

# Factories of Memory: Remembering the 12 September Military Coup In Beynelmilel and Bu Son Olsun

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## **Abstract**

12 September 1980, the third successful military coup in the history of Turkey, has had a debilitating impact on the social, political and cultural life of the country. This thesis examines the representations of the 12 September coup through the lens of film as memory. Based on content analysis of two films, *Beynelmilel* (2006) and *Bu Son Olsun* (2012) and their reception, this study examines the representations of the 12 September military coup by means of the concepts of cultural memory, communicative and material memory (memory of objects), and construes whether the reconstruction of this particular past event is challenged by the abovementioned cinematic products as a way to impinge upon the collective memories of this seminal event in Turkey. The results demonstrate that both cinematic products are reflective of multiple and fragmented memories of the 12 September, and that there is not a strong manifestation of remembering or references to memories of this event as the interpretation of online reviews of both products puts forward .

**Key words:** *12 September, collective memory, cultural memory, memory studies, film studies, reception studies, history.*

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## Introduction

There has been a vehement public as well as scholarly interest for memory, the history to know and a desire to comprehend history and memory by means of such circulated media as books, documentary, films and TV series. Ample germination of memorial sites in most societies such as museums (e.g. the Museum of Shame recently opened in October 2011 in Turkey) and public monuments venerating the past is also included in this mobilization<sup>1</sup>. However, cinematic representation assumes a pivotal role in the formation, preservation and transmission of collective memory. Cinema has served as a medium for representing history, and therefore rivaling other mnemonic devices today<sup>2</sup>.

Usurping the country's administration as the third triumphant coup d'état in Turkey, 12 September 1980 can be defined as one of the most cogent contemporary interventions of the military into politics. These interventions have been engendered in disparate forms ranging from seizing the power directly to influencing the policies of the government. 12 September 1980 coup has been the most powerful of these recent interventions in transforming the substance and means of political life in Turkey. The impact of the coup has been dioristic in reconfiguring the political and social settings of the country.

The military coup had an immediate impact on the social and cultural life of the citizenry. NGOs, associations and as such were banned from engaging in political life. Censorship, restrictions, imprisonment, torture and the death penalty became the main tools for spreading fear, depoliticizing and silencing society. The cinema industry in Turkey was one of many cultural institutions subject to extensive censorship and, thus representation of the military coup could not find space on the screens for seven years following the aftermath of 12 September, which meant that collective remembering was hampered and repressed. However, beginning in 1986, a gradual change in public policy allowed for the creation of films dealing with this seminal event.

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<sup>1</sup> Fuyuki Kurasawa. "Cinema, or an Art of Urban Memory in an Age of Forgetting". in *Public* 29 (2004):28.

<sup>2</sup> Other examples of mnemonic devices are electronic devices such as computers and calculators. These devices change the way we remember the past, our daily activities etc. It is also important to point out to the fact that collective memory is categorized into different sub-categories defined by Paul Connerton (1989) as memory of daily activities etc.(Kurasawa, 2004:26).

Cinema is just one form of media that contributes to the dialectic process of history and memory by opening up new avenues for re-thinking the past, and maybe coming to terms with it. Turkish cinema has taken steps towards coming to terms with the 1980 military coup particularly as of 2004. Since then, the event has occupied a significant place in cinematic productions of Turkey, and has been worked as a theme in the Turkish film industry. There is even a classification titled ‘12 September films’ in the Turkish cinema literature<sup>3</sup>.

A myriad of films dealing with the coup have been shot since its aftermath. Among these films are *Zincirbozan*<sup>4</sup> (2007), *Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar (Don't Let Them Shoot the Kite)* (1989), *Eylül Fırtınası (September Storm)* (1999), *Eve Dönüş (Homecoming)* (2006), *Babam ve Oğlum (My Father and My Son)* (2005), *Dikenli Yol (The Thorny Path)* (1986), *Prences (The Princess)* (1986) and *Yol (The Way)* (1981)- one of the most acclaimed films of Turkey<sup>5</sup> which was awarded various prizes at the 1982 *Cannes Film Festival*, and *Yol (The Way)* was first screened in Switzerland as it was a harsh critique of the state whilst touching upon the Kurdish issue, and it was not screened in Turkey until 1999 due to the restrictive Turkish constitution<sup>6</sup>. Cinematic products revolving around the theme of 12 September now appear as popular, mass products watched by hundreds of thousands of people. The narratives in these films contain many elements of previously forgotten or unknown accounts of the event and its aftermath<sup>7</sup>. Personal and collective remembering recur to a great extent in these cinematic products.

## Aim

This study sets out to examine how *Beynelmilel* (2006) and *Bu Son Olsun* (2012) (both 12 September films) reconstruct an earlier point in time reflected on screen, and the manner in which these popular products have affected the way 12 September is remembered in

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<sup>3</sup>“ Şükran Esen, 2000, p.224” cited in Nazmiye Karadağ, *Toplumsal Belleğin Sinematografik Sunumu: 2000 Yılı Sonrası Türk Sinemasında 12 Eylül Filmleri (Cinematographic Presentation of Social Memory:12 September Films in Post-2000 Turkish Cinema)*, İstanbul, 2008: 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Zincirbozan* is the name of a small town on the Aegean coast where several Turkish politicians such as Süleyman Demirel, Bülent Ecevit and Deniz Baykal (all of whom were political party leaders) were detained in the aftermath of 12 September 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed information, please refer to Dönmez-Colin, G. *Cinemas of the Other*. (UK: Cromwell Press), 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Eylem Atakav “There are ghosts in these houses!: on New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12:1 (2011): 141.

contemporary Turkey coupled by an interpretation of their reception as demonstrated by online film reviews. While accounting for the same traumatic event, each visual product has a different narrative, stylistic approach, ultimately, different visualization strategies. The intention of this thesis is to use collective memory theory to provide a reading of the films as indicators of wider social and cultural attitudes, and to discover what can be derived from the abovementioned cinematic texts, rather than to use the films to examine collective memory as a concept and practice.

## Research Questions

- How do the films produced at different points in time reconstruct the 1980 military coup?
- Have/ has the collective memory(ies) of this event been challenged by these two popular fiction films?

## Structure

In order to answer the research questions, *Chapter I* deals with the concepts of memory, collective memory and cultural memory, types of memory (individual vs collective). This section will elaborate on Jan Assman's memory typology whilst allocating space for an overview of memory studies and its origins. In this way, I will be able to track differences and similarities in the reconstruction of the same event. Both cinematic products appear to have divergent narratives, stylistic approaches, namely, different visualization strategies. *Chapter II* lays down the methods and materials to be used for the analysis. The following section is allocated for the analysis of the concerned cinematic products, *Bu Son Olsun* and *Beynelmilel*, followed by the analysis of the reception of these films (reactions of the audience on online film databases such as *IMDB*, *beyazperde* and *sinemalar.com*), and their comparison. Ultimately, the conclusion part presents a concise summary of the thesis and the results.

## Motivation

The myriad of cinematic products has everlastingly contributed to the understandings of past, present and future. Cinema frames the ways of imagining the past and affects the

content of collective remembrance and forgetting. ‘Films now serve as mnemonic self-referents woven into the social fabric’<sup>8</sup>. Film is a way of confronting the issue of trauma/repression in addition to healing the collective and individual psychological pain that trauma inflicts. By means of repeating the military coup and stories emanating from it, the public can derive meaning(s) from cinematic products. Consumers can experience a common heritage, memories of a past to which they have no organic relationship by means of cinema and electronic mass media.

Influence of a film on the society can affect those who do not have direct experiences of a significant historical event. From this standpoint this paper argues that the depiction of 12 September in Turkish fictional films serves as the reflection of and influence on the Turkish society at large. Hence, it is worth analyzing them as evidence of some significant Turkish attitudes towards and understandings of the past, present and future. Drawing strength from the aforementioned statements, it is a manifest fact that cinema bears a robust impact on human mind and memories. By the same token, the 12 September 1980 military coup has occupied a significant place in cinematic productions of Turkey, and the way they are representing, depicting this past has its impacts on the collective memory of the citizenry. It is also crucial to keep in mind that media does not simply reflect nor determine collective memory but are inextricably involved in its construction and evolution<sup>9</sup>.

