



## The Ultimately Determinant Role of Economy in Yılmaz Güney's Movies: An Essay From the Perspective of Marxist Theory

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### Abstract

The study examines a different aspect of the films of actor, screenwriter, and director Yılmaz Güney, who brought a new sense of reality to Turkish cinema. Güney's film *Umut* (The Hope), which he acted and directed in 1970, is a turning point for Yılmaz Güney cinema and Turkish cinema. The breath of Marxism can be felt in almost all of Yılmaz Güney's films after The Hope. In his films, Güney aimed to convey to the audience the fundamental contradictions of Turkish capitalism, the socioeconomic inequalities it created, and the resulting class differences. It can be argued that Güney's films discussed within the scope of the study *Umut*, 1970 (The Hope), *Endişe*, 1974 (The Anxiety), *Sürü*, 1978 (The Herd), *Düşman*, 1979 (The Enemy) focus on social class differences in the capitalist system by relying on Marxist ideology. Although the reasons for these differences in the movies are associated with factors such as politics, ideology, religion, culture, family, and education, it is thought that the most significant share of the factors that play a role in the formation of social classes is given to the economy. The study started with the problem of proving this claim. The films discussed within the study's scope revealed that the economy is the critical factor determining social class differences.

**Keywords:** Yılmaz Güney; Marxism; Economy; Class Differences; Inequality



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# The Ultimately Determinant Role of Economy in Yılmaz Güney's Movies: An Essay From the Perspective of Marxist Theory

Betül Sarı Aksakal

## Introduction

Yılmaz Güney<sup>1</sup> is one of the most important names of revolutionary cinema in Turkish cinema. The revolutionary understanding of cinema saw cinema as an action on the world and a weapon against the status quo. While demanding social change, it included class differences and class struggles. Güney's cinema presented films that reflected the lower classes and the oppressed society. He tried to make visible the class differences and social inequalities resulting from the division of labor in capitalist production relations in the cinema. Class differences and social inequalities in society arise from economic disparities. Starting from this, Güney's cinema has Marxist foundations.

Just as Marx introduced topics and concepts such as labor, economic problems, production, property, and workers into philosophy, Yılmaz Güney introduced these and similar topics and concepts into Turkish cinema. Güney brought to the screen the people pushed back by the ruling classes, the people oppressed under labor exploitation, the unemployed, those who were denied the right to life by capitalism and made miserable, and overlooked social problems. That is why he was nicknamed the *Ugly King* in the cinema.

Marx said that the economic structure of society forms the concrete basis on which a legal and political superstructure rises, corresponding to certain forms of social consciousness. This situation has caused Marxist thought to be criticized by many theorists for adopting an economic determinist method. Although Marxism is not thought to be a movement of thought with economic

determinist foundations, it is claimed that it refers to economics' ultimately determinant role in forming social classes. It is believed that Yılmaz Güney's films examined within the scope of this study act within the context of this thought. Güney's films *The Hope*, *The Anxiety*, *The Herd*, and *The Enemy* were examined within the study's scope. As Marx pointed out in all these films, the contradictory social relations between the owners of the means of production and those who have to work for a wage, in other words, the economic elements that form the basis of social class differences in the capitalist system, are conveyed to the audience.

In all these contexts, the method of the study was mentioned first. In line with the determined method, how Marxism deals with the dialectical relationship between social classes and the economy was first discussed. Whether Marxism is based on economic determinism or the ultimately determining role of the economy has been stated. Then, the crucial events that led to the emergence of political cinema in Turkey and the revolutionary cinema approach that Yılmaz Güney built on the understanding of political cinema are included. It is thought that understanding Yılmaz Güney's cinema depends on understanding the economic, political, and sociological factors that Turkey faced in the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, some data from Turkey at the time were presented. Then, it was debated how the films discussed in the study reflected the aspect of Marxism as the ultimately determining role of the economy in forming social classes, and all these discussions were concluded.

The study contributes to the existing literature by attempting to understand the dimension of Yılmaz Güney cinema, which depicts any social reality, and the social power relations that determine this reality. It also aims to contribute to the literature on constructing political discourse, based mainly on Marxist thought, in Yılmaz Güney films.

## Theoretical Framework

Films are cultural, discursive products that construct social reality and function as part of the cultural representation system (Ryan and Kellner, 1997, p. 17). As Ryan and Kellner underline when defining the ideological role and function of cinema that goes beyond being a simple means of entertainment: “Movies are a battleground where various forms of representation compete with each other to determine how social reality is to be understood and what it will be” (1997, pp. 37-38). With the contribution of mainstream movies, the dominant theses of the dominant system and ideology (capitalism) are internalized by the citizen audience through representations. To shed light on the relationship between cinema and dominant ideology (capitalism), it is necessary first to include Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and Louis Althusser’s views on ideology and the state's ideological apparatuses. Hegemony is, in short, the worldview of the class that directs society (bourgeoisie). The worldview of the dominant class is spread to society by organic intellectuals. Gramsci considers mass media to be organic intellectuals. Cinema, one of the tools that Althusser calls the state's ideological apparatus, directs society by serving the dominant ideology (2006, pp. 30-40). In this respect, it is possible to state that cinema, as a mass media tool, also spreads the dominant ideology (Yaylagül, 2016, pp. 113-114). From the first scene, when the film is shot, reality is filtered through the dominant ideology and reproduced. Thus, the dominant ideology is reconstructed at every stage of the film production process. The dominant ideology is reproduced at many stages, including the films' subjects, styles, and narrative structure.

Yılmaz Güney movies have shone and continue to shine with their structure that opposes mainstream movies that reproduce the dominant ideology. To be clear, when we think of Turkish cinema of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, in other words, Yeşilçam films, what comes to mind is

mostly love stories of rich girls and poor boys or crowded family comedies where the famous actors of the period always take part. In these stories, no economic, social, or political dimension is sought; most of the time, they are not observed.

In this study, Yılmaz Güney films are discussed within their ideological functions. The preferred research method is ideological film criticism. The main field of study of ideological criticism is class contradictions and revealing these contradictions (Ryan and Kellner, 2016, p. 37). In the ideological film criticism approach, films are considered a reflection of the society and the period in which they were produced, and it is investigated how infrastructure relations with socioeconomic foundations determine films as superstructure products (Özden, 2004, pp. 165-166). Regarding an ideological critical approach, it is essential to examine movies in terms of the most basic class contradictions within society (Ryan, 2013, p. 86). Ideological criticism concerns how movies handle economic inequality, class inequality, or the oppression of the powerful over the weak (Ryan, 2013, p. 88). In this context, ideological criticism examines the reflections of the tensions and contradictions inherent in capitalist society in movies, emphasizing the unjust foundations of social class differences. Marxist theory and the understanding of political cinema are shaped accordingly and form the basis of the ideological film criticism approach.

Güney is one of Turkey's first representatives of the political cinema concept. Political films generally deal with concrete social and historical events, with their ambiguity, and take a stance that questions the hegemonic ideology in the face of these events<sup>2</sup> (Suner, 2006, p. 253). Answers to the following questions were sought in the study: What are the effects of Marxist ideology on established narrative forms in Yılmaz Güney cinema? Does the film support one side of the social struggle? What do the argument or arguments in the movie mean in terms of political discourse? Does the film focus on exploitation, or is it constructed within the framework of a manipulative

approach to hide the injustices and exploitation relationships in the system? Is a critical attitude displayed if the film directly or indirectly focuses on social inequality or injustice? If the film is vital, does it offer or suggest an explicit or implicit alternative to the negative situation, system, or world being criticized?

In line with the purpose of the study, the films examined were determined using the purposeful sampling method. The movies *The Hope*, *The Anxiety*, *The Herd*, and *The Enemy* were reviewed for the study. The films were also analyzed using the sociological film criticism method. Sociological film criticism refers to the criticism of films as products of art and culture based on social sciences and sociological criteria. In sociological film criticism, the social conditions of the period in which the film was set or produced are also evaluated (Özden, 2004, pp. 153-154).

Although Güney, who was nourished by Marxist ideology while transferring his films to the big screen, associates the factors that determine social classes with political, social, cultural, ideological, and educational aspects in his movies, he seems to have given the most significant weight to the economy. The proposed theoretical framework that constructs the interaction between the economic and the non-economic is based on the hypothesis that the economic infrastructure will ultimately determine the social superstructure. The study aims not to criticize Yılmaz Güney's films comprehensively. One of the purposes of writing this article is to contribute to the literature on the construction of political discourse in films by tracing the traces of Marxism in Yılmaz Güney's cinema. There are reflections of the anti-capitalist economic discourse in Yılmaz Güney's films, which problematizes the origins of capital and private property around class differences and inequalities.

