



Joker: Film, Working Class and Post-Truth

Yıldırım Uysal, Bursa Uludağ University, yildirimuysal@gmail.com

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Abstract

The film *Joker* (2019) garnered huge interest from audiences worldwide and honored at the box office with an amount exceeding one billion dollars. Indeed, *Joker* has a class and political reflection on society. This article claims that the film *Joker* is a manifesto against the political forces that prioritize populist, authoritarian, and ruthless capitalist policies all over the world. The aim of our study is to analyze how the class movement is shown and examined in *Joker*. *Joker*'s anti-system and anti-capitalist stance needs a sociological analysis; this analysis examines how *Joker* reflects people's subconscious and inspires class resistance. Another important point is to analyze the movie scenes with a descriptive analysis that will help us understand the transformation of the social movement. How the characters are assigned semiotically in the script is another requirement in terms of emphasizing what the film tells implicitly. It is important both to understand the chaos of the working class, which has not yet positioned itself in the production relations of the postmodern period after, and to see the film's recipe for why the working class should not incline towards right-wing populist politics. Understanding these two points will be the most important result and achievement of our study.

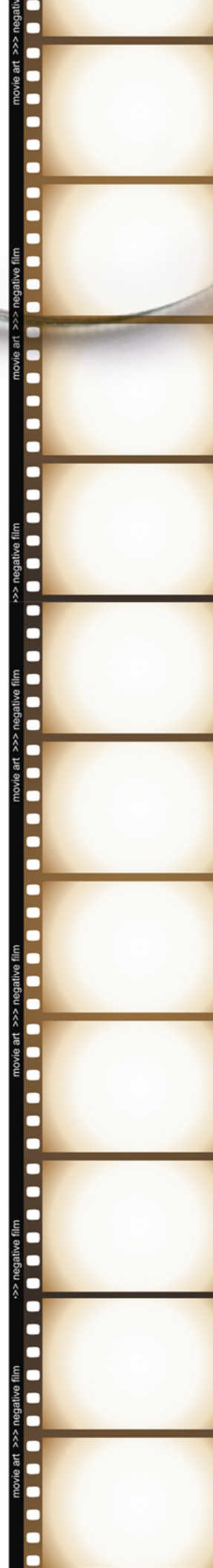
Keywords: Cinema; Working Class; Post Truth; Joker Film; Class Consciousness



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Joker: Film, Working Class and Post-Truth

Yıldırım Uysal

Introduction

The favor that the Joker film got from the moment it was released, was perhaps something that no one who was involved in the production of the film had expected. It can be thought that the interest which has been presented to Joker is due to its ability to analyze the position of the working class who have been affected by the changing production relations, as well as to carry a latent inspiration and leadership role for working class on the class consciousness issue. The deep and unending bond between the art of cinema and society, played a fundamental role in both making and acclaiming Joker film. The main reason that prompted us to write this article is the link between the Joker movie and the lower class, which has been indirectly placed at the center of the movie.

The aim of this article is to analyze the class phenomenon and class resistance in the Joker film. Since the article argues that the Joker film calls on the working class of today to resist the system, the aim of analyzing a class opposition can be an expected goal. The article is most important in terms of determining the stance of the working class, which has lost its class position and can't determine a new social / class position in the economic structure that has evolved from industrial production relations to cognitive production relations. This large mass of workers, who became unemployed when their profession lost its place in production relations, turned to populism when their economic future was in danger. The article aims to examine this situation of the labour class in relation to the concept of post-truth, because there is a very close relationship between the labour class and the concept of post-truth in post-modern times.

As the article progresses towards its goal, the article will receive support from the descriptive analysis that examines the scenes of the film, from the semiotic analysis that shows that each character in the film represents a different class / meaning, and from the sociological analysis that will examine the relationship of the film with the existing social structure.

At this point, we should take a closer look at the method of semiotic analysis that will be employed in our article. Semiotics is a science that tries to find the answer to the question 'how meaning is formed' and aims to analyze structures containing meaning (Uzdu Yıldız, 2011, 5). Another perspective sees semiotics as a field that essentially examines what is intended to be shown because semiotics recognizes that what is seen is not the reality itself (Çiçek, 2016, 27). Umberto Eco, while using terms such as 'codes', 'sub-codes', 'plain meaning', 'connotation' in his semiotic terminology, argues that the main subject of analysis in semiotics is the concept of 'substitution' (Çağlar, 2012, 26).

