

NOSTALGIA FOR AN IMAGINARY HOME: MEMORY, SPACE, AND IDENTITY IN THE NEW TURKISH CINEMA

F. Asuman Suner*

Since the mid-1990s we have been witnessing the emergence of a "new Turkish cinema." A number of young directors, among them Zeki Demirkubuz, Derviş Zaim, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Serdar Akar, and Nuri Bilge Ceyhan, made their first feature films during this period and have proved to be quite prolific since then. Acclaimed by critics in Turkey and abroad, recent Turkish films have received invitations from major international festivals and have won prestigious awards. The new Turkish cinema has also generated its own brand of audience. While Turkish films had largely disappeared from theaters for most of the 1980s due to severe economic adversities in the film industry,¹ local viewers had, in any case, distanced themselves from Turkish cinema on the grounds of its presumed "banality," the term "Turkish film" having become almost synonymous with "bad taste" for a decade prior to the arrival of the new Turkish cinema. Since the 1990s, however, Turkish films have once again begun to attract audiences to theaters,² signaling that the long lost reputation of Turkish cinema may have been restored.

In this paper, I will argue that the new Turkish cinema needs to be analyzed within the context of Turkey's integration into the processes of globalization over the last two decades, an experience of integration that has resulted in anxieties and yearnings built up around the notions of homeland, sense of belonging, and identity. "Provincial small town life," in this framework, appears as a recurrent thematic trope that facilitates the surfacing of these anxieties and yearnings.³

* Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Design, Bilkent University

¹ For more information on the crisis of the Turkish film industry during the 1980s, see Abisel (1994).

² For a detailed discussion of the Turkish film audience since the beginning of the 1990s, see Maktav (2001/02).

³ Provincality takes on differing meanings and is articulated through different visual modes in the films. In Zeki Demirkubuz's cinema, for example, provincality is consistently linked to claustrophobia, spatial/social entrapment and circularity (Suner, 2002), whereas in Nuri Bilge Ceyhan's films, the province becomes a peaceful site of contemplation and reconciliation with nature.

Complementing the privileged status of "the province" is renewed attention paid to the construction of visual atmosphere and space.

This paper aims to discuss a particular manifestation of the "provincial small town life" trope as it appears in recent Turkish cinema, focusing on three films: *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2000), *Offside* (Dar Alanda Kısa Paslaşmalar, Serdar Akar, 2000), and *Summer Love* (*O da Beni Seviyor*, Barış Pirhasan, 2001). The province appears in these works as a site of nostalgia for an imaginary past, an idealized representation of the 1970s period accompanied by an indirect critique of the transformation of Turkish society over the last two decades. In each film provincial town life of the 1970s is represented as a site of social harmony, innocence, and purity which would soon be contaminated by developments of the subsequent period.

The first section of this article is devoted to a discussion of the generic characteristics of *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love*, and makes a case for categorizing these films under the rubric, "nostalgia cinema." Following this will be a discussion of Gaston Bachelard's concept of "felicitous space" in relation to the special cinematic construction of the provincial town setting mentioned above. The final section seeks to interrogate the politics of Turkish nostalgia cinema.

Turkish Nostalgia Cinema of the 2000s

In a certain strain of the new Turkish cinema, the province comes into view as a site of nostalgia for an imaginary past. *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love*, are all candidates for this category and for this reason will be discussed jointly. These films are brought together by striking thematic, generic, and visual resemblances, making them almost seem to be parts of a sequel. One obvious thematic unity is found in the films' story-lines, which focus on community life in provincial towns in Turkey during the 1970s.⁴ *Vizontele* is set in a remote town near Van, in eastern Anatolia, and tells the story of the local inhabitants' initiation to television. *Offside* recounts the dealings of an amateur soccer team in Bursa, a provincial city of northwestern Anatolia, and *Summer Love* revolves around a teenage love affair in the small town of Malatya in eastern Anatolia.

With their stories set in the 1970s, *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer*

⁴ *Offside* appears to be set between the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Love obviously aim to give us an account of the past. It would be inaccurate, however, to call them "historical films," since they make it clear from the onset that what the audience will see is not an "objective" account of "historical reality," but a subjective account of memory. Also, there is a sense of "nostalgia" intrinsic to the narrative of each film. Thus if we are to make a generic classification, I would prefer to discuss these films under the "nostalgia cinema" rubric.