## Material

This paper attempts to inquire into the depictions of the 12 September military coup as communicated and transmitted via the following cinematic products produced at two distinct temporal points in time:

- The first film considered for the purposes of this paper is titled ‘*Beynelmilel*’ (*The International*) (2006), and was directed by Muharrem Gülmez and Sırrı Süreyya Önder who has gained acclaim in Turkey. *Beynelmilel* focuses on the story of a group of local musicians who are to perform at a large military parade in a small South-Anatolian town in 1982, two years following 12 September.

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<sup>8</sup> Fuyuki Kurasawa. “Cinema, or an Art of Urban Memory in an Age of Forgetting”.in *Public* 29 (2004):31.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Anderson, “Loafing in the Garden of Knowledge; History, TV and Popular Memory”, *Film and History*, (30, 2007): 16.

- One of the latest films embarking upon the theme of 12 September military coup is ‘*Bu Son Olsun (Let it be the last)*’, which was directed by Orçun Benli and has been screened in cinemas since 6 January 2012. ‘*Bu Son Olsun*’ is a political comedy berating the 12 September military coup, and thus might be categorized as a ‘popular political’ film. *Bu Son Olsun* focuses on five homeless individuals in the aftermath of 1980, and their apprehension as a result of ridiculing the military in order to escape adversary effects of street life, and their experiences in prison.

## A Brief Historical Background

The military possesses a pivotal role as a political actor in Turkey in that it has frequently intervened in politics, confirmed by three successful military coups following the nation’s transition to a multiparty system in 1946<sup>10</sup>. As the third successful military coup in the history of the Turkish Republic, 12 September 1980 can be interpreted as one of the most important manifestations of the intervention of the armed forces into politics<sup>11</sup>. Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic these interventions meant either direct take-over of the administration or influence and manipulation on the policies of the government. 12 September 1980 coup has been the most effective of these interventions in reshaping the content and the means of political activity in Turkey. The effects of the coup have been decisive in restructuring the political and social configuration of the country. The oppression, violence and restrictive policies of the military administration had an impact on all levels of the society, and every aspect of the social life.

Mal-administration of the government, the economic situation as well as the chaotic political situation in the country were the main reasons for the military to stage an intervention. The military determined (unofficially) the 1961 constitution and its embroiling impact on the society and distinct political powers as the most important reason for taking action: the left and the right<sup>12</sup>. The military administration blamed the 1961 constitution for political animosity, social turmoil, violence, and as the ‘guardian and

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<sup>10</sup> Tanel Demirel. The Turkish Military's Decision to Intervene: 12 September 1980 in *Armed Forces and Society* 29 (2003): 253.

<sup>11</sup> The other successful military coup d’états were staged on 27 May 1960, 12 March 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Veli Boztepe. “1960 ve 1980 Askeri Darbelerinin Türk Siyasal Sinemasına Etkileri (Impacts of 1960 and 1980 Military Coup d’états on Turkish Political Cinema)”, (Marmara University, 2007): 17.

protector of the Turkish state<sup>13</sup>, it took over the administration, and thus created a new constitution which contained restrictive policies which usurped the rights of civil society.

With an overwhelming ballot turnout (92.06 % ‘yes’ vote)<sup>14</sup>, a new constitution devised by the National Security Council was accepted by public opinion<sup>15</sup>. The following years were full of enforcing the restrictions stipulated by the new constitution., Dissolution of such crucial civil society groups as DISK (*Confederation for Revolutionist Workers’ Syndicates*), MİSK (*Confederation for Nationalist Workers’ Syndicates*) also restricted the activities of the cinema association of Turkey, Sin-Der (*Cinema Association*) bearing a negative influence on the cultural and social constitution of the Turkish populace<sup>16</sup>. Within the framework of the policies and the new constitution, any opposing opinion, including the media, would be punished. This situation would continue until a new government was formed in 1987. Considering this situation, productions criticizing the state and depicting this traumatic period were not created and film production rates severely dropped.

These years were relatively barren in terms of productivity. The number of annual productions dropped from 126 to 76. According to the constitution and the new media law, public dissent against the state was rendered illegal and would lead to anyone being apprehended and punished<sup>17</sup>. Due to all these reasons, the cinema sector lost blood, and no films regarding this violent act could be released for nearly the next six years following the coup d’état. As a result of this, comedy and socio-realist films focusing on the urban-rural dichotomy bloomed and took over the cinema market.

Despite the fact that films depicting the 1970 and 1980 military coups were produced within the following two decades, these products were either censored by the state or failed to have access to a larger audience. New liberal trade policies of the state opened the cinema sector to foreign productions, most of which were US productions. This brought about a change in the cinema sector in terms of focusing on popularity and American popular culture. Turkish cinema was affected by these changes, particularly, in terms of

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<sup>13</sup> Korkut Boratav et al. *Türkiye Tarihi 5: Bugünkü Türkiye 1980-2003 (Turkish History 5: Turkey Today 1980 2003)*. İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Bayram, Sibel. “12 Eylül’ün Siyasal Hayatımıza Etkileri (Impacts of 12 September on Our Political Life)”, MA Thesis, Cumhuriyet University, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 169-170.

<sup>17</sup> Boztepe, Veli. “1960 ve 1980 Askeri Darbelerinin Türk Siyasal Sinemasına Etkileri (Impacts of 1960 and 1980 Military Coup d’états on the Turkish Political Cinema)”, (Marmara University, 2007): 158.

film genres. Melodrama in the form of love stories occupied a wide space in the cinema sector. On the other hand, censorship as a tool of political and social repression was omnipresent throughout 1980s and 1990s in the Turkish cinema sector. The political atmosphere impacted on the number of films and their content. Films released as of 1987 and categorized as 12 September films revolved around autobiographical accounts of political ideologies which were suppressed rather than treating 12 September as their main referent.

## Chapter One: Theoretical Background

This section will shed light on contemporary debates on collective memory theory however, this study does not intend to focus on the theory of collective memory as a historical method since this project has its foundations in media studies and pertains to content, information to be derived from the cinematic products in question. Conclusively, memory studies has already received notable academic attention as will be laid down later in this section, and I am of the opinion that more original and relevant conclusions can be drawn in the analysis of military coup as a traumatic event in 12 September films.

### What is memory?

Memory has been a major preoccupation for social thinkers since the Greeks<sup>18</sup>. In an important synthesis, Jacques Le Goff (1992) identifies five distinct periods in the history of memory :first, peoples without writing possessed what Le Goff calls ethnic memory<sup>19</sup>; second, the move from prehistory to Antiquity, which enabled commemoration and documentary recording; third memory in the Middle Ages; fourth, memory as it developed from the Renaissance to the present involved the gradual revolution in memory brought about by the printing press, which required the long development of a middle class readership to complete its effect. In the nineteenth century, Romanticism generated multifarious forms of commemoration such as coins, medals, inscriptions, archives, libraries and museums. These forms were manifestations of building up shared identities

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<sup>18</sup> Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to a Sociology of Mnemonic Practices". *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24. (1998), 106.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed description of the concept of ethnic memory, please see Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 55-58.

within the citizenries of different nations. Developments taking place in the twentieth and twentyfirst century have brought about the invention of electronic means of recording and transmitting information which not only change the way individuals remember but also provide new means of conceptualizing memory<sup>20</sup>.

But what does memory mean? Memory is defined as the capacity for conserving information and referring to a group of psychic functions which allow us to actualize past impressions or information that we represent to ourselves as past<sup>21</sup>. For Maurice Halbwachs, memory is ‘‘a reconstruction of the past using data taken from the present’’<sup>22</sup>, thus attracting our attention to the interaction of the past with the present, and raising questions in relation to history and its meaning. According to William Guynn, memory is the *individual* faculty for reviving *images* of things past, and refers to two distinct concepts of memory which are memory as the (passive) presence of the image to the mind, and memory as the intentional activity of recollection<sup>23</sup>. As understood from this definition, we encounter images and pictoriality as the most significant features constituting memory. Based on this definition of memory as defined in the discipline of psychology and neurology, memory studies have come up with different conceptualizations such as individual, collective, social, cultural and prosthetic memory<sup>24</sup>. However, the most discussed of these concepts are individual and collective memory. I will attempt to explain the differences and similarities between individual and collective memory and the discussions relating to both concepts in the following lines focusing on the transmission of memory/ memories in the filmic products by means of images.

