

PASSING ETHNIC IDENTITIES:
A CASE STUDY ON COMEDY IN TURKISH CINEMA

A Master's Thesis

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September 2014

To Devrim, Duygu, Patiş and Garfie

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Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

September 2014

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies

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ABSTRACT

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September 2014

This study analyzes minority representation strategies in Turkish cinema, particularly Kurds in mainstream comedies. In the study passing is taken into account as a representation strategy that was developed and sustained by the dominant ideology in order to maintain ethnic inequalities in a society. Study examines how minority representations are created by majority through different discourses and how Kurdishness contextually either exaggerated or lessened by passing strategies of the mainstream Turkish cinema to privilege one ethnicity, Turkishness, over the other(s).

Keywords: Minorities, Narrative, Identity, Passing, Kurds, Comedy

ÖZET

ETNİK KİMLİKLERİN AKTARIMI: TÜRK SİNEMASINDA KOMEDİ ÜZERİNE BİR DURUM ÇALIŞMASI

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Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

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Eylül 2014

Bu çalışma Türk sinemasında genel olarak azınlıkların özelde ise Kürtlerin ana akım komedilerdeki temsillerini analiz etmektedir. Çalışmada aktarım kavramı toplumdaki etnik eşitsizliği sürdürmek amacıyla baskın ideoloji tarafından geliştirilmiş ve sürdürülmekte olan bir temsil stratejisi olarak ele alınmıştır. Çalışma azınlık temsillerinin çoğunluk tarafından nasıl oluşturulduğu ve diğer azınlıklar karşısında Türklüğü olumlamak adına bağlamsal olarak Kürt temsillerinin ana akım sinemada abartılı ya da belli belirsiz olarak aktarılma stratejisini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azınlıklar, Anlatı, Kimlik, Aktarım, Kürtler, Komedi

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My interest towards passing as an identity building strategy rose during one of my graduate courses when we discussed how a black actor seems blacker when he represents a drug dealer or a pimp, and how he seems whiter in a role of district attorney or a doctor. To that moment, to be honest, I had not paid much attention to color scheme of the actors as a character building strategy including light effects and cinematographic choices.

As an urban, Turkish intellectual most of the time I feel like a minority in today's society. I can only imagine being a lesbian Jewish woman or a transsexual Kurdish individual in Turkish society whose voices are less heard than mine, if not heard at all. As a Turk, I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had not been informed about privileges of being a Turk which brings an advantage that I, knowingly or not, benefited through all my life. This kind of privilege in society inevitably affects not only individual and group life, but also chances and opportunities in every field including media.

It allowed me to think about minority representation strategies in Turkish cinema, particularly Kurds in mainstream comedies where they can be acknowledged as the blacks of Turkish society. Since “blackness” is a contextual term as Max Black suggests “the poor are the negroes of Europe”, or as John Lennon says, “Women are the niggers of the world”, and as in Gustave de Molinari’s 1880 dated observation, “Irish are treated by English as a kind of inferior race, as a kind of white negroes.” (Pieterse: 23-24), I suggest Kurds can be considered as blacks of Turkey whose Kurdishness contextually either exaggerated or lessened by passing strategies of the mainstream Turkish cinema that privileges one ethnicity, Turkishness, over the other(s).

Politics of representation is still one of the core discussions of media studies where media hold significant power of production and dissemination of images which inevitably become the source of information for the masses. Media politics of the mainstream ideology regarding race, gender, ethnicity, and class are decisive to shape the understanding of a given nation. As for Turkey, for long years this ideology may be expressed as the ideology of the ‘white’ Turks which had derived from a nationalistic discourse. Using the advantage of being privileged in political and cultural domain, the national ideology conferred its dominance in cinema which lasted until very recent history.

Turkish nation was constructed as a concrete, unified entity, an ‘imagined community’, although the members of the community know little of each other; they are obliged to feel a deep attachment as in the famous child song: “There is a village there, far away, that village is our village although we do not visit, although we do not see.” Due to assimilation policies of the Republic regarding integrating diverse ethnic and religious groups, Turkish cinema’s view on minority identities and

contribution to them through representations were shaped according to the state policy along with strong censorship which resulted in stereotyping and limited representations. Furthermore, Turkish actors and actresses passed ethnic and religious minorities from a privileged stance. The cinematic representation of minorities is inseparable from the dictates of the nation-state. Wimal Dissanayake (quoted in Hill & Gibson, 1998:530) states that:

A nation-state should be homogenous, but when filmmakers attempt to articulate the experiences and lives of the minorities by thematizing the hardships these people go through, they create a representational space from where the hegemonic discourse of the state can be usefully subverted, and the idea of social and cultural difference emphasized.

Therefore, this study deals with passing which is a representation tool that was developed and sustained by the dominant ideology in order to maintain ethnic and racial inequalities in a society with a rigid binary and hierarchal structure where people are either privileged or marginalized. It is a unique representation tool that was developed and sustained by the majority where minorities are represented by majority actors that allows maintaining unequal social power. Passing requires a rigid perception of otherness and constant imposition of otherness through representations.

I chose to study passing of Kurdishness in comedy films because of two reasons: Kurds are the largest ethnic group in Turkey with an estimated population of 10%-15% of the society of around 77 million people according to 2103 dated census (the rate is an estimation since the last census posed the question about mother tongue was in 1965). However, they were only passed by Turks until late 1980s without a name or reference to their ethnicities. Cinema audience was expected to believe the

passing characters as Kurds with some hints like lack of language and heavy accent, the geographical settings, and the dress codes. They were not presented as an ethnic group having cultural differences, but a group of people lack of manners, and lack of codes and values of their own.

To this end, I chose to study comedies rather than other *genres* because comedy works “as a shortcut to community” (Medhurst, 2007: 21). Since comedy gratifies impulses which we normally repress, it becomes a very fruitful terrain to study ethnicity through ethnic jokes and stereotypes. Comedies allow us laughing at the others from a distance. After all laughing at speech, dresses, and presumed behaviors and lack of manner is rude, but laughing at any minority in cinema, particularly Kurds, is a safer ground. Moreover, when box success is considered in Turkey, comedy is the dominating *genre*. Consequently, popularity, diffuseness and the structure of the *genre* makes it an ideal terrain to study Kurdishness in comedies. Last but not least, although humor is widely tackled in anthropological and philosophical studies, despite its popularity, it is a rather neglected area in film studies. Andrew Horton states that comedy has long been considered as an “inferior *genre* in Western culture” and it is considerably understudied in the relevant literature (1991:2) to which I want to contribute.

The practice of passing in comedies offers a productive framework to understand the way of seeing and representing the other. From a Freudian perspective, ethnic comedy is a good signifier of the subconscious of a society or the collective thinking of the majority. To this end, I will argue passing through Yeşilçam- cinematic era from the 50s to early 80s- comedy films of late 70s and early 80s which delivered moments of pleasure, mostly to urban middle class, through certain stereotypes that are product of a dominant discourse where ethnic passing underlined the differences,

instead of providing solution to social prejudices. Yeşilçam comedies will be analyzed in the light of superiority and relief theories of humor which concentrates on repressed hostile feelings and implicit ethnic superiority. Contemporary films will be examined to reveal the changes of passing and the narrative towards Kurds. Latter films, written and directed by Kurdish origin mainstream director/actor/writer Yılmaz Erdoğan, will reveal special cultural codes of an ethnic minority, which was not presented previously, and his orchestration of speech, make-up, costume, décor and music along with acting breaks the positional superiority of the former narratives. However, I will suggest that his passing strategy doesn't differ from the previous one in terms of affirmation of Turkishness and it is in line with the unchanged subconscious of the society.

While discussing the issue, I will not concentrate on the accuracy or the reality of the representations; rather I will take the path of Mikhael Bakhtin who suggests that human consciousness and artistic practice do not get into contact with the real directly, but rather ideology. Since artistic language is the object of representation, it is not the reflection of the real world; therefore an artistic discourse is a reflection of a reflection which is a mediation of an already textualized and discursivized socio-ideological world (Stam, 1991: 252). The discourses that art represents are social and historical therefore are destined to change in time. I will take into account these social changes while discussing passing in films and draw attention to connection between representation, discourse and power.

The theoretical framework for this study is articulated within the field of discourse analysis that examines the structures and functions of the textual and visual components in their social, political and cultural contexts. This approach claims that in order to understand the role of cinema and its messages, detailed attention should

be paid to the structures and strategies of such discourses and their relation to institutional arrangement. Therefore a brief conceptual analysis is required to see kinds of power relations that are involved in cinematic production. I will concentrate on the concepts of power/knowledge and ideology to understand the conventions of ethnic passing in comedy films.

Thus, the aim of the paper is to reveal how minority representations worked for the construction of un-Turkishness, how Turkish mainstream namely Yeşilçam 'passed' minorities in Turkish comedies, specifically Kurds in comedies set in East Anatolia from 1978 to 1981, and how this passing has changed on surface, but not in heart, in contemporary comedy films of 2000s.

The seven analyzed films have common features of being set in Eastern province, villages and a small town, where underdevelopment is underlined with Kurdish rural life. To this extend, I will examine *Salako/Stupid(o)* (Atif Yılmaz, 1974), *Kibar Feyzo/Polite Feyzo* (Atif Yılmaz, 1978), *Erkek Güzeli Sefil Bilo/Man Beauty Miserable Bilo* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1979), *Şark Bülbülü/Mockingbird of the East* (Kartal Tibet, 1979), and *Davaro* (Kartal Tibet, 1981) as Yeşilçam comedies which pass Kurdishness as the opposite of Turkishness with a privileged and hegemonic point of view by orientaling the ethnic people through depicting them as uncivilized, childish, ignorant, lazy, and lack of Turkish urban manners. Same era films *Banker Bilo* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1980), can be considered a sequel to *Erkek Güzeli Sefil Bilo/Man Beauty Miserable Bilo*, *Şalvar Davası/Shalwar Case* (Kartal Tibet, 1983) and *Züğürt Ağa/Broke Ağa* (Nesli Çölgeçen, 1985) are not involved in this study since the first is an urban comedy set in İstanbul, the second is a rural comedy set in Western Anatolia and not passing Kurdishness, and the last is not a comedy but a drama.

Yeşilçam comedies will be followed by the analysis of two contemporary province films *Vizontele/Vizontele* (Ömer Faruk Sorak & Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2001) and *Vizontele Tuuba/Vizontele Tuuba* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2004) which depict Kurds ‘less Kurds’, but ‘more Turks’, a passing strategy requires assimilated Kurds to be welcomed by the audience. My claim is that depending on the cinematic era mainstream cinema passes Kurds as ‘more or less Kurds’, in a strategy which aims to maintain dominance of Turkishness over the others of the society through underlying the presumed differences or lack of them.

CHAPTER II

PASSING

In recent years the theme of passing has overspread and has become a source of productive debate terrain within certain disciplines, including literary theory, philosophy, cultural studies, gender studies, race and ethnic studies. This is to say, the representation of passing facilitates critical discourses about essentialist categories such as race, gender and sexuality. The concern of this study is the relation of passing between ethnicity and cultural representation. Therefore, firstly I will define passing in sociologic terms, as a process of rejection, imposition, adaptation and perception, then I will draw attention to forms of passing and its requirements, finally since passing is a matter of taking appearance for reality I will discuss passing in terms of cinematic representation from tragic interpretations, relying on the conventional understanding of the term, to more contemporary understandings that involve comic ethnic stereotypes and performances.

2.1. Passing as a Social Phenomenon

As a social phenomenon, in simple terms, passing is an essentialist notion that indicates acting against one's true subjectivity. Although the notion is contested, traditionally it means negation of subjectivity and denial of one's racial self. Racial and ethnic passing requires a society that has a majority and minorities. And, "due to cruel social, political, cultural and historical realities of the system of racial oppression characteristic of American society, passing assumed a peculiar role relative to African-American context" (Hostert-Camaiti, 2007:10) where deception is performed secretly by light colored blacks to promote in social life. "The commonsense understanding of the notion contains deception and self denial in a society with a rigid binary and hierarchal structure [where] there are two classes of people: privileged and marginalized," Camaiti adds (ibid: 11).

Traditional approach considers this self negation and denial of racial self carries negative implications. "On this view passing is the intentional presenting oneself to the world in a manner that conflicts how the individual views herself or himself" (ibid: 12). Conflicition derives from violating the laws of identity and sameness, from disengagement of true identity. At the end, the core of the person is violated or buried forever. These theories "tend to position passing as a radical and transgressive practice that serves to destabilize and traverse the system of knowledge and vision upon which subjectivity and identity precariously rests" (Ahmed, 1999: 88). From this stance, racial passers are trespassers of the society who cause rupture and breakage from the social norms which stabilize and secure social identities.

Considering the social realm of the 19th century in the USA, instead of negating the term, we may call passing as a survival tool and a ticket to freedom. The term has

gained positive meaning in time by some scholars such as Kathleen Pfeiffer who says “passing should be seen as a part of American individualism, the tradition in which individuals make and remake themselves” (Hostert-Camaiti, 2007:13). She suggests that passing is about self-making, expressing human agency and subjectivity. Similarly Werner Sollors chose not to see the phenomenon through a “narrow frame of racial hatred” where passing becomes a “structural conflict between identity as achieved and ascribed” (ibid: 14).

Then, the notion becomes a performative one not necessarily relies on self or racial hatred, but it is more about to build one’s self according to whatever design is chosen. Gayle Wald contributes to the discussion by stating that narratives of passing pose an ethical and political challenge to the contemporary readers and asks them to “consider their own political, theoretical, or ideological interests in race as a site of identification and political or cultural investment, its fictional qualities notwithstanding” (Wald, 2007: 9). Thus passing becomes a useful tool to question issues of identity and meta-narratives that most of us are privileged to choose to ignore. And, passing, finally, forces us to think what makes people ‘other’ and why we should care. Since the term is strictly in relation with social hierarchy, it is easily adoptable to Turkish society where Turkishness is privileged and the others are marginalized starting from the beginning of the nation state. Most of the times, passing had been used as a tool of transgressing the rigid boundaries of Turkish society to be accepted. Acclaimed director Yılmaz Güney stated in one his interviews that:

Many Kurds held prominent positions in society and reached the highest ranks of the state apparatus, but this was because they never said ‘I am a Kurd’. ‘The Kurdish deputies in the parliamentary are elected as Turks living in a country that denies the existence of Kurdish population” (in Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 117).

2.2. Passing as Performance

The concept has been widened in years containing not only race but gender, religion and class as well. Through the years real life experiences indicate that many people chose to pass another identity for many reasons from social acceptance to professional achievements. New interpretations of passing pass beyond the context of race, and as Elaine Ginsberg poses, passing has become a tool to challenge essentialism and it focuses on construction of identity. Using the real life experiences of a slave called Edmund Kenney who passed as white in 1836 and Teena Brandon who passed as a man, called himself Brandon Teena, in 1993, Nebraska whose life story was told in *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Pierce, 1999), where he was impersonalized by Hillary Swank who won an Academy Award for her performance, Ginsberg suggests that identities are structured beyond the modalities of truth or false. While evaluating their stories she states that their actions may be called “performative, neither constituted by nor indicating the existence of a “true self” or core identity” [...] the stories illustrate, “passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adaptation and rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties” (Ginsberg, 1996: 2). In Kenney’s case he was rewarded by freedom, but in Brandon’s case he was brutally murdered when his physical gender was revealed.

In the postmodern context, passing negates a true core or identity, instead “the process and discourse of passing challenges essentialism that is often the foundation of identity politics, a challenge that may be seen as either threatening or liberating but in either instance discloses the truth that identities are not singularly true or false but multiple and contingent” (Ginsberg, 1996: 4). Similarly Samira Kawash states “there is no authentic, original identity that could be hidden or imitated; there are copies and copies of copies that give the impression of originality” (in Hostert-

Camaiti, 2007: 16). Shortly passing becomes a tool for liberation from the rigid rules of the society and from the stereotypes which redesigns the boundaries of categories and the symbolic universe.

In some cases passing may be temporary, brief and situational and the reason of passing is motivated by other reasons such as exposes of racism. As remembered, German journalist Walraff had passed for a Turkish immigrant worker (*Gastarbeiter*) for two years from 1983 under the name of Ali Levent Sinirlioğlu, and worked in various places from McDonalds to Thyssen. Furthermore, he placed himself among the people who were tested for medicine. He collected his bitter memories of being a minority in Germany in his 1985 dated highly acclaimed book *Ganz Unten/The Lowest of the Low* where he documented ill behavior immigrants had faced, and the mistreatment he received at the hands of employers, landlords and the German government.

Similarly, white American journalist John Howard Griffin's 1961 dated ethno-journalistic study *Black Like Me* presents his experiment in race passing in the South states during the late 1959 to reveal black oppression and white privilege. As a Texan, he medically and cosmetically altered his skin color to pass as a black man in some of the most segregated and impoverished regions of the South. His experiences vary from being turned away from hotels and restaurants and being target of racial animosity to being denied from banking privileges gained him a "white cross-racial of understanding" that would be impossible to gain through orthodox methods (Ginsberg, 1996:151-152). These two journalists reveal the importance of passing in communication and in understanding the isolated groups. Thus passing has become a political tool through which we think about the meanings of classical notions of

identity, like Turk, minority or non-Muslim, and why we should care these identities after all.

As described the term contains myriad kinds of passing driven by different aims and reasons, from avoiding social conflict or rejection, or to fulfill personal and professional aspirations one can pass full time, part time or only on occasion as described in the experiences of the journalists. In most cases passing is about people who pass to be more truly themselves, and at the very least they make us to assess the validity of context regarding social issues from ethnicity to class and gender.

2.3. How Do We Pass?

In order to pass and “to be” one has to act, behave, talk, and, shortly, live in order to convince others who they really want to be or acknowledged to be. Not in all cases passing is a liberating experience, for instance in the 16th century Ottoman Empire, where high taxes had levied on non-Muslims, Christians were passing as Muslim in public life. Since they pass as Sunni Muslim, these people called as Crypto Christian who could had declared themselves as Christians in the 19th century (Yaşartürk, 2012: 80-81) To pass, one may have to change her/his, talking, walking, clothing, body language, gestures, hair color, and some other physical attributes in addition to change of the life style. Then, in order to pass some labels about the adapted identity come into recognition. The ability to pass involves a technique of the self that is to project the bodily image through alterations of various signifiers. Then when a black passes as white what are the elements for convincing others that he or she is as white as milk? Or a Jew passing for gentile, Kurd passing for Turk, what standards of

morality, codes and values are praised? How do we read as we look at others' bodies and classify them for their class, gender or ethnicity?

Passing requires both eliminating, rejecting certain aspects of given life or identity, or denial of background and ancestry, in most cases secrecy, and in return adopting and executing new aspects attributed to the selves other than the given one. Since the scope of this study is passing as ethnic minorities in comedies, I will limit the discussion with ethnical aspects of passing. Therefore, I will clarify the term of ethnicity, and secondly discuss the aspects of ethnic-labeling which makes passing possible.

“Ethnic identity has traditionally meant the associations with the more stable elements of one’s heritage (traditions, people-hood, orientation to the past, religion, language, ancestry, values, economics and aesthetics) and culture (social organization)” (Bernal& Knight, 1993; Gans, 1979 in Nakayama &Martin, 1999: 29). Ethnicity was discussed by scholars from different disciplines from sociology to anthropology and one of the oldest definitions is from sociologist Milton Gordon who named the conditions for an ethnic group that are race, religion and national origin which together create a people-hood relying on cultural pluralism. R. A. Shermerhorn added a component to ethnic identity that is “memories of a shared past”. Anthropologists Raoul Naroll and Ronald Reminick drew attention to the parameters of being an ethnic group such as territorial contiguity, language, local community structure, levels of operation. David Schneider underlined the importance of “small group of epitomizing symbols. Among the most influential anthropologists in the field, Frederik Barth emphasizes the importance of self-ascription; the factors that are recognized significant by the subjects. He shifts emphasis from internal factors like race and religion to individual’s choice. Then the core of the ethnic group

is the codes and values which are divided into two: overt signals of food, dress, and language, and basic value orientations of standards of morality and excellence (Friedman, 1991: 14-15).