"Nostalgia film" is often defined in terms of its differences from "historical film." What is emphasized in the "historical film" is the authenticity of the historical reference. In such films selected events are presented in a presumably genuine way in order to convince the viewers that what they are seeing is an objective account of the past. The term "nostalgia cinema," on the other hand, is often associated with Fredric Jameson's well-known discussion of postmodernism. According to Jameson (1991), one distinguishing characteristic of our contemporary postmodern age is the weakening of "historicity." Jameson defines "historicity" as a "perception of the present as history, that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective" (Jameson, 1991, p. 284). By Jameson's definition, nostalgia cinema reconstructs the past through a series of images without historical depth, while history is an illusive phantasm of the styles of the past reproduced for consumption in the cultural commodity market. Discussing a group of American films of the 1980s including *American Graffiti*, *Chinatown*, and *Body Heat*, Jameson produces a clearly negative account of this genre, which he perceives as a potent symptom of postmodern culture's inability to cope with time and history. He writes:

It seems to me exceedingly symptomatic to find the very style of nostalgia films invading and colonizing even those movies today which have contemporary settings: as though, for some reason, we have been unable today to focus on our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience. But if this is so, then it is a terrible indictment of consumer capitalism itself-or at the very least, an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history (Jameson, 1983, p. 117).

Applying the notion of "nostalgia film" to the study of post-1984

Hong Kong cinema, Natalia Chan Sui Hung (2000) does not share Jameson's negative perspective. Nostalgia film has become a prominent generic form in Hong Kong over the last two decades, especially in the works of critically acclaimed directors like Stanley Kwan, Ann Hui, John Woo, Wong Kar-wai. In an attempt to contextualize these films in the unique socio-political setting of contemporary Hong Kong city, Hung indicates that nostalgia cinema, far from effacing historicity, may in fact provide an opportunity to rewrite history and collective memory. Nostalgia cinema may thus accommodate a new reading of the past in the present. The historical past in nostalgia film, according to Hung, is "reconstructed not to produce a sense of authenticity as historical film does, but to remake the past from the present time in order to foresee the future" (Hung, 2000, p. 256). Considerably modifying and broadening Jameson's conceptualization, Hung gives us a different account of "nostalgia cinema" in which, she explains,

[H]istory is represented in a stylized or allegorical form, and it may be placed on an imaginary plane. The sense of history in [the] nostalgia genre refers not to the genuineness of what exactly happened in the past, but to the imagination of human history. In other words, there is an imaginary sense in the historical world of nostalgia films (Hung, 2000, p. 256).

Hung's emphasis on creativity directs our attention to a self-conscious use of fabrication, performance and fantasy in the re-writing of history in nostalgia films, and I would argue that *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* belong to the category of "nostalgia cinema" in the sense that their representation of the past is overtly fabricated. What is emphasized in these films is not the authenticity of historical reference, but a peculiar fabrication of a feeling of "past-ness" ("1970s-ness") through visual elements, particularly setting and costume. These films do not attempt to convince the viewers that they are seeing an objective account of the past. On the contrary, each film reveals, in its own way, that its representation of the past is based on a performative construction of the provincial life of the 1970s from the viewpoint of the 2000s. The sense of the past created in the films is fragmented and discontinuous, and although the atmosphere of 1970s provincial town life is reflected in the use of setting and costume, the mannerisms and dialogue of the characters clearly belong to contem-

porary, arguably metropolitan, Turkish society. A conspicuous sense of humor in the language and mannerisms of the three films reflect a present-day Turkish frame of mind. In so doing, the films intentionally produce a sympathetic version of the past. Visual elements in each film are also overtly aestheticized to create an appealing atmosphere. The use of present-day humor and deliberate aestheticization of visual elements strongly contribute to the impression that what we see is an enactment of the past through parodic performances rather than an objective account of history.