As witnessed from the history of memory described by Le Goff (1992) beginning from peoples without writing to electronic means of recording and transmitting information (together with the invention of cinema), it should be pointed out that memory will not be treated as a reified, unchanging phenomenon which carries the past into the present but instead as a process, as working differently at different points in time.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, appearance of large calculating machines in the Second World War, invention of computer technologies etc. in Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 90-91

<sup>21</sup> Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Gerome Turc, ‘‘Memory of places, places of memory: a halbwachsian socio-ethnography of memory’’, 119.

<sup>23</sup> William Guynn, ‘‘Film: A Place of Memory’’ in *Writing History in Film* (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 168.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Burgoyne. *Film Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

For a detailed description, see Alison Landsberg's ‘‘Prosthetic memory: *Total recall* and *Blade runner*,’’ in *Cyberspace/cyberbodies/cyberpunk: cultures of technological embodiment*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage, 1995), 175-89.

## Individual vs Collective Memory

In sociology, history and cultural theory, the phrase, *collective memory*, proposes that practices of remembrance are shaped and reinforced by societies and cultures<sup>25</sup>. Memory studies in a wider sense is a multi-disciplinary field to which psychology, neurology, sociology, anthropology etc. have contributed. However, there is an ongoing debate in collective memory studies which concerns the relation between the individual and collective<sup>26</sup>. In the following lines, this disputed area will be put forward based on prominent scholars from both strands of memory studies by focusing on discussions and definition of both concepts.

Contemporary usage of the term collective memory is largely traceable to Emile Durkheim and his student, Maurice Halbwachs in *the Social Frameworks of Memory (1925)*<sup>27</sup>. Embarking upon the concept of memory as a purely individual phenomenon, Henri Bergson<sup>28</sup> (1896) was challenged by Maurice Halbwachs in his fundamental work where Halbwachs asserts that studying memory does not pertain to ruminating on properties of the subjective mind. Instead, for Halbwachs, memory is a matter of how minds work together in society and how their operations are structured by social arrangements<sup>29</sup>. According to Halbwachs, it is not possible for individuals to recollect or remember in a coherent and consistent way out of their group contexts. He exemplifies this with the impossibility for an individual to remember with certainty regarding particular childhood memories as individuals recollect these memories based on the narratives of their parents<sup>30</sup>.

Halbwachs explains his collective memory concept by using what he calls “social frameworks”<sup>31</sup>. By defining collective memory in terms of social frames, Halbwachs adopts a constructivist perspective, which distances him from collective mythmakers and

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<sup>25</sup> Micheal Rossington and Anne Whitehead eds. *Theories of Memory: A reader*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>26</sup>Wulf Kansteiner. “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies”. *History and Theory*, 41 (2002): 180. doi: 10.1111/0018-2656.00198.

<sup>27</sup>Jeffrey K. Olick. “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures”. *Sociological Theory*, 17 (1999) :333-348. Doi:10.1111/0735-2751.00083.

<sup>28</sup> For a better understanding of Bergson’s memory concept, please refer to Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. New York : Cosimo Classics, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Rossington, *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, 129-134.

<sup>30</sup> Olick, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies”334.

<sup>31</sup> Social frameworks, such as institutions, memorial statues, festivities etc. function at the same time as *instruments* for reconstructing the past. For that reason, social frameworks are flexible and dynamic.

essentialists<sup>32</sup>. Halbwachs' thesis has been today verified by contemporary psychological and neurobiological studies which highlight the social nature of individual remembering and forgetting, and assert that narrative patterns used to express individual memories including autobiographical ones cannot be separated from the social<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, both individual and collective memory interact, for remembering is categorized as a social phenomenon and individual remembering is influenced by the social frameworks (as suggested by Halbwachs) that exist in a society bounded by limited space and time. It is not productive to polarize the individual and collective strand of memory as they interact.

Considering the fact that past is not a given but reconstructed, it might be said that our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. There are different modes of remembering identical past events<sup>34</sup>. Individuals or societies might remember (or simply forget) a war, a coup d'état, for example, as a mythic event, as part of political history, as a traumatic experience, as a part of family history. Myth, religious memory, political history, family remembrance, national commemorations, films and different type of media (television etc.) are counted as different modes of referring to the past. Based on these assertions, Astrid Erll suggests that history is another mode of cultural memory and historiography its specific medium<sup>35</sup>. Drawing on Halbwachs' collective memory concept, Erll categorizes memory on two levels: individual and collective. Erll maintains that cultural memory is concerned with biological memory and draws attention to the fact that no memory is purely individual but intrinsically shaped by collective contexts. In Erll's account, individuals remember in socio-cultural contexts and, therefore she prefers the "cultural memory" concept to "collective" or "social" memory as cultural memory encapsulates both collective and social memory. The other level of cultural memory pertains to the symbolic order, the media, institutions and practices (such as commemorative rituals) by which social groups construct a shared past<sup>36</sup>. Societies do not practice collective remembering *per se* however, the process of reconstructing a shared, common past bears some resemblance to such individual memory processes as selectivity and perspectivity intrinsic in creating versions of the past according to present knowledge

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<sup>32</sup> Alieda Assmann, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Wulf Kansteiner. "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies". *History and Theory*, 41 (2002): 185.

<sup>34</sup> Astrid Erll et al. (eds.) *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

and needs<sup>37</sup>. In other words, institutions, larger social groups such as nations, governments, religious groups, a company or the church do not *bear* a memory, instead they *construct* one for their own use by means of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and monuments<sup>38</sup>.

## Cultural Memory

I have decided to use communicative and memory of objects (material memory) concepts as culture is considered as a three dimensional framework comprised of social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media) and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities) according to anthropological and semiotic theories<sup>39</sup>. Based on this assertion it is, therefore, appropriate to analyze both cinematic products as they are materials/ media of culture. Considering the fact that cinema is a social phenomenon and hints at a larger cultural meaning, analyzing the reception of both movies is therefore suitable to confirm and test the social side of cinema and memory construction or collective amnesia.

One of the leading figures in the field of cultural memory is Astrid Erll and her definition of cultural memory calls for the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts. An understanding of cultural memory allows for an inclusion of a broad spectrum of phenomena as possible objects of cultural memory studies<sup>40</sup>. In Erll's account, the concept of collective memory is the most important and most frequently used concept of cultural memory studies. Erll's cultural memory concept complements Assmann's typology, and this concept will allow for a better and more in-depth analysis of the cinematic products in question by means of application of these concepts to moving images.

Basing his ideas on Halbwachs, Jan Assmann follows a similar vein apropos of collective memory. He upholds that an individual constructs, constitutes his/her memories in communication and interaction with others. Thus, he distinguishes between two memory concepts, one of which is *communicative memory* and the other being *cultural memory*. Daily communication renders individuals able to constitute a memory which is socially

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Aleida Assmann, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 2.

mediated and relates to a group<sup>41</sup>. Individuals acquire collective memory by means of a common image of their past, particularly, by means of cinematically different films. These image(s) are situated in multiple group contexts. This signals the multiple character of collective images and these collective memories might exist on the level of families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, it is possible to discern collective remembering on multifarious scales encompassing private settings as well as the public sphere.

Furthermore, Assmann distinguishes among four modes of memory in an effort to capture the range of memory problematics<sup>43</sup>: *mimetic memory*: the transmission of practical knowledge from the past; *material memory*: the history contained in objects; *communicative memory*: the residues of the past in language and communication, including the very ability to communicate in language; and *cultural memory*: the transmission of meanings from the past, that is, explicit historical reference and consciousness. However, material and communicative memory concepts will solely be utilized for the filmic products as visual objects and content serve as actors in rendering cultural memory (anchored in time and space) visible<sup>44</sup>.

The cultural memory concept will prove fruitful as it encompasses both social and collective memory, therefore allowing for a wider field of analysis<sup>45</sup>. In order to spot the memories of this event, material memory and communicative memory will be supporting cultural memory which is an umbrella term for social and collective memory concepts. It is for this reason that I have decided to use cultural memory as a concept in order to have a better reading of both cinematic products in question, and Assmann's memory typology allows to track and read memories of an event in a media production as an easy process. Assmann's concepts serve as solid concepts for interpreting the cinematic content.

Assmann distinguishes between communicative and cultural memory as follows: communicative memory includes varieties of collective memory based exclusively on everyday communications. These varieties constitute the field of oral history.