Among the brief sociological and anthropological definitions of ethnicity, the ones that favor the predetermined conditions like blood and nature, and the ones on self-determination and personal taste which may be read as self ascription, I will take into consideration the both views without compromising opposite theories rely both on, “descent and consent” as Werner Sollors states (ibid: 19). In addition to descent and consent of the group, ethnicity also is defined by containing the others’ perception that brings “labeling and identification” (Hall, 1992) (Nakayama & Martin, 1999: 29). In the context of this study labeling becomes crucial; how Turks label themselves and as well as the others? To what extent dominant discourse acknowledge the above mentioned codes and values? To give an example, there are two significant Kurdish words used in Turkish slang to insult to subject in terms of manners: *hirbo* and *kıro*. These words had entered in Turkish language through 70s and 80s when urban immigration of the Kurds significantly increased. *Hirbo* originally means the Kurdish character in tradition theatre *ortaoyunu*, and *kıro* literally means young boy in Kurdish. However, these words have lost their original meaning and become labeling tools in daily life with wide spread usage referring to uncivilized manners, boorishness and being hick, respectively. And sometimes, as Yılmaz Güney noted, even “being called as Kurd is an insult” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 117). Similarly there are other degrading terms regarding other minorities in Turkey such as ‘Armenian seed’ and ‘Greek bastard’. Thus, ethnic labeling is a strong part of hate speech in Turkey.

Inevitably any kind of identity is defined and experienced through socially constructed expressions which are based on social hierarchy of judgment. Classical sayings of Atatürk, founder of the Republic, are good examples of positive self labeling: ‘Turkish nation is smart, Turkish nation is hard working’ and ‘how happy the one who says I am Turk’. Since the aim of the new Republic was a rationalist progress, it was an understandable and, to some extent, useful statement, but it is a reasonable question to ask: if Turkish nation is smart and hard working, what are the others who do not consider themselves as Turks? The complex position of the state towards pre-existing ethnicities reveals itself in such discourses. This saying proves the construction and dynamic nature of labeling happens in certain discourses and is subject to change in time. Similarly, African-Americans were labeled as black by the white majority, but in the last decades with “self-determination and control over their identity”, the black community has changed their labeling with drawing attention to the ancestry over their color (Nakayama & Martin, 1999: 31).

Since films are coproduction of time, place, culture, authorship, desire, spectator mediation, and acting among other factors and forces (Foster, 2003: 3), by no means cinema attempts to capture reality; instead it captures distorted hegemonies of kinds that are nothing but fiction. An important part of this fiction is acting, a deliberate fabrication which aims to substitute illusion for reality. Therefore a brief history of passing in cinema in general, comedies in particular, will be discussed to see how the notion of sociological passing was used by cinema, then how the term has evolved in time from racist and tragic interpretations to comic performances.

2.4. Passing in Cinema

The traditional sense of act of passing that is to pass as white was reversed in early days of cinema due to racial prejudice where black characters were routinely played by whites in blackface wearing black face make-up, in order to mimic and appear as a black person. Back then, it was the only way to see an act of pseudo-black performance. In the first film of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903) all of the major black roles were whites in blackface. This tradition continued in films like *The Nigger* (Edgar Lewis, 1915) and *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) where Griffith casted whites in blackface to represent all of its major black characters, but reaction against the film's racism largely put an end to this practice in dramatic films. Thereafter, whites in blackface would appear almost exclusively in broad comedies in the context of a vaudeville or minstrel performance within a film such as in *Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936), and *Everybody Sing* (Edwin L. Marin, 1938). Black makeup was largely eliminated from cinema in the U.S. after the end of the 30s, when public sensibilities regarding race began to change where blackface became increasingly associated with racism and bigotry. Although blackface was erased from cinema, made-up whites routinely played Native Americans, Asians, Arabs, and so forth, for several more decades (Strausbaugh, 2006: 203-215).

The act of blackface was parodied in *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008) where Robert Downey Jr. plays a Caucasian Australian actor who is so committed to method acting an African-American character that he has his skin surgically darkened. "I'm a dude playin' a dude disguised as another dude," he drawls. His role is a parody of hardcore method actors though parody of blackface. Similarly, Spike Lee addresses blackface in his comedy *Bamboozled* (2000) where he tells a story of a

black television executive who wants to get fired and to this end hires two black street performers who perform blackface on a TV show which becomes a huge success. Both films humorously dramatize and criticize racism through passing and display how blackness is symbolized through an array of seemingly embodied signs from black skin, full lips to black way of walking and jive talking. These performances are mocking essentialist identity creation through allegedly racial norms.

After the WWII the narrative frames of the films had changed along with the social changes. War time contributions of black soldiers rose awareness towards racial segregation. While discussing the narrative changes, Gayle Ward states that although new films about passing seem to put forward liberal narratives regarding questions of racial integration, the films such as *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949) and *Lost Boundaries* (Alfred G. Werker, 1949) depict minority experiences for majority audience and “establish passing as the justification, in retrospect, for disciplining of the racially defined subject in the name of national interests.” Ward also underlines that in the both films white actors pass as black who are passing white which is a “conventional practice underscoring the industry’s reluctance to integrate with black labor force” (Ward, 2000: 21). White passing blacks in mainstream cinema derives from financial and social reasons such as easy promotion and marketing, the impossibility of interracial romance, to draw white audience (ibid: 91), a very similar pattern of Yeşilçam in which minorities were passed by Turks where the majority of the audience was Muslim-Turks.

Above mentioned films tell stories of light colored black people who pass for white through their lives and face a defining moment in their lives where a conflict occurs between their race, national identity and class. Both films underscore the possibility

of American dream when worked hard “while also insisting that they (protagonists) remain in their places, racially speaking” (Ward, 2000: 87). A contemporary film about white passing *Human Stain* (Robert Benton, 2003) adopted from the same name novel of Philip Roth, Sir Anthony Hopkins plays a distinguished professor although being black who passed as Jewish American. His character Coleman Silk is accused of racism when he calls two absent students from class as spooks without even knowing that they were black. He has two choices; to come clean and reveal his secret that he is black or resign where he chooses the latter. Ironically he dies in the hands of an anti-Semite where he becomes a tragic figure. Eventually, passing becomes, if not altogether bad, to some extent a really bad idea, and society, or life itself, will punish the passer for breaking the rules (Kroeger, 2004: 2). Consequently, mentioned cinematic representations through passing in mainstream cinema shape public discourse about race, and unfortunately not in a liberal or in a progressive manner. The films are like Greek tragedy if not didactic, eager to render retribution to those who exceeded and overstep presumed natural boundaries.

Passing of other ethnicities are also questionable if not problematic. American mainstream cinema routinely turns to non-Asian actors to portray Asian characters in films. In the history of Hollywood many known actors and actresses, such as Katharine Hepburn, Fred Astaire, Ingrid Bergman, Yul Brynner, and John Wayne, took roles that required them to "slant" their eyes, do the funny walk attributed as Oriental, and practice poor Oriental accents. These yellow-face performances by Caucasians both reinforce and embody labeling reveal itself in negative stereotypes consisting of funny accent, buck teeth, glasses, and sometimes prosthetic eyelids and taping eyes back into a slant. This practice gives us the perception of Asianness in Western culture where Asian people are degraded to a few elements all about

appearance. German-born Luise Rainer won an Academy Award for passing a Chinese peasant in *The Good Earth* (Sidney Franklin, 1937) with a bad make-up without even attempting for a Chinese accent. Directed by Tom Tykwer and Lana and Andy Wachowski, *The Cloud Atlas* (2012) is one of the most epic displays of yellow-face where audience exposed to images of non-Asian actors wearing slanty eyes instead of using Asian actors. One of the stories is set in Neo Seoul in the year 2144, where Jim Sturgess and Keith David wear makeup and eye-enhancements to appear ethnically Asian. With a little adjustment to eyes, the film offers being Korean requires nothing but slanty eyes. Yellow-face logic, as in black and brown-face and any other faces, supports and maintains an unequal power relation between the majority and the minority where imaginary and derogatory representations are executed by white actors while minority actors are excluded from acting such roles. As a practice of cultural appropriation, yellow-face recreates what is thought to be Asian and gives clue about the collective thinking of the majority. Therefore, “the production and distribution of imaginary Orientalist externalizations of Asianness helps reinforce the mainstream dominant control of cultural performance generally” (Ono& Pham, 2009: 45-46). This tendency is also relevant to Yeşilçam which controlled the ethnic representations in a tight sphere where non-Muslim minorities were passed by Turkish actors/actresses with highly exaggerated manners through imaginary and derogatory representations.

When it comes to comedies passing gains a different meaning; ridiculing other races, ethnicities or minorities through stereotypes. Here we see how the otherness is perceived in a given society. In Blake Edwards’ *Breakfast in Tiffany’s* (1961), Mickey Rooney passes as a Japanese character Mr. Yunioshi who is a caricature who has fake teeth far too big for his mouth and wears bandanna all the time referring to

classical Far East martial arts. His heavily made-up, bucktoothed, myopic Japanese passing is broadly exotic. In another Edwards' comedy *The Party* (1968), Peter Sellers passes as an Indian actor called Hrundi V. Bakshi who accidentally gets invited to a posh Hollywood dinner party and makes terrible mistakes based upon ignorance of Western manners. Sellers' brown-face routine depending on fish out of water premise can be acknowledged as offensive and stereotypical. The same pattern is seen in *The Love Guru* (Marco Schnabel, 2008) which explicitly mocks Hindu culture and writer and actor Mike Myers' performance of what an Indian man looks and acts like is obnoxious.

In *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (Larry Charles, 2006), audience laughs, most probably not Kazakh audience, at a Hebrew-speaking British Jew pretending to be a Russian-speaking Kazakh hick. In *The Dictator* (Larry Charles, 2012) Cohen's authoritarian ruler of the fictional Republic of Wadiya is a hairy and highly misogynistic Arab. With a tanned skin, beard, funny accent and funnier eccentric costumes Cohen passes this character with spreading anti-Semitic polemics and funny jokes about killing people which is beyond stereotyping. All passing attempts indicate lack of originality; instead they expose the audience to essentialist representations decorated with embodied ethnical references in order to underline differences.

Consequently any form of racial and ethnic passing systematically manufactures a way to maintain dominance over others' and/or minorities' subordination which is one of the main concerns of this study. Throughout Yeşilçam not only minorities were harshly marginalized but Turkishness was affirmed through certain stereotypes. In time the discourses regarding minorities have changed, but still historical stereotypes linger in mainstream cinema. Sarah Ahmed argues that passing requires a

“knowable other who can be fetishized” (Ahmed, 1999: 98), which enables inhabiting the place of the other through adapting or taking on signifiers of the other. In mainstream Turkish cinema “passing becomes a mechanism reconstituting or reproducing the other as the *‘not-I’*, beyond the structure of the *‘I’* (Ahmed, 1999: 100) that implicitly underline the features of the *‘I’* with a successful technique of transformation through the supposed knowledge of the other. Therefore, passing becomes an affirmation of the self through acting like the other. Then, in mainstream cinema passing becomes a tool to affirm the privileged identity through differentiation from the other.

On the other hand passing in cinema can happen quite differently; requires none of the above mentioned techniques but uses class as reference. Television success *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), through an apolitical narrative, deports fundamental cultural heritage of black people through depicting American dream which bleaches the black family. The dominant audience had welcomed the Huxtable family due to their white manners and middle-class ethics. Similarly Sidney Poitier, the first black star of Hollywood, met white standards through his “against the grain” manners. Donald Bogle describes his characters as tame, coherent with the system sans impulsive acts, sterile and almost sexless; a liberal dream, a man who can be invited to dinner by whites (Hall, 1997a: 253). Poitier was acknowledged by white audience like one of them due to his perfect manners that are believed to be particular to whites. This passing strategy creates “less black” people who are in tune with the rules and demands of society. This strategy will manifest itself in contemporary comedies of this study which pass Kurds as ‘more Turks’ and ‘less Kurds’, another strategy to maintain dominance and soundness of Turkishness. At the end both

strategies, over emphasizing or ignoring cultural differences, help to support and maintain unequal power relations in mainstream media.

In Turkey passing is a complex issue both socially and cinematically. As mentioned how Kurds passed as Turks to be accepted by the society, also minority actors/actresses of Yeşilçam passed as Turks in their real life (except Toto Karaca and Nubar Terziyan). Many known Yeşilçam Armenian stars like Kenan Pars, Sami Hazinses, Turgut Özatay, Adile and Selim Naşit and Vahi Öz passed as Turks to be welcomed by the audience and the sector (Balcı, 2013: 56) which is a sign of the strict hierarchical social structure of the society.

On the other hand, in cinema, Turkish actors/actresses passed as minorities. Until 70s only non-Muslim minorities-*Rums*, Armenians and Jews- were explicitly depicted in films where Turkish actors/actresses passed as *Rums* as Oya Peri in *Ağlayan Melek/Crying Angel* (Safa Önal, 1970) who lives out of wedlock with an elderly man, Mürüvvet Sim in *Söz Müdafanın/The Word is Plea's* (Mehmet Dinler, 1970) who runs a brothel and drugs young women to blackmail, and Bahar Erdeniz in *Arap Abdo/Arabic Abdo* (Remzi Jöntürk, 1974) who is a singer and an unreliable mistress to protagonist Abdo. Similarly Turks passed Armenians as Mürüvvet Sim in *Siyah Gelinlik/Black Wedding Gown* (Orhan Elmas, 1973), *Sabahsız Geceler/ Nights without Morning* (Ertem Görenç, 1968), *Kara Gözlüm/My Dark Eyed One* (Yılmaz, 1970), and Nevzat Okçugil in *Bekar Odası/ Bachelor Room* (Türker İnanoğlu, 1967) with heavy accent and eccentric manners. In *Bizim Kız/Our Girl* (Türker İnanoğlu, 1970) Zeki Alpan passes for Armenian jeweler Vartanyan and Kayhan Yıldızoğlu passes for Jewish jeweler David who is depicted stingy and very competitive. In *Üç Arkadaş/Three Friends* (Memduh Ün, 1971) Reşit Çildam passes for Jewish stingy pawnbroker, and in *Karakolda Ayna Var/There is Mirror in Police Station* (Halit

Refiğ, 1966) Orhan Çoban passes for a Jew called “cribber” Moiz, a ruthless but a coward man. A few examples reveal that there are certain categories established in passing minorities. These categories were created depending on prejudice, supposed knowledge of others, and essentialist labeling which makes strict distinction between the majority and the rest. This kind of passing relies on the notion of a core identity that is to be preserved and underlined in order to emphasize their differences from the majority. These categories will be discussed in further parts where minority representations and stereotyping will be touched upon.

Although Kurdish stories were told starting from the 50s without mentioning Kurdishness, it was the 70s when Kurdish actors, as Kurds, stepped into the scene such as Yılmaz Güney. It is an advantage that no makeup was required in Turkish cinema since all ethnicities are from the same geography and share same physical attributions. Their resemblance in physical figure was diminished by the exaggerated or blended manners.

The following chapter will touch upon how minorities were stereotyped in favor of construction of a positive national identity through passing and its strategies in Yeşilçam as a means of criticizing modernism and Western values that are attributed to minorities. In this manner, passing in Yeşilçam had an additional purpose other than ridiculing or resenting the minorities; to construct a new nationalistic Turkish identity.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

While discussing passing I drew attention to the importance of labeling which is never natural but discursive, and derives from the power relations between the dominant and marginalized groups. Labeling is tenacious, and deeply embedded in society's structure of thinking. Thus this chapter will focus on how Turks label themselves and the others of the society. Minorities hold significance to understand the logic of passing in a given society and its social structure. Since passing occurs in a society having a hierarchical structure among ethnicities where one is favored over the others, firstly Turkish identity construction in relation of the minorities will be examined in a newly founded nationalistic Republic and then the transformation of the nationalistic discourse. As Hall (1996: 4) suggests:

Identities are constructed within discourse; we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the specific modalities of power, thus are more product of the making of difference and exclusion.

And since identities are discursive and constructed through representations which linger in the collective memory of the societies and become living entities, the relations of narrative, memory and identity will be touched upon. On the one hand Turkishness, on the other all denied identities, this chapter will focus on the minority representations and stereotyping as a tool which “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes the difference” (Hall, 1997a: 258) in Turkish cinema in relation to dominant discourse of the society.

3.1. Understanding the Social Structure

3.1.1. Imagining the Turkish Nation

Throughout the 20th century, the concept of modernity was acknowledged as a fundamental and universal truth, which all societies would have to adopt themselves to. Accordingly Turkish modernization process had transformed state traditions fundamentally through rapid urban transformation, mentality shift, and change in cultural production that all eventually had transformed everyday life. Savaş Arslan notes that (2001: 66) binary oppositions of Turkish experience of modernity and modernization are not different from other nation-state experiences: “Western-non western, Turks and non Turks, secular state and religious masses, center and periphery, urban and rural, wealthy and improvised”. However, as Nilüfer Göle states Turkish modernization history can be considered the most radical cultural shift that executed voluntarily. This process “went far beyond the modernizing the state apparatus as the country changed from a multiethnic Ottoman empire to secular republican nation state; [it] attempted to penetrate into the lifestyles, manners, behavior and daily customs of the people” (1997: 83).

Keeping in mind the dominant ideology of the time was nationalism, cinema was one of the significant tools in disseminating these manners and behaviors to newly constructed nation. Within the production of the nation as an imagined community, the roles and stereotypes attributed to minorities played a potent role in nationalist identity creation. To this end, hybridity is oppressed for the sake of creating a monolithic nation state.

Constitutive role of discourse, as ways of constituting knowledge as Michel Foucault states, in identity building is evident in Turkish example. Thus, Turkish subjectivity can be elaborated as both outcome, for the modernized, and the very source, for the modernizers, of knowledge and power in Foucauldian terms. As a discourse, Turkish identity and Turkishness was produced by the narrations that are carried by different institutions from schools, media to military. If we hold a mirror to the terms now and then, we see these discourses are not closed systems and have changed in time significantly due to changing social power. Being one of the potent institutions, cinema has particular power to contribute to any discourse in any given period.

As Stuart Hall states, the national identities are inevitable constructions; “we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation” (2001: 292). Accordingly, to be Turkish can only be understood because of the way Turkishness is represented with meanings, values and culture. The historical outcome of the collapsed Ottoman Empire and the end of the *ümmet* (Islamic religious community) notion, Turkishness is a modern form where ethnic differences are subsumed beneath a national identity which is formed in relation to significant others. This articulation manifests itself also in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* where he suggests that (2006: 6-7) nationhood may be understood as an “imagined community”, since the members of a nation can never really get to know

or meet their fellow members and regardless of the differences, inequality and injustices that exists in a society, the notion of nation is perceived in the imagination as one of equality and unity. His work underscores the symbolic and emotional power of nationalism at both individual and collective levels and helps to explain the cultural-cognitive process that draws the line between groups and emphasizes the role of media in consolidation of nationalism especially in terms of mass production and distribution of images. With production and reproduction of certain images, communities gain collective memories which linger through decades.

As a symbolic community, nation requires membership or participation and is linked to the idea of unity through acts like singing national anthem, celebrating special days and attending ceremonies to constitute a sense of identity through institutions and representations. As a discourse, the national culture and identity are needed to be told constantly, for this objective they require certain narrations. Hall suggests that narrative of nations are told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture which provide sets of images and stories focusing on origins, continuity, timelessness and traditions of original, pure people (2001: 293-295) which was also the case in the birth of Turkishness. To this end, mass media creates a common information space where collective group consciousness enables to transcend geographical space to achieve national identity.

The narrative elements of the Turkish nation were created by the revolution made in 1923. The new Republic united varied identities under an umbrella to create a nation state. It used culture as an integration tool, and imposed common ways of thinking, understanding and vision to a mixed community. Turkish modernization is characterized as a process, as Savaş Arslan states, “Turkification-from-above” by political elites. This process aimed to create a national core and nationalization of

Anatolia which was associated with a series of reforms in relation to modernization and westernization. Arslan underscores that “Kemalism relied on a metaphor of light: the republican officials, teachers, and soldiers bringing enlightenment to the farthest parts of Anatolia, where traditional and backward forces of religion, feudal economic and social systems and rural life persisted” (2011: 63). However, the project of nationalism conducted oppression upon its internal others and clearly aimed urban and educated citizens while ignoring the ethnically and religiously diverse and rural population (ibid: 44-48).

During the nationalization of culture state played a dominant role in cultural sphere where reforms enabled the state to regulate the behavior of its citizens through their everyday life activities from choice of music, the language they spoke, the clothes they wore to the leisure activities and family relations (Çınar, 2008: 15). However, modernization did not originate as an historical outcome through internal dynamics of civil society. Çağlar Keyder underlines the crucial feature of this kind of modernization is that modernizers wield state power in their interests. They are not necessarily committed to modernity as a whole, but choose some dimensions and this process eventually tends to crisis and undermines the ultimate goals of modernity (1997:39). With these arbitrary choices from political to cultural, dictated Turkish modernism had shaped the national identity and national characteristics suppressing cultural differences, not to mention the ignorance of social classes. Consequently, imposition of the Republic’s elites’ modernity notion, their positivist modification of daily life and cultural practices, and the secular policies alienated the minorities, rural and traditional parts of the country. This kind of modern formation of cultural identity focuses upon the establishment of as Ernest Gellner calls “high culture” which is defined as:

Generalized diffusion of school mediated, academy supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro groups themselves (2006: 56).