## Marxism as a Movement of Thought Explaining the Unchanging Characteristics and Fundamental Contradictions of the Capitalist System on the Historical Materialist Axis

Before starting the article, it is thought that making a few critical warnings about the subject would be helpful. Considering Marxism as a movement with only political qualities can make it difficult to understand. Marxism has influenced a wide range of literature, ranging from aesthetics to literature, from metaphysical debates to epistemology, from sociology to history, from anthropology to economics, from archeology to art, from education to geography, from film theory to historiography, from philosophy to political science, psychology, scientific research, and even theatre.

Marxism is a philosophical, economic, political, and social approach based on the works of German economist, historian, political theorist, sociologist, and revolutionary Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) in the second half of the 19th century. More formally, Marxism is a socioeconomic analysis method that examines social class relations, social conflicts, and social transformation and interprets historical development from a historical materialist perspective. Historical materialism, in the most general sense, is based on the assertion that "the production and reproduction of the material basis of society is the antecedent and determinant in historical development" (Topakkaya, 2009, p. 65). The German Ideology, written by Marx and Engels, is the work in which the historical materialist method is most systematically embodied. Throughout history, authors have expressed societies in material production relations as primitive communal, enslaved persons, feudal, capitalist societies, and finally, the communist society that history must necessarily reach. In explaining these distinctions in societies, the property relations that belong to each society and differ from each other, the ownership of the means of production, and the mode of production are taken as the basis.

Karl Marx wrote the introductory theoretical text *Das Kapital* and the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. With this work, Marx pioneered the term capitalism in the modern sense and spread it to the social and scientific fields at the beginning of the 20th century (Obsorne, 2023, p. 10). The emergence of classes with private property rights protected by law and the fact that the state could not easily confiscate their capital accumulation laid the foundations of the capitalist system. The system became dominant in England at the beginning of the 19th century, and in a short time, it began to manifest itself as a production system in almost all countries of the world. As the system increased its influence, labor, land, real estate, and capital were freely bought and sold by individuals in the market, and all kinds of phenomena began to be evaluated as commodities in the system. It is possible to say that capitalism has a materialist functioning in this context.

Capitalism is the modus operandi and accumulation regime of societies that enable the accumulation of profit and the tool (capital) used to obtain this profit by using goods for the production of goods, purchasing and selling goods, or supplying and selling service-based labor force (Fülberth, 2018, p. 17). The capitalist system continues to exist within the framework of the antagonistic relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in other words, on the axis of the conflict between labor (proletariat) and capital (bourgeoisie) (Marx and Engels, 2014, pp. 116-117). In Marxist terminology, the bourgeoisie is the class that owns the means of production in the capitalist system and seizes the workers' surplus value. The proletariat is the class definition of a particular group regarding their position in production. It emerged when people became dispossessed with the dissolution of feudalism and had no choice other than selling their labor power for a specific wage. Proletariat means the dispossessed. The proletariat is part of the irreconcilable structural antagonism of capitalist society due to its necessary subordination to the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels used the concept to mean people who had to sell their labor to



survive. In Marxist thought, the working class (proletariat) is society's primary productive force and the main subject of capitalist exploitation. The working class comprises the industrial proletariat, the commercial proletariat, and the administrative services proletariat. Marx expressed the same view when describing the birth of the proletariat in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

“Economic conditions first transformed the mass of the people into workers. Capital dominance created this class's common position and common interests. Then, this mass has become a class regarding its relationship with capital” (Bottomore, 2002, pp. 496-498).

In this context, classes are specifically considered, in Marx's words, as the socio-historical relationship between exploiters and producers in which surplus labor is absorbed from the producer (Wood, 2008: 95). What determines the emergence of classes is the development of the social division of labor and the emergence of private property (Marx, 1976, pp. 275-277). The most fundamental element that distinguishes Marxist class analysis from other class analyses is the mechanism of exploitation, and an exploitation-centered class analysis offers theoretically powerful tools for examining many issues in contemporary capitalist society (Wright, 2014, p. 17). exploitation can be defined as a social relationship achieved through the domination of surplus labor over labor and the capture of surplus product (Marx, 1976, p. 279). Class is essentially a relationship, a social collective representation of the phenomenon of exploitation.

Capitalist order within the framework of Marxism is seen as a class conflict between the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" in both theoretical and practical frameworks. Marx and Engels stated in the Communist Manifesto that "the history of all societies up to the present is the history of class struggles and conflicts" (Marx and Engels, 1848, p. 8). Marx aimed to liberate the working class, the proletariat, who had to sell their labor for wages to survive, from the capitalist order.

## On the Dialectical Relationship Between Marxism, Social Classes and the Economy: Economic Determinism or the Ultimately Determinant Role of the Economy?

It is a fact that in Marxist thought, there is a dialectical relationship between social classes and the economy. Marxism defined the capitalist system and its functioning in terms of social classes. It also argued that the system was based on the antagonistic relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and continued its existence within this framework. What distinguishes the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is whether they own the means of production. Production relations are also determined within this framework. However, this characterization of Marxism has caused it to be criticized for attributing a decisive role only to the economy, and various theorists have chosen to define Marxist thought as economic deterministic. While accepting that Marxism attributes a significant role to the economy, some critics argue that it also considers political, ideological, institutional, social, and cultural factors other than the economy but attributes the role of ultimately determining the economy. Including these discussions in more detail will be guiding for the study.

Economic determinism, or economism, is a term widely used. In other words, it is a concept that argues that market forces determine all these phenomena. Simply put, it refers to the belief that economics determines all other areas of society, such as culture, ideology, morality, philosophy, institutions, art, law, politics, and historical development. Based on the discourse that infrastructure determines the superstructure, Karl Marx seems to have argued that economic relations determine all other political, social, cultural, and institutional societal developments (1979, p. 25). The infrastructure of society is the relationship between production and the material environment. Property relations determine economic infrastructure. The infrastructure and the

economy determine the superstructure, such as the social, cultural, and institutional areas and areas such as thought, art, and ideology. Here, the superstructure seems to be accepted as a simple infrastructure extension. The economic sphere is the main determining factor of social class differences (Jessop, 1982, p. 9). In a critical passage in the preface to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx revealed his awareness of this issue:

“While producing their lives socially, people are involved in certain relationships that they cannot give up and are independent of their will. These production relations correspond to a certain stage of the material productive forces of people. The totality of production relations constitutes society's economic structure and real basis. A legal and political superstructure rises on this ground, finding its counterpart in definitive forms of social consciousness. How material life is produced conditions general social, political, and intellectual life.” (Marx, 1970, p. 6).

According to thinkers who have adopted the post-Marxist approach, the biggest theoretical weakness of traditional Marxism is economic determinism (Mouzelis, 1990, p. 1). Samuel Bowles, one of the economists who has come to the fore in the last few decades with his essential studies on Marxism, has argued that traditional Marxism places excessive emphasis on economics and, within this framework, subordinates social and cultural practices. In this context, Bowles (1985) defined Post-Marxism as "an idea that aims to build a non-economist economic theory in which culture and politics play as important a role as economic factors in directing human action, as opposed to a limited subset of practices determined by Classical Marxism." However, the idea of economic determinism was rejected by Engels very early on:

“According to the materialist understanding of history, the decisive point (moment) in history is ultimately the production and reproduction of material life. Neither Marx nor I claimed anything further than this. Therefore, if someone turns this into the point that economics is the only

determinant, he will turn our claim into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd proposition” (Engels, 1978, pp. 760-761).

The French philosopher Louis Althusser, who left his mark on the 20th century with his significant contributions to Marxist thought, disagrees with the criticisms about Marxist thought being economic determinist in the theory he tried to develop. He says that in Marxist thought, politics and ideology have relative autonomy from the economic structure. Althusser emphasized that, according to Marx, the infrastructure always affects the superstructure. However, Althusser stated that Marx did not discard the determination relationship between infrastructure and superstructure and attributed the feature of being the ultimate determinant to the economic field. In other words, ideology, law, and religion, which appear to be other superstructure institutions, cannot be reduced to pure economy because the relationship between these institutions depends on a structural causality, not a linear causality. Althusser quotes Engels right here:

“Production is the determining factor, but only in the last instance. Neither Marx nor I asserted anything more. To distort this sentence would turn it into an empty, abstract, absurd sentence. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure, the political forms and consequences of the class struggle, other institutions, and even political, legal, philosophical theories, religious conceptions, and dogmatic systems influence and, in many cases, dominate, the subsequent developments of life and historical struggles. They determine the form of life and struggle” (Quoted by Althusser, 2002, p. 137).