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<sup>41</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity". *New German Critique* No.65 (Spring-Summer 1995) :126.

<sup>42</sup> Kansteiner, "A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", 188.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Assmann, *Kültürel Bellek (Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen)*, trans. Ayşe Tekin, (Ayrıntı Yayınları: İstanbul, 2001), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Depeli, "Görsellik ve Kültürel Bellek İlişkisi: Göçmenin Evi (Migrant's Home: The Relation Between Visuality and Cultural Memory)", 5.

<sup>45</sup> Erll, 2008.

Communicative memory is classified as an everyday practice which is materialized by means of oral communication. It has a limited temporal horizon not extending more than eighty to (at the most) one hundred years into the past equaling to three or four generations<sup>46</sup>. In other words, it does not have any fixed point which would bind it to the expanding past in the passing of time. Only cultural formation, which lies outside of informal everyday memory, can actualize such fixity.

Memory (individual, collective, social, cultural) is a mediated phenomenon. Vehicles or media of cultural memory may be extraordinarily multifarious. Cultural memory may be embedded in historical relics, monuments, emblems, words, feasts and fairs, towns, landscapes, films, television etc.<sup>47</sup>. Despite the fact that cultural memory is considered to be connected to the past, it constantly updates itself within the “present”, reconstructs itself through remembering and forgetting. Individuals remember by means of images, and moves the images in his/ her mind within the present, carry them wherever they go<sup>48</sup>.

### **History vs Memory : The Past Present and the Present Past**

Questions, discussions and ambiguities in relation to the concepts of history and memory constitute the subject matter of this section as there is a need to distinguish between or rather clarify the ambiguities of both concepts. What is that differentiates collective memory from history? The difference between the two is not so much about their content but their perspectives: memory’s first person character distinguishes it from historical analogue. If the goal of history is that it is written in third person, memory is always written in the first person<sup>49</sup>.

Halbwachs defines history as a collection of most notable facts in the memory of man<sup>50</sup>. He offered a polarization of memory and history based on two different dichotomies, one of which being ‘history as dead’ and the other ‘memory as living’<sup>51</sup>. In addition, collective memory is distinguished from history in two aspects, the first of which is its continuous

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Wolf, Introduction to the *Modernization and the Crisis of Memory: John Donne to Don DeLillo*. (Amsterdam/ NY: Rodopi, 2002), 16, accessed on google books on 12.03.2012.

<sup>48</sup> Gökçen İnce Başaran. “Medya ve Toplumsal Hafıza”. Trans. Ozan Tekin, 20.

<sup>49</sup> According to Poole (2008:159), history and memory should not be treated as unchanging, reified objects. Instead, they undergo changes in the course of time in addition to their interactive character (memory and history- both about the past- draw on one another to serve the present by means of the present).

<sup>50</sup> Olick, “Collective Memory: the two cultures”, 129.

<sup>51</sup> Rossington, *Theories of Memory: A reader*, 134.

and live character<sup>52</sup> (it only retains from the past what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive).

Pierre Nora<sup>53</sup> seems to confirm Halbwachs' opinion that history is dead whilst memory is alive. He contends that history and memory are opposed terms in perceiving the past and points out that memory is embodied in living societies. According to Pierre Nora, memory clings to places as history to events. Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image and object. We do not possess any organic relationship to history. It is for this reason that it is considered 'dead'.

As seen, both history and memory are seen as media for reconstructing the past. History is constituted and reconstructed in the present. History was defined as dead whereas memory as living. This holds true for both concepts however, I am of the opinion that both history and memory draw on one another and it is exactly for this reason that history is reconstructed and interpreted in different manners and modes in the present<sup>54</sup>. An understanding of the same event in the 17th century and 19th century is quite different as both memories and mnemonic practices changed the nature of remembering that particular past. Therefore, history is reconstructed by means of the present. The past and the present have an interactive character.

In retrospective to the ideas of Erll regarding memory and history as different modes of remembering, it is fair to refer to history as a mode of remembering distinct from memory however, it does include or incorporate memory into its reconstruction of the past. In the same vein, Le Goff argues that memory is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral or written, it is the living source from which historians draw. History is nourished by memory in return, and enters into the great dialectical process of memory and forgetting experienced by individuals<sup>55</sup>. On the other hand, the recognition that the same past is perceived changes in different periods and that the historian is subject to the time in which he lives, has led to either scepticism regarding the possibility of knowing the past, or to an

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Guynn, 171-176.

<sup>54</sup> What I mean here is that memory and history cannot exist without one another. History uses memory to confirm its object of research, and memory draws on history to legitimize itself. This interactive aspect of the both concepts prove productive and reliable for researchers as opposed to a reified, static history and memory concept. Besides memory and history, there is a discussion among scholars regarding the distinction between myth, memory and history. For a general idea of this distinction, please see Aleida Assmann.

<sup>55</sup> Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 51-58.

effort to eliminate any reference at all to the present. In reality, the interest of the past is that it illuminates the present<sup>56</sup>. As complemented by memory, historical scholarship does not only draw on memory for oral testimony and experience but also for criteria of meaning and relevance. Memory is distinguished from history in that it underlines the differences, exists in the plural; is linked to the identity of an individual (a group or institution); bridges the past, present and future; highly selective and deploys forgetting<sup>57</sup>.

## Film, History and Memory

Cultural memory is always mediated. In other words, it is carried or transmitted by means of various vehicles such as discursive, visual and spatial elements (memories stick to places as Nora would assert)<sup>58</sup>. How does film contribute to our sense of the past? Rather than reflecting history through verisimilitude, films reflect our received notions of the past and offer an understanding of how cinematic history is constituted<sup>59</sup>. History seems to be “there” in the form of ideas each spectator makes of the past as an imaginary and individual construct<sup>60</sup>. Memories constitute an indispensable part of reconstructing the past as they sensitize and express the past in the first person in contrast to history which is in third person. History is understood through memories inscribed in moving images.

Historians admit that cinematic representations are overwhelmingly influential and impose indelible images of the past on the public imagination<sup>61</sup>. Filmic products influence the ways the past is comprehended and considered in the present<sup>62</sup>. Considering that cultural/collective memory is constructed by means of “visual, aural and semantic” coding, it is not difficult to grasp the impact of films and media on memory construction<sup>63</sup>.

Different methods of film production and editing images, reconstructing the history through these devices change how the past is perceived, comprehended. The viewers might experience memories on the screen as their own personal memories, events through which

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Aleida Assmann, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: The Methodological Critique of Memory Studies”, 190. Basing his arguments on Halbwachs, Nora claims that memories stick to places and transform these places into sites of memory.

<sup>59</sup> Marcia Landy ed. *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>60</sup> Jönsson, “Now Here/ Nowhere: On History and Film”, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Gynn, 165.

<sup>62</sup> Jönsson, “Now Here/ Nowhere: On History and Film”, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 46.

they themselves did not experience. *JFK*,<sup>64</sup> which caused a great deal of controversy over the history of the assassination of the president of the USA, and *Forrest Gump*<sup>65</sup> serve as excellent examples of how history is perceived and the past is remembered in the public sphere, and might even replace the real event(s) by reconstructing the past through the medium of cinematic technologies<sup>66</sup>.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

### Rationale For the Selection of Cases

Both cinematic products in question serve as good examples for attempting to comprehend how memories of a particular historical event are reconstructed. These cinematic products spare a thought on the 12 September past from diverging perspectives, and points out to the multiple character of collective memor(ies). On the other hand, similarities and differences of these cinematic products demonstrate the fact that 12 September is remembered from different perspectives, and thus generating various memories of this event. This provides the basis for a broader analysis of 12 September and its possible meanings in Turkish fictional cinema as representations of the same event involve different perspectives.

The analysis is based on visual representations (thus, memories) of 12 September in *Beynelmilel* (2006, *Sırrı Süreyya Önder*) and *Bu Son Olsun* (2012, *Orçun Benli*). The aforementioned films were selected in accordance with their popularity, which is based on their coverage in media (articles, reviews, interviews etc.), their appearance and success in national and international film festivals, and their box office success. *Beynelmilel* gained national and international acclaim in such assorted film festivals as Altın Koza Film Festival<sup>67</sup> (winner), Barcelona Film Festival<sup>68</sup>, Moscow Film Festival<sup>69</sup>, Ankara Film

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<sup>64</sup> Another good example might be Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*(1998) in which sophisticated camera techniques and complex sound effects help depict the past as if the viewer physically experiences it, participates in the event depicted (Jönsson, 1998:20).