Since this kind of cultural production occurred within two groups that are the modernizing elite and modernized society, inevitably the modernization process created a tension between the values of the West and East, urban and rural, modern and traditional which reverberated in social and cultural arenas which would be an issue of the Yeşilçam melodramas where non-Muslim minorities are placed and caricaturized with one dimensional portrays as criticism to the Western values.

Under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, Turkey accepted the category of non-Muslims as minorities and granted minority rights only to, Armenians, Jews and Greeks, such as education in their own language but Kurds and other Muslim, such as Arabs and Alevis, were not even regarded as minorities hence exempt of such benefits. Although Muslim Arabs, Kurds and Albanians revolted against the state, says Avner Levi, the distinction of otherness formed over religion. With new legislations discrimination felt in cultural and economical spheres of the society where non-Muslims excluded not only from public services, but put out of ranks from social, economical and professional fields such as free movement in Anatolia, stock market and trade businesses which were mainly handed by non-Muslims during Ottoman times. At the end of the 20s, *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş/Citizen Talk Turkish* campaign was launched which made talking in other languages harder in public places. Thus, minorities were forced to talk proper Turkish without an accent. Other restrictions

such as ban from public service between 1926- 1965, and 1929 issued ban from stock exchange business and restrictions on free travel until 1930 particularly affected economic aspects of minority lives (Balçı, 2013: 30-37). These acts, as Gül Yaşartürk states, are part of the efforts regarding creating a national bourgeois class (2012: 20) and bring industry and trade businesses to Muslim Turks. Although some rights were granted to minorities, much more were taken from them. Consequently, along with other reasons, the minority population diminished considerably.

A. Gül Altınay states that during the nation state formation, “the transition from a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural empire to a Turkish nation state was a very painful one. For some communities, such as Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, [exile] meant destruction to the extent that Armenian life in Anatolia became virtually extinct” (2007:23). As a result of rising nationalism not only Armenians but also Greek origin, *Rum*, citizens were mistreated on various occasions such as population exchange in the mid-1920s, Wealth Tax of 1942, ransacking of property, churches and cemeteries on 6-7 September 1955 and the 1964 deportation. During the “Thrace Events of 1934”, most of the assaulted Jew citizens had to flee to İstanbul from Thracian cities. (Balçı, 2013: 40). Keyder states expulsion, deportation, massacre and exchange of Greek and Armenians was not welcomed in Anatolia since they were the only medium through which Muslim Anatolians had experienced peripheralization in daily life. At the end, some nine-tenths of Christian population, around one-sixth of the total population Anatolia was eliminated. (1997: 43-44).

As a result of anti-minority policies, the regression of religious minority population led to the Islamization of Anatolia. The remaining ones are treated as outsiders or discriminated which is still an issue of the present day. While performing Turkishness, non-Muslim citizens are often obliged to keep silent about their

backgrounds and try to mingle in society (Neyzi, 2002: 138), and passed as Turks with false names and we may assume the same for Muslim minorities of Alevi and Kurds. “By the late 20s, state historians and social scientists began to build a new ancestry for the Kurds, stating that they have descended from Turkmen tribes, and, thus ‘Mountain Turks’” [...] by the mid 20s speaking Kurdish was banned along with Kurdish names. (Arokan, 2014: 146). Moreover, starting from the first years of the Republic, Kurdish folkloric songs had been compiled from various cities like Antep, Adana, Urfa, Maraş and Diyarbakır. The first of the four visits held in 1926 by a delegation from Darülelhan/ The House of Melodies Music School (*now İstanbul University Conservatory*) compiling 250 songs. Followed by 1938 visit of Ankara University Conservatory with 491 songs, 1967 visit of TRT (Turkey’s Public Broadcasting Authority) involves whole Turkey resulted with 1738 song. Last visit in 1976 was held by Ministry of Culture focuses on solely Urfa and resulted with 300 folk songs (Yücel, 2008: 42, *emphasis is mine*). This cultural erosion of 50 years is a price Kurds paid for not being recognized as a minority. Moreover, oppressive practices and assimilation policies increased to the extent of “Turkification”, and from the 30s onwards, a state struggle was initiated against masses that don’t identify themselves as Turks.

This practice went as far as emptying Kurdish villages to fill them with Turkish speaking populations and changing the Kurdish names of the villages into Turkish ones. Turning Kurds into Turks was portrayed as a civilizing mission to eradicate tribalism and feudalism. Between 1925 and 1938, tens of thousands of Kurds and Alevi were deported to Western Turkey (Arokan, 2014:147).

Not only Kurds but also Alevi suffer from discrimination and oppression whose religious practices are not educated at schools whereas Sunni religious lessons are

compulsory. Gündüz Vassaf suggests that there is a strong enmity towards Kurd and Alevis and states, “they are ‘othered’ and considered as the agents of foreign forces that threaten our state and our unity and oppose our religion one-ness” (quoted in Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 91). Although some important steps have been taken, still, the official definition of being Turkish requires Turkish ethnicity, Turkish language and Sunni Islam- other than these are perceived as others. However Turkishness discourse has changed in time, moreover new identity formations have emerged.

3.1.2. Transformation of the Country

Relatively still waters of the country began to run deep in 1960 with the first military intervention, followed by 1971 intervention which was followed by era of polarization of the country through violent acts among left-wing, right-wing and Islamist political groups which led to another military intervention in 1980 that have interrupted and mediated the production of nationalist discourses of the state. Due to 1980 coup d'état and global changes, starting from the 80s Turkey has undergone significant alterations in terms of nationalism and modernism. Along with rapid urbanization the country shifted from the nationalist developmentalism to transnational market strategy. General imposition of high culture has come to an end where people had started acted upon their own will regarding from choice of music to outfit. As Reşat Kasaba states, by the 80s, Turkish people lost their enthusiasm towards the nation state and had become suspicious and cynical about the promises of “enlightened and prosperous tomorrows” and they had started to “inquire about the histories, institutions, beliefs, identities and cultures from which they have been forcefully separated” (1997: 16). This sudden liberal wind changed the positions of

the individuals from being an object of the modernization project to subject of their lives and during the 80s and 90s two major changes experienced in political arena; rise of the Islamic movement and Kurdish ethnic separatism. Before addressing these issues I will briefly touch upon the political, economic and social sphere during the 70s and early 80s which led to irrevocable changes in the country.

The nationalist and developmentalist policies of the state had come to a halt in the late 70s. 1973 world oil crisis led to severe domestic economic crisis in Turkey, followed by several embargos and foreign policy dispute with Greece over Cyprus. Moreover the country was polarizing politically between leftist and rightist which ended with 1980 Coup. Turkey faced the fail of state policy of import substituting industrialization -protecting the domestic market, inward oriented industrial development depended on ideological elements of nationalism and developmentalism- which led to inevitable expanding in foreign debt followed by crisis in development in the late 70s. In the early 80s Turkey shifted radically from statist-nationalist economic strategy to market oriented global one which was carried out by the military regime of the time. Thus, state's populist and socially redistributionist role drastically changed. The economy policies in the reconstruction period only benefited a limited segment of the society excluding majorities. This authoritarian and exclusionary period brought a harsh break from nationalism where a new ideology flourished that is competitive individualism which changed economy, politics and culture. And long waited economic development was achieved not through the nationalist strategy but after aligning with the world economy. Thus, the developmentalism and nationalism failed hand in hand along with the virtues of Eurocentrism as markers of Western superiority, such as rationalism, the nation-state, and economic development. (Gülalp, 1997: 52-56)

The modernization process of Turkey had displaced Islam for the sake of secularization. Despite secularization, the first religious prone party *Millet Partisi /Nation Party* was established in 1948, followed by *Milli Nizam Partisi/ National Order Party* in 1970 whose legacy has reached today. Cinema affected from Islamic movement in the early 60s where an Islamic cinematic trend was born: *Milli Sinema/National Cinema* which focused on the identity of Turks within the Islam-Turk “framework of commercial considerations, but always with a religious meaning” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 40).

Religion based politics showed its face again in the political arena during the 80s, an era which is characterized by integration with global capitalism accompanied with the confidence lost in the nation-state. Haldun Gülalp suggests that failed developmentalism and frustration towards the promises of Westernist modernization is the driving force behind Islamic movement. His argument relies on that this failure laid grounds for foundation of radical Islamism which condemned nationalism as a fruitless project, and its contradictory promises that ended up in crisis (1997: 55-57).

However, crisis in modernism didn't lead to postmodern criticism of meta-narratives or other political solutions but rather inclined towards religion and a very offensive stance towards nation-state and its promises of Westernization, modernization, and ultimately towards Kemalism. Hence, rise of conservatism and political Islam cannot be alone analyzed through economic failure. It is useful for explaining why an oppositional movement is born, but it lacks of reasoning the power of the movement. Nilüfer Göle gives a very useful guideline suggesting that “the rise of Islamic elite and intellectuals is tied to a historical backdrop that had been invisible to the republican elite until the outbreak in the 1980s” (quoted in Arslan, 2011: 250). She says the rise of political Islam can be understood “through examining how the

Western ideal of modernity is reconstructed and internalized locally and how the power relations between modernist elites and Islamic movements take shape” (Göle, 1997: 83). Keeping in mind the cultural effects of this process, the changes in lifestyle, gender roles, identities, it is evident all these changes were being criticized by the Islamist movement who were forced to live under secular rules which they hadn’t believed or wanted.

As Göle underlines Turkish modern elites had aimed secularization, rationalization, and nation building through the traditional ideological positivism and solely concentrated on progress through national unity. Therefore, all kinds of differences namely ethnic, ideological, religious and economic were considered as ‘toxic’, “not as natural components of a pluralistic democracy but as sources of instability and as threats to unity and progress” (1997: 84). Evidently this anti-liberal and paranoid discourse alienated not only minorities but conservatives and traditionalists. Modernists of the society decided, what was civilized and what was not, “everything that is *alafranka* is deemed proper and valuable; anything *alaturka* acquires a negative connotation and is somehow inferior” (Göle, 1997: 85). This imposed idea of superiority of the Western values criticized by the masses due to emotional, personal and symbolic values. The gap between the value systems of the two parties created a tension where people forced to make choices between traditional self definitions and “civilized” constructions. These values were rejected by the masses in the society but the rise of the oppressed through political agenda could not have flourished until the suitable political, economical and social sphere reveals itself. Regarding the alienation of masses Dönmez-Colin states that secular policies, along with its failure to solve the miserable life conditions of the majority, alienated not

only people of Anatolia but also minorities such as Kurds who couldn't find their places in the new society (2008: 14).

Another important event in the rise of political Islam is the 1980 coup d'état whose ideology is explicitly supported already strong notion of Turkish-Islam synthesis. It is a fact that during the social upheaval of the late 70s, the discourses and politics based on Turkish-Islam synthesis were used in disadvantage of leftists, minorities and Kurds. Emre Kongar underlines that the architect of the Coup General Kenan Evren referred to religion, since all the political parties were closed, because he was in need of political support. Religious education, but only in Sunni terms, became obligatory where religious high school graduates were allowed to choose any profession they like (2001: 187). And the coup is crowned with the 1982 Constitution, the most anti-democratic and unprogressive constitution in Turkey, which imposed tight controls on freedom of speech, organizations, and political activities. Moreover, it explicitly defined citizenship along with Turkishness. Still in force, Article 66 of the Constitution asserts: 'Each person bound to the Turkish state though citizenship is a Turk', nothing less, nothing more.

Socio-economical transformations, consecutive military interventions, political oscillations, rising Kurdish nationalism and violence mark the 80s and 90s. The neo-liberal policies had positive outcomes towards integration with global markets however; these policies widened the income and wealth gap among the society. The new social order was not about collective, communal or relying on protocols of Turkification, as Savaş Arslan underlines, but about individual capitalist order, the interpreting of Turkification and Western values on a personal level and rise of Islamism (2011: 209). Tanıl Bora lists the significant events of the 90s for Turkey as: changing borders and conflicts, rising minority and human right discourses, EU

oriented economic deregulation, Gulf War, and changing geopolitical sphere which triggered the possibility of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. The last event drew Turkey's attention on Kurdish problem in her soil. During this time the solution to Kurdish problem oscillated between military solution and democratization (2003: 434-436).

Kurdish problem can be acknowledged as one of the main social, political and military concerns of the country since the early 80s. The establishment of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in 1974 which aimed to establish an independent Kurdistan claiming land from Turkey, and from neighboring countries Syria, Iran and Iraq is the beginning of the tense relationship between the state and the Kurds. Gönül Dönmez- Colin (2008: 89) states that long time restrictions and bad economic conditions gained political consciousness to Kurds.

The power of the modern nation state to control the lives of its citizens has often forced individuals to play conflicting roles that have fragmented their identity. The banning of Kurdish language, Kurdish proper names, even Kurdish songs, has had repercussions in politicizing Kurdish consciousness, particularly in the rural areas of the south-east where remnants of feudalism and dismal living conditions have thwarted development.

Although the issue of underdevelopment is not only peculiar to Kurdish population in Turkey, along with the identity crisis, it is one of the fundamental reasons behind the unrest in the predominantly Kurdish populated south-east. However, this political consciousness, starting from 1984, started putting its claims through terrorist activities which caused the death of more than 30.000 until now.

In 1990 first Kurdish political party *Halkın Emek Partisi* (People's Labor Party) was established and entered the political sphere. Although it was closed by the Supreme

Court in 1993, it was followed by other parties which all either extinguished or closed and some of their members of the Parliament were imprisoned. The 90s can be considered as an era of intense terrorist attacks caused immense civilian casualties. After the arrest of the PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, a temporary ceasefire and peace period began at the beginning of the 2000s, however, terror has not ended yet. Kurdish separatist movement irrevocably changed the political arena and with the help of changes in the law regarding closure of political parties, today Kurdish movement has a place in the Parliament and indisputable supremacy in the South-East Anatolia Region of the country. Finally Turkey has come to a point where:

The global revival of religious discourses and civilizational clashes has coincided with three separations in Turkey: between the West (EU in particular) and the non West (Turkey in particular), the secular (Kemalists) and the Islamic (identified with the ruling party AKP), and Turks (nationalists and the Turkish army) and Kurds (Kurdish nationalists and the PKK). Despite the so-called trans-nationalist moves, nationalism is not withering away, but instead creating violent outbreaks against non-Turks and non-Muslims living in Turkey [...] The killing of the Armenian Turkish intellectual Hrant Dink or the attacks against Christian priests in 2007 can be understood as instances of such outbreaks (Arslan, 2011: 252).

Consequently maybe Turkishness and nationalistic ideology is not the only and dominant discourse and has lost its power to different discourses, but still nationalistic discourse has a social value embraced in some parts of the society. Nationalist-adventure TV serial and films *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak/The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (Serdar Akar, 2005) and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Terör/The Valley of the Wolves: Terror* (Serdar Akar, 2007) fuse three ideologies: “nationalism, conservatism and Islamism”

(Dönmez-Colin: 2008: 34) where Kurds represented as enemies, untruthful and unreliable people.

Tanıl Bora stresses that bleeding Turkish nationalism gained power through the 90s due to several factors such as the treat to the nation state due to globalization, the crisis of socio-economical self confidence due to economic and political crisis of the early 90s, and increasing Kurdish problem not only in Turkey but also in neighboring countries particularly in Iraq due to US invasion. All of these facts helped construction of a contemporary nationalistic discourse with four fronts: official Kemalist discourse, left-wing Kemalist nationalism, liberal pro-Western nationalism, and most importantly racist/ethicist nationalism fed by anti-Kurdish precisions. However, this quadruple structure is complicated by the rising discourse of Islamism (2003: 436). This multilayered and complex society has multiple and sometimes intertwined discourses as in Islamist-nationalist and Kurdish-leftist and so forth which reveal themselves in media productions.

Turkish media in general and cinema in particular inscribe these severe ideological separations. In the early 90s a new Islamic movement *Beyaz Sinema* (White Cinema), was born and gained significant success with films like *Minyeli Abdullah/ Abdullah of Minye* (Yücel Çakmaklı, 1989) and *Yalnız Değilsiniz/ You Are not Alone* (Mesut Uçakan, 1990). As Dönmez-Colin notes, “such films have been oriented reclaiming the Muslim self, which was perceived as having been robbed of its authenticity and heritage.” She adds that they drew large audience in Anatolia “who face alienation in an urban environment”. But due to their lack of artistic quality “white cinema didn’t establish itself a genre [...] Gradually, the newspapers, journals, TV stations and web sites owned or subsidized by rich Islamist industrialists/businessmen inside and outside Turkey have replaced white cinema to

carry on struggle to re-imagine Islamist political identity” (2008: 46-48). On the one hand secularist media continues to reproduce their version of Republican modernization, as Arslan notes, on the other their Islamic counterparts disseminate religious propaganda and visualize new born culture of Islamist bourgeoisie (2011: 252). Therefore, the next part will discuss why production of representations under different discourses matter and what are the social results of these representations in long term.

3.2. Representation of Turkish and Minority Identities

Having briefly discussed how being Turk is defined, how minorities were defined and treated, how a nation was born and changed in time now the study will focus on identity representations. To this end the connection between national identity, national narrative, and memory will be studied to stress the importance of representations in identity building of all kinds.

3.2.1. Identity and Collective Memory

At the beginning of the 20th century, culture was considered as the main structural element of nation-states and was used all around Europe and in Turkey as an integration instrument. To achieve this objective, state aimed to construct collective memories through shared mental structures, and imposed common ways of thinking, understanding and vision to shape national characteristics through certain representations that are shaped by a nationalistic ideology. Eventually, these images constitute memories and identities that are "constructed through, not outside,

difference" (Hall, 1996: 4); a fact that draws our attention to the others and/or minorities.

James Morreal stresses that "as an integral part of the pattern of culture, an image, by its very nature, will operate within and at most levels of society (1987:250). Images hold a prominent position in Western culture and advanced technologies transform our sense of the world, rather than representing it, and create our reality. This process leads to constant oscillation between the myth of ideal life and lived reality which enables memory, more than ever, open to manipulation. Consequently, there is no pure, pristine memory beneath restoration and manipulation caused by the various and changing representations. But how memory is built and manipulated? From a multinational empire to a nationalist nation, how can one perceive its place in the community? In Benedict Anderson's words, "all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias" (1991:208) which may be essential and healthy for mind. In this sense, while creating a new sense of Turkishness and Turkish nation, decision makers contributed to the nation forgetting the multi ethnic life in the empire and make them adjust to a new one with brand new representations. Through an ideological perspective, a collective memory was created involving new representations where Turkishness was holding the upper hand before all others. "Collective memories are usable, facilitating cultural, social, and economic connections; establish social order, and determining belonging, exclusivity, solidarity and continuity" (Zelizer, 1998: 4). Thus, supported with symbols and rituals of the shared values, newly founded identities almost seemed natural in collective memory which became an insurance policy for unity and prosperity of the newly founded nation.

Complex and ambiguous, memory is central to human identity and is structured by the interaction of individual subjectivity with cultural and social conditions. With the advent of photography, cinema and advanced technologies human memory is subject to manipulation and new sources of preservation next to traditional ones of history books, journals, textbooks, museums. Thus, whenever a memory is constituted some questions should be asked: by and for whom, what is the contextual background, and through which oppositions. The latter is one of the main concerns of this study.

In the 1920s French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs began to study what he calls “collective memory” and “instead of viewing collective memory as the past working its will on the present, Halbwachs explored “the ways in which the present concerns determine what of the past we remember and how we remember it.” Thus he underscores the ahistorical even anti-historical feature of the collective memory which simplifies the multiple perspectives and ambiguities in order to reduce events to mythic archetypes. To him, contrary to historical consciousness, memory insists on continuing presence (Novick, 2000:3-4), and becomes a useful discourse for uniting any given community around eternal and essential truths which are timeless. Novick adds that contrary to Freud who assumes memory as an imposition, Halbwachs considers it as chosen (ibid: 5). However, the choices are not individual but made by leading discourses, institutions or ideologies hence memory becomes political. Halbwachs’ conception of memory is interplay of image and narrative, in his words; “recollections are nothing but images” (1992: 170).

Thus, controlling the means of cinematic production has become a social power in contemporary societies. In this way, not only representations but also certain ways of remembering imposed through cinema. Having underlined the importance of collective memory and the contribution of cinema to it, I will examine how dominant

discourse shaped the collective memories through image systems using certain representations. In order to comprehend how representations internalized by society first I will first discuss how the symbolic forms manifest themselves through image systems.

