid. Yusuf (Musab Ekici) overhears their conversation and informs on them. This action of Yusuf situates him with the rulers represented by Resul (Tansel Öngel). On the other hand, İbrahim does not get involved in any of these debates. He is too self-closed to pay attention to what is going on around him. Later, a student, working at the construction site, Fırat (Ali Haydar Çataltepe) falls off the building and dies. The construction company pays Fırat's family to prevent them going to court, since that way would cost the company more and harm their credibility.

⁶⁵ Obviously, this is the depiction of many, if not every, dystopian filmic world such as the one in *Children of Men*, *Blade Runner*, *Alphaville* and *Gattaca*.

İbrahim tells Yusuf about his illness and at night of that day he dreams that he is at home with his family; which signifies the simplicity and modesty of his life as opposed to Resul's and Yusuf's. İbrahim learns that he cannot get retired because of the incomplete working days. If he wants to get retired, he needs to pay for it. Since the only income he has comes from his work, if he does not work, he cannot earn money. At the same time, if he gets treatment for his illness, he cannot work. This dilemma makes his situation completely desperate. Out of desperation, İbrahim asks his friend a loan and gambles on cock fighting. He cannot find any money and goes to Resul to ask for his unpaid payments. He gets small part of it and learns that the company is not doing great since it paid compensation to the family of deceased worker.

Yusuf and Resul, on the other hand, are getting more and more closer. Resul has plans for future, such as establishing a company and starting new construction, and includes Yusuf in his plans. Then the film cuts to a scene in which three construction workers perform a regional dance, which Yusuf also loves and performs time to time. Yet, this time when he sees them dancing, he gets mad and accuses them of shirking. Later Yusuf meets with his girlfriend Nihal (Kübra Kıp) and tells her about his "big ambitious" future plans, such as establishing his own company. These scenes together clearly show that Yusuf is changing and becoming more like Resul. Yusuf accepts Resul's proposition and asks for an advance to get his uncle retired. This action of him makes his character more complicated and real. He is ambitious about the future, does not care about the contrarian workers who do not get paid, and even informs on them (all of these attributes of him can be evaluated as selfish); yet at the same time Yusuf worries about his uncle and tries to make money for him. Therefore it can be argued that Yusuf is a complex and well-constructed character with his ambition, selfishness and altruism at the same time; as opposed to the other simple and single-layered characters in the film such as İbrahim, Resul and Nihal.

As can be expected, towards the end of the film, İbrahim commits suicide by jumping off the building that he is constructing, to provide his family with

compensation money; which is foreshadowed by previous death of Fırat. He does not see any other option than killing himself, the only way for him to get money is to kill himself. The whole political system and capitalist economy represented by the construction company lead him to this bleak end. This is a direct criticism, that the film makes, to the structure of society in Turkey. However, in the final scene in which Yusuf and İbrahim's wife Hatice (Güllü Özalp Ulusoy) meet with the manager of the construction company, Levent (Mustafa Kırantepe) and the lawyer Nedim (Sarp Aydınoglu), Hatice does not take the money even though she desperately needs it. In this final scene, the manager and the lawyer are depicted as heartless, cruel and inhuman, almost in a caricaturistic way. In this final scene, it can be seen that rather than characters, both the manager and the lawyer are the instruments that the film uses to criticize the social and economical circumstances in Turkey. However, it is the first time throughout the film that Yusuf opposes the authority and the system represented by the lawyer and the manager.

As for my dystopian analysis, *Babamın Kanatları* obviously lacks the *estrangement effect* which is used to remove the audience from the work of art and thus to bring the audience a new, fresh, critical eye on the subject matter. Instead, how the film deals with social, political and economical matter is much more direct as opposed to *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*. It can be argued that *Babamın Kanatları* is a kind of fiction that belong to the socialist-realism. It does not, as in other examples of the genre, *defamiliarize* the audience. On top of that, it does not use distant time or space as its setting. Since one of the three requirements of dystopian fiction, that is outlined before, is not met; *Babamın Kanatları* is not a dystopian film.