The fact that the economy is ultimately determinant does not mean that the economy determines everything, but that what is determined by what depends on the economic situation of the society,

and Althusser adds another sentence to this: "Neither at the first moment nor at the last moment, the clock of the last instance never strikes alone." (Althusser, 2002, p.139).

Marx also clarified the issue of the sequence of instances in his work titled *Grundrisse Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, which he prepared in 1857:

“It is impossible and wrong to consider economic categories in the order in which they played a historically decisive role. What determines the order in which they are treated, on the contrary, is their relations in modern bourgeois society, and here, the order is the opposite of the natural order and does not correspond to the order in which they followed each other throughout historical evolution. What is in question is not the historically established relationship between economic relations in the succession of different forms of society” (Marx, 2004, p. 44).

Here, Marx emphasized the articulation of infrastructure and superstructure levels. In Marx's works and the Marxist tradition, attention is drawn to the interaction between different layers of the social whole rather than economic determinism. Marx does not differentiate the economic field into social/cultural/political/ideological/institutional fields but states that these fields are interconnected and that historical conditions change this whole. At the same time, he pointed out the importance of structures and conditions by saying that people make their history within the conditions that are directly certain and come from the past. However, he wanted to emphasize that the determination between the structure and the subject is two-way by stating that people can also change the conditions.

### The Birth of the Concept of Political Cinema in Turkey within the Framework of the Dialectical Interaction between Art, Politics, and Economy

To understand the foundations of Yılmaz Güney cinema, it is necessary first to include the birth of political cinema in Turkey and the factors that determine this birth. The birth of political cinema

in Turkey can be understood by looking at the picture of Turkey's ideological climate in the 1960s and the revolutionary spurt that took place during this period. All of these brought about a revolution in Turkish cinema and a change in the face of Turkish cinema.

First, to understand the 1960s, let us summarize the 1950s-1960s period, when the Democratic Party was in power, both cinematically and politically. These ten years can be defined as the period in which rapid changes were experienced in Turkey's social life, capital accumulation accelerated, and the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie became stronger and entered the monopolization phase. In the 1960s, economic and political changes affected Turkish society's class structure, and stratification between social classes increased. However, it is difficult to find films containing class issues in Turkish cinema in this period. During this period, movies were shot in which examples of the melodrama genre, known as Yeşilçam films, were predominantly used. Until the 1960s, directors such as Osman Fahir Seden and Atıf Yılmaz made films under Yeşilçam market conditions. Directors who created cinematic language, such as Ömer Lüfi Akad and Metin Erksan, did not include social criticism in their movies due to concerns about censorship. Classes were not truly represented in Turkish cinema between 1950 and 1960 (Topçu, 2006, pp. 118-123).

The May 27 Coup left its mark on Turkey's economic, social, and political life in the 1960s. The administration's policy before May 27 prevented the emergence of many intellectual discourses through censorship. With the liberal environment brought by the 1961 Constitution, some differences were observed in terms of themes in the films. The social realism movement enables this difference to be seen (Tugen, 2014, p. 161).

Marxist thought first influenced cinema through the social realism movement in the 1960s. The movement is a small-scale picture of Turkey's general ideological climate. It is possible to count

nine essential films at the center of the movement: Metin Erksan *Gecelerin Ötesi* (*Beyond the Nights* (1960)), *Yılanların Öcü* (*Revenge of the Snakes* (1962)), *Susuz Yaz* (*Dry Summer* (1963)), *Suçlular Aramızda* (*The Criminals Are Among Us* (1964)), Halit Refiğ *Şehirdeki Yabancı* (*Stranger in the City* (1962)), *Gurbet Kuşları* (*Birds of Exile* (1964)); Ertem Göreç *Otobüs Yolcuları* (*The Bus Passengers* (1961)), *Karanlıkta Uyananlar* (*Those Awakening in the Dark* (1964)) and Duygu Sağıroğlu *Bitmeyen Yol* (*Endless Road* (1965)) (Daldal, 2021). All these films are films that look at the class relations and dynamics and the social dimensions of the conflict, influenced by the winds of liberation of the period, the achievements of democratic rights, and the political revolutionary spring. Social realism ended with the coming to power of the Justice Party, which can be considered an extension of the Democrat Party, in the 1965 elections. After this date, some of the movement's representatives turned to a national understanding of cinema. The other part adopted a revolutionary understanding of cinema that was fundamentally committed to Marxist ideology (Ucakan, 1977, p. 11). As mentioned in detail in the next section, Yılmaz Güney will be one of the screenwriters, actors, and directors who adopted a revolutionary approach to cinema that was fundamentally committed to Marxist ideology. With Güney, the step-by-step transition from socially realistic cinema to revolutionary cinema began. This transition occurred within the framework of the dialectical relationship between economy, politics, society, and art in Turkey.

### In the Context of Yılmaz Güney's World of Thought and Political Attitude: Revolutionary Cinema Dedicated to Marxist Ideology and the Struggle to Change the World

Yılmaz Güney's real name is Yılmaz Pütün. He is one of seven children of a Kurdish family living in Adana. Born in Adana's Yenice district in 1937, as the son of a poor agricultural worker from Urfa and a mother from Muş, Güney moved to Adana with his family at the age of 11, after

spending his childhood working as a farmhand, vineyard guard, and cotton picker in the village. Güney completed his primary, secondary, and high school education in Adana. He grew up as a cinema-enthusiastic young man who became interested in literature, wrote stories, and had them published in the Adana and Istanbul media (Onaran, 1994, p. 133). He later entered the cinema and rose rapidly there, directing more than 20 films between 1967 and 1971 and making eight films in 1971 alone. He was imprisoned twice, once for aiding a leftist organization and once for being involved in a murder. In 1981, he escaped from prison and sought asylum in France, where he died in 1984.

Güney spent his childhood in a period when the struggle for life intensified, and the burden on the back of people experiencing poverty became more and more apparent with the impact of the Second World War. In an interview, he explains the foundations that laid the foundations for the formation of his world of thought as follows: "I was born in a rural area. My family was poor peasants. They were also Kurds. Therefore, I was conditioned by rural ideology, peasant ideology, which was essentially a bourgeois ideology. However, being born and raised among poor peasants, especially part of an oppressed Kurdish nation, influenced my views" (Güney, 2004, p. 9).

However, it should also be noted that, before his Kurdish identity, Güney is thought to have focused his political sensitivities heavily on socialism, which he would begin to consider as a solution to inequality and injustice. Yılmaz Güney tried to earn his living when he started to come to his senses and realized that there was an injustice. However, he could not define it: "No one was talking about the working class, no one was talking about Marxism-Leninism, dialectical materialism." (Güney, 2004, p. 9).



Like many young people, Güney learned Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism from Nazım Hikmet, who became a legend when the Democratic Party tried to suppress intellectuals, writers, and scientists. He meets people who associate with left-wing ideology, reads all the books he can find, and attempts original writing. He wrote his story *Üç Bilinmeyenli Eşitsizlik Denklemleri (Inequality Equations with Three Unknowns-1955)*, which would cause him trouble in the following years, during his high school years:

“Nobody was explaining who we would fight against, how we would fight, what ideology we would fight with, none of these. Under these influences, I started writing short stories and talking to myself, which is how I encountered the political police (Güney, 2004, p. 9).

Because of this story, he was imprisoned for nearly two years on charges of making communist propaganda. Literature excites him so much that he makes his final decision: he will become a writer. Güney, who came to Istanbul in 1957 with this enthusiasm and tried to establish relations with literary figures, soon found himself in cinema, which he saw as a source of income. He meets with his fellow citizens from Çukurova, Atif Yılmaz, and Yaşar Kemal and tells them what he wants to do. The duo, which made joint films then, included Güney in their team. Güney worked as a set worker in studios and was involved in figuration, but he would rise to the role of leading actor, screenwriter, and director step by step. Güney started working in screenplay because of his connection with literature and began to take part in films as a screenwriter, director assistant, and actor. Yılmaz Güney was first known as the *Ugly King* of Yeşilçam action films.

Yılmaz Güney was not included in the social realist movement that was influential in Turkish cinema between 1960 and 1965. Güney, still living the ugly king period then, was an indispensable actor in the grindhouse Yeşilçam films (Daldal, 2021, p. 126). However, Yılmaz Güney wants to make films about the socioeconomic environment in which he lives and the class contradictions it

creates, and he will soon adopt a cinema approach in this direction. In the historical context, Yılmaz Güney explains the process of politicization with the following words, confirming the words expressed by Karl Marx that people do not live as they think but think as they live:

“In those days, I had no idea what Marxism was. I did not know about class struggle, working class, or revolution. I did not set a goal to become a political man. However, after a while, the events I encountered and my attitude towards the events outside turned me into a real political person. "For any politician to set himself the goal of becoming a politician and develop himself in this direction, and for me to become a political man as a result of natural development are two different things" (Güney, 2004, p. 14).