3.2.2. Image System

“One inserts himself between the object and the camera”

Federico Fellini

An ordinary cinema audience has no direct influence on any kind of knowledge production. On the other hand, powerful agents control the discourse easily by setting the norms, selecting the actors, language, topics and agenda. Eventually they are the decision makers who decide what will be told to whom in which terms. In the realm of media, with this power, competent agents create a potential, and an indirect, control to some extent in the mind of the audience. According to Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ideological hegemony, as Carl Boggs states, mass media are tools that ruling elites use to “perpetuate their power, wealth and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture and morality” (in Lull, 1995: 32). Throughout this study Republican discourse and nationalistic ideology are mentioned and the use of media, particularly cinema, is referred as a method for gaining and maintaining power. For long years Kemalist hegemony was in force through which dominant ideology was transmitted, consciousness was formed and social power was exercised. And it succeeded because cultural production in general, cinema in particular, as Kaarle Noordenstreng puts; “introduced elements into individual consciousness that would

not otherwise appear there, but will not be rejected by consciousness because they are so commonly share in cultural community” (in Lull: 1995: 32).

It is evident mass media is not comparable to no individual, institution or group when it comes to disseminating certain discourses or an ideology. Until the 80s, media monopoly saturated society with their preferred ideological agenda and that allowed nationalism to reign since every medium worked in tandem to disseminate and legitimate certain symbolic forms. In visual media these symbolic forms manifest themselves in image systems. James Lull states that spread of dominant ideologies depends on use of image systems, of which there are two basic types: ideational and meditational.

Ideational image system is composed of units of ideational representation, complex internal forms of organization, and particular preferred interpretations. (1995: 9-10). In the context of Yeşilçam films and their minority stereotypes, we may say ideology is not only made up from certain representations but also from a grammar of production with certain codes through which cinema imposes a way of perceiving minorities through projected imagined worlds. Repeated stereotyped characters of minorities through certain conventions stick in collective memories that linger for long years. Due to heavy nationalistic rhetoric in cinema, minorities often ridiculed, condemned or despised through negative stereotyping. And, these repeated presentation of the predominant ideology continued to define culture for people who are heavily exposed to media. Republican discourse was directly imperative and supposedly acted in the best interest of people who clearly needed guidance in every aspect of life, and Yeşilçam guided them with ideational image systems.

Mediational image system refers to framing content in such a way that standardized presentational formats themselves connote to particular ways of thinking and how people internalize above mentioned ideological productions and make use of them in their daily lives. To Gramsci, dominant ideological discourses must be subsequently reproduced in the activities of basic social units in everyday life and hegemony requires that ideological claims become self-evident cultural assumptions. Its effectiveness lies in people's acceptance of fiction as reality (Lull, 1995: 33-34). This is called the process of social mediation where ideology is made part of everyday life, and ideological representations are recognized, interpreted and used in construction of daily life. These processes are also the part of the ideological effect of the media because even trivial extracts from films carry powerful ideological force once they circulate socially (Lull, 1995: 16-20). This is what Michel Foucault suggests about being both objects and subjects of power/knowledge. "[Foucault] suggested that the dominance of certain discourses occurred not only because they were located in socially powerful institutions but also their discourses claim the absolute truth" (Rose, 2007: 144). Thus imposed ideological representations become living entities in society. When it comes to minorities, mediation carries an enormous significance because "reality is framed according to prior media representations and their underlying assumptions and analogs so that mediated imaginary becomes the referent with which the 'real world' is often compared, an analytical inversion and ideological reification that carries enormous social implications" (ibid: 20).

Through the eyes of dominant ideology minorities are still recognized as inferior to some extent. Consequently, there is still inferential racism, as Hall calls it, "naturalized representations or events and situations relating to race, whether "factual" or "fictional", which have racists premises and propositions have inscribed

in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (1995:20). This kind of racism reveals itself in Yeşilçam films from imitation of the accents to mannerisms to emphasize Turkishness as the higher value.

3.2.3. Representation of Turkish Identity

For long years, the ruling elite of the Republic had set the rules for narrative choices which were implying specific emplotments, explicative models, and loaded with ideological stances. In this sense, selected ways of thinking were advocated through a variety of channels. The ongoing manipulation of public information empowered dominant ideology which helped to sustain the material and cultural interests of their creators’. The cultural sphere was shaped around the norms of the national identity which derived as mentioned earlier from “Turkification-from-above”. The state ideology established a cultural hegemony that did not allow for much public space and new cultural practices.

Naturally, nationalism undertakes to redefine a collectivity as a community but as Keyder states; “Turkish nationalism placed special emphasis on the vulnerability of the new community, on its precarious viability in the face of hostile external forces. The state had to be intrepid in protecting it. Predictably, such a defense required interdiction of internal dissent as well” (1997: 45-46). However, Turkey’s loneliness paranoia, the very component of modern Turkish identity, relies on the term ‘sick man of Europe’ which was attributed to the Ottoman Empire during the late 19th century. Thus, rigid and paranoid features of identity, which also ignored civil rights for the sake of the state, help us to understand the harsh and unwelcoming attitude towards minorities. We may say the minority representations are the cultural

extension of this nationalistic discourse in political arena. Turkishness not only affirmed with these representations but also protected with “severe censorship laws, inspired by Mussolini’s *Codice di Censura* (Censorship Law) established in 1939” which was abolished in 1998. Accordingly, a censorship board was created whose members were from the state departments including police and military who had the last saying on artistic production. And in some cases artist refused to conform and compensate were sent to prison or exile such as Yılmaz Güney.

The censorship board ensured that that the films would be harmful to the undividable wholeness of the state- that would affect national independence, general morality, health and politics in a negative manner and insult *national feelings*, or have qualities not commensurate with the *national culture, customs and traditions* of the country- would not be approved for distribution (Dönmez-Colin: 2008:49, *emphasis is mine*).

In this political atmosphere the cultural production in Turkish cinema until the 1980s remained in a very tight sphere where minorities had a few to say, if none, on cinematic production. By homogenization and cultural integration, a dominant discourse and culture were legitimized whereas all other culture was suppressed and marginalized. Cinema has been remarkably successful at imposing Turkishness as a cultural norm. Similarly, while glorifying Turkishness through images and codes, Turkish cinema depicted social behaviors of the minorities through collective representations to classify and generalize them by ignoring the motivations, struggles and contradictions among the society. Keeping in mind that many individuals of the society had never met a minority in their lives and had had no firsthand experience, media representations were the sole source of social knowledge where cinema came up, as James Clifford says, only with “ethnographic

representations which were always partial and positioned” (in Abu-Lughod, 2001: 142). Since social hierarchy runs something as follows: “ideal, normal, liminal, abnormal and counter-ideal” (Entman& Rojecki, 2000: 52) and Turkishness is accepted as the ideal trait, we may say the minorities fall in the categories from liminal to the latter ones. It is an ideal trait that, as Gündüz Vassaf notes, even “fictional heroes are brought to justice for insulting Turkishness” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008:91). Although censorship was abolished in 1998, still presumed anti-Turkish discourses are considered as threats to Turkishness where columnists, authors and script writers are sued time to time.

To this end, cinematic representation of the identities developed as inclusive and at the same time excluding practices where Turkishness and otherness are constructed. They evolved in a hierarchy between Turkishness, a construction depends on myths and distortions, and the marked others who were condemned one way or another. In this sense, what Richard Dyer says for whiteness can be adapted to Turkishness, “white people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account for other people’s; white people create dominant images [...] and don’t quite see that they thus construct in their own image” (2002: 12). In other words, Turks sets the standards of morality and manners by which they are bound to succeed and all others bound to fail. But what are these standards failed by the minorities, if not in society in the realm of Yeşilçam?

3.2.4. Representation of Minority Identities

Although several ethnic and religious minorities (Laz, Bosnian, Alevi, Assyrian, Kurd, Jew, Greek, Armenian, Gypsy, Circassian, Pomak and etc.) constitute significant part of the population, from the early days of the Republic, Turkish cinema struggled to reinforce an imagined unity through often marginalizing the minorities. It is a known maxim that Turkey is a like a cultural mosaic, a melting pot, however; “Yeşilçam ignored the ethnic mosaic of the country in favor of the official state policy of national identity based on homogeneity regardless of the differences in religion, ethnicity or sexuality” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 15) and used culturally determined forms of representations. Melting pot argument is only beneficial if you had a proper Turkish name and no accent at all. It is a contradiction, if not an oxymoron, to alienate certain groups constantly and reinforce differences and prejudices towards the minorities where the aim is to unite a nation under an umbrella. Hence, representing the difference between Turkishness and the minorities carries significance since the former is built on the lacks of the latter which are generally constituted on language, moral codes and manners.

In this sense representing Turkishness is an easier subject since it is associated with high moral values and manners. What about minorities of the very same society who live in similar conditions? As mentioned for long years only non-Muslims- *Rums*, Armenians and Jews- were represented in cinema. Since these representations are result of anti-minority policies and discourses, and understanding them would be helpful in analyzing Kurdish representations in cinema. In her comprehensive study regarding minority representations in Yeşilçam, *Yeşilçam'da Öteki Olmak/Being Other in Yeşilçam* (2013) Dilara Balcı draws our attention to how non-Muslim

minorities are marginalized politically, socially and culturally. I will refer to her study in this manner to reveal the codes of such representations.

In Turkish cinema general, Yeşilçam particular, non-Muslims, they will be referred as minorities, were acted as decorative figures in narrative with a few dialogues. Their only function was to emphasize the cosmopolitan structure of İstanbul, if removed cohesion of the narratives would have stood still. Their irrelevance was materialized in a tavern scene in *Beş Hasta Var/There Are Five Patients* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1956), when a Turkish customer asks the tavern owner if his name was Yorgo and the answer is: Yorgo, Koço, Mihal, Aleko, Miço; what does the name change? (Balcı, 2013: 84-86), which can be interpreted the core of minority representations in mainstream Turkish cinema where they are approached as a commodity that is to be labeled and passed.

In cinema one of the significant representation tools was the profession of the minorities who were the most educated ones of the society. According to 1945 census, illiteracy was more common among Muslims with 76.1%, followed by Christians with 39.4%, and Jews with 34.5%. This education difference revealed itself in accommodated wealth and in time of crisis rather economic, psychological or identity, this fact turned to hostility towards minorities (ibid: 39). Education was in direct relation with the professions of the minorities. Not only they were active in industry and trade, but also were active all education-intensive professions from management, translation, medicine, banking to art. However this wide spread professions were limited with a few and minorities generally were represented as tavern and hostel owners, manner tutor, moneychanger, jeweler, dancer, singer, brothel owner, prostitute and so forth. Besides these professions *Rums*, being the beastly characters if not foes, were represented mostly as bandits, smugglers and

thieves, in short ordinary criminals if not enemy of the state in historical films. These profession attributions are dispersed carefully where *Rum* men are ultimate bad characters, and *Rum* women are represented as femme fatales in its worst. Besides being prostitute they sometimes are mistresses, brothel owners and smugglers. Although, in 1920 the number of certified prostitutes dispersed as “774 Muslim, 691 *Rum*, 194 Armenian and 124 Jews” and in the same period out of 175 brothels “79 were owned by *Rums*, 45 by Jews, 35 Armenians and 11 Turks” (Balci, 2013: 102) only *Rums* were explicitly related to sex and prostitution. They are represented exact opposites of imagined Turkish women who are mostly modest and sex-free. Sometimes Armenian women are represented as such but they are not villains and good people in heart. These *Rum* representations clearly draw attention to their lack of morals, bad manners and present them as antipathetic and unreliable people. Previously paranoid discourses of the state were mentioned and clearly *Rum* representations are in line with this ideology reinforcing the paranoid ideas regarding the enemies inside. Therefore in many films, especially in historical ones *Rums* are belittled, affronted and attacked verbally and physically. In *Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe/Mehmet Efe of Çakırca* (Yılmaz Atadeniz, 1969), besides verbal abuse, *Rum* bandits who were guilty of rubbing a Turk were “undressed full frontal and exposed to village community; a first in Turkish cinema in terms of exposure of male genitals” (ibid: 104).

While *Rums* were represented as ultimate bad, Armenians were represented as comic, friendly and sympathetic characters. They were hostel owners, manner tutors, singers, absurd doctors, actors, sometimes tavern owners, photographers or tailors. These characters were represented in a friendlier manner as likeable

characters (Balçı, 2013: 109-121). They are the ones to be ridiculed not to be hated or despised like Rums.

As the least represented minority, Jews were the most monotype and caricaturized ones. They were generally represented as jewelers, moneychangers and pawnbrokers; however, in real life most of the Jews were living wealthy lives dealing with industry and trade. Minority wealth was seen as a threat as a part of the nationalistic paranoia therefore the films abstained representing high class minority lives. (ibid: 123-126). As seen, Jews were related to materialism with negative connotations, such as interest, related to monetary business. It is clear that their real life wealth is approached with suspicion and their wealth accumulation was criticized through these representations clearly based on greed. And “since Jew were not liked Muslims/Turks, in many films they often were ridiculed, belittled, and affronted” (ibid: 181).

Professional representations are very important because we don't see any private life details regarding minorities. They are almost always lonely characters without family, children or kin; they are depicted in relation to their occupation; no religious or cultural object is viewed; no social or cultural life motifs were given such as schools, sanctuaries, cemeteries, celebrations, religious feasts, in Dilara Balçı's words “even the minorities were Turkified” in these films. Moreover these characters are not in relation to their own ethnic group (ibid: 130-132).

Another important emphasis, or the lack of it, is family life as if family concept is for Turks only. They are represented alone as if “one minority for each neighborhood”. They are either flat lonely or widows and if women, they certainly are not associated with motherhood which is also classified as a Turkish manner

(ibid: 132-134). Rothbart & John claimed people have tendency “to maximize the difference between the boundaries of groups and often treat overlapping characteristics as if they were non-overlapping” (Entman & Rojecki, 2000: 55) which is suitable for minority representations in Turkish cinema. If they were depicted in a family setting instead of ignoring the similarities of the lives, then an out group individual would be seen in favorable terms. These deliberate choices would derive both from nationalistic and discriminative discourse and the lack of interest and knowledge regarding minority lives which also can be considered as a result of the dominant discourse.

As for motherhood and children, since children are recognized as the assurance of future, it seems to be believed that this assurance would be supplied by Turks only as if Turkey’s future would be exempt of minorities. Consequently these representations demonstrate minorities who are only in business or sexual relations with Turks and nothing more; they are not socially or culturally welcomed. The feelings towards them oscillate among hatred, resentment, dislike, ridicule and occasionally sympathy.

These representations come with certain stereotypes which are decorated with human weaknesses personalized in greedy, sneaky, arrogant, unreliable, pedant and foul-mouthed characters. Hall states that “stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘differences’ and deploys a strategy of splitting: “it divides the normal and acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable” (2003: 258). Thus ‘normal’ Turks are separated from ‘abnormal’ minorities through these stereotypes.

Minorities in cinema, for a long time, remained frozen in space and time while “setting up a symbolic frontier between insiders and outsiders, us and them” (Hall,

2003: 258) and worked as cultural short cuts. Richard Dyer notes that stereotypes help the dominant group in “applying their norms to subordinated groups, find the latter wanting, hence, inadequate, inferior, sick or grotesque and hence reinforcing the dominant groups’ own sense of legitimacy of the domination” (1977: 356) which has been a very typical practice of Yeşilçam. Savaş Arslan notes that the most influential intellectual and political positions in Yeşilçam involve leftist, Kemalist and Islamist ideologies which seem very different from each other but share a common feature of retrieving the lost pure Turkish essence (2011: 129). Eventually, these stereotypes and discourses helped to reconstitute dominance of Turkishness without drawing explicit attention to this affirmation. Now we will look closely to the minority stereotypes that mostly lived through time and became entities of their own which help us to understand what is being Turkish. Since minorities were passed by Turks, stereotyping confirmed the nation’s ability to be itself by incorporating the others.

3.3. Minority Stereotypes in Turkish Cinema

Stereotypes are not directly and visibly imposed upon individuals in a given society. Therefore visible cinematic representations carry importance in constructing and maintaining the stereotypes. One of the significant aspects of them is they “are to be momentarily enjoyed by insiders, are assumed to be ‘just stereotypes’”. The outsider is in a different position—their very being does not distance themselves from the stereotypes” (Billig, 2005: 165). Another important aspect is they are passed orally or visually from one generation to another. H. R. Trevor-Roper draws our attention to its contagious nature: “Once established, creates, as it were, its own folklore,

which becomes in itself a centralizing force. And because separate persons attached their illusions to the same imaginary pattern, they made that patterns real for other” (in Morreal, 1987: 251). By this way, a stereotype can be reproduced over an extended time period as seen in Turkish cinema where still Greek women are depicted as prostitutes such as in *Güz Sancısı/Pains of Autumn* (Tomris Giritlioğlu, 2009) and *Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali/The Last Ottoman the Knock-Out Ali* (M. Şevki Doğan, 2007) where Greeks are French and English collaborators who are depicted as immoral and incompetent.

Morreal’s observation is particularly important for Yeşilçam since it had unwritten rules for representing minorities through marking otherness within a limited discourse to highlight what is not Turkishness. Dönmez- Colin states that traditional Yeşilçam depicted minorities one-dimensional such as mature Armenian women, called *Madame*, as tutors of Turkish girls, Greeks often as old fishermen called “uncle” or spinsters, Jews with small commerce. These stereotypes to some extent reflect the truth, were not completely fabricated, since in real life many Armenian women were hired as governesses, İstanbul Turks had Armenian or Greek neighbors called uncle and Jewish shopkeepers who had Turkish names. Turks had daily contact with only these non-Muslims which were the assimilated ones. However, in real life most of the minorities were not assimilated by the society, were affluent and lived wealthy lives beyond the imagination of the majority. They socialized with their community in their own language, spent summers at summer houses, had professional jobs like doctors, dentists and industrialists, and they were not in service of Turks, contrary they employed them (2008: 109-110). These lives were deliberately distorted in cinema and we only experienced Turkified stereotypes that doesn’t wear crucifix necklaces, or celebrate Christmas or Passover.

What James Morreal says about the effects of the stereotypes in long term is very significant for Yeşilçam stereotypes. Stereotyping can proceed virtually “unhindered and unchallenged, the image can stand apart from all circumstance, a separable entity, an icon” (1987: 251) which leaves a mark in collective memory. Minority stereotyping has significance also because as Walter Lippman underlines: “The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those perceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception” (in Morreal, 1987: 250). Since education is also highly ideological, unfortunately his thoughts about benefits of education in struggle to stereotypes seem very optimistic.

In order to create stereotypes there should be gross inequalities of power which is directed against the subordinate or the excluded group. And eventually these stereotypes serve to fixing boundaries and exclude everything that doesn't belong to the norm (Hall, 1997a: 258). The power in representation is power to classify and name, to have the last saying on who will be represented and how. Then we face a struggle for hegemony over the images. Richard Dyer draws attention the relation between stereotyping and hegemony which requires widespread consent and appears not only natural but also inevitable:

The establishment of normalcy through and stereotypes is one aspect of the ruling groups- a habit of such enormous political consequences that we tend to think of it as far more premeditated than actually is- to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value-system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it does to them) as natural and inevitable- and for everyone- and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony (Dyer, 2006: 356).

Dyer's observation is true to core for Turkish cinema as well. As Dilara Balcı (2013) underlines Yeşilçam was never interested depicting the daily or family lives of minorities', their culture, religious services, and other celebrations. Minorities were always side acts, never the center of the story where each minority has its own stereotypes with different characteristics which tell us significant things how the society perceive them. The only feature they share is the bad use of Turkish, heavy accents which differ also from each other. This lack of language is sometimes used for humor and the other times just to underline the difference of their ethnicity.

3.3.1. Rums, Armenians and Jews

Rums were the most populated minority, and as mentioned in the previous part, in cinema they were the least liked characters, immoral and almost hostile ones. Young *Rum* men are mostly bandits, criminals, smugglers or state enemies in historical productions working for *megola idea* (great ideal), and women are prostitutes or potential prostitutes, dancers, singers, brothel owners; they are not to be married but to have fun. They are emphasized through immoral behaviors to shine out the main Turkish leading lady as in Safa Önal films *Ağlayan Melek/Crying Angel* (1970) and *Bir Genç Kızın Romanı/Novel of a Young Girl* (1971). These negative stereotypes identify *Rum* women directly with prostitution as if no *Rum* housewives were living in the country. Stereotypes of *Rum* men identify them with savageness, felony and treason. In result they are dissolute and unreliable people as in *Umutsuzlar/Desperates* (Yılmaz Güney, 1971) where *Rum* Stavro is a smuggler and a ruthless killer. Seeing a stereotyped minority in Kurdish Güney's film proves inevitable power of stereotypes in representations.