<sup>65</sup> Please see Chapter Five in *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at US History*, Robert Burgoyne, p.104 for a detailed discussion of *Forrest Gump* as reconstructing the past through *Prosthetic Memory*. Prosthetic memory is a concept coined by Alison Landsberg to describe the way mass cultural technologies of memory enable individuals to experience as if they were memories, events through which they themselves did not live.

<sup>66</sup> Vivian Sobchack ed. Introduction to *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, by Vivian Sobchack ( London: Palgrave, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> "Beynelmilel sweeps awards at Altın Koza", Today's Zaman, last modified 11 June 2007, accessed 23 March 2012, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-113629-beynelmilel-sweeps-awards-at-altin-koza.html>

Festival, İstanbul Film Festival. According to *boxofficeturkey.com*, *Beynelmilel* was seen by 431.696<sup>70</sup> people while *Bu Son Olsun* has been seen by a number of 78.053<sup>71</sup>. Furthermore, a direct depiction of the 12 September coup in both cinematic products is another criterion in order to have a reference point from which to compare both films.

The first film discussed, *Beynelmilel* (2006, *Sırrı Süreyya Önder*), under the analysis section was selected based on its audience turn-out (popularity), its post-12 September depiction. On the other hand, the film representing the coup d'état from a rural area (Southeastern Turkey) perspective makes it a significant departing point for the 12 September film genre. *Bu Son Olsun* (2012, *Orçun Benli*) was selected as it is the latest 12 September film released in January 2012. Furthermore, it was re-released on 29 June 2012 in addition to its screening on a national Turkish television channel (*KanalD*)<sup>72</sup> on 5 July 2012. It focuses on the 12 September from a city perspective and its impacts in İstanbul as opposed to *Beynelmilel*.

## Method

While the representational aspect of cinema is solely one element of its impact on collective memory, the widespread reception of films is the other aspect given that cinema remains to be the most widely diffused and popular of art forms. Films encapsulate a considerable amount of information. Some of it is shaped by the cultural habits of a period or society, some of it is new and recondite. Old and new constitute the film. Collective memory or rather cultural memory can be treated as the result of interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artifacts according to their own interests<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> "Beynelmilel", IMDB, accessed 10 January 2012, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0893507/awards>

<sup>69</sup> "Archives 2007", Moscow Film Festival, accessed 23 March 2012, <http://www.moscowfilmfestival.ru/miff33/eng/archives/?year=2007>

<sup>70</sup> "Beynelmilel", Box Office Türkiye, accessed 25 March 2012, <http://boxofficeturkiye.com/film/2007004/Beynelmilel.htm>

<sup>71</sup> "Bu Son Olsun", Box Office Türkiye, accessed 29 May 2012 <http://boxofficeturkiye.com/film/2011215/Bu-Son-Olsun.htm>

<sup>72</sup> According to *Bu Son Olsun* facebook page, the film had the top rating in the AB group with a rating of 4.64 and share of 18.83 on 5 July 2012 in Turkey (based on data acquired from KanalD). The page is followed by 9 222 individuals.

<sup>73</sup> Wulf Kansteiner. "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies". *History and Theory*, 41 (2002): 180.

Hence, this paper will complement, and interact with the representations of the 12 September by accommodating the use of reviews on such online film databases as *IMDB*, *beyazperde* and *sinemalar*, *youtube*. Their reception will be used to confirm (or otherwise) the findings derived from the analysis in relation to collective memory and reconstruction of the past in the concerned cinematic products. The number of reviews used for the purposes of this paper is 595. While only six reviews are in English, 589 reviews are in Turkish. 2006-2012 period was chosen as a relevant time frame as 2006-2012 represented important events in relation to the 12 September. 2012 has witnessed the emergence of memorial sites as the 12 September Museum of Shame<sup>74</sup>, political attempts to come to terms with the past as forming the *Darbe Araştırma Komisyonu*<sup>75</sup> (the Inquiry Commission for Military Coups) in the parliament and the trial of military generals accused of staging the 12 September<sup>76</sup>. All these developments are attributable to various reasons such as the accelerated democratization process which has taken place since 2002 thanks to Turkey's commitments and political will to democratize as an accession country for the EU. In 2006, there was another attempt to bring the military officials to court on the grounds of staging the military coup in addition to Kenan Evren's (former chief of the general staff and president in 1982) remarks that he had no regrets for staging the 12 September<sup>77</sup>, which had a wide repercussion in the media.

Qualitative content analysis will serve as the main method which is 'used for subjective interpretation of the content of various media by means of systematic classification of coding and identifying themes or patterns'<sup>78</sup>. By means of this method, researchers can understand social reality subjectively but scientifically<sup>79</sup>. The content for analysis encompasses textual materials, visual materials (still or moving), audio materials and interview responses. As specified beforehand, the samples for the analysis are comprised

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<sup>74</sup>"Museum Sheds Light on Darkest Atrocities in Turkey", Hurriyet Daily News, last modified 9 May 2011, accessed 17 February 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=museum-of-shame-sheds-light-on-darkest-atrocities-2011-09-05>

<sup>75</sup>"Panel Starts Working on Coup and Charter", Hurriyet Daily News, last modified 11 May 2012, accessed 25 May 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/panels-start-working-on-coups-and-charter.aspx?pageID=238&nID=20494&NewsCatID=338>

<sup>76</sup>"Turkey's Trial of Evren and Sahinkaya is Historic Moment", BBC News, last modified 4 April 2012, Accessed 25 May 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17605962>

<sup>77</sup>"Former President Evren: I Have No Regrets For Staging A Coup", last modified 3 March 2006, accessed 20 April 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/former-president-evren-i-have-no-regrets-for-staging-a-coup.aspx?pageID=438&n=former-president-evren-i-have-no-regrets-for-staging-a-coup-2006-03-03>

<sup>78</sup> Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis" in *Qualitative Health Research*, 15 (2005): 1278.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

of texts and visuals considered to inform the research question defined at the outset of this study. Qualitative content analysis lays special emphasis on context as analysis of the content is context-dependent. For example, a film released and viewed in 1999 might be evaluated divergently in 2007. This method divides raw data into categories or themes depending on valid inference and interpretation<sup>80</sup>.

I will base the findings on the interpretations derived from the *narrative(s)* and *mise-en-scene(s)* of the cinematic products. According to Neuendorf, content analysis alone cannot generate inferences in relation to producers' intent or audiences' interpretation arguing that an integrated approach is required involving the use of content analysis<sup>81</sup>. Therefore, I will set out to compare these findings and juxtapose them to the findings derived from reviews in order to see whether collective memories of 12 September are confirmed in the public or not. To this end, themes derived from the content of the concerning cinematic products will be used as the coding unit for the analysis of the reviews on *IMDB*, *beyazperdeler*, *sinemalar* and *youtube*.

Benefiting from memory conceptualization of Astrid Erll (cultural memory), the aforementioned films will be analyzed by drawing on the memory typology conceptualized by Jan Assmann: *communicative memory* and *material memory* (or memory of objects)<sup>82</sup>. The films will be placed within the framework of Assmann's typology in order to track the ways memories related to the 12 September are constructed, thus acquainting the reader with the representations of the concerning event. I seek for the visual/ verbal expressions which are dominant within their own narrative structures. I focus on themes however, it comes out that each film has its particular narrative constituting a distinct theme for film.

In order to examine the visual representations, memories of the 12 September using the concepts of *communicative memory* and *memory of objects*, I will focus on such cinematic features (or analytical tools) as *narrative*<sup>83</sup> and *mise-en-scene*<sup>84</sup> which are connected to

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, "Analysis, Interpretation and Reporting" in *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 452-457.

<sup>81</sup> Jim Macnamara, "Media content analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology" *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, (Vol.6 Issue.1, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Communicative memory and memory of objects constitute the main concepts to be used for the analysis.