Güney began to take advantage of the opportunities to draw more realistic characters and present social problems more realistically by acting in films with more substantial social aspects and cinema aesthetics (Maktav, 2013: 166). In films such as *Kızılırmak-Karakoyun* (Ömer Lütfi Akad, 1967), *İnce Cumali* (Yılmaz Duru, 1967), *Law of the Border* (Hudutların Kanunu) (1966), *Kozanoğlu* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1967), *Seyyit Han* (1968), he shows the power of the ruling circles, the lords, and the bad guys who rob the people. He is a social bandit who opposes bandits and fights them to the death:

“With these films, I opposed the lords of the semi-feudal Turkey of the 60s and saluted Mehmet Ali Aybar's Turkish Workers' Party, which called the peasants' land. After 1966, I got behind the camera to realize my main goals. “I made my first attempt called *Seyyit Han* in 1968” (Güney, 2004, p. 10).

The film *Seyyit-Han* (1968) heralds the birth of Güney as a new director. The film can be considered the first film in which Yılmaz Güney looks at political issues from a more concrete

perspective and tries to tell a story. Over time, Yılmaz Güney learned about Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union, and Mao: "I learned the leading role of the working class and transformed my attitudes in my life into a revolutionary attitude" (Güney, 2004, p. 11). Thus, Yılmaz Güney began to approach events and developments from a class perspective and began to evaluate the events through the filter of scientific socialism. As a product of this perspective, his approach to cinema began to show itself in the films he acted in, wrote the script for, and directed.

Yılmaz Güney cinema is based on Marxist economics. Güney tried to analyze Marxism carefully by meticulously examining the infrastructure and superstructure. Because there is a dominant economic basis in his films, he called it a social cause. This economic foundation guided the story. Characters depend on these economic conditions. People's movements are guided by their economic situation:

“Whether it is a true story, a fairy tale, an adventure or a love story, I tried to give a cross-section of people's efforts to live on an economic plane (Güney, 2004, p. 10)”.

Although Güney did not rely on economic determinism, he attributed the role of being ultimately determinant to the economy. He based the content of his films on the theme of economic-based class inequalities. In Yılmaz Güney's films, he has taken a stand in favor of a style of cinema that explains the economic order that determines the social class differences in Turkey, the backwardness of this order in Turkey, and teaches the ways of liberation from this order.

### In the Context of Turkey's Political and Economic Panorama in the 1960s and 1970s: Tensions Based on the Proletariat-Bourgeoisie Contradiction

Before discussing Yılmaz Güney's films inspired by Marxist thought, it would be helpful to include the political and economic panorama of Turkey in the years when the movies were shot,

the social classes formed within this panorama, the tensions based on the proletariat-bourgeoisie contradiction, and the sources of these tensions.

Türkiye snowballed from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. The growth of the industrial sector has accelerated (the annual average is close to 10%, and the average of the agricultural industry is approximately 4%). However, urbanization is ahead of industrialization (Boratav, 2006, p. 130). Many villagers migrated to the city, found work in the services sector, and settled in slums without breaking their economic and social ties with the village, thus entering the urbanization process. When the phenomenon of migration from village to city is tried to be explained based on the data analyzed by social scientists of the period, the following conclusions are reached:

“Since the 1950s, with machines in agriculture, an intense migration from rural to urban areas began. Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Eskişehir, and Adana were the main cities that received immigration. However, this migration was much higher than the employment of workers in the industry concentrated in the cities. Industrialization in the cities came long after mechanization in the countryside. While the urbanization rate reached 18% between 1960 and 1970, the industrialization rate was around 7%. The population of the slums created by people migrating from villages to cities in the mentioned large provinces had reached rates of 40-60 percent of the cities" (Algan, 2011, p. 208).

All these developments would escalate the tension based on the proletariat-bourgeoisie contradiction. Yılmaz Güney chose the subjects of all his films in this context and treated them with a socialist perspective. It brought to the screen the people pushed back by the ruling classes and the segments oppressed under labor exploitation (Armes, 1987, pp. 269-276).

As underlined in the previous chapters, Yılmaz Güney researched and embraced Marxist thought and tried to evaluate Turkey's economic, social, and political history through his films based on this thought. Again, as mentioned in the previous sections, Marxism has been distorted as an economic determinist understanding that explains almost every phenomenon or process with economics. With this distortion, various comments have been made that it is not scientific. However, Marxist thought suggests that the economy is not the only but the fundamental and ultimately determinant of class differences. Of course, there are many factors other than economic relations (law, philosophy, institutions, politics, ideology, culture, religion) in the formation or development of social classes, but what is ultimately determinant is the basis of the material life of the society, in other words, production relations, the economic field. Yılmaz Güney has also managed to draw attention to the ultimately determinant role of the economy in the formation of social classes, especially in some of his films. *The Hope* is undoubtedly one of them.

### In the Context of Production Relations, Economic Inequalities and Class Conflicts Created by the Capitalist System: *The Hope*

*The Hope* is a masterpiece that interprets the social inequalities and class contradictions created by the capitalist system based on Marxist ideology. It can be said that the film emphasizes that social classes are determined by many political, social, cultural, institutional, and ideological factors. However, economic and economic inequalities ultimately determine the classes. The film also represents the turning point in Güney's cinema career. Yılmaz Güney wrote the script and directed this movie. Actors such as Yılmaz Güney, Tuncel Kurtiz, and Osman Alyanak shared the leading roles in the film. In the words of Ömer Lütfi Akad: "This is our first realistic film." Nijat Özön wrote about *The Hope*: "Without a doubt, it is the most realistic movie our cinema has ever produced" (1995, p. 206). Güney, who signaled that he had turned to social realist films with the

film Umut, began to be known as one of the representatives of the revolutionary cinema film concept (Onaran, 1999, pp. 199-200). He was also accepted as the first representative of this cinema movement, also called the third cinema, in Turkey (Armes, 1987). Sadık Battal (2006, pp. 191-198) also claimed that Güney, who had been inseparable from horses, women, and guns in the films he had appeared in until that day, underwent a significant change with his role in the movie Umut.

The film Hope was hailed as the first and primary work of revolutionary cinema and became a pioneer for future works. Its central nodes revolved around economic and social inequality and bore intense influences from *Italian Neorealism*<sup>3</sup>.

The main hero of the plot, Cabbar, is a poor carriage driver living in Adana. He lives in a makeshift house with his wife, five children, and elderly mother (Figure 1). Cabbar is trying to support his wife, mother, and children with his shabby phaeton pulled by two tired, old horses. The only hope he relies on in these negativities is the lottery tickets he constantly buys. However, for Cabbar, disasters come one after another. One day, a luxury car crashes into a phaeton, killing each of Cabbar's horses. Cabbar is innocent, but he is also economically weak. In such a case, he would be the one to blame. Desperately, he sells a few items at home, finds them together, and has enough money to buy a horse. Nevertheless, Cabbar's creditors sold the car and the remaining horse and confiscated the money he collected. All of these will create an irreversible hole in Cabbar's life, and from now on, Cabbar's descent into madness will accelerate.



*Figure 1:* The slum where Cabbar lives with his wife, children, and mother.

Source: <https://www.peramuzesi.org.tr/film/umut/935/169> (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

In his despair, Cabbar is carried away by the ideas of his friend named Hasan, who initially suggests that he search for treasure by consulting a powerful so-called hodja, and then they set off on the road. The hope symbolized by a lottery ticket in the first half, the hope of escaping this vicious circle, this miserable, unlivable life, is continued with a search for treasure in the second half (Figure 2). At the movie's end, the treasure will not be found, and it will be impossible for Cabbar to lose his mind.



*Figure 2:* While searching for treasure, Cabbar, his friend, and the hodja.

Source: <https://www.cinerituel.com/bir-umut-figuru-olarak-yilmaz-guney/>(Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

Traces of Yılmaz Güney's life story and family can be seen in most of his political films after 1970. The most striking of these films is *Umut*. Güney's father, just like Cabbar, one day brings an older adult home. Together, they dig down the house's foundations to seek treasure (Soner, 2005, p. 100). Güney responded to a question about the ban on the screening of the movie *The Hope* as follows: “The movie was described as an enemy of the state. However, this movie was vital for me. When I was a child, my father also went on a treasure hunt, and I was a carriage driver for a while” (Dorsay, 2005, p. 339).