However, there is no question as to the film's including the *satire*. The whole story of İbrahim is how a man belonging to a marginal group in Turkey can be led to a suicide, which is the only solution for him, by the political and economical systems. Plus, the opponent workers do not get paid even though they deserve it and the company has money to pay them. The company tries to manipulate Yusuf and Hatice in the last scene to pay them less and prevent them

from going to the court without feeling an empathy for their loss and the difficulties they are going through. The company does not care about its workers, the only thing that matters to it is a reputation and profit. Other than these, the death of two workers, Fırat and İbrahim, are directly related to Turkey's chronic "deadly work accident" problem. In 2016 (the year in which *Babamın Kanatları* has come to cinemas in Turkey), Turkey had the highest deadly work accident rate among the European countries (and third across the world).⁶⁶ All of these criticisms can easily be detected in the film. It also depicts the managers and the lawyer as stereotypical self-centered figures. Obviously, Levent and Resul belong to the same tradition of dystopian authorities with Hamza from *Abluka* and Beybaba from *Sarmaşık*. These are the same characters in the sense that all of them pursue their own interests without considering the others and under the pretext of favouring the whole society. This kind of authoritative dystopian character, as Somay argued, is based on Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor from *The Brothers Karamazov*.⁶⁷

On these authoritative figures plus the characters of Yusuf and İbrahim, who can be considered as "misfit dystopian protagonist", *Babamın Kanatları* touches dystopian tradition, although it does not belong to dystopian fiction because of the lack of *estrangement effect* as mentioned before. As opposed to Kadir and Ahmet from *Abluka* and, Cenk and Alper from *Sarmaşık*; İbrahim is a "flat character", in the literary sense of the term. It means that İbrahim does not change drastically throughout the film and lacks emotional depth. He does not oppose to the company managers (except asking few times Resul for his unpaid daily wage which he deserved) and does not care about the injustices around him. He just gets weaker and weaker both mentally and physically until killing himself. In short, İbrahim is a tool, rather than a character, for the film to show how the economical and political systems and the authorities holding power (Resul in this

⁶⁶ <https://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiye-olumlu-is-kazalarinda-dunyada-ucuncu-avrupada-birinci-sirada,335085>

⁶⁷ Somay, Bülent. *The View From The Masthead: Journey Through Dystopia Towards an Open-Ended Utopia*. İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2010.

case) destroy an individual by leaving no other option than suicide. Since İbrahim's marginality is emphasized, it can be generalized that the harshness of İbrahim's story shows what ethnical, socio-economical and cultural marginal groups in Turkey experience on daily basis. Yet, unlike Kadir from *Abluka* for example, İbrahim's reaction to his experience, interaction with the others and the change he is going through are not focused by the film. In this sense, he is more like an object that is affected and destroyed at the end by the authoritative figures. Actually, this is one of the problems that dystopian fictions have, that is not being able to create "real, multi-dimensional characters" and the reason why Bülent Somay does not consider *1984* as a novel.⁶⁸

However, Yusuf is a "real character" with his complex, multi-dimensional character and because of the drastic change he is going through from siding with Resul to opposing to Levent at the end. He is ambitious, selfish, lively, thoughtful and altruistic at the same time. In the scene in which Yusuf tells Nihal about his future plans, it is clear that he is not like İbrahim and even he belittles his uncle for being passive. Yet he worries about his uncle and tries to find money for İbrahim. However, Yusuf's being "misfit and heretical" is questionable. Except the last scene in which he helps Hatice and opposes to Levent and Nedim, he does not have problems with the situations in the construction site or with the management and Resul. In other words, the filmic world of the film is not a dystopian place from the point of Yusuf's view. On the other hand, İbrahim does not fit to his environment, even he is crushed by it; and thus the world depicted in *Babamın Kanatları* is a dystopian place in the eyes of İbrahim. Yet, his not being a "real character" makes it difficult for the audience to be identified with him. Therefore the film has problems with presenting a misfit dystopian protagonist, which is an another requirement for dystopian fictions.

All in all, as mentioned before, *Babamın Kanatları* is not a dystopian film, although it is *satirical* and socially, politically critical about the system and the society in Turkey. On the other hand, it lacks a strong *estrangement effect* or a

⁶⁸ Somay, p.110-120

noticable *absent paradigm* because of the tone and style of the film. Yusuf Güven argues the same:

In this sense, the director's cinema, who studied in Bologna, Italy that is famous with "cineteca", adapts reality into a screenplay in a simple and striking way, which forms the basis of Italian neorealism. The camera neither moves the audience away from the subject nor keeps the audience close enough for it to be able to identify with the subject.⁶⁹ (my translation)

In short, it does not *defamiliarize* the audience and cannot present "classical misfit, heretical dystopian protagonist" whose point of view is used to define the setting as dystopian. *Babamın Kanatları* can be used as an example to show that not every satirical, realistic film presenting the clash between the oppressive authoritative figures and the misfit "characters" (that are crushed by them and the systems) and also utilizing the bleak, greyish, depressive and dark atmosphere (which makes it similar to *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık* in a visual way) is a dystopian one.