At this juncture, we should also indicate that *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* present an ambivalent relationship with the conditions of "provinciality" that they portray. It is possible to speak of a double articulation of the "province" in these films as a space of both constraint and happiness. On the one hand, provinciality appears as a site of restrictions, backwardness, and destitution. Thus one dominant structure of feeling in each film is that of subtle melancholy arising from a particular experience of provinciality, one which summons feelings of remoteness, belatedness and of being left behind. The characters are acutely aware of the negative aspects of their provincial condition, and have no illusions about the social and cultural constraints of their small town environment. For example, in one scene from *Vizontele* the mayor describes his town as the "capital of disappointment," and on several occasions characters mention that no one would come to their remote town unless they had to. When the mayor feels the need to say something positive about his town during a speech, he manages only to state that "people love their native towns, because they have to."

On the other hand, however, the province is also depicted as a site of uncontaminated human warmth and happiness. Far from depressing, the provincial small town atmosphere of the 1970s is constructed as a cheerful setting, with the deliberate aestheticization of visual elements contributing much to the small towns' special ambience. Instead of reducing the province to a cultural void, a distinctive face is given to it in each film through the overt emphasis on the natural and folkloric assets of the town being depicted. *Summer Love* opens with a fantastic landscape scene showing the main character, an adolescent girl, joyfully running across a vast field of red poppies. The scene conveys a gorgeous awakening of nature in spring in the Malatya countryside. In *Vizontele*, in addition to beautiful landscape shots, the ethnic dress of

eastern Anatolian women is visually accentuated with its bright colors, beautiful fabrics and sophisticated ornaments. As a result, in spite of its drawbacks, the province of the 1970s is reinvented as a secret world with hidden treasures, a lost paradise with its extraordinary natural and folkloric wonders, a conviviality and warmth of human relations, and an overall sense of harmony and innocence governing all aspects of social life.

As mentioned above, these films direct our attention not so much to the time period that they describe as to a process of "remembering" it. While all three stories begin and end in the past, each one covering a period of two or three months, they convey a sense that these events are in fact being remembered in the present, thus giving us an account of the 1970s as seen through the filter of the 2000s. Remembering is by definition a partial, selective, and subjective process by which elements of the past are selectively assembled and refashioned by the remembering subject. Also, although remembering always points to the past, it always occurs as a present-time experience. As Andreas Huyssen puts it:

[R]ather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The future that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable...The temporal status of any act of memory is always the present and not, as some naïve epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience (Huyssen, 1995, pp. 2-3).

What is evident in all three films is a self-conscious acknowledgment of the aspect of "re-presentation" inherent in the practice of memory. They "re-present" the past without trying to conceal the element of fabrication and fantasy in the act of remembering.

Imagining Provincial Towns as "Felicitous Spaces" of Childhood

One special characteristic of *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* is the quality of the past being remembered, its feeling of intimacy akin

to that of childhood memories. In this sense the atmosphere created is reminiscent of what Gaston Bachelard (1994) calls "images of felicitous space." Bachelard has a particularly spatialized conception of memory. For him what defines lived time as opposed to abstract time is its spatial specificity, its localization: space gives quality to time. In this context, Bachelard defines "felicitous space" as a space which is "lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination" (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxxv). The privileged image of felicitous space is that of "the house." "Our house," Bachelard writes, "is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (1994, p. 4). Whatever the facts of our childhood might have been, according to Bachelard, when we day-dream of our childhood house we produce an image of protection, intimacy and well-being. The protective and hospitable value of the house of our childhood makes it the ultimate felicitous space.

Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house... When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise (Bachelard, 1994, p. 7).

In Bachelard's theory, memory and imagination remain associated in the realm of the "felicitous space" since, for him, the past remains alive in the imagination, not in the facts: "It is on the plane of the daydream and not the facts that childhood remains alive...Through this permanent childhood we maintain the poetry of the past" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 16). In Bachelard's conceptualization, childhood is something we never leave behind. On the contrary, we have to grow old in order to experience our youth, although then it is one transformed by imagination and memory and hence in a sense larger than the reality of childhood.

