

Chapter 31

Overview of the Gay Characters in the New Cinema of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Similar to the worldwide perceptions, gay characters in Turkish cinema are mostly perceived and used as elements of humor and comedy. They are also used as standards for measuring the masculinity of other male characters in some Turkish movies. And what about Today? What are the differences between the past and now? It is possible to say that Turkish cinema in 2000s involve more visible sexual identities apart from heteronormative understanding. This study will focus on the reflections and portrayals of only gay characters in New Turkish cinema.

INTRODUCTION

Popular films are under the influence of commonly accepted norms, rules, moral and ethic understandings in Turkey, just like in any other part of the world. Images presented to silver screen audiences are based on the idea of reflecting different realities in actual life such as femininity, masculinity, different sexual identities, male-dominance and situation of family in different societies. In other words, mainstream cinema or popular films are built on an understanding that reflects dominant social life, dominant viewpoints, life principles and dominant culture; what is perceived as ‘different’ in a society is rarely included in the movies framed with this understanding. Canonized, idealized value judgments are presented to the audience; social statues are reproduced in these films.

The issue of sexuality, like most of the other topics, is one of these value judgments and it is reproduced on the basis of the limitations of idealized society. Identities which are hidden or limited in social life –identities that are not completely, independently expressed in most of the traditional societies- are uploaded in the images in cinema. The productions of movie sector confirm these images and represent the so called ‘normal’ identities to the perceiver: The audience.

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Popular movies are under the impact of dominant, traditional cultural structure that excludes all of the sexual identities other than heterosexuality; homosexuality (gay or lesbian), bisexuality and intersexuality are 'abnormal' according to the dominant understanding in the sector. Homosexual characters in movies since the beginning of cinematography have been mostly used as elements of comedy or humor. There are surely various films that reflect such characters through more casual dimensions; but even the modern cinema is full of examples that alienate different sexual identities or reflect them in a way that they are estranged or abnormalized. This attitude since the beginning of cinematography hasn't much changed. Individuals with different sexual identities are characterized and represented in films with problematic approaches in terms of individual and sexual characteristics.

Gay characters are mostly in the background, they are usually not presented at the center of the story in a film, and they are mostly separated from their original identities. These facts had been dominant especially until 1980s except for a few positive representations in films. Homosexual characters had been reflected in a quite problematic manner in the cinema for a very long time.

2000s is the main period that will be analyzed in this study; gay characters in Turkish movies of the period will be the main focus of analysis. Before analyzing the reflections in Turkey, it is necessary to mention similar characters in the world cinema. It will be possible to present and understand gay characters in Turkish movies and analyze the cinematography in the country only when the topic is firstly discussed in terms of its characteristics around the world.

Projections of Gay Characters in the Cinema

The first marks of gay identity in the cinema dates back to the end of 1800s. It is possible to say that gay characters were included in the movies during this very first period of cinema. The first movie with two gay characters is *The Gay Brothers* directed by William Dickson in 1895. The movie doesn't directly reflect a gay relationship; it implies the homosexual relationship in a more indirect manner. *The Gay Brothers* is the first movie with real-time voice records. It is only 18 seconds long and two male characters waltz intimately in a harmony. Another character plays violin in the background throughout the scene, and finally the fourth character enters the scene. It can be said that a humorous air is felt behind the representation of gay characters even in this very first example.

There has been a tendency to portray these characters in a humorous manner starting from *The Gay Brothers* until today. Although there are some movies with original narratives and characters—they will be mentioned in this study—, the reflections are usually stereotyped; these characters are mostly removed from their original contexts and popular movies that attract masses are produced within a limited perspective.

It is possible to say that male characters that represent the concept of hegemonic masculinity are included in most of the Hollywood studio films. Strong, self-confident, dominant male characters that look as if they can change the world are at the core of this concept. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the form of masculinity that works for having dominance over women and other male forms (Connell, 1987).

Serpil Sancar defines the notion of hegemonic masculinity as young, white, heterosexual, religious (within reason) male individuals who have full-time job and the ability to carry out active physical performance sufficient to be successful at a branch of sports (2009: 30).

Robert Hanke (1992) states that hegemonic masculinity, which is established as a form of dominance, casts gay identity away or destroys it symbolically and functions on the basis of this structure. Hollywood films, which are designed on the basis of this classical common structure, usually portray gay characters

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