Before going into the conclusion chapter, there are two final points about the differences and similarities between the three films, other than those mentioned above. The first difference between *Babamın Kanatları*, *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık*, which is related to *absent paradigms*, is that *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık* are able to generalize the issues they handle; instead of referring to a specific time or place, which makes them even farther from the socialist-realism in cinema. In the case of *Abluka*, restricting the knowledge about the filmic world (which is named as "lack of knowledge" above) and mixing accents used in the film on purpose make it impossible to locate the time and place in the film. In other words, the neighbourhood in *Abluka* could be anywhere in anytime, and the matters the film tries to criticize are valid for any society which suffers from political violence. In case of *Sarmaşık*, the whole allegorical structure of the film makes it possible to view the ship as a country, not just Turkey but any country. This generalization allowed by the both films is inherent in dystopian tradition, as many dystopian

⁶⁹ Güven, Yusuf. "Babamın Kanatları: İşçinin Onuru." *Yeni Film* 41-42 (2016): 4-7.

science-fiction film taking place in future and distant places are not about just one specific society or country. In *Babamın Kanatları*, on the other hand, the generalizability is more limited as opposed to other two films because of the limited *absent paradigms* and the direct references to the real world experiences of the minorities in Turkey.

As for the second one, which is directly related to the item “Embeddedness” presented towards the end of the first chapter, all three films open *in media res*, without any introduction to the filmic worlds. Presenting an estranging filmic world in a familiar way as if the audience actually lives in that world, increases the effect of estrangement; which is the mere reason why dystopian fictions open *in media res*, as in *Abluka*. As mentioned before, many questions in *Abluka*, such as why some people living in the neighbourhood are seen as potential terrorists, are deliberately left unanswered, as if the audience already knows the answers. The implication here is that the fictional world of *Abluka* on the screen is actually living; the whole characters, relations between them, the social rules in this world and the political systems, in short everything is embedded in this living world, as in every realistic, non-estranging, familiar filmic world. Because of the absence of explanation and introduction, what is presented on the screen becomes a small fraction of a larger time line. This implies that things in *Abluka* has always been like that and always will be; which provides the feeling of being trapped for the audience, in the same way Kadir and Ahmet feel in the film.

However, on the other hand, in the case of *Babamın Kanatları*, this technique strengthens the quite realistic tone of the film, in accordance with the usage of the technique as in the other realistic fictions. The same technique that contributes to the *estrangement effect* in *Abluka* here narrows the distance between the actual world of the audience and the filmic world of *Babamın Kanatları*. In other words, in *Babamın Kanatları*, the absence of introduction to the filmic world means that it is the same world that the audience lives in and knows in detail.

In accordance with this technique, dystopian misfit characters are generally very close to the authorities or the systems. For example, Deckard is a blade runner who works for the Tyrell Company to “retire” replicants. As for the three films from contemporary Turkish cinema; Kadir works for Hamza in *Abluka*, Nadir is Beybaba’s most trusted man in *Sarmaşık* and Yusuf is close to Resul who is a role model for him in *Babamın Kanatları*. In all three, the misfit characters actually work for whom they oppose to at the same time; which complicates their situation. The relation between these misfit ones and the powerful others is not just about hate, it involves love and trust as well; which is the situation in many dystopian work.

CONCLUSION

Dystopia, both in literature and cinema, is much more related to social, political and cultural issues of the empirical world of an artist and the history itself, than science-fiction and utopia; which does not mean that the other two do not include criticisms about the actual matters. As mentioned earlier, every work of art has political, social and cultural aspects. Yet, dystopia puts these into its center. And thus the logical question here is how the dystopia is different from other types of fiction that are centered around the political and social matters, such as socialist-realist cinema. Obviously, the principal difference between them is how they deal with these matters, or the difference between them is the *discourse*. In this regard, the primary technique of dystopia is *defamiliarization* or *estrangement effect*; which cannot be put forward in the case of socialist-realist cinema.