Another *Rum* stereotype is middle aged or old, chubby and happy tavern owner “Barba” commonly named Kosti, Stavro, İspiro or Niko, restaurateurs and waiters whose only concern is to serve his Turkish customers as Barba Kosti in *Ağlayan Melek/Crying Angel* (Safa Önal, 1970) and Barba Niko in *Haracıma Dokunma/Don't Touch My Racket* (1965) (Balci, 2013: 106-108). These men depicted linked to alcohol selling places. These characters are not as bad as the first group but they earn a living from selling alcohol in Muslim neighborhood. Since in prostitution only women are condemned and the customers are exempted any social reaction, then we may assume the same social hypocrisy in tavern business as well.

Armenian stereotypes are more cheerful than the *Rum* ones. As mentioned before good hearted *Rum* is very hard to find but Armenians are friendly people with some eccentricities. The first type is hostel owner middle aged, widow, bad mouthed, funny, money-minded but good hearted “Madam” with heavy make-up and prone to young Turkish men. They are generally called with typical names such as Surpik, Margarit, Agavni and Nuvark as Madama Nuvark in *Seviştiğimiz Günler/The Days We Made Love* (Halit Refiğ, 1961) and Madama Margarit in *Siyah Gelinlik/The Black Wedding Gown* (Orhan Elmas, 1973). These frump, sweet-rough characters, although being mostly stingy and selfish, are liked by the audience due to her funny manners including her bad mouth. (Balci, 2013: 109). The second type is again widow or spinster, educated, arrogant, pedant women characters who teach Western manners to young Turkish women such as Madame Bulbulyan character in *Rüyalar Gerçek Olsa/If Dreams Could Come Through* (Hulki Saner, 1972) where she accuses the Turkish character by saying: “Dance, music, table manners, stylish dressing- you know nothing” (Dönmez-Colin: 2008:32). “Dresses in Western style, cares for hair and make-up and not caricaturized as the Madam stereotype”, this is an indispensable

character for Pygmalion type comedies such as *Kara Gözlüm/My Dark Eyed One* (Atif Yılmaz (1970). During the education they are mocked and ridiculed by their pupil and the humor born from puns, malapropisms and word games; language difference is the main source of humor. (Balci, 2013: 110-113)

Absurd doctor stereotype's can be considered as the male version of the tutor who is highly eccentric who seems to know a little about medicine as in *İlk Göz Ağrısı/The First Love* (Nejat Saydam, 1963) and *Küçük Hanımın Şoförü/The Driver of the Damsel* (Tunç Başaran, 1970) Although in real life Rums were practicing medicine, this relatively positive stereotype was considered worthy for Armenians (ibid: 113-114).

As mentioned before, Jew stereotypes are monotype and highly caricaturized and the least visualized. The stereotypes are ruthless, stingy, bleak, coward and strict bargainers generally deal with antiques, jewelry and exchange. They are often very “thin characters with sunken cheeks reinforced with extra make-up and goat beard (ibid: 92). I suggest these physical features also refer to their exaggerated stinginess. The implication is clear; a tight-fisted character doesn't even eat. Although other minorities have rather personal relations with Turks, these characters have limited encounters with Turks, “they are not friends, lovers or foes” (ibid: 145) but jewelers as in *Kozanoğlu* (Atif Yılmaz, 1967) and *Balıkçı Osman/Fisherman Osman* (Nejat Okçugil, 1973), or pawnbroker and lawn sharks as in *Üç Arkadaş/Three Fiends* (Memduh Ün, 1971).

Furthermore, professions of *kantocu* (sanger), singer and actress were divided between Rum and Armenian women as in Rum *kantocu* Niça in *Arab Abdo/Arabic Abdo* (Remzi Jöntürk, 1973) and Armenian *kantocu* Hayganuş in *Haracıma*

Dokunma/Don't Touch My Racket (Hasan Kazankaya, 1965). Although they execute the same profession, since Rum, Niça is unreliable unfaithful, selfish and more dangerous than Hayganuş who is a good hearted and faithful character (Balçı, 2013: 116-117).

Stereotypes in Turkish cinema are not limited with the above listed ones, but they are the most predominant ones give clues about the mental structure of the society especially regarding women. From the beginning of the national film production and through the rise of Yeşilçam, minority women depicted in specific ways such as scarlet women, mistresses, singing or dancing as in *Gurbet Kuşları/The Birds of Nostalgia* (Halit Refiğ, 1964) or brothel owners in Hasan Kazankaya films *Haracıma Dokunma/Don't Touch My Racket* (1965) and *Sayılı Kabadayılar/Special Rowdies* (1965). Similarly films about the Ottomans, the *Malkoçoğlu* and *Battalgazi* films, depict *Rum* women as object of desire who easily submit themselves to the Turkish protagonists. The decisive feature of these stereotypes is lack of moral values of women who easily have extramarital intercourses; on the contrary Turkish women are connoted with chastity and modesty, they even don't kiss. Good Turkish women were dictated to be chaste, delicate and loving. The ideal Turkish woman was an asexual creature whose emancipation came at the expense of her individuality and sexuality. Therefore, even if they have an extramarital affair for one night, they conceive child so sex would not be considered for the sake of sex but something more meaningful.

Except villain *Rum* characters, all minority stereotypes are middle aged or old with no children or family. As if when these lonely characters die, there is nobody next to kin. And the young *Rum* villains are considered default childless due to their professions and life styles. Thus the future of Turkey is in the hands of pure Turkish

families. Considering the religious structure of the country now, discriminative and nationalist discourses seem to have worked well in this sense.

Yeşilçam melodramas have significance for criticism of modernism through the use of minorities, othering of the West often emphasized through minorities. Social anxieties towards modernization and urbanization are the backbone of the classical Yeşilçam melodramas that were largely consumed by women. These films have a discourse where tradition is favored to “so called” artificial and pretension modernization and westernization of the educated urban upper classes that are represented with degenerated life style. Dilek Kaya states that envy for modernism and for being modern is articulated in these films, especially through women characters that should undergo a fundamental change by learning manners from non-Muslim instructors who are depicted as ridiculous and snobbish (2010:420). These characters explicitly represent westernization and are used for criticism of western values through their artificial manners which underscores what Hall calls as “ambivalent nature of the difference” (2003: 238); westernization is affirmed but ridiculed at the same time. Criticism of Turkish antagonists often executed through anti-values dedicated to the minorities.

Consequently, in Yeşilçam various ethnic communities were being subjected to homogenization through exaggeration and simplifying. Exaggerated lack of language skills is the main marker of these characters who are articulated to be mocked and laughed at by Turkish audience. These kinds of stereotypes were social and psychological reductions and clearly attempted to preserve a social distance between Turks and all the others to maintain a sense of ethnic superiority.

While discussing American white narrative and problem of minorities in media, Audrey Foster states that “for most white spectators, executives, producers and directors, the underrepresentation of the minorities is not a problem that they instinctively seek to correct. The white media power structure simply does not stand up and say, “We want better representations of people of ethnicities”, (2003: 94) which is also the case for most of the Turkish media agents. Drawing an analogy between whites and Turks, we may say Turks are everywhere in representation from writing, directing and acting, and moreover in media, politics and education. Although minorities worked in production of the films in Yeşilçam from music to editing, directing to acting, they were muted on the screen. And this imbalance of power and privilege conferred dominance for very long years.

3.3.2. Changing Times, Changing Stereotypes

The population of the non-Muslim minorities was regressed significantly during the 70s due to discriminative policies and other political events such as Cyprus conflict. Today estimated Rum population is less than 1.500 people (Yaşartürk, 2012: 32), Armenian population is 40.000-60.000 and Jew population is around 35.000 people (Balcı, 2013: 43-46). Once they were mentioned in millions, now they diminished to thousands which make them a very small percentage of the total population. Evidently they now can't be considered as a threat to any ideology, moreover they can't be a reference to Turkishness since Turkishness has also lost its meaning. Thus, by the end of 70s not only minorities from society, but also these representations diminished significantly from cinema e.g. “the Armenian doctor” and “Jew insurance man” characters of *İlk Göz Ağrsı/The First Love* (Nejat Saydam, 1963) were both

replaced by Turkish characters in its 1975 remake *Acele Koca Aranıyor/Urgent Husband is Wanted* (Muzaffer Aslan) (Balcı, 2013: 114). Changing world and country dynamics, changing social life and urban immigration resulted with different representations in cinema such as workers in İstanbul immigrated from East, namely Kurds. Now the main other of the society is Kurds who are the people what Turks can't be. Contrary to non-Muslim others who were educated, mostly wealthy and business and profession owners, Kurds are generally poor from an underdeveloped region, less educated and to some they are considered as belonging to the lowest scale of society. Therefore, their representation and stereotypes in mainstream rely on the general perception of the Kurds who are also more known to the society than the non-Muslims.

Since they were not considered minorities Alevi or Kurds were altogether ignored by Yeşilçam. *O da Beni Seviyor/Summer Love* (Barış Pirhasan, 2001) can be acknowledged the only film in Turkish cinema about Alevi life. Due to their limited economic, cultural and symbolic capital, Kurds were absent from cinematic representation until the 1970s except exiled Yılmaz Güney who “depicted Turks and Kurds as suffering human beings under state oppression. Due to heavy censorship, which regularly condemned several of his films for leftist inclinations, he was obliged to deliver the Kurdish identity of his characters through circumlocution [...] (in) *Toprağın Gelini/Seyyit Han/ The Bride of the Earth/Seyyit Khan* (1968), *Umut/Hope* (1970) and *Endişe/Anxiety* (1974) are about Kurdish people [...] but Kurdish is never spoken. Güney tried to create a Kurdish atmosphere by the use of local elegies” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008:91-92).

During the 70s mainstream cinema's interest towards Kurds revolved around narratives including feudalism and rural Kurdish life realities such as *berdel* (bride

exchange), *kuma* (co-wife), bride price, vendetta, smuggling, and recently honor killings. The first three of the topics are woman center tragedies like *Ezo Gelin/Ezo Bride* (Feyzi Tuna, 1973) and *Kuma/Co-Wife* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1974) (Yücel, 2008: 94-101). Bride price and vendetta are among the central themes of the Yeşilçam comedies of this study along with other traditional themes: anti-*ağa* and bandit films which have been filmed since the 60s as in *Koçero* (Ümit Utku, 1964) and *Aç Kurtlar/Hungry Wolves* (Yılmaz Güney, 1969).

Although liberalization process of Turkey had begun with election in 1984, when Kurds are represented, the mainstream cinema avoided calling them as Kurds. Until the 1990s, Kurdish identity was not named but “the audience surmise that a character in the background who wore black *shalvar*, spoke bad Turkish, was poor, illiterate and came from the South East was a Kurd, the ignorant man from the mountains, devoted to his master and willing to serve him like a slave” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 17). Their conditions are depicted as a result of feudalism and of their subservient nature, not the inadequate state policies (ibid: 91). Mainstream cinema filmed Kurds and their geography without giving a name and reference to authentic culture. In popular comedies of the time, a timeless and placeless Kurdishness is caricaturized through an Orientalist approach as in *Kibar Feyzo* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1978), *Erkek Güzeli Sefil Bilo* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1979), *Şark Bülbülü* (Kartal Tibet, 1979) and *Davaro* (Kartal Tibet, 1981). From the eyes of the Turkish directors, and Turkish actors, through exoticization and stereotyping, these ethnic comedies centralize Kurds who are constructed according to the dominant ideology; underdeveloped, primitive, vulgar, laughable, uncivilized minorities lack of certain qualification such as proper language and basic manners. James Morreall states that this kind of superiority depends on heightened self-esteem which highlights the social function of humor

where one gains power from mockery, ridicule and cutting someone down to size (1983: 4-6).

These “fixed, clear-cut and unalterable” (Dyer, 1977: 355) stereotypes were the markers of un-Turkishness and still are, to some extent, in mainstream media as in *Hemşo* (Ömer Uğur, 2001) where a naïve and childish Kurdish character Cebrail wears *shalvar and keffiyeh*, speaks with a heavy accent and cherishes a vendetta which signifies his uncivilized character, or in the box office success *Eşkiya/The Bandit* (Yavuz Turgul, 1996). Although the central character Baran is Kurdish, the film is concerned about the changing values of the society, the effects of modernization over people. He wears *shalvar and poshu*, his Kurdishness is a décor where he is depicted as a human in the wrong times in which his understanding of duty and honor has lost its meaning. Not to mention these characters were played by Turkish actors. Stereotyping is significant for passing because it is economical in a sense that “a stereotype possesses a core around which the images flow and change. The constancy of the central image is rarely altered and is repeated in relation to other aspects of the main form” (Morreal, 1987: 251). They are handy regarding conveying information swiftly about characters and to imbue audiences with expectations about actions of the characters.

Through the 80s, 90s and 2000s, from one channel stated owned television to the age of internet, Turkey experienced the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and ethnic separatism which shook the core of Kemalism. Now the identity formations and feeling of belonging varies:

According to a 2007 survey (conducted by Tarhan Erdem), being a citizen of Turkey has identified first as loving Turkey (80%), then saying “I am from Turkey” (62%), being Muslim (55%), and being Turk (46%). As may be seen from this survey, while the nation state’s central republican ideology and its projects of modernization from above, which also involved the marginalization or elimination of the nation’s others, have recently lost their momentum and influence (Arslan, 2011: 12).

Post-coup Prime Minister Turgut Özal era politics embraced minorities, thus the number of productions containing them increased starting from late 80s and through the 90s. This fact is in close relations with Turkey’s EU accession negotiations, as Gül Yaşartürk underlines, where Islamic, non-Muslim and Kurdish identities came along in cinema. In terms of non-Muslim minorities, while Rum characters led, Armenian characters have increased after the 90s (2012: 53). Neither Yaşartürk nor Dilara Balcı mention contemporary films including Jews which can be considered as an evidence of blanking of Jew representations. As for the ones we have, non-Muslim representations escalate from traditional to progressive ones, but most of them, particularly historical ones still have usual stereotypes which are polished, yet remain the same such as in Rum prostitutes Madam Eleni of *Ağır Roman/Cholera Street* (Mustafa Altıoklar, 1997) and Elena of *Güz Sancısı/Pains of Autumn* (Tomris Giritlioğlu, 2009). In *Pars: Kiraz Operasyonu/ Pars: Operation Cherry* (Osman Sınay, 2007) drug smuggler is Armenian Vahe who is supported by a Kurdish Member of Parliament called Sami. As mentioned before, minorities depicted as out of society, without roots characters through Yeşilçam. This tendency can be seen in films where minorities are depicted as alienated or lonely, and sometimes mentally and/or otherwise retarded characters such as in *Sen de Gitme/ Don’t You Leave Either* (Tunç Başaran, 1995), *Güle Güle/ Bye Bye* (Zeki Ökten, 2000), *Gönül Yarası/Lovelorn* (Yavuz Turgul, 2005), *Eğreti Gelin/Borrowed Bride* (Atif Yılmaz,

2005), *Sis ve Gece/ Fog and Night* (Turgut Yasalar, 2007) and *Kurtuluş Son Durak/Last Station Kurtuluş* (Yavuz Pirhasan, 2012). Non-Muslim minority representations in above mentioned films, as Gül Yaşartürk presents, are used for justification of Turkish characters' marginalization in a sense that Turkish characters in close relation to these minorities become others of the society. (2012: 77). Moreover, lonely *Rum* characters, particularly women, are presented as desperate characters in need of Turkish protection to survive as in *Sen Ne Dilersen/Whatever You Wish* (Cem Başeskioglu, 2005) which tells a story of five unhappy and lonely *Rum* women and their relations to homeless men (ibid: 104).

Fotoğraflar/Photographs (İrfan Tözüm, 1989) has a progressive narrative containing Greek dialogues, music and church images; a hint of ordinary life of *Rum* minorities. Turkish cinema comes to terms with the past in *Bir Kırık Bebek/ One Broken Doll* (Nisa Akman, 1987) and *Dar Alanda Kısa Paslaşmalar/Offside* (Serdar Akara, 2000) where honor of Armenians is restored through Armenian doll master Artin and football trainer Hacı, respectively.

Today, the subject of minorities and their identities separates Turkish contemporary cinema into two: art house films concentrate on minorities politically and socially, and mainstream productions which neglect the social dynamics and prefer stereotypes such as in *Eşkiya/Bandit* (Yavuz Turgul, 1996) and *Vizontele/Vizontele* films where Kurdishness is performed by Turkish actors, except Yılmaz Erdoğan, and the culture is reduced to an exotic, decorative element.

Naturally art house films create a representational space where the hegemonic discourse is challenged where the idea of social and cultural difference is emphasized. The examples, among many others, can be listed as *Işıklar*

Sönmesin/Let the Lights On (Reis Çelik, 1996) places Turkish soldier vs Kurdish militia, *Güneşe Yolculuk* (Yeşim Ustaoglu, 1999) depicts a friendship of Turkish and Kurdish protagonists while criticizing prejudice towards Kurds and allows Kurdish language for the first time in cinema, *Salkım Hanımın Taneleri/Mrs. Sakım's Diamonds* (Tomris Giritlioğlu, 1999) comes to terms with the infamous property tax of 1942 through an Armenian family tragedy in the hands of a Turkish villain, *Bulutları Beklerken/Journey to the Sun* (Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2004) focuses on the deportation issue while telling a sad story about a Greek woman passed as Muslim-Turkish for fifty years, and *Büyük Adam, Küçük Aşk, aka Hejar/ Big Man, Small Love* (Handan İpekçi, 2001) deals with restriction of Kurdish language while telling a story of a retired Kemalist judge and a Kurdish orphan. Throughout the 90s and 2000s strict nationalist discourse has left its place to multiple discourses but despite their progressive representations, still the narratives are mostly constructed around problematic issues and characters who are struggling with the system as still being the mistreated or marginal ones.

In midst of various representations, I follow the change in ethnicity discourse and analyze the patterns of passing of Kurdishness in particular cinematic eras in comedy *genre* which is chosen due to its three significant intertwined features; popularity, contextuality and its unifying structure. Mahadev Apte notes that in order to laugh, familiarity with a cultural code is prerequisite which is not consciously acknowledged by the individuals since they already possess the cultural knowledge to enjoy the humor. An individual out of any specific culture who hasn't internalized its behavioral patterns and value systems may not laugh (Medhurst, 2007:12). And since comedy is one of the forms through which membership of a particular group identity can be reinforced as Henri Bergson suggests: "However spontaneous it

seems, laughter always implies a kind of free masonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary” (in King, 2002: 155), I will take into account comedy as a unifying *genre* through which us and otherness, as well as social inequality, can be constructed continuously where certain representations help this process. It is a known fact that comedy is often used to ridicule or mock other groups in society, in this sense ethnicity is one of the major grounds on which such mockery takes place. In order to understand this structure the next chapter will touch upon what comedy is, what are the main humor theories that applied to different kinds of jokes, and finally how ethnic jokes and comic stereotypes function in society.

CHAPTER IV

A TERRAIN FOR UNITY: COMEDY

“To Whom It May Concern

I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone.”

Sigmund Freud

Until now passing and identity construction issues are studied in relation to dominant discourse of the society, how us and others formed, how they are anchored in the collective memory through certain stereotypes. We saw the importance of representations for establishing the social unity to which laughter also contributes because laughter at others is one way social groups define themselves, it is “a process of consisting to a large extent of distinctions between self and other” (King, 2002: 144). Evidently comedy *genre* has a significant contribution to these cultural productions and the reasons of its choice over other *genres* are justified below as Geoff King puts it:

As a social product, comedy is often involved –implicitly or explicitly- in the politics of representations: the way one group or another is identified, distinguished and portrayed. Who and what we laugh at, and why implications in terms of both how we see ourselves and how we define

ourselves, the two often closely interconnected. Gender, race/ethnicity and nationality are there major sets of grounds on which such distinctions and identifications are constructed and articulated; as such, it is not surprising that they should be recurrent sources of comic material in film as elsewhere (2002: 129).

Moreover, in his anthropological humor studies Mahadev Apte stresses “comedy is often used to ridicule and mock other groups in society, whether on gender, racial/ethnic or any other lines, a tendency which is widespread in human culture (in King, 2002: 143-144). His multidisciplinary humor studies including anthropology, psychology and sociology reveals that:

Ethnic humor seems basic in human societies, derives from ethnocentrism, in-group adulation, out-group resentment, prejudice, and intolerance of the lifestyles of others. Much of this humor is designed to combat undesired socio-cultural traits, such as excessive sexuality, uncleanness and gluttony. And many times these qualities are projected onto ethnics so as to make them the comic butt (Lowe, 1986: 451).