Cinema semiotics has been formed as a sub-field within the field of semiotics in the time. We can find the definition of the function of semiotics in cinema in the following sentence: “The theory that analyzes the indirect (implicit) meanings imposed on the visual materials used in cinema which establishes its narrative especially on visuals” (Ulusal, 2019, 187). Christian Metz, who was inspired by Roland Barthes' views in the field of semiotics, followed the path and principles of structuralist linguistics. Metz is a leading name when the issue would be the fields of 'cinema' and 'semiotics'. Metz tried to prove that cinema has a language in order to express his point, even though it is an art which is based on visual and auditory (Çiçek, 2016, 35). Another important name of semiotics, Juri Lotman, emphasises the relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' and underlines the concept of 'iconic signs'. He claims that all signs have a text of their

own content, the reason behind this is that the cinematic text is encrypted through signs and transferred to the audience in this way (Topal – Topal, 2022, 47).

The Conversion in Relations of Production

I think the point where we need to start to understand the Joker's point is, the conversion in relations of production. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have witnessed the transition of relations of production from industrial capitalism to cognitive capitalism. The relations of production of postmodern era which is based on information technology and internet prevailed over the industrial and factory-centered production type of modern era.

The new production phase can be recognized and summarized with three terms: cognitive capitalism / intangible labor / informatics society. Mete Ogün considers ‘the work itself’, ‘the subject of the work’ and ‘the means of the work’ concepts as the three basic factors of labor process. He also thinks that technological production and innovation have become evident as new causes of efficiency and development in new relations of production. This situation has emerged with the transition from industrial society to informatics society (Ogün, 2020, 131). Labor is cheap, flexible, and unorganized in cognitive capitalism (Ogün, 2020, 132). Labor has experienced a transformation process as both space and form, and still experiences (Ogün, 2020, 133).

A significant part of the working class could not find a place for itself in the new economic life produced by the new relations of production. As a result, the lower income group has evolved to move away from rationality, concrete social conditions and life and to get closer to their emotions, their instincts and to ignore the facts which are determined by science and to follow the lies which are told to them. It is an expected final that the working class will lose its connection

with concrete conditions and establish a fabrication world that does not consist of facts; otherwise, it cannot resist life psychologically.

Another consequence of losing its place in the relations of production is losing the prestige and social status in the society. Depending on this situation, the working class is looking for a representative to represent itself before the society and choosing this representative from the upper class, which the working class thinks this representative is respected in the social stratification. The most important characteristic of this agent is that he tells the lower class what they want to hear but not the truth and does not spoil the imaginary world that the lower class has produced for itself; on the contrary, it strengthens it. This representative, as though, acts as the protector of the lower class against the upper and middle classes.

Modern to Postmodern, and Post-Truth

It is the modern period when science has replaced religion as the source of knowledge. In the postmodern period that came after the modern period, science has lost its importance and place as a source of information (Oruç, 2020, 156). It can be claimed that the transition from the modern period to the postmodern period has changed the basic notions of social structure. It means that many things, from methodological approaches in social sciences to the practices of daily life, undergo a sharp change. Terry Eagleton counts classical reality, mind, identity, objectivity, universal progress, salvation, singular framework, grand narrative or ultimate ground, as the terms of the modern period, while describing the differentiation of the concepts and ways used to reach knowledge in the postmodern period, from the modern period (Eagleton, 1997).

Slavoj Žižek bases the most classical definition of ideology on the words of Marx, and this view defines 'ideology' in modernity: "The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx's Capital: 'sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es' - 'they do not know it but they are doing it'" (Žižek, 2008, 24). According to Daniel Tkatch, people have entered a 'post-knowledge' era. About this era, Žižek's definition is closest to his perspective about the relationship that the average person establishes between the action and the knowledge that guides action: "We know very well what we are doing, but still, we keep doing it" (Tkatch, 2016).

"The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive naivete: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it. That is why such a 'naive consciousness' can be submitted to a critical-ideological procedure. The aim of this procedure is to lead the naive ideological consciousness to a point at which it can recognize its own effective conditions, the social reality that it is distorting, and through this very act dissolve itself" (Žižek, 2008, 24). I think the most important phrase in Žižek's sentences is "a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation". It is, as important to see that social reality is a 'constructed' reality as, to see our representation in society as a 'constructed' representation away from 'the real we'. Apart from this, the disintegration of the great narratives of modernity means the disintegration of the mental world of individuals who have established a relationship with modernity through these narratives. In the postmodern period, the individual, especially the lower class individual, could not re-establish the intellectual bond which he has in the modern period between him and the system. The disappearance of the mental bond resulted in the formation of a subclass which can not make sense of itself within the system and has been feeling itself out of the system.

Today, world societies live in a political and social atmosphere based on populism and authoritarianism, which many political scientists describe with the term 'post-truth'. Sean Illing is realizing one of the definitions of 'post-truth' by saying: “.. a ‘post-truth’ world — a place where shared, objective standards for truth have disappeared” (Illing, 2018).

The definition of the post truth in the Oxford dictionary, one of today's most important dictionaries, is as follows: “relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts” (oxfordlearnersdictionaries). Steve Fuller even considers this definition itself a post-truth definition, with its incomplete sentence structure, incomprehensibility, and lack of subject (Altun, 2022, 251).