There are several ways to defamiliarize the audience throughout the history of dystopia. The one way that dystopian films use is to set either the place as unearthly or the time as future; which is one of the reasons why dystopia has been seen as sub-genre of science-fiction. The question of this thesis here is whether it is possible for a dystopian film to take place “here and now” and to defamiliarize the viewers at the same time. If the answer is yes, then the question of how it defamiliarizes without resorting to estranging time and place should be addressed. This is exactly what Chapter 3 shows.

In addition to being satirical and estranging, one more criterion for dystopian fiction is presented, that is a need of presence of ‘misfit character(s)’ whose point of view is used to evaluate the filmic world as dystopian. Kadir and Ahmet in *Abluka*, the whole crew except Beybaba in *Sarmaşık* and İbrahim in *Babamın Kanatları* provide this point of view. The other concepts used for determining dystopian places such as intention of the director or author, response from the viewer or reader and *temperament* of a work are less reliable and thus those concepts could cause many different interpretations.

Is the misfit protagonist's relative situation, that is exactly on the opposite side of the rulers of a fictional world, the only way to present that world as dystopian? In other words, is it possible to create a dystopian filmic world without presenting misfit characters? It can be noticed that all dystopian films listed throughout this thesis include 'misfit dystopian protagonist'. Thus the question of whether there can be alternative ways that could be used to determine any filmic place as dystopian, requires further research.

In short, if a film is called as "dystopia", it has to include satire, to be estranging and to involve "misfit protagonist"; as outlined in the "three criteria for dystopian fictions" in Chapter 1. *Abluka* and *Sarmaşık* meet these three even though they take place in a quite familiar place (set "here and now") which is not estranging at all. Yet, as analyzed in Chapter 3, both films succeed at defamiliarizing the audience. *Babamın Kanatları* is included in the analysis to highlight the difference between defamiliarizing and non-defamiliarizing films that are centered around the similar matters that they try to criticize. Although *Babamın Kanatları* touches the dystopian tradition on many aspects, it is not a dystopia.

It is noticed that the years in which dystopian "here and now" films produced in Turkey are released (*Abluka* in 2015, *Sarmaşık* in 2015, *Gölgesizler* in 2009 [*Tepenin Ardı* (2012) can also be considered here]), are quite close to each other. Since dystopia has always been about the present and problems inherent in societies, there have to be serious social, political and cultural issues in Turkey in recent years that led the directors to produce dystopias. The relation between these historical issues in Turkey and the matters dealt with in the films is open to research as well. In other words, why have these dystopian films from contemporary Turkish cinema been shot now and not before? This question requires interdisciplinary study, beyond the film studies.

In fact, there is a more intriguing question when all of the dystopian films with realistic settings are considered. It can be argued that towards the end of 20th

century and in the beginning of the 21st, dystopian films tend to take place in more familiar worlds, which are almost inseparable from the immediate world of the audience, instead of futuristic or unearthly, extraterrestrial places. And since dystopia has been born out of the dreadful developments in history and science;⁷⁰ this asserted transition to the realistic settings in dystopian films, that are almost inseparable from the actual reality of the audience, has to be related to the some developments in history and science.

First of all, the film corpus for that kind of setting needs to be enlarged by including films from various countries and directors to strengthen the claim of this transition in dystopian cinema. Secondly, the relation between dystopian films with familiar worlds and the developments in science and social, political and cultural changes especially after the 1980s needs to be revealed; which requires much broader study. Also, whether ‘here and now’ dystopian films are encountered more often in the countries that are more unstable in terms of politics, culture and economy such as Argentina and Turkey, can also be addressed; since the immediacy of the problems inherent in those countries may have an effect on the directors who chose familiar time and place as setting instead of future or other planets to emphasize the urgency of the problems. All of these questions and suggestions are open to debate and require further reading and studying.

The aim of this thesis, as mentioned before, is to question the very definition of dystopia. Removing the “non-existent society” from the definition of dystopia stated by Lyman Sargent leads to an entirely different research into the recent Turkish cinema. As suggested by Ruth Levitas for utopian studies, the questions related to the definitions, however different and opposing they are, should be encouraged.⁷¹ Because out of new definitions, new perspectives and studies will arise.

⁷⁰ For example, the second law of thermodynamics that implies heat death of universe and thus the end of humanity; interpretation of the theory of evolution stating that humans may evolve into less developed creatures; the two world wars; invention of the atomic bomb; mass production and media. All of these developments in science and history fueled the dystopian novels and films.

⁷¹ Levitas, Ruth. *The concept of utopia*. Vol. 3. Peter Lang, 2010.

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