I would like to argue that in *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love*, the provincial small town setting is transformed into an image of Bachelard's "felicitous space" of childhood/youth, with the attributes of its protective, hospitable setting, the common values of its inhabitants, and its enclosed world comparable to the sheltering embrace of the house of childhood. Small communities thus function not just as symbols or reminders of limits, but also as environments offering protection against the outside world. The small town community with its

warm and intimate relations is like an extended family in which everyone knows everyone all too well, yet that familiarity and intimacy provide a kind of refuge for all who live there; even the harshest conflicts between enemies have a naive and innocent quality. Whatever the negative aspects of the province might be, when it is reconstituted as a childhood/youth memory it becomes a site of protection, intimacy, and well-being. Like Bachelard's description of the "house" of our childhood, the provincial town is depicted in these films as the characters' "corner of the world," their "first universe, (their) real cosmos in every sense of the word."

However, while the provincial environment functions as a protective shell akin to the childhood house, the mood of harmony and innocence prevailing in these films also involves a sense of vulnerability, in that the idyllic atmosphere of the settings and stories is too good to be true, giving rise to anticipation of an approaching menace. It is in this sense that all three films evoke a sense of *before-ness*: the impression that the events occur during a period *before* something bad was to happen, prior to the interruption of a negative force. Thus while the province is equated with the blissful image of home in childhood memories with all its positive attributes, this image is contrasted with the approaching menace of a troubled period immediately to follow. In fact, while each film describes an idealized world that existed before the loss of social harmony and innocence, each one also ends at a moment when the protective shell of innocence is irrecoverably destroyed.

Of the three films, *Summer Love* is the most focused on a single character. It revolves around the female protagonist's discovery of her emerging adolescent sexuality and femininity through a platonic love affair that she experiences during a summer holiday. In this film, "loss of innocence" is represented as a private issue experienced by the solitary individual. For the protagonist, the end of innocence comes with heart-break and betrayal as the young girl's euphoria comes to an end when she realizes that she has misunderstood from the beginning the feelings of the young man she fell in love with. Not only did the young man have no feelings for her, but he was actually in love with her beloved middle aged aunt. Even more painful than this discovery, however, is the protagonist's encounter with the harsh rule of patriarchy working against women in rural Turkey. The provincial town where the story takes place is depicted as a female-dominated environment where women, particularly elderly women, are treated with respect

and exercise a considerable amount of authority over community matters. At the end of the story, however, when the aunt's violent husband arrives in town to claim land that she had inherited from her family, no one can stop him. Thus the peaceful small community atmosphere here is destroyed by the intervention of patriarchal rule.

The stories of *Offside* and *Vizontele* are more community-oriented than that of *Summer Love*. The loss of innocence in both these films is thematized within the public/communal, rather than the private, domain. In *Offside*, the spell of innocence is broken with the penetration of capitalist relations into the amateur spirit of a local soccer team. At the end of the film, the soccer team is forced to disband despite the players' eagerness to continue playing. The small community's enthusiasm for their team vanishes, signaling the penetration of capitalist logic into all areas of social life.

In *Vizontele*, the arrival of television brings about the loss of innocence for another provincial community. At the beginning of the film, the mayor hears a rumor about the prospective installation of a television broadcasting station in their town. At that point, no one in the town has the slightest idea what television might mean. One day, three officials from Ankara arrive to deliver technical equipment, but leave immediately without explaining how to install it. The story then revolves around the mayor's attempts to fix the transmitter with the help of a half-gifted, half-crazy former student. After many discouraging trials and failures, they finally succeed in receiving the television broadcast, which becomes a cause for celebration in the town. Groups of people pour into the mayor's house that night to see television broadcasting for the first time in their lives. Tragically, however, the celebration turns into mourning when they learn from the prime-time news that the mayor's youngest son, who was shown joining the army to do his compulsory military duty at the beginning of the film, was killed during the Peace Operation carried out by the Turkish army in Cyprus.

The prevailing sense of innocence in *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* is also loosely connected to the theme of cultural difference. While each film subtly touches upon ethnic and/or religious differences in Turkish society, *Vizontele* takes the most ambiguous position toward these differences. On the one hand, the story is set in a small town in eastern Anatolia near Van, a region mostly populated by people of Kurdish origin. Yet although the film makes references to Kurdish culture in its use of music, costumes, and proper names (the mayor's wife, for example, has an apparently Kurdish name, Sidi),

Kurdish identity is in no sense alluded to as an ideological or political issue. As a result, the Kurdish question has a ghost-like presence in the film: very much there in the story, but not visible.