In the very first frames of the film, we encounter striking economic and social underdevelopment and the urban landscapes that can occur in such areas. It is possible to notice the motifs and urban images that can become traditional due to the crisis the city entered with



industrialization and urbanization experienced for a long time without being dependent on industry. It has been revealed that there are car drivers, meatball sellers, street vendors, and farmhands in every part of the city. The scenes of dual structure, inequality and injustice, wealth and poverty, cultural lag, and how poverty is reflected in a slum or slum of Adana have been successfully reflected. Even though the slums are so bad, the beauty and signs of the staged apartments reveal another truth about Turkey: the injustice in the distribution of equality; what determines this injustice is the social class differences that arise from economic differences. These scenes show that people do not live the life they want but rather live a life they are dragged to. Life has not been fair to everyone, and everyone is forced to live their lives according to the conditions they live in and the class they belong to. Due to societal inequalities, some things are the dreams of the poor while they are already in the palm of the rich.

There are scenes in the film that almost summarize the scenes in which the class differences arising from the ultimately determinant role of the economy are revealed. One of these is the scene where Cabbar drives a horse-drawn carriage and sees bank and housing advertisements. One of the movie's first scenes, where Cabbar wakes up in his horse carriage and goes to the toilet, is also thought-provoking. Because the place where Cabbar goes to the bathroom is a billboard with the Sümerbank advertisement and the slogan "Your savings are the guarantee of your money" (Yıldırım, 2018, p. 203). In this scene, the capitalist system, which has the most significant share in forming this order in society, is criticized through a bank advertisement where rich people can invest their money. In this respect, it is possible to see in the movie *The Hope* the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat within the capitalist system, in other words, capital and labor, and the determining power of money and economy on social classes (Yıldırım, 2018, p. 205).

Class inequality is also clearly shown in the police station scene. Cabbar complained about the person who hit his horse, but the person who hit his horse was rich. While Cabbar is standing bent over at the police station with his hands folded, the rich man is sitting and giving his statement comfortably. Although Cabbar is in a rightful position, he is not even considered because he is from the lower class.

Additionally, in this scene, the commissioner shows the carriage drivers as the source of all the negativities in the city. Carriage drivers do not pay taxes to the state and do not use fuel. Meanwhile, while the owner of the car is sitting on the chair and drinking the tea offered to him, Cabbar, who is standing, is trying to say something and explain his problem with his hands clasped together (Figure 3). However, Cabbar is not given the right to speak and is humiliated. The dialogues in the scene develop as follows:

“Commissioner: I know the people of carriage drivers; they cause all accidents.

Cabbar: Wait a minute, Mr. Commissioner.

Commissioner: Stop! It is not your fault; it is the municipality's. The accident is on you; the dirt is on you. They could not handle it, so that we could get rid of it.

Cabbar: But, Mr. Commissioner, my horse is dead.

Commissioner: If you leave your car empty, of course he will die. Was that a parking lot? The gentleman took pity on you and dropped the case.

Cabbar: I am the plaintiff.

Commissioner: Stop, it will not do you any good anyway."



*Figure 3:* Conversations between the car owner that hit Cabbar's horse, the commissioner, and Cabbar.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQvVmF08Cbg> (Scene: 26 min. 40 sec-(Scene: 26 min. 50 sec.) (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

While the loss of his livelihood saddens Cabbar, the driver of the car that hit his horse is upset about the paintwork of his car. The commissioner, who appears as the state's representative in the police station scene, is not on the side of the oppressed but on the side of the powerful criminal.

In this scene, Yılmaz Güney showed the privileges of the rich and that even the state applies class privileges. These are scenes of the state as an organ subjected to a particular mode of production and to the dominant class or classes in that mode. In the famous phrase of the Communist Manifesto, the state is “the committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie” (Marx and Engels, 1848: 486). According to the Marxist view, the capitalist state has become the guardian of the interests of the capitalist class and has undertaken the task of protecting the property of the capitalist class. It was unthinkable for this to be otherwise. According to this

approach, the state represented the class that dominated the economy or its interests. Engels explained the Marxist view of the state as follows: "Since the state arose from the need to restrain class antagonisms but also emerged in the context of the conflict between these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the strongest class, the class that dominates economically, and thanks to this has become the politically dominant class, and thus has acquired new means of keeping the oppressed class under control and exploiting it" (Engels, 1962, pp. 320-321). Political power reflects economic power, which shows that the capitalist state and its law side with the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the capitalist state is, as a rule, the state of the most vigorous class, the class that dominates economically, thus becoming the dominant class politically and acquiring new tools to keep the oppressed class under oppression and exploit it.

The scenes where Cabbar goes to the people he used to work for in the hope of getting a loan after his horse dies are also noteworthy regarding the structure mentioned above in the film. One of these people lives in a large house with a pool. The children of the house go into the pool and drink Coca-Cola, and the scene where they drink Coke is not included in the movie by chance. This scene emphasizes Turkey's turning direction of emulation towards America, especially in the 1950s, and its internalization of the consumption phenomenon. This narrative in the film is compatible with Turkey's liberal-capitalist policies that supported the petty bourgeoisie at that time, in other words, its dominant ideology. Not only can Cabbar not get a loan but he is humiliated again by one of the men representing the bourgeoisie, saying, "Did I tell you to come to the city?"

The following line from Cabbar's friend Hasan reveals the determining aspect of the economy on social class differences in the capitalist system (Figure 4):

“Everything is good when you have money. When you have money, eat a kebab, have a dessert, and drink wine. You sleep in good beds. When he has money, a man becomes strong; when he has money, he has money to live in, a pot of boiling water at home, and children. Didn't you have money? There is no one worse than you in the world. They will chase you from everywhere. The face of the poor is cold. Why is it cold, brother Cabbar? For example, you will feel cold on a summer day if you do not have money. Why? Because money keeps a man warm.”



*Figure 4:* The scene between Cabbar and Hasan, where they talk about economic power determining social class differences.

Source: <https://mubi.com/tr/tr/films/hope> (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

According to Yılmaz Güney, art is one of the most critical elements of the struggle to change the world and the class struggle. Art and artistry challenge society's official narratives, ideological patterns, and traditional definitions (Güney, 2004, p. 14). The movie *The Hope* effectively reflects class struggle and the challenge to official ideology. Moreover, through that movie, Turkish cinema achieved a new form of realism (Dorsay, 1989, p. 48). Although the film is about the poor

segments of society, it uses documentary-like language. Moreover, it uses very realistic language because the audience leaves the cinema wondering what happened to those characters after the movies are over. In the words of Elia Kazan:

“I started to worry about the man on the screen, the family on the screen, their future. I continued to worry after the movie ended. I thought, what will happen to this man? What about children? What will happen to their children? To our children, to all of our children? There was nothing even remotely like social criticism here. The film itself was society” (Quoted in Dorsay, 1988, p. 49).

The film successfully depicts the social class differences on the economic axis in Turkey and the poverty and despair arising from these differences, with the theme and ideas spread throughout the film. It is seen as one of the first realistic films of Turkish cinema. In this respect, it is crucial both in Yılmaz Güney's filmography and Turkish cinema. It can be argued that *Umut* is the first film in Turkish cinema to break away from all popular stereotypes and tell the story of poverty. *Umut* is also the turning point of Yılmaz Güney's film career. It is a genuinely hopeful beginning.

### *Agricultural Capitalism, Agricultural Proletariat and the Reality of Exploited Workers: The Anxiety (1974)*

*The Anxiety (1974)*, written and directed by Yılmaz Güney and directed by Şerif Gören after Güney went to prison, focuses on the agricultural workers in Çukurova. In the movie, seasonal workers leave their villages and come to the fields to pick cotton, working to make ends meet without the slightest social security or minimum health conditions. From a documentary perspective, the film begins with images of workers on the highway coming to Adana to pick

cotton in trucks (Figure 5). The scriptwriter and director remind us that this place has become a Sabancı city. Even the Adana sign at the city entrance was changed to AdaSA (Figure 6).



*Figure 5:* The truck bringing cheap cotton workers to Adana while entering the Adana border.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrQnhxf9zJk> (Scene: 5 min. 40 sec.-6 min. 10 sec.) (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).



*Figure 6:* Adana, which turned into Sabancı city.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrQnhxf9zJk> (Scene: 7 min. 16 sec.-7 min. 20 sec.) (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

Again, the film was motivated by the intention to show sections about the brutality of capitalism on the axis of Marxist ideology, this time through the agricultural sector. In this context, the film's central themes are agricultural capitalism, the agricultural proletariat, and the reality of exploited workers. The film also aims to criticize the ongoing feudal order in Turkey's Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions. In this context, light is also shed on the issue of blood feuds.