<sup>83</sup> Narrative as a formal system can be defined as a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space. Causality, time and space are the most important elements of narrative. We can make sense of a narrative by identifying its events and linking them by cause-effect, time and space (Film Art: 76). In any narrative film characters create causes and register effects (Film Art: 78). Narrative is comprised of two parts: the actual story and how it is communicated (discourse). Chatman, a leading narratologist, distinguishes between a story (*histoire*) and discourse (*discourse*) as parts of a narrative. Story is considered

collective memories of the coup period. Treating visuals, communicative units as the units of analysis, this paper examines the translation of memory into a visual form and unravel differences and similarities in both cinematic productions. Both 12 September films in question will be analyzed individually as each film is shaped around a divergent but meaningfully organized sign system.

## Limitations and Criticism

There are limitations to using collective memory theory as a method for reading/ interpreting cultural texts. It does not allow to adopt a unitary perspective on an historical event as it can only provide what can be referred to as the collective voice of widely held opinions. In addition, collective memory lacks objectivity (of classical historical analysis). However, this lack of objectivity allows for investigating the long-term effects of this amalgamation of collective voices on how the society at large perceives the same event through a particular period of time.

Collective memory theory is also problematic in the study of cultural texts as there are many diverging definitions of the term. As laid out in the theory section, there are a great many uses of the term in various fields such as psychology, sociology etc. and approaches to the theory itself. Many of these are debated or make insufficient claims. However, it still serves as an effective approach for studying the effects of cinematic productions on public opinion through a consistent working model built with relevant collective memory theory(ies). It is also worth mentioning that I do not privilege the collective memory concept over the study of history. I opine that they have an interactive character and draw on one another. It is the multifarious faces of the collective memory approach to the past which presents the most beneficial framework to track the effect of popular cinematic productions dealing with history on collective memory.

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“...the narrative in chronological order, the abstract order of events as they follow each other.” [55] (cited in Vassilou, 3). which are communicated” or “what in effect happened” [Ibid]; in an event something occurs. A set of events can be considered what happened in a certain sequence and forms the idea of the story. Events are actions or things that just happen ( happenings ) and are associated with characters that either make the event happen, agents , or are impacted by an event, patients. Chatman describes discourse as the other necessary component of a narrative, “a discourse (discours) that is the expression, the means by which content is communicated.” Discourse carries with it the notion of plot which is “how the reader becomes aware of what happened,” that is basically, the “order of the appearance (of the events) in the work itself”. Narrative as a tool is compatible with the communicative memory concept.

<sup>84</sup> Film scholars use the term to signify the director’s control over what appears in the film frame. Mise-en-scene includes the following aspects: setting, lighting, costume and behavior of the figures (Film Art: 112). These are four general aspects constituting mise-en-scene. In this paper, I focus on costumes, setting and behavior of the characters again in a cause-effect relationship situated in time and space.

On the other hand, qualitative content analysis is not as objective as it appears as the researcher intentionally selects and records data accordingly. It is upto the researcher to decide what categories to use and what to include in these categories. Accordingly, qualitative content analysis relies heavily on researcher ‘readings’ and interpretation of media texts. Qualitative content analysis has been criticized for its low reliability as it is based on selected units and subjective interpretation of visual/ written texts however, qualitative analysis of texts is necessary to construe their deeper meanings and likely interpretations by audiences – namely the ultimate goal of analysing media texts.<sup>85</sup> Neuendorf adds that content analysis has some predictive capabilities as well as other specialist uses<sup>86</sup>. However, audience characteristics such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, education level and socio-economic position which have a stark potential to affect interpretation/ readings of media content are omitted from this study as it is not possible to access the abovementioned audience characteristics. Whilst film reception cannot provide individual responses to films, it can contribute to illuminating the meanings available within a given moment.

## **Chapter Three: ANALYSIS**

### **A RURAL PERSPECTIVE: *BEYNELMİLEL***

#### **Synopsis of film**

The plot focuses on the story of ‘‘*gevende*’’s ( name for rural bands in Anatolia) in the aftermath of 1980 coup d’état. *Gevendes* fall short of money due to restrictive policies imposed by the military administration. Running illegal entertainment activities on a truck trunk leads to their apprehension by military officials. Events start developing as the martial law commander desires to turn ‘‘*gevende*’’s into a contemporary, Western orchestra which will compose a piece and perform it (workers’ anthem *the International*), which leads to their un felicitious end.

#### ***Beynelmilel* as a 12 September Film**

*Beynelmilel* can be categorized under the rubric of the 12 September films as it is thematized around the impacts of this traumatic event on the society at large. Nevertheless,

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<sup>85</sup> Macnamara, “ Media content analysis: Its Uses, Benefits and Best Practice Methodology”, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

these films examine the same event in multifarious ways focusing on the subject of torture during the 12 September, pre-/ post-12 September, experiences of political prisoners following their imprisonment (or referred to as the idea of “*homecoming*”), impacts of the 12 September on the society at large. These films started blooming as of 1986 following the easing of suppressive military policies and transmission to civil administration. The military administration censored 197 films and banned screening of these films<sup>87</sup>. While some of the movies included an explicit or implicit engagement with the 12 September, censorship appeared as one of the main coercive mechanisms over the control of knowledge/ memory production.

In particular, *Beynelmilel* can set a good example for a popular 12 September film as it intersperses the 12 September into its narrative and treats it as a given. As a result of the repression of memories of the 12 September, first generation of the 12 September movies which began sprouting as of 1986 are shaped around subjective accounts and stories of the 12 September. As a popular 12 September film, *Beynelmilel* is also focused on subjective accounts of the past drawing on regional and cultural characteristics however, it directly engages with the impacts of the 12 September on the society through these private or personal stories, thus rendering the private public. It also enables the audience to revisit their own past and consider new ways of representing their cultural identity. Nevertheless, subjective accounts and fragmented character of the 12 September memories in contemporary Turkish films point to a myriad of collective memories of the same event by means of weaving various narratives, thus representing the 12 September in multifarious ways.

*Beynelmilel* promises its audience nostalgia, innocence and with scenes of a lost past. This nostalgic innocent past is disrupted by the outside force: the state. It uses humour as a tool to render people remember not through mourning but laughter. Humour might be interpreted as a way to deal with this traumatic past and ridicule the military authority and its constitutional practices. The traumatic side of this event is not highlighted (due to the genre and its light-hearted mood), and hence its impact on the collective memory of the Turkish citizenry is not completely challenging and does not raise questions related to the the 12 September past. Therefore, it might be asserted that *Beynelmilel* does not bear a

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<sup>87</sup>Boztepe, 169-70.

considerably critical stance towards this past, however definitely raises question in relation to remembering a certain event.

On the other hand, *Beynelmilel* makes the personal public and politicizes this certain past through its satirical narrative. Despite its generally light-hearted mood, the film adopts, possesses and reveals a political stance with an attempt to criticize the contemporary Turkish society through an *idealized* representation of the past. It seeks to resolve tensions, anxieties, and contradictions that arise from complex social and political processes within a single dichotomous structure based on before/ after and inside/ outside<sup>88</sup>. As much as it depicts the 12 September as a given, it treats the nostalgic, innocent past (before the outside force intervened) as a given as well.

But in order for memory to be something than a fantasy, what we remember must have taken place somewhere . Places matter as cinematic products have the power to essentially transform or change our mnemonic perceptions of particular places converting them into sites of memory and forgetting. The provincial town in *Beynelmilel* is depicted as a space of uncontaminated cordial relationships and happiness<sup>89</sup>. This space represents the innocent, nostalgic past. The provincial small-town atmosphere of the recent past is constructed as very joyful. These joyful provincial town memories become cultural products of national identity<sup>90</sup>. While raising questions in relation to how to remember the past, *Beynelmilel* also reveals patterns of national identity by means of its focus on childish adults, their innocence and use of space, in particular, the provincial town. The innocent, childish adults contribute to the contemporary representation of the Turkish citizenry and their depoliticized character wishing to distance themselves from politics and its delirious effects.