Offside and *Summer Love*, however, handle cultural difference much more directly, as their characters are somehow forced to come to terms with the issue at some point in the narrative. The female protagonist of *Summer Love* slowly realizes that the young man she is in love with belongs to the Alevi sect of Islam. Although this sect is one of the prominent factions of Islamic belief in Turkey, the protagonist had no prior knowledge of it. Throughout the rest of the story she is gradually familiarized with the values and rituals of Alevi belief.

In *Offside*, the way that the narrative discloses the domain of cultural difference comes as a major surprise to both the characters and the audience. At the end of the film, the much-loved soccer team coach dies of a heart attack. Having no family or relatives in the town, the man is buried by his friends in accordance with Muslim rituals. Shortly after the funeral, however, his brother from Istanbul appears, much to everyone's surprise since even the coach's closest friends do not know that he had a brother. Even more shocking is the brother's declaration that the coach was of Armenian origin. Everyone in the community is deeply puzzled by this information as they realize that the coach had lived a secret life for years, not revealing his cultural identity and religious beliefs even to his closest friends. Yet nothing can be done to correct the awkward religious blunder of his having been buried in accordance with Islam. The coach's death, like his life, leaves an ironic question mark in the townspeople's minds.

The issue of cultural difference in *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* seems to be at odds with the sense of social harmony and innocence characterizing the provincial small town life of the 1970s since the films, each in their own way, imply that social harmony is only possible at the expense of the effacement, or disregard, of cultural difference; that small town communities can maintain cordial and innocent relations only as long as differences do not come to the surface. When they do surface, however, the shocking recognition of difference coincides with a loss of harmony and innocence.

Nostalgia Cinema or Screen Memories: A Question of Politics

Whether conceived as an attempt to efface historicity or to rewrite history, nostalgia cinema always implies a political stand regarding

the present. What, then, might be the politics of the nostalgia films of the new Turkish cinema? What kind of a political statement do they make about contemporary Turkish society through the idealized imaginary construction of the provincial communities of the 1970s?

In order to make an assessment of the politics of *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love*, we first need to investigate the sense of *before-ness* prevailing in these films. As explained above, in each film the 1970s small town setting is presented in images of the felicitous space of childhood/youth with its attributes of innocence, harmony and purity; and each story ends at a moment when that idyllic state is about to be irrecoverably lost. These films therefore seek to describe how things had been *before*. However, the sense of before-ness is necessarily constituted by something that "comes after." If it is necessary to grow old in order to experience childhood/youth, as Bachelard maintains, then *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* seem to suggest that the innocence of the 1970s in Turkey can only be discerned through a kind of knowledge that belongs to the 1980s and 1990s. In order to make sense of the age of innocence and harmony depicted in these films, we need to interrogate what happened next.

The military coup of September 12, 1980 constitutes a watershed in Turkey's recent history. Following the coup, the military regime brought about a restructuring of social and political institutions in accordance with the 1982 Constitution. The human and democratic rights record of the country received a serious blow during this period, while the decade of the 1980s also saw the introduction of a series of neo-liberal economic reforms under the patronage of the military government. As Çağlar Keyder and Ayşe Öncü indicate:

[T]his new regime resolutely applied the orthodox policies counseled by the IMF in the hope of restructuring the economy toward greater openness and liberalization...It entailed attempts to both dramatically reduce the scope of the state sector and to pave the way for Turkey's full integration into the unitary logic of global capitalism (Keyder and Öncü, 1993, p. 19).

In addition to the IMF-imposed economic program, a number of ground breaking legal, economic, and technological reforms were initiated throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, particularly in the information and communications sectors, making it possible for Turkey to catch up with the globalizing world.