In the film, a slice of the life of cotton workers in the Adana region is given, and their exposure to large-scale exploitation, like almost all agricultural workers in Turkey, is examined. With the phenomenon of mechanization in agriculture, which has become increasingly prominent in Turkey, especially since the 1950s, landlord-peasant relations have also begun to evolve. With the disintegration of feudal relations and the transition to capitalist production relations, the number of landless peasants gradually increased, causing the large mass of people in the countryside to become unemployable<sup>4</sup>. Those who were employed were made to work in an inhumane manner for meager wages and in poor working conditions. It would be appropriate to include Marx's views on the subject:

“In modern agriculture, as in urban industries, the increase in labor productivity and the mass of labor mobilized comes at the expense of waste and consuming the labor power itself. Moreover, every advance in capitalist agriculture is an advance not only in the art of robbing the laborer but also in the art of robbing the soil. Every step in increasing soil fertility for a given period also progresses towards destroying this infinite source of fertility. Production, therefore, develops



technology and unites the various processes into a social whole only by draining the real source of wealth, namely the land and the laborer” (Marx, 1976, p. 638).

The film sheds light on the fact that landless workers in the village are forced to work under the command of the landowner, hungry, thirsty, and under extreme heat. It is shown that these people, whom the lords do not give food, cook their meals and eat foods such as bread, tea, bulgur, and the wild purslane that grows among the cotton in the fields. Yılmaz Güney has made it his mission to create a narrative that summarizes this situation, which is also experienced in real life in many parts of Turkey, in a realistic context:

“Now, tens of thousands of hands are reaching for cotton in this huge plain and picking it up. Looking at them, I think: What will these people eat and drink? Where will they go? What will they do? What will these people become? "I want to make a film of this feeling of anxiety" (Güney, 2004, p. 10).

The movie tells the story of Cevher, who tries to save the blood money he will pay to his enemy to escape from the blood feud. In the film's background, there are essential movements such as harsh working conditions, terrible labor exploitation, and agricultural workers going on strike. The farmhands who work cheaply and under dire conditions in the cotton fields quit their jobs to oppose labor exploitation, but Cevher has to work, and he sells his daughter to one of the boss's men in exchange for money. However, when the girl runs away to the young man she loves, Cevher is left stranded, unable to save any money, and left alone, face to face with death. The movie ends with Cevher being chased by the bloodies. Şükran Kuyucak Esen has effectively summarized the film's main points and all the messages it wants to convey to the audience:

“The film explains in great detail the working system in the cotton fields and the relationships between the farmhands at the bottom of this system and the landlords at the top. The contradictions

between this wealth in the fertile lands of Çukurova and the visible poverty and despair of the farmhands are displayed masterfully. The ideological function of radio, a communication tool that reaches the masses and ensures the continuation of the status quo, is revealed. Changes in society such as spraying planes, cotton picking machines, mobile cinema screenings, and invariances such as blood feuds, girls being married to men they do not want with bride price, and clothes being placed on married women... Those who accept this order as it is and try to adapt to it, and those who think it should be changed. Those who are trying to change... In short, *Angry*, with its masterfully constructed images, suggests its viewers to think about the Çukurova of the 1970s and the future Çukurova” (Kuyucak Esen, 2020, p. 122).

According to 1966 statistics, 40% of the workers who came to Çukurova that year did not know Turkish, 70% had never gone to school, 48% were children, 92% were unemployed in the city they came from, and 60% ate meat on average every three months. 30% of them do not have a school in their village. 1% have a blood feud (Algan, 2011: 198). Every year, on average, 1500 children die in Çukurova from disease or malnutrition. In 1972, 100 thousand workers came to work in Çukurova, 75% of which were women and children (Algan, 2011: 198). In addition, in the interview with the President of the Farmers' Union, İzzettin Özgiray, it is stated that, according to 1972 data, five hundred thousand of the eight hundred thousand agricultural workers in cotton agriculture in Turkey work in Çukurova (Algan, 2011, p. 198).

*The Anxiety (1974)* is a political film that portrays the exploitation of agricultural workers, who constitute a significant part of the Turkish people, on the big screen, relying on Marxist ideology. In this movie, the economic factor ultimately determines social class differences. Although the role of phenomena such as feudal order and lack of education in forming social class differences

is mentioned in the film, the economy is conveyed as the final determining factor. Class differences and the antagonistic relationship between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in other words, capital and labor, are abundantly underlined in the film. On the one hand, there is the bourgeois class (landlords) who own the means of production. On the other hand, the agricultural proletariat (agricultural workers) have no choice but to sell their labor to survive and are, therefore, doomed to be exploited more and more, stuck under the grip of the capitalist and feudal order.

One of the fundamental problems that the film draws attention to is that the phenomenon of exploitation and the resulting social class differences are not just a result of the capitalist system. Feudal relations have not ended. The newly emerging capitalist relations of production, the remnants of feudal relations, and the lifestyles imposed by traditional norms such as blood feuds and bride prices are taking workers under guardianship. Therefore, although the problems of workers and people with low incomes are ultimately related to economic factors, they can also be linked to many inherited historical, cultural, and structural issues.

### Exploitation is Everywhere and in Every System: *The Herd*

With the movie *The Herd*, Yılmaz Güney aimed to prove the inevitable collapse of the feudal order brought about by the capitalist transformation of Turkey, but that the crumbs of the feudal structure will not disappear quickly, that exploitation is not specific to capitalism. That exploitation can also exist in feudalism.

Güney said, “I told the history of the Kurdish people” (Quoted in Arslan, 2009, p. 132) when talking about his film *Sürü*. The film caused a great sensation upon its release, received praise at festivals abroad, and became Güney’s most talked-about film after *Umut* (1970), which he shot about eight years earlier.

Actors such as Tarık Akan, Melike Demirağ, and Tuncel Kurtiz took part in the film; Zeki Ökten directed the movie, and Yılmaz Güney wrote the script. The tragedy of the inevitable and thunderous dissolution of feudalism and the tribal system is depicted in the film. In this movie, Güney describes feudalism as being doomed to be left behind, a state of decay, extinction, and disintegration, just as the heroes leave the feudal system behind and get lost in the city. With its entire culture and positive and negative aspects, feudalism will survive in Turkey's rural areas and towns for a long time, fragmented and crumbled (Algan, 2011, p. 201). Güney explained the picture of Turkey of that day as follows:

“Imperialism, capitalism, and feudal remnants. Feudal ruins are among the most important targets of our struggle for democracy today. Democratization of the country is possible by eliminating these ruins. Feudalism is dissolving somewhat, but the feudal structure and capitalism live side by side. Furthermore, this is reflected in everything: economic life, social life, political life, cultural life” (Quoted in Dorsay, 2005: 203).

Starting from the first scenes of the film, which begins in a hamlet near Pervari, we witness signs of disintegration of the Veysikan tribe, which is in danger of losing its livelihood as a result of the mechanization of agricultural production and the loss of importance of animal husbandry in the region, and which has become weaker in terms of population as many of its members have sacrificed themselves to blood feuds. The story of a family that was followed by a herd and was destroyed is told with the metaphor of the defeat of feudalism and feudal relations in the face of capitalism.

The basis of the story is the extinction of a tribe in the face of capitalism, as well as the stories of Şivan and his wife, who oppose the customs, ending in Ankara. Hamo Agha, the conservative

and stubborn leader of the Veysikans, to cover up the gradual weakening of his tribe and to maintain his authority, holds his daughter-in-law Berivan, whom he insults at every opportunity as lousy luck and calls the enemy among us, and his son Şivan, who takes care of her, responsible for the deterioration. Most of the sheep that Şivan and his father brought to Ankara to sell have perished. When he takes his wife on his back and falls into the streets of Ankara to get her treated, he repeats the words of the anthem he learned in the military service: "Ankara, Ankara is beautiful Ankara" (Maktav, 2013, p. 171) (Figure 7). He believes that the cure for all troubles lies there, but his hopes are in vain, and his wife dies. All that remains of a great tribe is poverty and despair, which hits them like a slap in the face in the capital of the Republic.



*Figure 7:* The first day Berivan and Şivan came to Ankara.