Konrad Lorenz, in *On Aggression*, draws our attention to aggressive nature of humor and its two functions. He offers that; “laughter produces simultaneously a strong fellow-feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders [...] Laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line” (in Lowe, 1986: 440). Since this aggressive attitude disguised behind laughter, it becomes more dangerous and subversive; after all, humor can disguise hatred, contempt and any destructive feelings. Morreal draws our attention to the intimate relation between humor and aggression which reveals itself in powerful terminology containing words and phrases which reflect hostility in such words idiot, fool, buffoon, empty-headed, simpleton, thick-brained, half-brained, low-brow, dunderhead and so forth (1987:

255-256). Not only these words have perfect translations in Turkish, but Turkish has an idiosyncratic vocabulary of its own.

Then as a contextual and unifying *genre* in which every ethnic script implies a discourse, I suggest that comedy- a very popular *genre* in Turkey- is a very fruitful terrain to study the structure regarding passing of ethnicities in regard to clarifying borders between us and others. The films in question, especially the Yeşilçam productions, were meant for this society and this society only. Keeping in mind that ethnic humor is a tool to maintain hegemony of the group in power, I first to draw a framework why we laugh, and I will briefly mention the theories of humor and then examine how stereotyping and passing works within comedy; a *genre* which is defined as “an invitation to belong” by Andy Medhurst (2007: 19).

4.1. Theories of Humor

While maintaining its power and success from early days to date, comedy has further created subgenres that are conventionally executed, such as parody, black comedy, political satire and comedy drama. Considering the wide spectrum of the *genre*, in order to determine how to approach comedies in general, and the films of this study in particular, I will draw attention to humor and major theories concerning it.

“Humor is primarily a social phenomenon, as are other forms of human enjoyment. We rarely laugh when alone, even at things that would evoke our laughter if we were with others. [...] laughing together unites people” (Morreall, 1983: 114-115). Thus there is a social relativity in humor and this aspect is particularly important for this study. As a social phenomenon, humor is a very broad field to study since it can be

obtained from “human misfortune and clumsiness, obscenity, grotesqueness, veiled insult, nonsense, wordplay and puns, human misdemeanors and so on, as manifested in forms as varied as parody, satire, drama, clowning, music, farce and cartoons” (Morreal, 1987: 139).

Each culture has its own values, norms and rules about what is appropriated as humor and these determine the content, target and style of this very board field. Humor raises social considerations in many issues such as in the use of sexist and ethnic jokes. And there are various theoretical approaches available in humor studies addressing different questions as Murray Davis suggests:

It is fruitful to apply Hobbes’ superiority theory to aggressive jokes, Bergson’s mechanization theory to farce, Freud’s sexual theory to dirty jokes, and Northrop Frye’s anthropological theory to Aristophanic Old Comedy [...] But humor is too complicated to be comprehended by such single-factor theories, no matter how well they explain one of its aspects (1993: 7).

Keeping in mind the complex nature of humor, for the sake of the study I will touch upon the most dominant theories that are superiority, incongruity and relief to gain a necessary insight to construct a comprehensive discursive field to approach ethnic jokes and comic stereotyping. However, these theories alone do not form a general theory of laughter. Although these three theories are inadequate, each of them draws our attention to important aspects of humor. This study acknowledges that all three theories are indispensable and interrelated for explaining humor. As Victor Raskin notes, the three theories “characterize the complex phenomenon of humor from very different and do not at all contradict each other-rather they seem to supplement each other quite nicely” (in Morreal, 2009: 7).

4.1.1. Superiority Theory

The oldest and probably still most widespread theory of humor suggests that laughter is an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people. This theory goes back to Plato, for whom the proper object of laughter is human evil. He suggested that the laughter leads to lose of rationality which makes people less human. The theory was modernized by Hobbs to whom the human race is in constant struggle and to him laughter is "a sudden glory arising from some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" (Morreal, 1983:4-5). Hobbs' notion of sudden glory was evolutionized by Anthony Lodovici who said "laughter is an expression of a person's feeling of "superior adaptation" to some specific situation, or to his environment in general" (ibid: 6). "The next step in the evolution of modern laughter was the development of ridicule. Originally people laughed at the black eye and the broken arm of the defeated combatant, but later they came to laugh outside of combat situations at any mark of injury or even deformity because these suggested that the person had been defeated in combat" (Morreal, 1983:7).

Superiority depends on heightened self-esteem which highlights the social function of humor. It gains power from mockery, ridicule and cutting someone down to size and the last one contains sexual, aggressive and nonsense jokes for emotional release. There is feeling of superiority towards human incompetence, clumsiness, clowning, and misfortune. And sometimes it is a moral superiority when humor is born from incidents of "sex, drinking or human greed" (Morreal, 1987: 140). Furthermore derision is a significant part of this type of humor which sometimes can be cruel. Although "our moral training has removed some of it, it still comes out in many ways, [...] as in our laughter at ethnic jokes. Even if, it is not permissible to

laugh at someone's misfortunes in polite company, we still enjoy witty repartee, especially well-phrased insults” (Morreal, 1983: 10).

Evidently this approach can be useful to especially in analyzing ethnic and sexist humor since both contains hatred, hostility or aggressiveness to some extent. It is not adaptable to other types of laughter deriving from tickling, puns or verbal plays, absurd and nonsense humor. Superiority theory is important for this study because we laugh at persons through ridiculing them over some human features such as physical prowess or intelligence. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of humor. By nature, inanimate objects, or situations cannot be ridiculed since we can compare ourselves to, and so feel superior to, only other persons. Since this action carries a lack of respect for the ridiculed ones, in context of minority stereotypes in comedies, this will be the primary theory to be taken into account.

4.1.2. Incongruity Theory

“Two dog owners are having a conversation:

-Can you imagine, my Astor goes out for the paper on his own!

-I know, my Rex told me about it yesterday.” (Vandaele, 2002: 223)

If we may call the emotional side of laughter lies in superiority, then cognitive side lies in incongruity. This time the cause of the laughter is not a feeling of triumph or self glory but an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way. The basic idea behind it is very general and simple: we live in an orderly world, where certain patterns are expected in orderly daily life and if something doesn't fit the rule it brings laughter. (Morreal, 1983: 15-16). Shortly, the core concept of the theory is that human experiences work with learned

patterns; our experiences which prepare us for further experiences. First hinted by Aristotle but not elaborated as superiority theory, the theory was shaped by modern philosophers Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer (Morreal, 1987: 130). To Kant “in everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh, there must be something absurd. Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Morreal, 1983: 16). On the other hand, Schopenhauer’s theory differs from Kant in terms of relying on nothingness. To him, what we get in laughter situations is not nothing but frustrated expectations. Morreal notes that “once we have experienced something incongruous [...] we no longer expect *it* to fit our mental patterns. Nonetheless, it still violates our normal expectations. That is how we can be amused by the same thing more than once” (2009:11). Eventually we get something that we were not expecting which fits into the situation in some way but just does not fit in the expected way.

Then incongruity is a cognitive process which depends on a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke. It relies on inconsistencies between circumstances and the person, thus the normative structure of the joke contains a surprise. In a comedy we may see different kinds of incongruities. One of them is linguistic incongruity which requires the most economical and fluent usage of language, therefore, misuse and stuttering are means of humor in any language. Furthermore, cognitive schemes may refer to the interaction between the signifier and the signified in a given language: a one-to-one correspondence is expected and any deviation from this creates humor in the form of puns, allusions, misuse of maxims, referential vagueness, lack of figurative speech, social metaphors and an arbitrary mixture of them which is called pragmatic incongruity (Vandaele, 2002: 230). Also there is narrative incongruity where the film interpretation interacts with

pragmatic phenomena like referential vagueness; we have a logical expectation about a scene depending on the previous scenes but we are wronged in an unexpected way (ibid: 232).

Consequently this theory cannot be applied to sentimental or ridiculing situations. It is a sophisticated laughter theory which is limited with intellectually constructed and “it is now the dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology” (Morreal, 2009: 10) as in the contemporary comedies of this study.

4.1.3. Relief Theory

The last theory approaches laughter from different aspects of the phenomenon and concerns its biological function and physical form in relation to nervous system. There are different versions of this theory, but they all have in common a more or less physiological point of view in which laughter is seen as a venting of nervous energy. While the superiority theory focuses on emotions, and the incongruity theory on objects or ideas causing laughter, the relief theory addresses the physical and biological aspects. Morreal suggests that relief might fit into laughter situations in two ways. Firstly, “the person may have come into the situation with the nervous energy that is to be released, or the laughter situation itself may cause the build-up of the nervous energy, as well as its release” (1983: 21). Then any prohibition can build up an increased desire in a person to do what has been forbidden, and this frustrated desire may manifest itself in pent-up nervous energy. It is based on cathartic and abreaction purposes of humor and any taboo, such as sex, violence, alcohol, drugs, can be the source of relief laughter. Freud suggests that laughter releases the nervous tension and energy:

In all laughter situations we save a certain quantity of psychic energy [...] is usually employed for psychic purpose but which turns out not to be needed. The discharge of this superfluous energy is laughter. In joking, he says, we save energy that is normally used to suppress forbidden feelings and thoughts; in reaction to the comic we save an expenditure of energy in thought; and in humor we save an expenditure of energy in emotion (Morreal, 1987: 131).

Jokes or events about sexuality, violence, and racism may be considered in this category. According to this theory restrictions cause people to suppress their sexual desires, when a taboo is broken and sexual jokes are made, forbidden sexual thoughts are called up and some of the repressed sexual energy is released in laughter which happens in Yeşilçam comedies of this study frequently talks about sex and sexual intercourse.

Clearly there is a connection between at least some laughter and the relief of tension or the expenditure of energy. But not every comic situation releases excessive energy such as word plays and puns. And certainly not in every situation people have a hidden agenda relying on forbidden thoughts and feelings. But we cannot deny that after surviving a great deal of danger many people laugh very heartily, and get rid of this excessive energy where laughter works in a cathartic way. This feature of laughter will be taken into account while studying taboo issues of the society.

4.2. Ethnic Jokes and Comic Stereotypes

“-Everybody thinks we are terrorists,” complains an Arab shopkeeper.

“-You think that's bad?” replies a Jew. “Everyone thinks we are you!”

You Don't Mess with the Zohan (Dennis Dogan, 2008)

Consumption of media texts, films particularly, takes place in cultural contexts and comedy, biography and history are considered typical high-context genres (Volz et. al., 2010: 134). The themes, plots, values, ideas, expressions and ideology that films convey are embedded or presented through the cultures from which they are flourished. Therefore, in these *genres* identifying with the style, values and behavioral patterns of the material is very crucial. Out of the three, comedy by nature can be applied to any object in film therefore, in cinema; it has a wide range of forms from slapstick to grotesque, from satire to romantic comedies.

Fundamentally comedy “concentrates on the incongruities of human beings, especially their short comings. From its earlier days it has highlighted human ugliness, ignorance, folly and vice; and its stock characters have been the hunchback, the fool, the wind-bag, the drunkard, the imposter, the hypocrite and so forth” (Morreall, 1999:14). Some of the traditional characters have changed or evolved, though, the purpose remained; to-be laughed-at-ness through physical appearance or socially repressed behaviors. Not limited to, but highly appraised profane, vulgar and obscene films such as *There is Something About Mary* (Bobby & Peter Farrelly, 1998), series of *American Pie* (1999-2003), series of *Hangover* (2009-2014), and *Jackass* series (2000-2013), far more than the others, not only use body vulgarly, disregard the social rules but also make use of human abject such as saliva, vomit or semen for the sake of comedy. This type rude and to some extent crude comedy involves comic elements like pushing the limits of stupidity, grotesque body and numerous kinds of irrationality is also very popular in Turkish cinema where comedy is among the most profit making *genres* whose spectators are not gendered like melodrama or pornography.

Comedy is a relatively inexpensive cinematic form which can generate high profit with low costs and humor based on obscene language, slang, lack of manners, barbarity and thick accent are commonly used by Turkish mainstream to draw the masses. Turkey box office success of all times reveals this particular fact. Out of the top ten of all times most watched films, seven of them are comedies; the first in the list is *Recep İvedik 4* (Şahan Gökbakar, 2014), followed by *Düğün Dernek/Merry Making* (Selçuk Aydemir, 2013), fourth is *Recep İvedik 2* (Şahan Gökbakar, 2009), fifth is *Recep İvedik* (Şahan Gökbakar, 2008), seventh is *GORA* (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2004), eight is *Eyvah Eyvah 2* (Hakan Algül, 2011), and the ninth is *CM101MMXI Fundamentals* (Murat Dündar, 2013). (http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/hollywood_komediden_umudu_kesti_bizde_tam_tersi-1200755). *Recep İvedik* films are perfect example of rude and crude comedies where laughter derives from excessiveness and misbehavior. These films not only gained immense success at box office but also quickly became a phenomenon in cultural sphere.

In 2013 and in the first six months of 2014 the figures are six and five, respectively. Considering the DVD sales, internet viewings and television broadcasting, the prevalence of the *genre* goes beyond this measurable box office success which makes comedy a powerful *genre* to disseminate certain ideologies since, media images are referred in everyday conversations where “privileged ideological discourse is socially validated” (Lull, 1995: 20). Therefore, despite commonly treated as safe and unthreatening the power of comedy should not be underestimated. When ethnic representations are taken into account the significance of comedies reveal itself. Because under uneven conditions, derived from the structural inequalities of the society, mocking and ridiculing others contribute to the legitimation to dominance of power. Previously minority representations and

stereotypes in Turkish cinema were discussed in general now the study will concentrate on comic ethnic stereotypes and underline how they don't differ much from the resentful, hateful or humiliating ones.

Morreal notes that telling and enjoying sexist and racist jokes rely on certain emotional attitudes in a society (1987: 226). Similarly, Michael Billig states that humor is not so far from hatred and adds that unambiguous stereotypes of gender or ethnicity demand a suspension of empathy with the target being an object of ridicule (2001: 268). Therefore, ethnic jokes and stereotyping is a good signifier of the subconscious of a society or the collective thinking of the majority. The most common ethnic jokes and stereotypes are about stupidity, laziness, sexual immorality and some other shortcomings where "the other is seen as laughably foolish and incompetent, and so not capable of taking on greater power or responsibility" (King, 2002: 144) which reproduces the dominant discourse regarding social hierarchy through laughter as in Yeşilçam comedies.

As mentioned before humor unites and draws boundaries. Anthropologist Christie Davies notes that ethnic jokes "delineate the social, geographic and moral boundaries of a nation or ethnic group. By making fun of peripheral and ambiguous groups they reduce ambiguity and clarify boundaries or at least make ambiguity appear less threatening" (1982: 383). Ethnic jokes play an important role in group identity formation and solidarity. She studied thousands of jokes around the world and found out that ethnic jokes reflect the competing moral values, uncertain social boundaries and impersonal power structures of the societies. Moreover, jokes about cowardice and other shortcomings attributed to ethnic groups are found in numerous countries with the same social pattern. Thus, although it is unifying, humor can be simultaneously social and antisocial, bringing some individuals together while

fostering division among others. Any minority can't be expected to laugh at themselves through ridiculing stereotypes as the majority does.

In many cases although the ethnic joke tellers don't imply or assert that certain groups are inferior in any ways, they are still responsible and guilty to some extent by telling the jokes and being indifferent and not caring about the harm that may derive from circulating these jokes. Morreal notes that these jokes should be considered as harmful because "they present characters with exaggerated degrees of undesirable traits who represent groups that some people believe actually have those traits." Jokes about stupid Polish, dishonest Greek, coward Italian, stingy Jew, pedant Armanian etc are based on "stretching negative stereotypes" with exaggerated degree of shortcomings. These exaggerations "convert morally objectionable ideas into palpable ones". As mentioned before Turkish cinema creates comic stereotypes of certain minorities; Armenians and Kurds. However, it is a significant fact that comic stereotypes are not more innocent than the hostile ones. Framing stereotypes with a playful tone makes the jokes enjoyable rather than hostile. However this playfulness lets prejudice slip smoothly into people's minds without being given a second thought as in 2006 made comedy *Borat: The Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (Larry Charles) in which Kazakhs were represented as racist, anti-Semitic, crude and Gypsy hating people. Consequently Kazakh government released an advertisement in *New York Times* for their resentment of the stereotype created in the film which has nothing to do with real life Kazakhs. (Morreal, 2009: 98-108). Thus even if the majority enjoys, there is always a potential to offend lies underneath the many types of humor including the one derives from ethnic jokes. Watching clumsy, naïve and sometimes foolish French

Inspector Jacques Clouseau in *The Pink Panther* (Blake Edwards, 1963) has different affects on English and French audience.

It is obvious that this kind of stereotypical jokes treats the people of target group as inferior and interchangeable with certain shortcomings. The shortcomings of the minorities are also used by Yeşilçam such as lack of proper Turkish spoken by Rum, Jews and Armenians of İstanbul. In the context of Kurdishness these shortcomings have a longer list from manners to language, from dressing to life style. Consequently, when Kurdishness is passed by a Turkish actor, the shortcomings become more significant because we acknowledge the actor in his real identity and make distinctions about ethnic innuendos easily. While discussing whites passing as Asians Kent Ono and Vincent Pham state that any “form of racial masquerade” in which the audience is aware of the actor’s original racial identity “allows the audience to play around with race- to imagine what aspects of race is align with an imagined while simultaneously attempting to note aspects of the actor’s whiteness, thus practicing the skills of discriminating” between what is white and what is not (2009: 47). I suggest that the implication is also true for affirmation of Turkishness; moreover, since the audience knows they are Turkish actors, they feel safe to laugh at them from a distance.

Stereotyping in comedy has significance because they help to establish instantly recognizable character types from which stereotype based jokes born as a source of humor. Moreover, stereotyping serves an ideological function that to legitimate the social hierarchy through normalizing racially/ethnically defined characteristics (King, 2002). Jane Feuer argues that “the *genre* positions the interpretive community in such a way as to naturalize the dominant ideologies expressed in the text” (quoted in Park et. al, 2006:145). Thus, ideological implications of these stereotypes gain

significance in a social environment in which ethnic prejudice, resentment and/or hatred is rooted such as Turkey where ethnic jokes and stereotypes inevitably reinforce the ongoing hierarchy.

In his discussion of *48 Hours* (Walter Hill, 1982) Donald Bogle claims that although comedy has a potential to “comment on the problematic nature of stereotyping, it rarely capitalizes the opportunity [...] since minority characters rarely resist or reject the stereotypes that are forced upon them” (ibid: 159). *48 Hours* is a valid example to prove the idea since Reggie Hammond (Eddie Murphy) never gets mad at Jack Cates (Nick Nolte) for making racially insulting comments, thus “greatly neutralizes the inherent racism” (quoted in Park et. al, 2006: 159). Moreover, since comedy is considered as a light *genre*, “theories of *genre* suggest that the naturalization of racial difference through stereotyping is more likely to occur in a comedic format because generic conventions discourage viewers’ critical engagement with the racial discourse” (Park et. al, 2006: 160)

In Yeşilçam comedies stereotypes “gain power by repetitive play” so that the image becomes part of a collective memory and ridiculing and mocking in comedies “becomes pernicious where it is used to reinforce inequalities” (King, 2002: 144). I had mentioned before that stereotypes become living entities and they eventually leak into the collective memory and social domain. The danger of negative stereotyping is, as Morreal notes, “mere repeated thinking of groups in negative stereotypes is enough to prompt us to treat real individuals not according to their merits and shortcomings [...], but as automatically inferior because they belong to those groups” (2009: 108). Furthermore, Geoff King points out the possible harmful effects of minority actors’ passing as their own racial/ethnic stereotypes. Giving example of enactment of racist stereotypes such as the ‘coon- a stereotype based on

an black adult who is lazy, perpetually frightened, idiotic and childish-' by Black comedians such as Eddie Murphy, Martin Lawrence, and Chris Tucker, he suggests that their performances are uncomfortably reminiscent of racist ideologies that have been used to justify racial discrimination discourses of the past (2002: 145). His assertion is a valid one considering most of the audience welcomes negative stereotypes of the minorities; they are taken for granted most of the time, without criticizing or even thinking.

Comic or not, stereotypes are "tenacious in its hold over rational thinking" and they "pervade the deepest sense and profoundly affect behavioral actions" (Morreal, 1987:250). When audience laughs at humor derived from ethnic jokes or acts, they validate the stereotypes embedded within. Charles Husband underlines, in ethnic humor discussion, one should always remember that a joke is never "just a joke" (in Billig, 2001, 269), and this study will take this fact into consideration and not forget that defending ethnic humor may in fact validate negative stereotypes in society. In Turkish cinema, given ethnic stereotypes are most frequently used to represent minorities, the imposed rigid ethnic beliefs help maintaining the social hierarchy, implicitly affirm Turkishness and confirm its privileged stance. And I believe that ethnic stereotypes in comedy should be taken seriously because of their potential to naturalize the differences through humor.