The major negative effects of the neoliberal policies implemented over the last two decades have been a worsening income gap and social polarization. In addition to these economic and social problems, Turkey has experienced a protracted conflict between separatist Kurdish guerrillas and the Turkish army throughout most of the 1990s which has claimed the lives of an estimated thirty thousand people, most of Kurdish origin. On the other hand, the implementation of anti-democratic and oppressive policies by the military government after the September 12 coup paradoxically gave rise to the development of a "civil society" in Turkey (Saribay, 2000; Keyder, 2000; Tekeli, 1995). Assessing the political situation in Turkish society at the end of 1980s, Şirin Tekeli writes:

While we were approaching the end of the decade it appeared that, perhaps for the first time in history, a "civil society" was coming into existence, made out of divergent groups of conflicting interests which nonetheless formed a common block opposed to the state... There was a widespread consensus as to the anti-democratic nature of the 1982 Constitution and many other basic laws that the military junta forced upon Turkish society. It is true that the policy of systematic depoliticization pursued by the junta was still quite effective, but when interviewed large segments of society expressed their hope for greater democracy and freedom (Tekeli, 1995, p. 7).

Paradoxically, then, the last two decades have been an era in which antidemocratic policies implemented by governments on the basis of the 1982 Constitution have coexisted with a rising civil society consciousness.⁵ This era has witnessed the emergence of new social movements (feminist, gay, environmentalist, and so forth) as well as new forms of social activism. Cultural identity and difference have become organizing principles of these new civil society movements.

Vizontele, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* attempt to develop a critique of the era following the 1980 military coup through an idealized representation of the preceding decade. These films, in other words, attempt to rewrite the collective memory of the 1970s in a nostalgic mode in order to provoke a critical reconsideration of the succeeding era.

⁵ On the paradoxical nature of the transformation that Turkish society has gone through since the 1980s see Bora (2001), Keyman (2002), and Suner (2001).

Evoking a sense of *before-ness*, they encourage the audience to situate the present historical moment in a new way, as an aberration from the normal flow of history. In this respect, the choice of the provincial town settings is hardly a coincidence, in that the province connotes, among other things, a protected environment beyond the reach of the center. The sense of before-ness designates a situation which can be read as "*before* the penetration of the center," "*before* contamination," or "*before* the loss of social harmony and innocence," while the ending of each film can be considered an allegorical reference to the rupture that comes with the 1980s. As I explained above, in each case the story ends at the moment when the social harmony and innocence of provincial small town life is irrecoverably destroyed. In *Vizontele* this reference is all too clear in that television represents a channel through which the remote eastern town was suddenly connected to the center. The townspeople had looked forward to getting direct access to developments in the center through the programs of TRT (Turkey's Public Broadcasting Authority). With the news of the death of the mayor's son, however, it becomes clear that being connected to the center will not necessarily be cause for celebration; on the contrary, it is associated with devastation. The mayor's son's death in the course of the Cyprus Peace Operation of 1974 functions as an allegorical reference to the death and devastation that would wreak havoc throughout the eastern Anatolian region during the 1990s.

In this context, *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* attempt to critique transformations in Turkish society over the last two decades by drawing upon some major premises of the civil society movement which developed in the same period. The films touch upon questions of cultural difference in the context of the suppression of Kurdish, Alevi, and Armenian identities. The way in which cultural difference is foregrounded, particularly in *Summer Love* and *Offside* with the discovery of different identities coming as a shock to the characters, reveals how this issue is still being effaced and rendered invisible by hegemonic discourses in Turkish society. Since Kurdish, Alevi, and Armenian identities are still a matter of controversy in contemporary Turkey, the three films seem to offer a progressive political statement by making an issue of them.

Thus we are brought to the question of how to assess the critical value of this particular tactic of intervention via the nostalgia genre in film in Turkey. To what extent does the nostalgic construction of provin-

cial town life of the 1970s accommodate a critique of contemporary Turkish society? What are the political implications of taking a critical stance toward the present through a nostalgic idealization of the past?

Throughout this article I have tried to draw a parallel between representations of the province of the 1970s in Turkish nostalgia films and Bachelard's conceptualization of the house as a felicitous space of childhood memories. I have maintained that *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* represent a past transformed by imagination and memory, as the 1970s are transformed into an image of "permanent childhood" that remains alive in the imagination. If childhood is some kind of a "forward looking memory" (Game, 1995, p. 203) waiting to be reconstructed in adulthood, then provincial town life of the 1970s appears in these films as a childhood memory recovered and reconstructed in the 2000s.