In today's communication and media world, the marketing of the news is more important than the presentation of the truth. The economic criteria of the internet, which is the most important way of having the news today, are more 'clicks' and to reach more 'consumers' (Oruç, 2020, 154). It can be easily claimed that fake news that attracts more attention and is clicked more, is more precious than true news which gains less attention for media.

Although science is the only source of knowledge in the modern era, there are many sources of knowledge other than science in the postmodern era. Because the postmodern period multiplied the ways of acquiring knowledge, post-truth logic can find a place easier. A lot of people don't need to criticize the information through rational criteria or don't care about scientists who ground on rational information sources. Thus, the production of reality can also be based on irrationality and there is no problem with that.

As a second point, it can be said that everyone's own truth is formed, or rather, everyone 'forms' his own truth. I think this point stems from people's desire to produce their own truth and world. The media and the internet, who are aware of this desire, offer everyone material from

which people can produce their own truth. Thus, as many 'facts' as the number of people in the world can be produced but many facts that are independent from the will of all people in the world and which leave no room for interpretation, are ignored in this way.

Post truth is a concept that best defines the epistemology of the postmodern period and constitutes an important part of it. The first known and defined use of the word post-truth is in Steve Tesich's article "A Government Of Lies", published in 1992. Tesich underlines that the lies which were told by politicians about the scandals that occurred during these administrations were easily accepted and internalised by the people.: “We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world” (Tesich, 1992). Tesich's prediction, which has been confirmed later with great acceptance, was the first to define the concept of post-truth, which will make its presence much more widely accepted to the world societies in the 21st century.

According to McIntyre and Keyes, postmodern thinking is the major cause of the road that ultimately leads to post-truth (Altun, 2022, 256). Keyes considers today's technology as the another cause of the emergence of post truth (Güven, 2020, 31).

The post-truth period should be perceived as a time period in which 'meaninglessness', and the concepts of 'meaning' and 'truth' are not needed (Güven, 2020, 32). According to Evan Davis, what is presented to us as 'reality' today is structurally contextless. It is not possible to determine whether facts are 'true' or 'false', due to this 'contextlessness' (Demirkol, 2022, 303). Evan Davis

evaluates the fact that the desire to reach the truth no longer means anything as a consequence of the fact that the social will has lost its directive position on social functioning (Demirkol, 2022, 303). In a statement which has been published in *The Guardian*, which is one of Britain's most respected newspapers, Davis expands his thinking: “ “In practice,” Evan Davis writes, “we evidently are quite happy to believe untruths.” Davis is stating what is, perhaps, the most indisputable fact regarding what has been trumpeted as the rise of a new kind of “post-truth” politics. Shrewdly, he describes the belief that we are living in a post-truth era as “an expression of frustration and anguish from a liberal class discombobulated by the political disruptions of 2016” “ (Gray, 2017).

In the postmodern period, there is no single truth; truth varies according to society, social group or individuals with a subjective perspective. Narrative is much more valuable than truth and thus, the 'best narrator' is the winner of this system (Altun, 2022, 256). Keyes claims that truth has moved away from what it really is and the main reason for this is the relativisation of truth. Keyes characterizes online platforms with the concepts of 'decentralization' and 'lack of control'. The anonymous character of the internet can be cited as another reason so well, which distances the truth from what it really is (Demirkol, 2022, 295).

Keyes states that people of the post-truth period tell lies without feeling guilty. This type of person needs justifications that hide the truth in order to distance himself from being a liar. By doing so, he conceals the truth but he never thinks that he is a liar (malumatfurus.org). Keyes also states that, hearing the truth is not an easier act than telling the truth in today's conditions (Bulunmaz, 2017). Keyes argues that literary figures, lawyers, therapists, academics, journalists and clergy, like politicians, employ the post-truth approach in their discourse. He believes that manipulation and lying increase in direct proportion to the level of knowledge which the person

has (Özcan, 2020). We can assert that all these professions have gained more value and importance in the postmodern period compared to the modern period. The reason for this is the transition from modernist industrial society to postmodernist information society. Knowledge is much more important than in modern society, but the reliability and respectability of knowledge is much more controversial than in the modern period.

James Ball argues that the increasing prominence of the internet over the traditional media is the reason that determines the character of the post-truth period, which values bullshit more than lies (Altun, 2022, 252). In Ball's thinking, bullshit is the force that dominates the media today. Websites that report bullshit news receive far more clicks than rooted media organisations (Altun, 2022, 252-253). The fact that newly emerging internet news sources make bullshit news stems from the expectations of the people who read and follow them.