CHAPTER V

PASSING KURDISHNESS IN TURKISH COMEDIES

5.1. Methodology

The theoretical framework for this study is articulated within the field of discourse analysis that examines the structures and functions of the textual and visual components in their social, political and cultural contexts. Therefore, Kurdishness will be discussed as a discourse, which has changed historically, and will be analyzed through passing practices in cinema. Kurdishness only meaningfully exist within the discourse about them, it also exists through certain discourse which gives us a kind of knowledge about it. Thus, the films will reveal this state of knowledge (*episteme*) sharing the same style to support a strategy and pattern. Furthermore, at a particular historical moment the discourse provides us certain ways of talking and excludes other ways about the given topic like the films of the late 70s and early 80s. The subjects of the discourse, the Kurds, are only to be known through the knowledge which was constructed at that time. This knowledge is produced by an authority, namely Yeşilçam, the mainstream cinema, constitutes the truth about the matter for

an historical moment. Since stereotyping occurs in the realm of power, it can be an example of Foucauldian power/knowledge relation where people are classified according to a norm, constructed and excluded as other. These stereotypes have changed and a different discourse had born with new conceptions about Kurdishness as will be seen the latter comedy films.

According to Foucault, “in each period, discourse produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects, and practices of knowledge, which differed radically from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them” (quoted in Hall, 1997: 46) which also explains the changing Kurdishness discourse in the films. It is evident that the production of the latter group films were realized when the power relations in the society shifted and cultural sphere allowed different narratives.

To this end, ethnic elements of tradition, people-hood, religion, language, values, and aesthetics, or I may say ethnic features that are attributed to them, will be looked for in construction of Kurdishness. Since the core of the ethnic group is their codes and values; overt signals of food, dress, and language, and basic value orientations of standards of morality and excellence, the analysis will focus on them as markers of identity. In other words, labels of Kurdishness in behaving, talking, clothing, body language, gestures, and some other physical attributes will be analyzed through different discourses to reveal the passing codes of the films.

5.2. Rural Comedies in General

The ethnification of comedy was a well-established trend during the last years of Yeşilçam where films were made about minorities casting majorities for two main reasons: the issues regarding production and distribution (the cast is formed by well known Turkish comedy actors) and Turkish audience identify easily with Turkish actors. The films in this study depict lives of the Kurds living in rural East, the most underdeveloped region in the country, where the Kurdish community is predominant. The interest towards the region can be inscribed through “nostalgia and nationalism, which caters to a gap between modernity and tradition” (ibid, 2011: 254). Furthermore there is a distinction among urban and rural comedies that the first type comedy of manners depends on topicality offering an alert critique of metropolitan society at a particular place and time, whereas in rural comedy of manners “the fun lies in recalling or inferring the rules of a remote, outdated or a vanished world” (Nelson, 1990: 36). Then from the beginning we may suggest that we are looking at an outdated, primitive and backward world of the Kurds where characters would be unsophisticated. Although shot during the late 70s and early 80s, before the transformation of the country, there is no time reference in first group comedies.

Although first era films were not shot in the region, they give the impression of the region though mountains and badlands. Yeşilçam depicted villages in melodramatic, realistic or Kemalist terms. The first is about clash between good and bad, the second depends on social reality of rural life and the last one focuses on the ideological war of the state men such as teachers, doctors, soldiers against traditionalist and reactionaries (Arslan, 2011: 211). The studied Yeşilçam era comedies can be considered melodramatic since there is always a battle between the feudal landlord

Ağa and the peasants however; it also underlines the gap between civilized West and uncivilized East which is depicted as backward, uneducated and primitive.

5.3. Yeşilçam Era Comedies

Comedy is a matter of conflicts as well as pleasure, literary critic James English notes and describes comedy as:

Comic practice is always on some level or in some measure an assertion of group against group, an effect and event of struggle, a form of symbolic violence. The inescapable heterogeneity of society, the ceaseless conflict of social life, the multiple and irreconcilable patterns of identification within which relationships of hierarchy and solidarity must be negotiated- these are what our laughter is 'about' (quoted Medhurst, 2007: 14).

What English suggests for comedies is very accurate for Yeşilçam films since Turkishness was imposed as a norm of the "good" moral values against minorities. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that all the comedies from classical era depict Kurds sex driven individuals. "Freud sees the lower bodily stratum repressed for the advance of civilization" (Horton, 1991: 113), and it is not a surprise that none of Kurdish characters' explicit talk about sex and continuous acts of vocal sexual implications can be seen in Turkish characters. What Frantz Fanon suggests for blackness in mainstream cinema is applicable to some extent to these films: "The Negro represents the sexual instinct in its raw state. The Negro is the incarnation of genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions" (Foster, 2003: 37). I am not suggesting that over sexed black representations share the same historical and cultural reasons with Kurds, however I suggest that sex, which was denied by the

norm of Turkishness, was used by cinema as one of the tools to differentiate Kurds from Turks.

Another tool is the constant emphasize on how Kurds haven't been able to develop a civilized way of life in their original territory namely East and South East Anatolia. This part of the country is depicted as uncivilized regardless the fact of lack of state and the underdeveloped discourse is structured upon binary oppositions of civilized west and uncivilized east. Stuart Hall claims rightfully that blacks are associated with "open expression of emotion and feeling rather than intellect, a lack of civilized refinement in sexual and social life, a reliance on custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions, all of which are linked to Nature" (1997a: 243). When Yeşilçam comedies are taken into account this assessment fits the followed pattern in the films, Kurds are depicted as less civilized, lazy, primitive to some extent and childish characters live under the authority of the *Ağa* whereas Turks are depicted within urban settings associated with culture. Moreover, the films impose limitations upon Kurds in terms of social, economical and geographical mobility. Although Kurdish urban immigration had begun, these films capture a timeless Kurdish life set in East Anatolia in a rural setting as if implying their infinite place.

Another common feature of these films is their concern in sexual intercourse and marriage. Andrew Horton states that romance requires personal compromise and social integration, as traditionally represented in the final marriage. Such comedy is therefore Oedipal and exists in the realm of the symbolic as opposed to that of the imaginary. The characters, no matter how much they have turned the everyday world upside down during the narrative, must act like "adults" to the degree of committing themselves to each other and thus to life within society. They change; society remains the same. They may have had their flings and fantasies and acted them out

but in the end, order is restored, and the rules of society are maintained. No matter how nutty or carried away the characters become, commitment to heterosexual partnerships ultimately means that some Oedipal resolution must emerge (1991: 11). Thus, although they live on the border of the society, they are interiorized through patriarchal adjustments.

Moreover these films are based on familiar ethnic stereotypes and linguistic humor depending on malapropisms, double entendres, and accent play which include exaggerations. According to Allon White:

Our cultural categories of seriousness and triviality are profoundly intertwined with questions of social power, and those categories are questions are often played out in terms of different forms of language. Certain ways of speaking indicate particular points in the social hierarchy, so that comic characters in many Shakespeare 's plays speak in prose, often use regional dialect and come from the lower social classes, whereas tragic characters speak in poetry, use dominant forms of language and come from higher social echelons (quoted in Medhurts, 2007: 16).

The films use language as an indicator of social hierarchy where Turkish characters of law, military or state speak fluent Turkish and dictate dominance through high language and seriousness. Although few, when appear all Turkish characters represent, one way or another, state and maintain “Turkish authority” and social power with language. White argues that seriousness is a matter of power than content thus the authority designates what should be taken seriously in a way of maintaining and creating power. (ibid: 16). These comedies implicitly urge the audience, as well as the Kurds, to take state seriously. This approach is closely related with the social and political sphere of the country during the 70s and the early 80s when the country was divided into two halves: left and right.

Before Kurdish movement, Kurds were placed on the left wing of the political agenda, their identities were determined not by Kurdishness but by their political stand. During the 70s Turkish state was struggling on many fronts: economical crisis, rapid urban migration, social upheaval and unrest, foreign crisis. And these Yeşilçam comedies were meant to bring joy to a country which was always on the verge of a breakdown. Furthermore, these films were produced before the attacks of the PKK which were responded with military intervention. Hence, the image of the Kurds as minorities was not associated with terrorism and separatism. Kurdish issue as it is today didn't exist back then since the division in the country was based on orthodox political stands. The known Kurds to urban population mostly were the ones immigrated and work at low class jobs. They were associated with ignorance and underdevelopment. Yeşilçam films were made under these social, political and cultural conditions. There is no self-determination and control over Kurdishness by Kurds but an imposition by the majority to stuck them in certain geography.

Now the films in question will be analyzed in light of the above mentioned patterns and codes of ethnic passing which depict Kurds as “more Kurds” and as much as possible “less Turks”; a strategy naturalizes presumed ethnic differences, underlines the superiority of Turkishness through lack of manners, language and culture. Last word before the analysis; I had mentioned a child song about a village far away, it is the village in these films that is too far that we never visit but claim to be ours with nameless people that, in fact, we know so little about.

5.3.1. *Salako/Stupid(o)*(1974)

Directed by one of Yeşilçam's most widely acclaimed directors, also producer, Atif Yılmaz, it is the first of the Kurdish village comedies which can be considered as the weakest link in terms of narrative and characterization. The environmental settings are enough to imply a Kurdish rural life; not a civilized one. It is a parody of traditional Kurdish bandit films like previously mentioned *Koçero*. Allegedly set in Eastern Anatolia, the film tells a story of a highly childish and stupid character Salo (Kemal Sunal) who is called as *salako* referring to his lack of intelligence. The last letter is tagged to the original word *salak*/stupid to refer Kurdishness which is a strategy followed in the following films such as in names Feyzo, Gülo, Bilo and Maho. Salo reminds the traditional black stereotype of Sambo a happy, irresponsible or carefree character who is naturally lazy and docile, therefore reliant upon his master for direction. The film mocks Kurdish bandits and feudal system mainly through Salo character. The humor derives mainly from Salo's excessive stupidity, clumsiness and repeated sexual demands where these actions at the same time define Kurdishness. There is an ongoing emphasize on sexual intercourse supposed to happen on the wedding night which eventually happens at the end of the film in a cave like environment without a wedlock, a very inconvenient situation for the mainstream comedies. The film lacks of the heavy Kurdish accent acknowledged by the following films, instead the villagers talk in Central Anatolia accent and only the bandits are depicted in traditional outwear. While mocking the bandits living on the mountains and drawing attention to *Ağa*-bandit collaboration as the reasons of the uncivilized and backward life, the film caricaturizes Kurds who are either bandit or servants; either living in a village owned by an *ağa* who exploits his subjects or

becoming a bandit and rob mostly your own people. This is the life of a Kurd which is more or less repeated in the following films.

5.3.2. *Kibar Feyzo/Polite Feyzo (1978)*

Although shot in Reyhanlı, Hatay, Atıf Yılmaz directed film is set in an Eastern Kurdish village with badlands without crop. The storyline is simple: after military service two young Kurdish men Feyzo (Kemal Sunal) and Bilo (İlyas Salman) return to their village with will to marry to the same girl Gülo (Müjde Ar), but there is a problem of collecting bride price. Thus the story revolves around this particular problem and the protagonist Feyzo - who is exiled many times by *Ağa* (Şener Şen)- tries to raise the money through working various jobs in İstanbul from porterage to manual labor which are considered as traditional Kurdish jobs to be handled by villagers. Unlike *Salako*, the use of language, the accent and outfit of the villagers are consistent in this film. Again the vulgar language, slang (characters call each other as *hurbo* and *kıro*) and swearing, oversexed driven characters, the tension of first night of the wedding which happened by the road in the bushes, and repeated references to sexual encounter are the main source of comedy.

The lack of proper set decoration reference to Kurdish culture and the usage of Turkish folk songs sung with proper Turkish by Hatay Community Center Folklore Group are the remainders of a film which is produced by a hegemonic point of view. The supposedly cultural elements are selected in the film for exaggeration and vital elements of culture are neglected such as food or festivities. Considering the ban on Kurdish songs, and as Müslüm Yücel states most of, if not all, Kurdish songs are compiled as Turkish starting from 1926 to 1976 (2008: 20), it is an inevitable choice

to use Turkish or complied songs in the films. But the remarkable fact is that the songs are sung in proper Turkish as if cleansing the folkloric realm and cultural production from Kurds. Turks appear on the screen thorough serious characters representing the state as gendarmes and judge, or urban civilized citizens with proper language and manners; who don't collect bride price, use public toilet and who are after their rights through worker unions. To be brief, urban Turks know the best and teach these matters of facts to Kurdish characters as in one of İstanbul scenes where a fedora wearing urban Turkish citizen tells Feyzo who was about to take a leak by the side of a building; "This is not a mountain top, learn some civilization." As discussed at the beginning of this chapter language is used as an indicator of social hierarchy where Turkish characters of law, military, state dictate dominance through high language. The film ends with Feyzo's killing the tyranniser *Ağa* who refused every single change in order not to lose his power. While doing so he was assisted by Feyzo's foe *Bilo*, a very vigilant character. Inevitably poor Feyzo goes to jail and it is told that new *Ağa* is worse than the deceased one. The film often underlines that Kurds had long forgotten to look after their own rights and crushed by the power of *Ağa*, yet no reference is attributed to state's role in the backwardness of the region. And the film finishes with a line from Feyzo; "Who is to blame?" where every arrow direct feudalism and the people who are like *Bilo* or passive villagers.

5.3.3. *Erkek Güzeli Sefil Bilo/Man Beauty Miserable Bilo (1979)*

Directed by another one of Yeşilçam's most known directors, producer and scenarist Ertem Eğilmez, the film again is set in an Eastern Kurdish village, this time protagonist *Bilo* (İlyas Salman) tries to get married to the *Cano* (*Sevda Aktolga*) who

is the daughter of his father's murderer. The film revolves around the problem of vendetta and how it is manipulated by Maho *Ağa* (Şener Şen) who is after the same girl. Bilo is a very lazy, rather stupid, manipulated, unemployed and a childish character that steals apple from trees or wanders around. He is a very similar character to Salo of the first film which also has strong resemblances with previously mentioned Sambo stereotype.

When Bilo is forced by *Ağa* and the villagers for vendetta, he refuses to do so and exiled from the village by *Ağa*, and then with the help of two old bandits, one of them is called Şivan- a Kurdish name means shepherd in Turkish- he passes on to bandit life in the mountains. While he hi-jacks and earns his reputation as a bandit, the state decides upon a land reform where *Ağa* owned land be transferred to villagers for free. The decision is declared by the voice of the state; gendarme and state officials. This proposal is accepted by the villagers reluctantly. In byplay, Bilo abducts Cano and rapes her in her sleep, which is implied but not shown, to force her into marriage. Again the oversexed characters and vulgar language are the determinant factors of the culture. While getting famous and rich, Bilo cooperates with *Ağa* and he forces villagers to give back their registered land to *Ağa*. However, when Bilo understands he is deceived by *Ağa*, he kills him and goes to prison. This time we are left with an unspoken question: Who is to blame? To be frank, it is a tricky question to answer.

Through the narrative we see that an oppressive and manipulative *Ağa* who rules as he wishes until state launches a land reform which takes most of his power. The intervention of the state is welcomed reluctantly since Kurdish villagers seem confused with what to do with the land. Then *Ağa* requests from bandit Bilo to take the land back which he complies and forces his own villagers to feudal slavery which

was recently came to a halt thanks to the state. The bandit character turns out to be an enemy for his own people similar to *Ağa*. Moreover, at the end, Cano promises her eternal love to her rapist and abductor Bilo which makes the audience ask whether these people are too naive or forgiving. When Bilo kills the *Ağa* he declares; “You are our main enemy”, but it seems to be too little and too late. But eventually the blame is put on *Ağa* and the feudal system which is carried on thanks to Kurds who didn’t follow the authority which bestowed land to them. At the end, similar to its precursors, the narrative is formed around village-mountain-jail triangle for Kurdish men, and being a property, not only to *ağa* but also to men in their lives, for Kurdish women.

5.3.4. *Şark Bülbülü/Mockingbird of the East (1979)*

Directed by an important figure of Yeşilçam actor, scenarist and director Kartal Tibet, the film is different from its precursors; it is set both in rural East and İstanbul. As a sign of the increasing immigration to big cities, especially İstanbul, the film revolves around the classical themes of bride price and *ağa* oppression, yet it also is a parody of life of well known Kurdish singer/actor İbrahim Tatlıses who emigrated to İstanbul from a village of Urfa with nothing, and became a huge success. The surname of the protagonist is Ballıses, an open allegory to the singer’s. The film begins with Şaban Ballıses (Kemal Sunal), the village guard, taking bribe to collect bride price. The village is sold for five million liras to a new *ağa* since the previous one has decided emigrate to İstanbul. Not only cows and sheep, but also women, men and children are priced during the sale. When new *Ağa* Zülfo (Sırrı Elitaş) wants to take Şaban’s fiancé as a co-wife, Şaban is exiled from the village. Thus, half of the

film is set in İstanbul where he rapidly becomes a celebrity. While becoming so, his misfit to urban manners is mocked in many scenes like where he wears white underwear to a women filled swimming pool where he is called as “wild man”. İstanbul scenes work in two layers; rising of his accidentally began singing career where he also becomes a film and television star and his misfit to the urban living and manners. At the end, after involving with the mafia unknowingly, he is also troubled with the *Ağa* who wants him dead. After running from an assassination attempt he comes back to his village whose debt is paid by him. This time the *Ağa* dies from a possible heart attack and quite accidentally where villagers commit to development of the village. Unlike the real life celebrity who is also is a businessman; Şaban chooses the simple life of the village and leaves İstanbul for good. Once again the evil *ağa* is killed for better futures, among all this is the most optimist film where collective development is aimed in the absence of a feudal system.

5.3.5. *Davaro* (1981)

Last of the classical era comedies *Davaro*, directed by Kartal Tibet, revolves around the same themes of vendetta and bride price, furthermore like the previous film it is set in the East and İstanbul. This time Memo/Davaro (Kemal Sunal) comes back from Germany after collecting bride price for Cano (Pembe Mutlu), however, he is required by his mother to kill Sülo/Hıyarto (Şener Şen) for vendetta before marriage. When outcasted by the villagers, he cooperates with Sülo in execution of a false killing. However, they find themselves in the mountain with bandits from whom they steal and immediately run to İstanbul where Sülo deceives Memo and runs with the

money. At the end they are back to village, pay villagers debt to *Ağa*, and Memo and Cano run to the mountains.

The lack of sex and wish to fulfill it is a strong component of the story along with the bandit life wherein protagonists hi-jack busses with passengers in western-modern apparels where bandits are decorated with vests full of bullets and heavy guns. When in jail, Memo sings two songs with dubbed proper Turkish similar to the practice in *Polite Feyzo*. The voice of power floats through songs and Turkish characters mainly wardens and gendarme. When Sülo is caught on blowing the stolen money on indulgent life they return the village. The story is wrapped around the same themes of the precursors but it also involves an urban small time crook story which draws attention to fail in city life due to misfit. At the end Memo threatens to kill the *Ağa* if he bothers the villagers where he leaves for the mountains with his wife and a weapon in hand. Like in the *Mockingbird of the East*, the pattern of returning to the village, not hanging on the urban life, and being a misfit is repeated here as an indicator underlying the place of the Kurds. Because, unlike *Polite Feyzo* where city was a temporary place to work and collect money to marry, in the last two films the protagonists tend to stay, but fail eventually. The films can be considered as geographically closed which tend to capture Kurds in a specific region.

As its precursors, the film is lack of indicators of Kurds traditions such as food, music, festivities, and concentrates on bandit life, vendetta and bride price as cultural signifiers. These caricaturized images naturalize and normalize the ethnic differences where disadvantages and limitations of social, economic and geographical aspects are ignored.

5.4. Contemporary Comedies

The following films are made two decades after the first group after having seen enormous changes that shook the core of the society. The country had passed through an era of violence and polarization where Kurdishness discourse has changed. People living on the border came into existence with political demands. During these years Turkey gained new concepts such as Kurdish issue, Kurdish language, names and identity, and acknowledged the fact of a de facto independent Kurdish Regional Administration established in Northern Iraq after the First Gulf War in 1991. Thus the understanding of Kurdishness was changed fundamentally and when 2000s came, urban Kurds had increased considerably where they gained visibility. The beginning of the 2000s may be called an era of consensus where military approach was changed for democratization. The following films were made during a relatively peaceful period of Turkey; however, their stories are set in 1974 and 1980. Thus the facts and events of the 70s are the main concern of the both film which were box office successes. Since their creator Yılmaz Erdoğan suggests these films about Kurdish problem, in their own way, now I will examine Kurdishness, or lack of it, in light of the social changes to underline how small the change has been in minority discourse, and Kurdishness in particular, in mainstream cinema. These provincial films will be discussed from a perspective of an idealized representation of the 70s from the point view of the 2000s.