In retrospective to Pierre Nora's remarks that memories stick to places, depiction of the aftermath of the military coup in the countryside plays an important role in reconstructing this traumatic past. In *La Memoire Collective*, Halbwachs makes the following crucial statement: 'places play a part in the stability of material things and it is in settling in them, enclosing itself within their limits and bending its attitude to suit them, that the collective thinking of the group of believers is most able to become fixed and to last: such is the

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<sup>88</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, 40.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

condition of memory”<sup>91</sup>. The countryside holds a significance for the overall narrative and memory construction. It hints at the proximity of the people to the center. The countryside is far from the center and state. This remoteness depicts the countryside, and thus the people as innocent and away from the problems. However, the outside force (the state) is depicted to disrupt the internal harmony of the innocent provincial town life and is often associated with the central government’s intervention in this life.<sup>92</sup> It attributes a protective and hospitable value to the provincial town life of the past which functions as a shell protecting its innocence from the outside force (the military and state).<sup>93</sup> *Beynelmilel* does not put so much emphasis on the past itself but on the remembrance of the past from today’s perspective.

### **Silence and Peace: How Does *Beynelmilel* Construct Memory?**

#### **Communicative Memory**

Basing his ideas on Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann follows a similar vein apropos of collective memory. He upholds that an individual constructs, constitutes his/her memories in communication and interaction with others. Thus, he distinguishes between two memory concepts, one of which is communicative memory and the other being cultural memory. Daily communication renders individuals able to constitute a memory which is socially mediated and relates to a group<sup>94</sup>. This is what is defined as communicative memory by Assmann.

The opening scene starts with the apprehension of local musicians called *Gevende* in Adiyaman (a Southeast Anatolian town) *the 12 September* imposes a curfew throughout the whole country, and these musicians are apprehended since they clandestinely carry out musical activities at night. As many things in the lives of ordinary people are suppressed or banned by the military rule, *gevendes* cannot play certain musical pieces as dictated by the military rule in a list of ‘forbidden’ musical products. One of these musical products is a Kurdish folk song called *Lorke*. Nevertheless, in a local wedding, Abuzer and his friends are requested to play this particular local piece. The song is performed quietly, and guests at the wedding dance to this song in the same manner. This scene is important in terms of communicating the absurd and suppressive policies of the military regime those days, and

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<sup>91</sup> Cited in Turc, 149.

<sup>92</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, 29.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 28-29.

<sup>94</sup> Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, 126.

submission of the society through silence and inactivity. This attracts our attention to the genre of the film and thus representation of the 12 September policies as absurd and tragicomic.

Another significant scene in the movie is when *Servet*, *Haydar*'s brother, shun his brother's ideals and belief in communism. *Servet*:

*‘‘Is it up to you to save this country? We are musicians. Do you think musicians will make communists, revolutionists? Factories, fields! How many of you will work in a factory? Can you run a factory if they give you one?’’*

This communicates the attitude of the ordinary citizens, parents or families towards the young people who define themselves as revolutionists or communists. The fear and authority of the military rule penetrated the society in such a way that individuals were encouraged to be politically inactive and ‘‘mind their own business’’. This is a precursor to the depoliticized character of the society.

The narrative of the film is very much supported by character narrations and objects. Some of these objects are *Haydar*'s books written by Engels and Marx. Here again the depoliticized face of the nation is emphasized vis a vis *Haydar* as a revolutionist. As memory is always related to identity, attributes of Turkish national identity are highlighted through the words of *Haydar*'s sister-in-law when she contends, in response to the name of *Haydar*'s book titled ‘‘*Engels: Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*’’, that there will not be any ‘‘obstacles’’<sup>95</sup>, and he will have a family, protect his private property and state at God's will’’. These words represent the public opinion which mirrors the present situation among the society at large. This manifests submission of the people to the state focusing on their daily lives and making ends and meet, and their extent of knowledge in relation to the events transforming the country. The abovementioned scenes reflect upon the current state of the Turkish Republic: the unquestionable nature of the state, and the military as the protector and guardian of the fatherland.

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Engel’ means ‘obstacle’ in Turkish.

Experiences of the *12 September* are emphasized in the film by means of communication between the characters. The depoliticized side of the society is further highlighted with Gülendem who is portrayed as a childish young woman. A dialogue between her and *Haydar* in relation to his books reveals her childish and depoliticized character whereas *Haydar*'s socialist and revolutionist side is further reinforced. At this point it should be reminded that the reasons of the coup are brought upto the fore through *Haydar* who is objectified as the representation of the revolts since the leftist ideology was strictly against the liberalization of the economy and liberal policies of the state. All these elements help construct the past by means of communicative elements as the dialogue between characters which endow the story with memory construction elements. Through these communicative elements, memories of the effects of the 12 September on the society and in particular the leftist ideology are constructed. However, *Haydar* has autocontrol and autosilence when he is around certain people as the people at large or his brother who is against "anarchy" and "fascism". Therefore, *Haydar* representing the leftist ideology is silenced as well as the society at large. For this reason, the theme of auto-silence or rather playing the three monkeys and obeyance appear to serve as recurring themes throughout the whole movie and thus hints at the character of 12 September as a silencing, oppressive rule not only in the 1980s but also in present.

As told before, in order to construct a certain past, history and memory draws on the present, and thus reflects upon the present, contemporary situation in Turkey. This is demonstrated by the military commanders in *Beynelmilel* who point out to the significance of an "orchestra, musicians" instead of being "gevendes". As seen, this has become a culture and memories relating to the military, and the state as representing 'westernization' and 'development' is emphasized by means of stereotypical discourses used by the military officials such as remarks by a military general which follows as:

*"What the heck is gevende? If one is engaged in music, he is not called gevende. He becomes a musician in an orchestra. This city does not need shabby gevendes but an organized, a regular orchestra. You will be an orchestra from now on. Understood?".<sup>96</sup>*

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<sup>96</sup> My translation of "Gevende de neymiş? İnsan dediğin müzikle uğraşıyorsa gevende olmaz. Müzisyen olur, orkestra olur. Bu kentin böyle kılıksız gevendelere değil tertipli, düzenli bir orkestraya ihtiyacı var. Bugünden itibaren orkestra olacaksınız. Anlaşıldı mı?...".

At the outset of the film, the social life of the people in the provincial town does not seem to be complicated and influenced by the suppressive military policies prevalent in those days as seen in the scene when a certain circle of *gevendes* play at a wedding. However, this happiness is partly distorted by a song included in the banned-songs-list, thus pointing out to the ‘pointless’ impositions of the regime.

### Memory of Objects

Pierre Nora seems to confirm Halbwachs’ opinion that history is dead whilst memory is alive<sup>97</sup>. He contends that history and memory are opposed terms in perceiving the past and points out that memory is embodied in living societies. He highlights the materiality of memory and how it is reinforced by a sense of place by stating that it sticks to places, therefore it is living and continuous as long as it is transmitted to other generations. According to Pierre Nora, memory clings to places as history to events. Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image and object. We do not possess any organic relationship to history. It is for this reason that it is considered ‘‘dead’’.

Many objects reminiscent of the 1980s were used in the film in order to depict and construct this historical period. Haydar’s dark and curly hair, brown eyes and his outfit construct a socialist, revolutionist figure back in the 1980s. Haydar’s books on socialism and communism points out to his revolutionist character and helps construct memories of this event from a socialist perspective. As reiterated before, construction of memories drawing on a certain history are based on socialist, communist symbols (such as the *Internationale*), his outfit and discourse as a whole construct the memories of this event from a socialist point of view and includes a harsh critique of that period whilst drawing upon the present and criticizing the present situation in contemporary Turkey, in particular the neo-liberalist and capitalist order in the country. Traditional, local costumes of certain characters help distinguish the ordinary citizenry, revolutionists and the military officials. Photographs of certain top rank military officials, who were members of the National Security Council, recur as figures throughout the movie. These figures are paid special emphasis and importance in that they are treated as the perpetrators and those in charge of the military coup who were still at large. It can be asserted that the plot of the movie would like to attract attention to the military officials, and thus

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<sup>97</sup> Guynn, Writing History In Film, 168-173.

Using the names and photographs of certain popular artists known for their Kurdish identity such as Müslüm Gürses (one of the most famous representatives of the renowned music genre specific to 1980s called *Arabasque*) again play an important role in constructing the past in this region and past referring to 1980s. Military's obsession with the leftists is prevalent throughout the whole movie. It is also relevant here to refer to the importance of space as incorporating and including certain objectified meanings as the *People's House (Halkevi)* (where individuals meet for arts and culture) representing socialist ideals and distorted by capitalist interests. The People's House ends up being transformed into a pavilion.