Steve Fuller explains today's post-truth world through the sophists of Ancient Greece. Fuller says that the sophists used the rhetoric method, which Aristotle was considering the 'art of persuasion', and also the fallacy method, to present the facts in a different way than they are (Altun, 2022, 259). In his own words, Mason-Wilkes explains Fuller's idea that post-truth is a concept that extends from past times to the present as follows: “Fuller claims post-truth is nothing new; a disconnect between external ‘reality’ and accounts of reality which have historically claimed epistemic authority has always existed” (Mason-Wilkes, 2019, 1198).

Ralph Keyes argues that deception has become a part of our daily lives as a way of life, while Evan Davis says that the phenomenon of 'not trusting anyone' has become a natural element of our daily lives (Şimşek, 2018, 2-3). Ralph Keyes, thinks that the prevalence of the concept of 'cheating' in the American lifestyle makes it easier for societies in the rest of the world to lose

touch with reality, because America is the most important influencer of the cultural transformation in the world (Altun, 2022, 251).

Post Truth Politics, American Politics and American Elections

Post-truth politics, which is the reflection of the post-truth concept in the field of politics, repeats its 'unscientific' and 'populist' features in political discourses. According to Hopkin&Rosamond, standing against concepts such as reason and veracity, feeling of distrust towards experts of a field, the dominance of populist and anti-elitist movements, can be listed as the characteristics of post-truth politics. (Dorosh, Astramowicz-Leyk & Turchyn, cited from Hopkin & Rosamond, 2022, 344). “Post-truth politics (also called post-factual politics and post-reality politics) is defined as a political culture in which debate is framed largely by emotional appeals, and by the repeated assertion of talking points ignoring factual rebuttals” (Chowdhury, 2018).

It seems that post-truth politics is populist because it speaks to the sentimental side of the people, it is irrational because it has no content which is based on truths. Blanco Alfonso underlines that the concept of ‘passion’ has become more important than ‘rationality’ in his words: “The post-truth era has revealed the ability of passionate political discourse (based on pathos) to ravage rational political speech (based on logos)” (Blanco Alfonso, 2018, 421).

Vattamattam explains Žižek's thoughts in the context of the relationship between society and politics as follows: “The oft-repeated political lies make the people at large indifferent to truth, the symbolic order gets shattered, and people are dehumanized. With no sense of truth, we cannot criticize power and this makes governments more authoritarian. The sense of reality derived from the symbolic order is what Žižek calls social reality .. This, to a certain extent, stabilizes human subjectivity. The decline of the symbolic order leads to changes in the positions we take regarding

any social reality. This shift in perspective is what Žižek calls the parallax view ..“ (Vattamattam, 2020). Sebastian Vattamattam focuses on two concepts here: ‘social reality’ and ‘parallax view’. For myself, I think that both concepts are closely related to the social transformation that the working class has been experiencing in the postmodern period. The social reality which is built in the modern era, has lost its response in people's minds with the collapse of the modern era. The change of social reality sometimes affects the perception of reality, but sometimes it also forms the need to destroy that reality and build a new one.

In the 2020 American Presidential elections, Joe Biden was elected President of the United States by defeating his rival Donald Trump with a difference of more than 7 million votes difference. In the American Presidential elections which was held in November 2016, Republican Party's candidate Donald Trump was elected President of USA; perhaps this situation must have surprised that even those who voted for him because his rival Hillary Clinton was ahead in the pre-election polls. In fact, Trump’s victory should not have been a surprise but expected because Trump is also an extension and a reflection of the populist / authoritarian / wild capitalist political line that has declared its dominance in many countries around the world.

In the 2016 elections, the Republican Party, which is the representative of the production relations of the past, subjected the working class to an illusion with populist rhetoric and thus, it managed to win the election. The fact that, a significant part of American workers lost their jobs due to the changing production relations from industry to informatics and they did not know where to position themselves in the new economic life, made it easier for them to obey the rhetoric of the Republican Party. In the 2020 elections, however, the American working class has partially

awakened from this illusion. The working class made a 'lesser evil' choice compared to the Republican Party by bringing the Democratic Party to power.

From such an axis shift, it should not be concluded that the Democratic Party is a party that protects the interests of the working class more than the Republican Party. The political philosophy of both parties is liberalism and supports capitalist relations of production. Despite the conservative, single-identity and more 'American' character of the Republican Party, the Democratic Party follows a more universal political line that embraces different identities. While the Republican Party realizes the right interpretation of liberalism, the Democratic Party reveals the left interpretation of liberalism.

Peter Marshall claims that the political belief system, which he calls Trumpism, constructs the truth, but he does not think that this system is consistent or stable. According to him, Trumpism is a structure that includes a fluid belief acceptance and a self-fixed ideological stance at the same time (Marshall, 2021). Andrew Kirkpatrick says that Trump and people like Trump understand the life in general based on dichotomic logic: like black and white, like winners and losers. Trump proves with this logic that, he has no difference from the politicians which he claims that he is against; the politicians whom Trump calls they belong to 'system'. Actually, all of them are following the Social Darwinist perspective on human nature. However, this mentality is no longer exclusive to the Right. Margaret Thatcher's infamous claim that there is no alternative to neoliberal economics has received double acceptance on the mainstream left. Social Darwinism, which is another reflection of the idea that there is no alternative to neo-liberal economy, gradually ceased to belong to the right political line and also took left politics under control (Kirkpatrick, 2017, 322).