Source: <https://mubi.com/tr/tr/films/the-herd-1979> (Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

Towards the film's finale, a character who conveys Güney's voice to the audience is included in the story. The hope in the movie is reserved for the revolutionary young man who questions poverty by going against his father, who dreams of turning corners again. This young man is the still very young son of Şivan's hometown, Sıddık, with whom he and Berivan took shelter in

Ankara. In the first shot, where the young man appears, Marx's posters hang behind him. Although the young man tries to enlighten his father and Şivan by saying that salvation is only possible through class struggle at every opportunity, he cannot attract them to such a political consciousness. The film was motivated by this young man's speeches to embody the logical extensions of the process that Marx called the genuine yoke of capital over labor. In this context, it is necessary to include the young man's speech, which seriously criticizes capitalism and gives important political messages:

“This is not the way you say, Dad. Now you have no home, no job, no doctor. You do not have money to keep me studying for years. Neither does Brother Şivan. So, what is the basis of this poverty? Millions of honest working people have nothing. Three or five people have millions, billions. Where are millions of workers going? Who set up this business like this? “The rich here and the lord there are all the same.”

This character, included in the story to suggest a solution to the country's impasse, draws attention to the fact that there is no escape in the city from the order that Şivan escaped from; in other words, he emphasizes that exploitation is everywhere, in every system. Exploitation in the feudal order has been replaced by capitalist exploitation: "The rich here and the lord there are all the same," said this young man (Maktav, 2013, p. 171). It is a sentence that perfectly summarizes the situation. Exploitation is everywhere. Unlike the feudal system, which is effective in rural areas, in the capitalist system, which is effective in the city, bosses replace the landlord. Labor exploitation is at the root of deprivation and poverty. Therefore, the film draws attention to exploitation due to economic class differences in feudal and capitalist systems. Here, Güney's views on realizing a socialist revolution against the capitalist order can be observed. However, it

can also be understood that Güney believes that it will not be enough to transfer the means of production from private ownership to shared ownership and that a holistic struggle is necessary against all institutions and ideas that have become ideological, political, cultural, and lifestyles of the ruling classes. As Roy Armes underlines, “Herd reflects two evils that exist simultaneously, capitalism and feudalism. The violence they create contradicts human love and compassion. So much so that the tyranny of the social system is reflected in people’s lives” (Armes, 1987, pp. 269-276). The word *Sürü*, which is the title of the film, has also been used to emphasize the fact that the *Sürü* is a tribal community under the control of the landowners in feudal living conditions or refers to the working/laboring poor class under the power of the urban rich in the capitalist economy. In this context, the ultimately determining role of the economy also winks at us in this film. The film shows how the feudal conditions and tribal structure are dragged towards a dead end as they lose their economic foundations. It can be observed that the basis of Hamo Agha's unquestionable power lies in the fact that the tribe is economically strong, that even the strictest rules within the tribe can be relaxed when faced with economic impasses, that, when necessary, the agha can even make a business deal with his son, and that his class power is declining.

However, it should also be underlined that, in addition to the great emphasis on economy in the film, it can be perceived that social dynamics that cannot be reduced to economics, such as tradition, custom, behavior, and daily life, are also intertwined from time to time. On the other hand, it is possible to notice various aspects of daily life in the film, such as crime, migration, strikes, ethnicity, literacy, and family history.

In short, in the movie *Sürü*, Yılmaz Güney successfully narrated the feudal order's inability to resist the capitalist order in the Kurdish region, other rural areas of Turkey, and the cities and its

inevitable gradual collapse and disintegration. He presented the tragedy of this significant, thunderous disintegration to the audience with epic richness and multidimensionality.

### *A Panorama of Capitalism's Monsterization of Humans: The Enemy (1979)*

Following the success of Yılmaz Güney *The Herd* (1978), he wrote the script for the film *The Enemy* (1979), using similar aesthetics and narrative methods. The film was directed by Zeki Ökten and featured actors of the film such as Aytaç Arman and Güngör Bayrak. The movie aims to portray a panorama of Türkiye's working class.

In the movie *Enemy*, İsmail and his family, struggling with unemployment and poverty in Çanakkale, are spotlighted. İsmail lives in a makeshift slum with his daughter, who is about to start school, his wife, Naciye, who is bored with poverty and wants to live in better conditions, dress well, and own a tape recorder, and his elderly mother-in-law, who complains of toothlessness and the need for glasses. If İsmail had a regular job to support his family, everything would be fine, but there is no secure job in sight in Eceabat, which resembles a provincial town at that time. İsmail attempts to find daily employment in the labor market. The movie begins with İsmail coming to the labor market. İsmail comes here for the first time. Because he was ashamed, he went to the market where foreign workers, not locals, gathered. However, the bread is in the lion's mouth in this market, and hundreds of unemployed people are waiting for jobs like İsmail. İsmail observes how fierce a struggle is going on among the people waiting for work here. The scenes of people in the labor market are among the most striking images depicting poverty and class differences in Turkish cinema (Maktav, 2013, p. 171). There are workers in the market who fight together to go to work and lose their lives by jumping into the truck carrying workers. Finally, out of desperation,



İsmail has to do the dog culling job given by the municipality to poison stray dogs for a few days, reluctantly, with great regret, and having nightmares at night (Algan, 2011, p. 202).

İsmail's wife, Naciye, cannot find any other way out other than being a prostitute. This decision will bring the end of low-income families together. When his wife leaves his house, İsmail reveals his heart to Cemil, the worker representative at the workplace where he works in Istanbul, and mentions that he plans to kill his wife, as expected from his anger and disappointment. On the other hand, Cemil and his wife tell him that he can build another life as an organic representative of the working class, that they can find him a job in a factory in Istanbul, and that this can positively change his whole life (Algan, 2011, p. 203) (Figure 8). The film ends with İsmail, who sets out for Istanbul, looking hopefully at the road ahead. There is a way out for the hero of the movie *Enemy*. That is, to go to the big city, become a factory worker, and join the industrial proletariat's ranks; this truly means hope for the Turkey of that day.



Figure 8: Cemil and his wife telling İsmail that it is possible to build a different life.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFHuHE86KRM> (Scene: 1 hour. 48 min. 16 sec.)

(Date of Access: September 12, 2024).

In the film, poverty and social class differences and the capitalist system that creates poverty and class differences are criticized. Most importantly, it has been explained very strikingly that economic differences primarily determine the reason for poverty and social class differences. On the other hand, the way in which the capitalist system changes and corrupts people and human relations is also conveyed in the movie. It is reflected that poverty, which is an inevitable product of the system, does not hesitate to destroy spouse, family, and friendship relationships. Since the source of these expenditures is also economic, the ultimately determining role of the economy is highlighted in this film. On the other hand, Turkey's changing socioeconomic and cultural climate can also be observed intensely in the film. The impression that the economic difficulties, class differences, and social crises discussed in the film result from the capitalist system is reflected by the high-rise buildings, banks, and global trademarks that the camera focuses on from time to time.

## CONCLUSION

It can be said about Yılmaz Güney's artistic productions or political existence as a screenwriter, actor, director, producer, and political figure that the element that determines his cinematic practice is life itself. Güney, who never gave up trying and searching for the truth and beauty with the sensitivity of an artist, always knew how to surpass himself and dared to speak about what was new and current, thanks to the bond he established between life and art.

It is thought that Yılmaz Güney is an artistic and political personality who captures the most basic link of the correct approach to problems and approaches the solution of the issues based on Marxism. Güney approached the events and developments from a class perspective and handled

them through the filter of scientific socialism. Yılmaz Güney's cinema is considered a realistic and revolutionary cinema approach that explains the social realities of its period in all their nakedness. Therefore, for Güney, cinema is both a tool and an end, and the aim of making good cinema is a tool to change societies and the world. It is a tool that can shed light on class differences in culture and raise public awareness on this issue. Yılmaz Güney reflected social realities and conflicts, inequality, and injustice caused by the feudal order, ruptures caused by economic, political, or cultural transformations, and contradictions in social relations in the characters he portrayed in the films, with the film scripts he wrote on the big screen. For Yılmaz Güney, cinema was a tool to raise public awareness beyond its commercial function.

Following the Marxist ideology he adopted, Yılmaz Güney emphasized the critique of the capitalist system and the concept of inequality that this system brings with it in his films. He touched upon social class differences and evaluated these differences in the context of the bourgeoisie-proletariat conflict. While Güney explains social class differences in the movie discussed within the scope of the study (*The Hope, The Anxiety, The Herd, The Enemy*), he is thought to primarily associate the reasons for these differences with economic factors. The South, of course, associated class differences with political, social, cultural, ideological, feudal, education, religion, and family, but Güney attributed an ultimately determinant role to the economy. In other words, in his films, he aimed to convey to the audience that social class differences are related to having or not having economic power. However, the movie also takes a stance against the problems of patriarchy, bureaucracy, customs, smuggling, banditry, and blood feuds, and it is emphasized that these phenomena also fuel social class differences.