Speaking of childhood memories, it would be interesting to have a look at Freud's comments on the issue. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1986/1901), Freud observes that most of our childhood memories have an indifferent or unimportant content. He explains this curious situation by suggesting that the indifferent memories of childhood owe their existence to a process of displacement. They are substitutes, in other words, for other impressions that are significant. Freud uses the concept of "screen memory" to identify these substitute memories. He draws a parallel between the forgetting of proper names as an everyday psychopathology, and the formation of "screen memories":

Both have to do with mistakes in remembering: what the memory reproduces is not what it should correctly have reproduced, but something else as a substitute. In the case of the forgetting of names the act of memory occurs, though in the form of substitute names; the case of the formation of screen memories has as its basis a forgetting of other more important impressions...With the forgetting of names we *know* that the substitute names are *false*: with screen memories we are *surprised* that we possess them at all (Freud, 1986/1901, p. 45).

Even more interestingly for our discussion, later in his essay Freud draws an analogy between the childhood memories of individuals and those of nations: "[T]he 'childhood memories' of individuals come in general to acquire the significance of 'screen memories' and in doing so

offer a remarkable analogy with the childhood memories that a nation preserves in its store of legends and myths" (Freud, 1986/1901, p. 48).

Would it be possible, then, to read the idealized representation of 1970s provincial town life in recent Turkish cinema as a collective "screen memory"? If so, the act of nostalgic remembering in these films may indeed be a function of forgetting. What is being remembered, in other words, may be a substitute for more significant impressions that are suppressed. In this regard, although *Vizontele*, *Offside*, and *Summer Love* take critical positions regarding the transformation of Turkish society after the 1980 military coup and make progressive political statements on the issue of cultural difference, at the same time they seem to comprise a kind of ideological blind spot which tames this critique. I think that the way that these films attribute an inherent "goodness" to provincial communities, together with the suggestion that menace always comes from outside, is quite problematic in the sense that it promotes some form of essentialist nativism.

This criticism may sound rather too harsh. Even if it holds true, however, we still need to give credit to Turkish nostalgia films for provoking a key political question: What lies behind the screen? What is screened, in other words, by the nostalgic memory of the provincial town life of the 1970s?

REFERENCES

- Abisel, Nilgün. 1994. *Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar*. Istanbul: Imge.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Bora, Tanıl. 2001/02. "Son Yirmi Yılı Ayırtırmak İçin Notlar," *Birikim*, 152(53), pp. 55-60.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1986 (1901). *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. London: The Hogart Press.
- Game, Ann. 1995. "Time, Space, Memory with Reference to Bachelard," in Featherstone, Mike et al. (Eds.), *Global Modernities*. London: Sage, pp. 192-208.
- Hung, Natalia Chan Sui. 2000. "Rewriting History: Hong Kong Nostalgia Cinema and Its Social Practice," in Desser, David and Poshek Fu (Eds.), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 252-272.

- Huyssen, Andreas. 1995. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1991. *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.
1983. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Foster, Hal (Ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 111-125.
- Keyder, Çağlar and Ayşe Öncü. 1993. *Istanbul and the Concept of World Cities*. Istanbul: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Keyman, E. Fuat. 2002. "Globalleşme ve Türk Kapitalizminin Kültürel Ekonomisi," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 93, pp. 83-109.
2000. *Türkiye ve Radikal Demokrasi*. Istanbul: Alfa.
- Maktav, Hilmi. 2001/02. "Türk Sinemasında Yeni Bir Dönem," *Birikim*, 152-3, pp. 225-233.
- Sarıbay, Ali Yaşar. 2000. "Türkiye'de Demokrasi ve Sivil Toplum," in Keyman, Fuat and Ali Yaşar Sarıbay (Eds.), *Global Yerel Ekseninde Türkiye*. Istanbul: Alfa, pp. 99-118.
- Suner, Asuman. 2002. "1990'lar Türk Sinemasından Taşra Görüntüleri: Masumiyet'te Döngü, Kapatılmışlık, Klostrofobi...ve İroni," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 92, pp. 176-203.
2001. "Bir Bağlantı Koparma Aracı Olarak Türkiye'de Cep Telefonu: Kriz, Göç ve Aidiyet," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 90, pp. 114-130.
- Tekeli, Şirin. 1995. "Women in Turkey in the 1980s," in Tekeli, Şirin (Ed.), *Women in Modern Turkish Society*. London: Zed Books, pp. 1-22.