Tolmach Lakoff thinks that Trump is neither affiliated with populism nor any other ideology. For her, the necessity of an -ism is a prerequisite for being defined as an -ist; similar to other politicians, even a populist has beliefs that he adheres to (Tolmach Lakoff, 2017, 598). Mehmet Sebih Oruç is relates the success of Donald Trump to his style which takes spectacle and show to the forefront. According to Oruç, truth, ideology and negotiations have lost their importance in current political discourse and this situation is closely related with the success of Trump (Oruç, 2020, 147).

In that respect, post-truth discourses are functional for right-wing parties and for those unemployed workers in terms of ignoring or denying the conditions which they are in. The mass, who need the warmth of populist policies and post-truth lies to escape the brutal economic realities they are faced with, also forms the natural voting base of these right-wing parties.

Joker Film

The Joker movie was released at a time when there was such a short time left for the American political elections and people have been breathing such a post-truth atmosphere. World societies which have experienced these approaches of post-truth politics rewarded the Joker movie, which was released in 2019, with a revenue of more than 1 billion dollars at the box office, constitutes a situation worth examining sociologically. In our opinion, there is a close relationship between the conditions in which the Joker movie took shape and the 2016 and 2020 political elections of the United States. When we delve deeper into the film, we encounter a scenario that is open to semiotic analysis and class analysis.

It would probably be correct to understand the Joker movie as a 'last exit before the bridge' warning directed to all world societies, especially the American society. Economist Ergin

Yıldızoğlu considers as the primary reasons for populism-based policies and Trump's presidency are the rising unemployment rate and the shrinkage of the economy (Yıldızoğlu, 2020). A higher percentage of unemployment and poverty strengthens right-wing parties and their right-wing populism, as in many examples in the modern era. This is exactly what was witnessed in the 2016 elections: a parallelism can easily be formed between the masses turning to Trump by ignoring that he is one of the best-known and most fervent representatives of "wild capitalism" in America, and the masses that brought the Nazi Party to power in Germany in 1933. The number of unemployed was 6 million in Germany in 1932 and this 6 million was the main factor that Nazi Party came to power in 1933. The number of people waiting for a 'saviour' in hopeless economic conditions is substantial and the expectation of such a savior is the biggest reason for the power of right populist parties/leaders.

Such populism will certainly produce imaginary enemies to its potential electorate. In his article, Gleiberman says that the Trump administration marginalizes and even demonizes Americans whom he does not see as "normal Americans". This political line, which sees destruction as pleasure at a time when an attitude based on hatred is gaining popularity, is supported by its followers who glorify a cult of anger based on being 'white' (Gleiberman, 2019).

The huge box office success of the movie can be seen as proof that the majority of the American working class has been realizing that populist-opportunist politics and president are not the right choice for their future. We can understand that people who do not have capital, who do not have any ownership or any right to speak in the means of production, find themselves in these films and get support from the Joker and similar films against the class that controls the means of production and capital.

From Arthur Fleck to Joker: the conversion of the subject

The main character of the movie, Arthur Fleck, is a laborer. He earns his living as a clown and he lives with his mother. His mother Penny is a fan of Thomas Wayne, the strong candidate for mayor. The character of Arthur Fleck, apart from the fact that people do not respect him because of his profession, is someone who is not taken seriously by anyone in his private life. He also suffers from a disease that causes him to laugh constantly at irrelevant situations.

The film embodies the goal to destroy the system in the person of Fleck and starts the process by turning him into Joker. Fleck begins to destroy and his first action is to kill three white-collars in the subway. These middle class white-collars who do not have class consciousness ensure the continuation of the system by being the servant of the system. Although Fleck is from the lower class, the crushing gears of capitalism are not only valid to the lower class but also to the middle class. Tuğçe Nur Biga argues by underlining the "they don't care about people like you or me" statement, which Fleck's psychiatrist told Fleck that the system does not give importance to the middle class and the lower class equally. The doctor seems to be advantageous economically and socially with her education and social status in comparison with Fleck, who is working in a precarious job and possibly less educated than doctor but ignoring the middle and lower classes at the same time by the system are happened in a socio-economic environment where economic criteria deteriorate, finding a job becomes much more difficult and social justice disappears (Biga, 2019). Michael Eden, on the other hand, considers Wayne's butler as middle class and claims that he has served the system and Wayne with full obedience, like a machine: "Further to this bureaucratic (middle-class indifference) is represented by Wayne's butler who cruelly dismisses Fleck from behind the iron gates to Wayne's mansion while the bored social worker who

perfunctorily meets with Fleck weekly is po-faced and doesn't really listen to him" (Eden, 2019). The psychiatrist is just as lost in the system as Wayne's butler or the white-collars on the subway. Perhaps the difference from them is that, she is weary of the system and does not have intense desire to serve to the system or to a person. The system eliminates those who are unwilling to serve it, like the psychiatrist, and throws them out of the system.