In his film *The Hope (1970)*, a turning point both for his cinematic career and Turkish cinema, he was greatly influenced by New Realistic Italian Cinema, especially Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle*

*Thieves (1949)*. In the movie, he tells a universal story about unemployment, just like in *Bicycle Thieves*. Cabbar also struggles, just like in De Sica's movie. In the film *The Hope*, it is possible to see the resistance to capitalism, the contradiction between capital and labor, and the power of the economy and money. In the film, the economic predicament that a poor car driver is dragged into with the introduction of motor vehicles into daily life and the ways he uses to escape this predicament are successfully displayed. While Güney continues the car driver's adventure, he reflects the reality of the little person in all its dimensions in his personality. The movie *Hope* conveyed Marx's metaphor of infrastructure determining superstructure to the audience. Class differences and distortions determined in the context of economic inequalities in society are expressed on a socially realistic basis and in striking detail.

Güney's film *The Anxiety (1974)* focuses on cotton workers from Çukurova. On the other hand, with the increase in mechanization in agriculture, which is the determinant of Turkey's rapid evolution to the capitalist mode of production in agriculture, the sharpness of the social structure and class distinctions in the context of the working class, which is further condemned to exploitation, and the landlords who exploit them, has been emphasized. In the film's background, important movements include harsh working conditions, terrible labor exploitation, and agricultural workers going on strike. While it is underlined that workers do not have any concepts such as union, right to strike, or social security, the awareness process of agricultural workers on these issues is also mentioned. Based on Marxist ideology, the story of the change that lies behind the social change that caused the villagers to become poor is presented. In the formation of social class differences, the ultimately determining role of the economy is again brought to the fore.

The movie *The Herd* (1978) is about how a nomadic tribe whose livelihood is based on animal husbandry disappears due to developing technology and new economic conditions; as Akbulut (2012, p. 63) states, nomadism, settled life, animal husbandry, industry, and the service sector in Eastern Anatolia can be considered as the film of the defeat of feudalism in the face of capitalist production relations (Akbulut, 2012, p. 63). Despite the socio-cultural fragments of feudalism and the existence of the patriarchal structure, the shaking of nomadic life and tradition with the change in economic structure has been successfully addressed. As Kuyucak Esen (2018, pp. 146-147) states, the train that takes the herd to Ankara drags us from the feudal structure to the capitalist structure. Behaviors, relationships, and situations change as the journey progresses. In short, the film generally describes social change under the influence of capitalist ideology, new relations built from top to bottom, the collapse of the remnants of feudalism in the most remote corners of Turkey, and the pains of integrating into capitalism. In this film, Yılmaz Güney argued that social classes cannot be considered independently of the local conditions, beliefs, and value systems in which people who are thought to belong to that class live. He also told the stories of small people caught between the ongoing and still strong feudal organizational relations while the South was integrating with capitalism. In addition, he acted to convey to the audience that exploitation is not specific to the capitalist system, that exploitation also plays a leading role in the feudal system, and that it only changes shape. The most determining factor enabling one class to exploit another is the economy.

*The Enemy* (1979) is a film that depicts class differences, poverty, and inequality arising from differences in economic power. In this film, Güney penetrated the world of people with no way out with a sharp observation power and wanted to document the living conditions of unemployed and poor people in every detail. The film conveyed to the audience the unbearability and brutality of economic oppression in all its nakedness. It is a fact that social class differences are determined

by many educational, social, political, ideological, and cultural factors. However, the movie *The Enemy*, created based on a Marxist ideology, primarily associated the reason for social class differences with economic factors and attributed an ultimately determinant role to the economy.

In the words of Roy Armes (2011, p. 236), the person who created a turning point in Turkish cinema is Yılmaz Güney. Güney's film *The Hope* was a beginning in this context, and in almost all the films he shot or wrote after *The Hope*, he aimed to convey the contradictions of the capitalist system and the social class differences it brought with it to the audience. In other words, he described the tragedies of oppressed and exploited people resulting from the class society structure. Although he associated the fundamental determinants of this class society structure with factors such as politics, ideology, education, family, religion, and culture, he attributed the ultimate determinant role to the economy consistent with his adopted Marxist ideology. It can be argued that Yılmaz Güney is a director and screenwriter who remembers Marxism as a guiding map to explain the deprivation and inequalities in Turkish geography. While doing this, he understands that aesthetics cannot be considered separately from the story told and tries to wrap the way of describing this map as much as the issue he tells. For this reason, it is thought that he changed the way cinema was made in Turkey in the 1970s and left a cinematic legacy in Turkey that has not lost any political influence.

Güney is remembered as a pioneer of creativity in Turkish cinema and as someone who managed to represent Turkish cinema abroad (Gevgilili, 1989, p. 157). Sadık Battal's highly accurate observation that Güney is the only filmmaker who disturbs the status quo and creates a different cinema language and world than the imposed status quo language (2006, p. 55). Only the films examined within the scope of the study prove this observation as films that the status quo

can never accept. While many contemporary filmmakers make films with love, history, sexuality, and melodrama themes that repeat each other, Güney has managed to make films that convey social class differences and problems that are primarily based on economic axis but also political, cultural, religious, and family foundations by following a Marxist framework.

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## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> [Editor's Note] Though one of the greatest film directors in world cinema, there is scarce analyses of Güney's cinema in English. There have been recent attempts like Giles & Sahin (1982), Kaftan (2002), Akser (2009), de Brujn (2012), Carruthers (2021), Daldal (2023) and Köksal (2023) and this new addition tis welcome by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Even famous and commercial films that do not ostensibly have a political point of view are considered to have a specific political discourse, as they assume and reproduce the existing hegemony as usual and legitimate. Therefore, as Mike Wayne (2001, p. 1) emphasizes, all films are political. However, some films are more explicitly and directly political, questioning the unfair distribution of cultural and economic resources among people or the legitimacy of rulers. With these films, filmmakers aim to create a particular political consciousness in the audience by expressing their discourse on various social problems.

<sup>3</sup> Italian Neorealism is a significant cinema movement that emerged in Italy after the Second World War (1945-1952) and adopted principles such as using amateur actors, on-location shooting, and minimal scenarios. The movement began to disappear after 1952, when the Cold War atmosphere, the Truman Doctrine, and anti-Communist propoganda increased their dominance in Italy. Among the best-known representatives of the movement are Roberto Rosellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, and Fellini. Rosellini's films *Rome Open City* 1945, *Peasant Woman Paisa Paisa* 1946, *Germany Year Zero Germania Anno Zero* 1947, Visconti's *The Earth Shakes La Terra Trema* 1947, De Sica's *Pavement Children, Sciuscia* 1946, *Bicycle Thieves Ladri Di Biciclette* 1948, *The Miracle of Milan Miracolo a Milano* 1950, and Umberto D 1951, as well as Fellini's *Vagabonds I Vitelloni* 1953, *Endless Streets La Strada* 1954, and *Nights of Cabiria Le Notti Di Cabiria* 1956, are among the leading films of the movement (Diken Yücel, 2021, p. 83). Fascism, which broke out during and after the Second World War, was essential to the movement's formation. New Realists turned their cameras to people in post-war poverty. The struggle of poor people to hold on to life has been the film's central theme. Importance was given to the stories of the working class and peasants. Italian Neorealism, which greatly influenced world cinemas, also set an example for Turkey (Daldal, 2021, p. 123). Although *The Hope* carries intense influences from Italian neo-realism, on the one hand, it took its inspiration from people experiencing poverty, the crowded, underdeveloped Adana rural area from which Güney came and managed to construct the actor-space relationship in realistic ways. Like the character Ricci in the movie *Bicycle Thieves*, Cabbar in *The Hope* loses his only means of earning a living. Despite all their realism, the economy is the determining factor in both films: Ricci, although belittled at first, later falls for the words of the fortune teller he relied on, while Cabbar goes out to search for treasure with the suggestions of a deceitful man.

<sup>4</sup> The film also sheds light on phenomena such as primitive capital accumulation and dispossession, which are essential concepts of Marxist thought. As a result of the loss of small land ownership, dispossession, and access to the means of production, life can only be sustained by selling labor. The agricultural workers in the movie *The Anxiety* represent a class that has lost their land due to mechanization in agriculture and has nothing left but their labor to sell. Direct quotes from Marx on the subject will make it easier to understand this process. "The process of disintegration of a nation that transforms a certain mass of people into potentially free wage workers—individuals forced to work and sell

their labor simply because of their propertylessness” (Marx, 1967, p. 617) is the subject in question. Ways that involve intense labor exploitation, such as the liquidation of small land ownership, confiscation of labor, and colonization of nature, serve the accumulation of primitive capital (Marx, 1967, pp. 617-618).