With the born of the new Turkish cinema during the mid-1990s, new directors stepped in the scene, Asuman Suner states. Among them some tend to make lyrical provincial life films which contain an idealized representation of 70s. This tendency, according to Suner, derives from, but not limited to, the need to make a critique of the transformation of Turkish society over the past decades which shook the core of

notions of homeland, sense of belonging and identity. In this framework, *Vizontele*, *Dar Alanda Kısa Paslaşmalar/Offside* and *O da Beni Seviyor/Summer Love* have recurring thematic trope about anxieties and yearnings through a “nostalgia for an imaginary past, an idealized representation of the 70[with] striking thematic, generic and visual resemblances” (2002: 61-62). In the light of her argument, I will analyze the new set of film using her “provincial small town life” trope. The subject of this study *Vizontele Tuuba* was released two years after the article but as a sequel it has all the characteristics the others share regarding small town life; a new kind of rural film depending on subjective account of memory which remakes the past from present. Consequently this nostalgic approach rewrites history and collective memory. In short, leaving the truth Gevaş is a real town in physical senses, it is as real as the villages of Yeşilçam which capture the lives of the Kurds; imaginary villages of Yeşilçam left their place to an imaginary historical sense idealizing the 70s small town life from the viewpoint of 2000s. Then, in these films, imaginary meets the real life to represent a dreamlike past that is before all the negative events of the upcoming decade. In both of the following films, there is a clear “fabrication of a feeling of “past-ness” through visual elements, particularly setting and costume [however] the mannerisms and dialogue of the characters clearly belong to contemporary, arguably metropolitan, Turkish society” (Suner, 2002: 65) which explains the sense of incongruous humor of the present day. These people, as Suner suggests, acknowledge the fact of their limited and close life, feel its melancholia and, when necessary, make fun of themselves through a modern consciousness (2006: 56).

As well as the ill incidents Turkey lived in late 70s and early 80s, as Suner puts, Turkey also has undergone a big transformation in terms of economy, global

integration, minority rights and civil society. While having legal, economic and technological reforms, Turkey faced different problems such as income gap and social polarization. (2002: 72). In the midst of the social and economic problems Turkey struggled with Kurdish separatists which certainly had a direct effect on Kurdishness discourse. Thus, while criticizing the era starting with the Coup, the following films depict a world beyond reach, but unsheltered from all the upcoming effects, where people have warm and intimate relations even conflicts have an innocent quality. But what do films offer about Kurdishness in a transformed Turkey?

During his promotion for *Vizontele*, when interviewed by Hürriyet journal, director/writer Yılmaz Erdoğan was reminded that his favorite film was *Züğürt Ağa*, despite having scenes of Kurds literally attack food, and was asked if he would be successful to break the tendency of using Eastern people as a part of humor based on rudeness. He replies that in society there is a tendency to think Kurds as a community with stereotypes and that he turned down a role in Kurdish story written by a scenarist never had been to the East. He underlines the importance of regional experience to be truthful and adds: “How can you write without going? When you are never been there, you write clichés depending on what remains in your mind. This doesn’t bother the audience, only bother Kurds” (<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/printnews.aspx?DocID=-222837>). Now we will see to what extend Yılmaz Erdoğan succeeded in truthfulness regarding the region and how he interpreted Kurdishness relying on firsthand experience.

5.4.1. *Vizontele/Visiontele* (2001)

Written, acted and directed by Yılmaz Erdoğan, mainstream director of new Turkish cinema, the film is about the introduction of television to lives of townspeople who name television with a pun as vision-tele. Television is the symbol of negative developments of the consequent period which ruins “social harmony, innocence and purity” (Suner, 2002: 62) of the 70s. While depicting an imaginary past of happiness and joy, the town of the film also “appears as a site of restriction, backwardness, and destitution” (ibid: 65). In this sense the film shares the same feeling of remoteness with Yeşilçam comedies where characters remained naïve under the sheltering roof of the remote town.

The story is based on Erdoğan’s childhood memories set in Gevaş, Van, an Eastern town in 1974 summer, and it revolves around Mayor Nazmi (Altan Erkekli) attempts to install the TV transmitter which was left, along with a television, by TRT (Turkey’s Public Broadcasting Authority) officers. His main help is an eccentric former student who is called Deli (Crazy) Emin (Yılmaz Erdoğan). After a number of failures, the mission is completed and to celebrate town people gather at Mayor Nazmi’s house only to watch that his son is killed during the Peace Operation carried out in Cyprus. In the end, the too good to be true small town life is shattered with a single integration from the outer world. In this sense, state authority has nothing but a devastating effect on once happily living people. Therefore, the intervention of the authority/state, sending television to the region and sending troops to Cyprus, caused loss of social harmony. Instead of judge, gendarme, guard and urban citizens, this time authority reveals itself in the East with above mentioned interventions.

Television also stands for the neglectful state whose officers left the equipment, instead of fixing, to the hands of technology ignorant townspeople. This time backwardness or underdevelopment is not put upon a feudal system, since there isn't any, or local people but on state indirectly through television.

References to Kurdishness in the film are limited to music (but no language), costumes, landscape and use of a Kurdish name. Major's wife, Siti (Demet Akbağ), is called after the protagonist of a love story in the most known Kurdish epos *Mem u Zin/Mem and Zin written by Ahmet Khani in 1692* (Yücel, 2008: 76-79, *emphasis is mine*). And, visually it is a very colorful film mostly due to the bright, ethnic Eastern Anatolian woman costumes decorated with ornaments, and due to lyrical landscape shots of Gevaş, a town populated with people of Kurdish origin. However, cultural references end here, men hair and costume of the film are in line with the fashion of the era. Kurdish identity is not a political or an ideological issue, but a decorative element. During an interview film's creator Erdoğan also stated that he chose an apolitical stand:

All characters in the film think in Kurdish and speak in Turkish and the script reflects this reality. The film is not about the Kurdish problem, neither does it show the Kurds, ignorant, oppressed and pitiful, as it of then is the case in Turkish cinema. To illustrate how a real political stand should be, I chose an apolitical stand [...] I do not consider inserting a Kurdish dialogue as a political stand or bravery. I use a Kurdish elegy when the son of the family dies during the Cyprus Peace Operation. I narrate a problem, which language I use for this purpose is irrelevant (quoted in Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 93)

Indeed, we watch a town of people, assimilated Kurds, the townspeople we see on the screen can be from anywhere from Anatolia, not needed to be specifically Kurds. Erasing cultural references doesn't affect consistency or integrity of the story. How

this apolitical stand does any good for progressive representations? Haven't Kurds been thinking in Kurdish and speak in Turkish, at least publicly, for long years because of oppression which lead to social upheaval and unrest? The film is made in relatively peaceful era of Turkey just after the era of violence during the 90s. Therefore cultural references which may be acknowledged as separatist or offensive to Turks were eliminated to reach mainstream audience. Asuman Suner suggests the film "implies that social harmony is only possible at the expense of effacement, or disregard, of cultural difference; that small time communities can maintain cordial and innocent relations only as long as differences do not come to the surface" (2002: 70). And, I suggest the film longs for world before of Kurdish identity crisis, political and social tension and a time when Kurds only think but cannot speak. Therefore, the narratives refrain from provoking statements about the cultural and political issues although Yılmaz Erdoğan claims the opposite. His characters may not be ignorant or pitiful, but they are naïve and funny peasant with an urban contemporary humor of understanding helps to make Kurds 'less Kurds'. Some of the dialogues demonstrate the sense of humor in the film that is executed by more than 15 characters through sketch like side stories such as in the scene between Crazy Emin and Mother Siti talk about the use of television:

Siti: What is it used for?

Emin: It brings the world to our feet.

Siti: What for?

Or in the scene where Mayor announces television's arrival to the town, people ask questions about it:

Citizen: What is it used for?

Mayor: It is a radio with visuals. When you listen to Zeki Müren (a famous Turkish singer) you will see him at the same time.

Fikri: Will he see us too?

Mayor: I don't know that either.

This sarcastic sense of urban humor also seen in a scene between Mayor and his lazy unemployed son Nafiz:

Nafiz: Do you have an order, father?

Mayor: Yes, but I don't want to waste on you.

Or in a scene when Crazy Emin and Mayor have a heart-to-heart talk:

Emin: In fact, being bastard is a good thing. You don't have any relative, that's an ace!

One of the main characters is CHP (Republican People's Party) Mayor Nazmi, a retired teacher and a progressive and secular citizen. He represents the ideals of modernist Republic at best. And, his citizens are far from ethnic polarization, without a distinctive accent they not only talk but look and live like Turks. Apart from a few cultural references, the film depicts Kurds without ethnic signs. Only visible cultural reference, the bright traditional costumes, is balanced with urban outfits of men, as if to say as long as assimilated some cultural elements should be contained. The film seems to aim erasing devastating facts of the last two decades and suggest a brand new Kurdishness that is avoided politically and approached culturally at minimum to be welcomed by the mainstream audience. It is a film about Kurds that doesn't

bother audience, but offended Kurds because of its “naïve Kurdish peasants, which contributes to the antics and buffoonery” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 93).

5.4.2. *Vizontele Tuuba/Vizontele Tuuba (2004)*

In 2003, during an interview at Boğaziçi University, Yılmaz Erdoğan had declared his wish to film the sequel which would touch upon the Kurdish issue with his weapons and tools, from a humorous perspective and which would refer to social chaos of the time as well. (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/vizontele---de-kurt-sorunu-var/magazin/magazindetay/11.05.2003/958584/default.htm>)

Based loosely on librarian Güner Senikli’s seven years in Hakkari and director Yılmaz Erdoğan’s childhood, set in 1980 summer just before the coup d’état September 12, the sequel is about establishing a library during the days of social upheaval. Accompanied with his physically handicapped daughter and wife, a leftist librarian Güner Senikli (Tarık Akan) is exiled to Gevaş which doesn’t have library. Upon his arrival Mayor Nazmi (Altan Erkekli) and Crazy Emin (Yılmaz Erdoğan) give hand to him to establish one. Once it is completed, it also serves as a community center whose activities ended with the Coup which considers library to be extremely leftist, even anarchist and communist. At the end, many of the young men of the town are arrested, including the librarian, where the narrator informs us many had not returned. With multiple love stories and new characters, the film’s visual and thematic elements are in line with its predecessor; a harmonious life just before a life changing event; devastating 1980 Coup which depoliticized the country by the cruel laws of military government.

Like the previous film, it doesn't have a strong dramatic structure but sketch like story telling involving library establishment, summer holiday of youngsters, romantic relations, Mayor's estranged religious son who was an alcoholic in the previous film, political conflict of Mayor's left wing political party CHP and right wing AP (Justice Party) and increasing social upheaval of the 70s which is presented through leftist and rightist groups of the town where hostility among the groups is naïve and innocent until the intervention of the Turkish Armed Forces. The struggle among the groups and their naïve approach to the matter is one of the main humor sources in the film. In one scene leftist Nafiz, son of Mayor, and his comrade Mahmut talk about the change rightists made to their slogan on the mountain:

Nafiz: They changed our slogan!

Mahmut: Who?

Nafiz: Social fascists!

Or in a scene when a young boy tries to tell Mahmut's girlfriend Hacer that he is having a fight with rightists:

Boy: Today there was a fight with social fascists at the mall.

Hacer: With whom?

Boy: Social fascists!

Hacer: With whom? I don't understand!.

Boy: See, with Brother Cahit and his entourage.

When Mahmut is questioned by his girlfriend Hacer's father Hadji Zübeyir about his university degrees, the same humorous pattern is seen:

Zübeyir: How is school going?

Mahmut: Fine, I left a few lessons.

Zübeyir: Where did you leave them?

Mahmut: Mmm, at school.

The state/authority is criticized on two levels: First its careless and unconcerned approach to the Region's needs through exiled librarian to a place without library. It symbolizes the failure of the modernist approach regarding bringing light to the East where is now associated with exile, not a place to be enlightened. And secondly, authority physically presents itself in devastating and unnerving army intervention which is criticized through the vandalized library and arrested innocent people. Every progressive step has been taken by the townspeople is vanished with a single authoritarian touch. The system criticism doesn't end here, neglectful facts are underlined such as the constant absence of district governor due to trivia reasons and the lack of a doctor since no one has been assigned ever.

A sub-plot revolves around a romantic affair between Crazy Emin and librarian's beautiful daughter Tuba (Tuba Ünsal), the film calls itself after her name with a pun. The possibility of inter-ethnic relation is underlined with this affair which would be successful if she wasn't a handicapped, but a very cheerful and optimist Turkish girl. Her disability doesn't have a direct effect on the plot but an insignificant detail used as an excuse for the kind of relationship. Furthermore, as in the first film, excluding Kurdishness from the plot doesn't affect the dramatic structure. Although "geographical, historical and cultural features are underlined to gain an identity for the provincial town" (Suner, 2006: 58), Kurdishness is still degraded to a decorative element in the narrative. Kurds are not awfully caricaturized, but they are blended

with urban Turkish manners of the 2000s which leaves no room for Kurdish culture. The only progressive contribution of the films is putting some of the blame of backwardness and underdevelopment on the state.

Both films are not political, but good comedies which succeeded entertaining masses. However, before and the release of the films Yılmaz Erdoğan insisted that the films about Kurds would be righteous to the region and the people. He underlined the importance of regional experience to make adequate representations. If he hadn't insist on a different Kurdish discourse and declared that his films would touch upon Kurdish issue, then the lack of Kurdish culture and any other ethnic references wouldn't come to attention; the films would be accepted as they are: mass entertainment. However, they lack a serious criticism to the system. Same as the first film, the only cultural reference is colorful traditional women costumes. If the films would follow the rout of the political, social and cultural changes then they would contain characters not only thinking in Kurdish but make them speak even a few words, use Kurdish names other than Siti, would demonstrate a Kurdish dish or a handwriting. All of these are not necessary if a plain comedy is aimed but the director's constant declarations on ethnic narrative requires these elements. At the end, these characters are as believable as the first group films' characters when ethnic elements are considered.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Media generally, Yeşilçam particularly, transmit highly selective images framed by certain ideologies on many issues that are outside the personal knowledge and experience of the cinema goers. My first experience with Kurds and as well as other minorities that I know of was through the Yeşilçam films. For long years I didn't meet a minority in real life or I have not realized if I had seen one since they were assimilated or in the closet. And to be honest my sheer knowledge of Kurds depended on the people passed by Turkish actors to be mocked in the first set of films which were unbelievably vulgar and simple films with loose plots and not the best quality production, but you watch nonetheless because they were making you laugh in repetitive narratives at "some people" who are somehow different. And I got interested in the feeling of being a minority wondered how Kurds had reacted to these films. Did assimilated urban Kurds distance themselves from the images and think they are not one of them? How rural Kurds feel about the images product of an understanding of the majority of the society? Were they enjoying or only bothered as Yılmaz Erdoğan suggests?

Contrary to Erdoğan, I think even for Turkish audience the films are annoying, but at the same time funny. The annoyance is acting on different levels: the vulgar language and manners that are too different from urban comedies where Kurds degraded to a bunch of stereotypes vulgar and uncivilized. Moreover you laugh at Kurds openly, even if they are not called so. But these are some of the risks you take when you are watching an ethnic comedy, *a genre* I discussed in this study which served as a fruitful terrain for examining Kurdishness discourse in Turkish cinema.

Throughout the study I have dealt with discourses concerning identities in cinema. While doing so, I aimed to understand the structure behind minority representations through a journey from early Yeşilçam to contemporary films. To this end, as an identity building strategy to survive in the beginning, and then a preference, passing was discussed within sociological and cinematic frameworks. For the sake of the argument, passing in cinema, particularly comedies, is examined as a tool of the dominant discourse to maintain its power. Same as nationalistic discourse, this kind of passing strategy assumes a core identity which should either be polished as in Turkishness, or exaggerated or disregarded as in representing minorities. When the study unfolds I saw that through the given period of time, passing was used as a strategy to support and verify Turkishness through various minority stereotypes from dramas to comedies. Un-Turkish and unwelcomed manners were attributed to the minorities who were passed by Turkish actors and actresses.

Turkey has faced significant political, social and cultural changes due to neo-liberal policies starting from the 1980s which led to rise of the new right and its neo-liberal economic policies where the mission of cultural enhancement was left for the sake of cultural popularism. In this realm of individualism and competition, Turkish society met consumer and mass culture, and consequently faced a wide cultural

transformation namely: shatter in political, economical and cultural ideologies, rising terror activities, and born of “so called” democratic, libertarian and liberal, only in sense of free market, ideology that calls itself democratic-Islam. Above of all, under the disguise, this liberal ideology is deprived of basic human rights, lack of respect to not only ethnic but also religious and gender minorities. The lack of acceptance and understanding in the society towards minorities reveal itself through mainstream cinema where Kurdishness has nearly invisible a ghost-like presence. In the contemporary films, even if Kurdishness is reminded through cultural elements, it is never outspoken, it is almost invisible. We presume they are Kurds due to these details and accept their cultural differences through them. This superficial acceptance of another culture is not progressive in the sense of understanding the conflicts of the society.

The study reveals that any representation is still under very tight leash not only because of the will to sustain unearned and lasting privilege, and moreover because of their rooted place in social and cultural life due to very long years of media mediation. We can understand the long living effects of the negative representations and media mediation through Halbwachs who underscored that in modern societies, even though individuals are seemed to be left to their own devices, their lives are constantly penetrated and insinuated by the society due to the multiple and complex nature of the relations. And the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of this very complicated society (1992: 50-51). As a living structure, ambivalent and changing, collective memory through representations grasps subjects not from minds but from hearts as rude and underdeveloped comic Kurdish stereotypes that Yılmaz Erdoğan challenges while offering nothing progressive but ambiguous.

In Erdoğan's films, we don't see Kurds as laughable under civilized people but people like Turks; ordinary law abiding small town people who have no intention for social upheaval. They are not stereotypes but interesting and educated characters who are not the subject but creator of humor with clever dialogues. With this kind of positive labeling, Kurds are passed like Turks only having small cultural differences. Sole cultural reference left in the memories is women costume worn by Kurds with urban Turkish manners. I suggest that blending Kurds with Turkish labels is not a very different strategy than blending Kurds with excessive labeling. It seems the mainstream audience's acceptance works on two levels: laughing at "more Kurds" and laughing together with "less Kurds". Mainstream comedy films pass Kurdishness either as the opposite of Turkishness with a privileged and hegemonic point of view by orientalizing the ethnic people by depicting them as uncivilized, childish, ignorant, lazy, and lack of Turkish urban manners, or depicting them with proper Turkish manners.

Kurdishness discourse may have changed, but the dominant ideology towards minorities remained almost the same. From ridiculing Kurdishness to docile representations, the change isn't as progressive as it should be considering the social changes Turkey faced. Clearly, this cinematic discourse is in close relation with society's approach towards minorities and understanding of them. In the absence of acceptance and tolerance towards the others, cinematic discourse can only evolve with minor steps. After discussing the ethnic semiosis in the films it can be suggested that *Vizontele* films has a few saying on Kurdish culture, instead they utter: We have a colorful life not much different from yours, and these words are outspoken by Kurdish origin director.

Passing Kurdishness in mainstream cinema hasn't progressed much from overly exaggerated stereotypes to less-Kurds. We have moved from the images where ethnic differences were naturalized and normalized through neglect of social disadvantages to invisibility. Although passing strategy has seemed to change, the aim is still the same; mainstream cinema passes Kurds as "more Kurds" or less Kurds", in a strategy which aims to maintain dominance of Turkishness over the others of the society implicitly or explicitly in line with the subconscious of the society or the collective thinking of the majority.

Passing would be a fruitful notion in understanding the conceptualizing not only ethnic but also sexual identities. A further study would undertake the analysis of LGBT individuals through the discourses of femininity and masculinity in Turkish society. The study would approach to both passing and gender from a post-modern point of view as performance. Therefore, passing gender, particularly LGBT individuals in cinema can be examined to understand the collective thinking of the majority about gendered identities through culturally shaped discursive practices.

Last but not least, Ana Lopez notes that "understanding the nation demands a look that can see its narrations, ambivalence and hybridity; that can see the international within the national" (1993: 151) and I suggest through the discussed films we can only experience the national through one sided narration of the majority where things about minorities are not told as they really are, but from a distorted angle. Consequently mainstream cinema holds a dominance that involves of reproduction of certain strategies, including passing which is a matter of taking appearance for reality, to legitimize social inequality where privileged holds power over the marginalized.

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