The point where the psychiatrist and Fleck converge in the perspective of the system is 'worthlessness'. The reason which the capitalist system does not value them is that they have no 'capital'. In the system, the upper class that owns capital, is valuable; the middle and lower classes are positioned at lower levels by the system. Especially in economic crises, investments decrease and unemployment increases; as Biga mentions before, the value of labor and the laborer decreases even more in these periods.

Fleck's chain of killings continues with his mother Penny and former co-worker Randall. As a person who is full of reaction and struggles against the system, he has no tolerance for lower class types who try to ingratiate the system and do not have class consciousness. What he wants to see is the thousands of people who take to the streets wearing clown make-up. He is aware that the future world, which should include more equality and freedom, will be built by the thousands on the streets. The presence of Penny and Randall is unnecessary, and is also harmful as unnecessary. They are an obstacle to the egalitarian and free world that the lower class will build in the future.

Fleck also kills Murray Franklin, who represents the capitalist media. Franklin represents in this film the type of media that represents the interests of the upper classes that control property. The media, as it exhibits, never represents the non-property majority of society. Fleck, who was teased when he was first shown on Franklin's show, wins the public's favor and attracts attention

during the show. The program, which realizes that Fleck is attracting attention, invites him as a guest this time. These two figures that Fleck presents on the show are a good example of how the media objectifies dispossessed people. Franklin's program first presents Fleck as a comedy element and makes fun of him. As soon as he realizes that the public is interested in Fleck, he accepts him to display in a more 'serious' presentation, as a 'program guest' and this time, he tries to get a rating on him in this way. We can see that the media behaves with a Machiavellian understanding and does not care about the path taken towards the goal of 'making more money'. The media offers people things to linger on and earns money over people.

At the end of the movie, the people also beat up the cops who follow Fleck. This beating is an indirect lynching. The health status of the police is serious but stable after this beating. They get beat up badly because they serve the system. However, the script doesn't kill them because the police are just a tool in the system. Finally, Thomas Wayne, who represents the upper economic class, and his wife are killed after leaving the cinema. They went to the movies with their son Bruce. The fact that Bruce wasn't killed tells us that society is or should be hopeful for the next generations, no matter what class they come from, lower, middle or upper class.

Class Concept in Joker Film

If we examine the film in terms of semiotics, the film has assigned a meaning and a task to each character in the script. Thomas Wayne and his wife Martha clearly represent the upper class; it is even possible to see Thomas Wayne as Donald Trump himself. The three white-collars whom Fleck killed in the subway represent middle-class who do not have class-consciousness and who are fawning and accomplice to the upper class. Fleck's mother, Penny, and colleague, Randall, represent the low income class without class consciousness. The policemen investigating Fleck on

suspicion of carrying out the murders are the 'brute force' side of the system. Fleck thinks that they caused the death of his mother (the lower class), indirectly.

It probably would not have been what most people expected of him that the increasingly insane and criminalized actions of a person who has a mental illness and earns his life by clowning gain the support of the people; moreover, he spearheads class-characterized demonstrations that spill onto the streets. Özkurşun says that when the meaning of Joker word is examined, it also has meanings such as 'anyone', 'anonymous'. It is referred to as a 'jester' in the playing cards but perhaps the most remembered way which he has is when he stands next to the king and reminds the truths to him (Özkurşun, 2019). Fleck's transformation from a person who is mocked to the Joker, who is the vanguard of a social movement, is conducting to laborers who do not have class consciousness gain the class consciousness. People support Joker, his resistance and even his murders by making clown makeup.

If we consider that everyone is becoming a clown after Joker, that leads us to an interesting point in this respect: if everyone is the Joker, it doesn't matter who is the Joker. By choosing to hide his true identity behind make-up, Arthur Fleck wants to say that his own existence is not important and he has no intention of leading any social movement. The expectation is, for people to organize themselves with an anarchist-revolutionary attitude, without including the state and political institutions, and to govern themselves. This should not be perceived as a lack of discipline or disorder. The movie *Joker* informs us that the classical modernist era has already come to an end and a very different social and political life awaits us in the postmodernist era that has begun. Joker says that the construction of this period will not be realized by a savior who is from the politician class but by people themselves and by people believing in themselves.

Fleck has a desire to spread 'joy and happiness'. While he is making friends in his imagination with a single mother who lives on the same floor, he tries to spread the concepts of "joy and happiness" to her in the first place. The elements of abandonment, child abuse and alienation in his past should definitely be taken into account in making sense of Fleck's life course. Moreover, almost every person in his life has betrayed him (Eden, 2019). Fleck responds to his life and past, which is full of negative elements, with 'joy and happiness'. In addition, humor and joy allow Fleck to shoot the bourgeois class which he is fighting, with the bourgeois class's own weapon but with a different interpretation. In Özkurşun's thinking, Arthur confronts the humor understanding of the bourgeoisie which is based on violence with a violence which is inspired by humor. While he is doing that, analyzing the elements which makes the capitalist-eroded society laugh is helpful to him (Özkurşun, 2019).

According to Biga, Fleck's harmony and relationship with the system reveals itself depending on whether he has a job or not. Fleck's incompatibility with the system and oppositional identity become evident after losing his job but his clash with the system does not come to light while he has a job (Biga, 2019). We can follow the nature of the relationship that the system establishes with the low-income class in Fleck himself: system keeps the low income class dependent on the system and in a competent position by employing them. It is possible for people to become independent from the system only if they do not need a job; this is a situation that can happen for the lower- and middle-class people if only they manage to retire. Whereas, the upper class either does not work at all for a lifetime or works less in terms of time. It does not have any obligation to the system but always shows adherence and loyalty to the system that makes them live comfortably.

Biga associates the Joker's “finding himself” and “constructing his own existence” with the concepts of 'human will' and 'consciousness' that exist in Marx's literature. According to Biga, Marx defines the basic feature that distinguishes human beings from other living things as 'consciousness'. The concepts of 'will' and 'being free' at the core of man are the basic elements in man's ability to produce his own reality. The biggest obstacle in producing his own existence is the alienation of the individual from his own labor. Joker explores his own existence with the concepts of 'resistance' and 'rebellion', which are another reflection of 'consciousness'; being a part of the rebellion of the society is the main reason for overcoming his own alienation (Biga, 2019).

Köpüklü says that the longing of the society which is oppressed under the system for a savior is embodied in Joker's anarchist personality. Joker's case, which is suppressed by a system like society, makes it easier to produce analogy with society. The situations of Joker and society are immanent to each other because of their relations with the same capitalist system (Köpüklü, 2019, 57). The Joker's problematic psychology, which comes from his troubled past, is in parallel with the masses which are overwhelmed under capitalist wheels. Gleiberman also thinks that the problematic psychology of the masses and Fleck's troubled inner world follow a parallel line: “Arthur is a figment, a projection, a dream image of our collective spirit” (Gleiberman, 2019).

Joker film says that 'salvation' is not in a human-leader although people expect it in this way; salvation lies in the social bonds that people will build among themselves. In the movie, people follow Fleck's invisible call, go out into the street, everyone puts on clown make-up and everyone seeks 'salvation together'. This situation also differs from the method of right-populist politics that produces the 'leader cult', and it has to be different. Thomas Wayne, the politician in the movie, is killed. This killing is not a physical killing only, but a spiritual one also. All politicians and the political establishment were killed in Wayne's person; class differences and

class-based humiliations were also killed in Wayne's person. İdil Özkurşun is underlining Wayne's expression which contains many humiliations and prejudices against poor people that 'failed clowns in life who are jealous of the wealthy who have earned their living by working' (Özkurşun, 2019). That mentality is the one which the film resists completely. This perspective is based on inequality and discrimination, it includes capitalism's disdain for the lower classes who have no money.

While Michael Eden draws the character structure of Thomas Wayne, he actually shows us a exact representation of the capitalist system in Wayne's person and what the Joker rebels against: "... he is a rich man who gives to charity and has a respectful visage while also glibly expressing concern for the murdered city workers 'Wall Street Guys' as the film polemically refers to them and treating Fleck and his mother (a former employee) with utter disdain .. Wayne's pompous and macho sense of entitlement is a nod to politicians and big business who believe their own hype, that their wealth is in no way due to luck, circumstance or inherited power but is actually directly related to their inert superiority, 'you get what you deserve' is a motif repeated throughout the film which satirises the American dream .." (Eden, 2019).

Class oppression and despicency takes place severely between Thomas Wayne and Penny, Fleck's mother. Biga asserts that when the exploitation of the bourgeoisie on the working class and the patriarchal aspect of the capitalist system are considered together, the sexual exploitation of Thomas Wayne on Penny is better understood in the minds (Biga, 2019). Wayne, who is very likely Fleck's father, denies being father of Fleck, and this reminds me of the denial of bourgeois class on its exploitation of the working class. Wayne's sensitive concealment of a filial relationship

that might be against him is exactly the same as the attempt of the bourgeoisie to conceal its exploitation of the working class over surplus value.

If we look at Fleck's character structure from a Freudian perspective, we can see that Fleck's relationship with his mother is fed by the Oedipus complex. Like a caregiver, Fleck bathes his mother and prefers her feeding to his own. In a house without a father, he also has an intense longing and need for a father figure: he approaches Murray Franklin first and then Thomas Wayne (Eden, 2019) but both efforts are futile. These two brand faces of the capitalist system definitely have no intention to give heed to a 'loser', who is mentally ill and who is coming from the lower class; above all, to perform a fatherhood figure to him.

Joker's Proposal and Violence in the Film

The purpose of the Joker movie is to propose a system change as an 'anti-system' movie. Thousands of people who took to the streets at the end of the movie present a social structure that has evolved from cosmos to chaos, but the movie can be subjected to criticism just at this point: the movie does not suggest a new system to replace the system which is destroyed. It leaves people in the midst of chaos, in a pointless and meaningless position.

Biga attributes the inability to offer a clear solution instead of the system which is abolished, to the lack of an organized infrastructure for social action. In this respect, she says that the film fails to establish a connection between today's forms of rebellion and the struggle of the oppressed classes, although she appreciates the realistic look of the film (Biga, 2019) but Köpüklü likens the dampening of the lower class's hatred of the system to preventing the explosion of gas accumulation by allowing minor oscillations. Opening an opposition area to the opposition side under the control of the system means absorbing the opposition's reactions within the power of the system (Köpüklü, 2019, 57). In this perspective, it can be said that the film does not aim at a total

system change, on the contrary, it aims to reduce the hatred of the lower class towards the system to the lowest possible level, thus removing the lower class from being a threat to the continuity of the system. Köpüklü's perspective is an interpretation which we disagree with because we think that Joker makes an explicit call which is based on class concept.

In fact, it may not be appropriate to blame the Joker for not making any suggestions about "how or in what direction the system should change" because few people in the world have any idea what the current system, which is in the throes of giving birth to a new one, has been becoming,. In this respect, it is an expected result that the Joker movie does not/cannot make a descriptive and precise definition of a 'new system'. This uncertainty is bothering the majority of people in the world and it is the reason for the protests and riots directed against states in different countries.

The concepts of 'status' and 'class discrimination', which emerged as a result of the concept of 'inequality' in the nature of the capitalist system, are means of 'otherization' and 'exclusion' for the lower class. Thus, the system gives the individual no choice but either to 'revolt against the system' or to 'give up on himself' (Sunal & Arkan, 2020:240). If this state of 'revolt against the system' spills onto the streets, it would not be surprising that to express itself with the concept of violence.

In American films, it is often seen that film includes violence and film justifies violence in the eyes of the audience. When Arthur turns into Joker and the character turns into a hero, the audience legitimizes in their minds the action of the character who committed a murder. Because Arthur serves the desire of the lower class to take revenge in all the murders that he commits. Arthur does his actions on behalf of the audience: his suffering, his fighting, his happiness,

everything is for the audience. While he performs these actions, the audience accompanies him with a sense of pleasure (Sunal & Arkan, cited from Kara, Kucukgoncu, Saygılı, 2020:242).

Biga attributes the reason for the chaos based on anger and violence that occurs at the end of the movie that individuals move away from being a 'subject with rights' (Biga, 2019). The situation of individuals losing their 'subject' status in social life has occurred mostly for the lower economic class since the early 1980s. This is a mass already which goes out to the streets, protests, demonstrates and due to the case, clashes with the police. The poor people who are ignored and not taken seriously by the system, often try to make themselves visible through violent actions and send the message to the system that "I am here, too".

As Last Word: The Call of Joker

One of the most important rules that the discipline of sociology can teach us is the impossibility of spreading chaos in society in the long term. In the short term, society may show a high level of resistance to overthrow an unsatisfied regime or system. This state of resistance, of which we can find many examples in history, is called 'revolution'. However, society cannot sustain this resistance in the long term and it does not prefer to continue it. It tends to settle in certain order and structure, it prefers to return from chaos to the cosmos. Long-term tension is contrary to the interests of society.

In this framework, society tries to extract the best possible system from this short-term chaotic process. Historical examples often tell us that such chaotic processes have evolved into different outcomes. The reason for this, as stated earlier, is the 'inability to organize' problem of the lower and middle class, which produces chaos and which demands change. This problem results in the chaotic process not in favor of the lower and middle class, but in favor of the upper class, which is better organized and more conscious of its class interests.

Still, we consider the film an artistic scream in the name of the lower and middle class. The main purpose and function of the film is to call the working class to unite against populism or to reflect the stance of the working class, which had already made an anti-populist preference against the system. Whichever the purpose of the film is, it has succeeded in its purpose. Although Joker does not know what the future system will be, it knows pretty well that the lower and middle class workers can survive only with an organized and class-conscious solidarity in the current system, and in the future one. What whispered slightly to our ear at the end of the movie is that the survival of every person who does not have any share in the means of production and earns his life by selling his labor depends on being in solidarity and reconciliation with other people like himself.

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