The nationalist side of the society is emphasized by the military commanders, particularly when *gevendes* play a nationalist song pertaining to the homeland depicted as heaven. This is a recurring pictorial image throughout the film in certain scenes as the placard on which members of the national security council are referred to as the saviors and protectors of the homeland, and when '*gevende*'s start playing a nationalist song praising the homeland, and the nation as soon as they notice the military officials approaching.

### Seeing Reality On the Ground: Comparison of My Readings to The Reviews

The multiple representations of the past allow contemporary Turkish citizens to create alternative identities for themselves and their communities<sup>98</sup>. In regard to what impacts *Beynelmilel* bear on the collective memory(ies) of the 12 September, it is possible to embark upon three possible interpretative and representative reception of the movie by the reviewers on *youtube*, *IMDB* and *beyazperde*: Kurdishness-Turkishness problematic, imperialist/ capitalist – anarchist/ fascist dichotomy. The commentaries under *Beynelmilel*'s trailer on *www.youtube.com*<sup>99</sup> points out to the fascist-imperialist dichotomy whilst a video of one of the most important scenes in the film (in which *gevendes* (local musicians) play a well-known Kurdish traditional wedding song in a silent manner) attracts attention to the Kurdish- Turkish dichotomy. In the fascist-imperialist dichotomy, the commentators condemn the fascist military rule and imperialism/ capitalism. As to the Kurdish-Turkish dichotomy, this was a very much expected reaction since the film's

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<sup>98</sup> "Özyürek, 2007:2" cited in Suner, 2010: 39.

<sup>99</sup> "Beynelmilel film trailer", YouTube, accessed 16 April 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jq1Oe0\\_qfk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jq1Oe0_qfk) (video deleted due to right infringement).

setting is in an eastern town in Turkey. Another point brought up by the reviewers is the meaningless practices of the military rule and its current (referring to 2006 when the film was released) oppression prevalent all around the country. One third of the comments contained elements ridiculing communism, demonizing communists and categorizing them as fascists. This reflects the official discourse of the military in the 1980s which bore a stark impact on shaping, forming a public opinion against communism. In this regard, the film seems to confirm this official discourse and fear of the people of the state. On the other hand, a great many comments on *www.sinemalar.com*<sup>100</sup> celebrate this movie in that it is perceived by the reviewers as a critique of those years and meaningless practices of the military and the pain it caused for the people. The film revolves around the issues of revolution and idealist accounts of socialism by drawing on certain discourses and objects as demonstrated in the memory of objects and communicative memory section.

Reviews regarding the film on *sinemalar.com*, *IMDB* and *sinematürk.com* bear common points in terms of certain terms and look on the film and the 12 September itself. Often referred to as an amnesiac society, Turkish reviewers seem to confirm this proposition concerning the 12 September past. While the number of comments which directly or indirectly refer to the 12 September are limited to 88 on both *sinemalar.com* and *sinematürk.com* out of 359 reviews, 271 reviews focused on acting, two leading characters in the movie who are also renowned actors.

However, as claimed in the film analysis in relation to memory construction, reviews confirm the social emphasis of the film with respect to the impacts of the 12 September on the immediate lives of ordinary citizens. From this point of view, it is possible to discern the very fact that *Beynelmilel* did not raise political questions in relation to the 12 September past, and horrendous events which took place in this period. Focused on the social influences of the 12 September, *Beynelmilel* appears to have been successful in constructing a 12 September past through subjective memories of the event limited in time and space (the southeast provincial town Adıyaman). In this respect, the film has created a collective and cultural memory engraved in the minds of people as characteristics of this region, character costumes and regional accent do not serve as differentiating this event according to regional particulars, and thus applies to the country as a whole.

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<sup>100</sup> "Beynelmilel", Sinemalar, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.sinemalar.com/film/273/beynelmilel/12/>

Furthermore, the reviews are laden with references to the genre of the movie as comedy and drama in addition to referring to it as tragicomic. The reviewers point out to the impacts of the 12 September on the general public at large emphasizing the human side of these events. Reviewers are absorbed in the quality of acting, genre and the love story between the two main characters, *Gülendam* and *Haydar*. This suggests that the 12 September is constructed as a tragicomic event by means of subjective accounts of the characters. Comedy and drama combined contribute to the event being remembered as such. Nevertheless, it is also possible to point out the fact that a collective memory of the 12 September seems to be missing among the members of society considering *Beynelmilel* as a product of memory construction despite the fact that the film embodies explicit and implicit references to ridiculing the military authority, absurd, tragic and dramatic side of the event. Therefore, *Beynelmilel* is one of the mnemonic accounts of the 12 September among 12 September movies, which highlights the multifariousness of collective memor(ies) of a certain past event. Nevertheless, the reviews suggest that silence in relation to this event is widespread among the reviewers, namely, they do not recall events of this past despite the fact that the movie is laden with political and social messages concerning the 12 September. *Repression* and *silence* serve as recurrent themes in *Beynelmilel*, and spatiality, space provides a shelter for this silence coupled by nostalgic elements present in the film in the form of happy citizens and *before/ after* dichotomy. The current silence of the society at large in Turkey is confirmed both by *Beynelmilel*, and the reviewers who fail to remember a suppressed and covered past.

Although the impacts of 12 September appear to have had its impacts on the social and cultural life of the people in the southeastern part of Turkey represented by Adıyaman in *Beynelmilel*, reviewers do not raise any questions or doubts in relation to, and direct any critique towards the issue of cultural and social differences in this region. Instead, reviewers welcome the culture of the region particularly by focusing on specific cultural particulars of the region such as musical pieces, dialect etc, and thus dismiss the cultural differences and treat the 12 September past as applying to society at large as a whole. Reviewers focus on the side-effects of the 12 September with a humane perspective and does not spare a thought on regionality, difference, Kurdishness etc.

However, as pointed out beforehand, 271 of the reviews are not politically motivated and do not refer to any historical issue in relation to the 12 September and its impacts. Nora highlights the materiality of memory and how it is reinforced by a sense of place by stating

that it sticks to places, therefore it is living and continuous as long as it is transmitted to other generations. This might be caused by a generational issue and the famous 1982 constitution which has depoliticized the society and is still in effect as individuals acquire collective memory by means of a common image of their past, particularly, by means of cinematically different films.<sup>101</sup> For example, memories of the Holocaust will be recollected in a different way than it was among the first generation of the survivors of the Holocaust who had an organic relationship to that particular past. In addition, as these images are situated in multiple group contexts, the memories of the 12 September might exist or not on the level of families, professions, political generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations <sup>102</sup>.

It is worth reiterating that the issue of space gains significance in that the provincial town contributes to an idea of escape and repression as a place afar from the center, namely, the state. Most reviewers contend the cultural elements specific to that region. Therefore, memories of the 12 September do not seem to be very much confirmed by the audience as demonstrated by the overwhelming number of reviews on assorted film directories.

However, on all three film directories, the issue of socialism/ communism vs capitalism do not come to the fore as prominent themes in relation to cultural memory. Reviewers do not go beyond appreciating and celebrating the success and quality of the film. As mentioned beforehand, the issue of censorship and impacts of a depoliticizing constitution inherited as a result of the 12 September appear to have been successful in evoking the memories of this certain past as can be seen by the comments of the reviewers who do not provide a deeper insight into the 12 September. It is also observable from certain reviews that the issue of generation or remembering the same event in different generations comes to the fore. The memory of this event is almost non-existent among the reviewers as there were not a great many comments focusing on the 12 September and its meanings. Cultural memory or collective memory is the result of an interaction among three elements which are cultural traditions framing all our representations of the past, memory-makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions and memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artifacts according to their own interests<sup>103</sup>. This manipulation or rather selectivity of the memory-makers (the military officials who performed and were the

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<sup>101</sup> Filmic products are not the only sources of memory but memories of an event or a particular past might be constituted by various means such as official state discourse and policies, monuments, rites etc.

<sup>102</sup> Kansteiner, "A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", 188.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 180.

masterminds of the coup) had an apparent impact on the Turkish society at large, specifically on those young generations who do not have access to the history of 12 September at school. This amnesia is derived from a lack of material, thus the interest of the public in 12 September. This lack of interest, or rather silence, might be based on multiple reasons ranging from the traumatic side of the 12 September, repressive policies and violence of the state and military, and thus leading the society to silence and playing the three monkeys. The interaction among the abovementioned elements are confirmed by the lack of interest, knowledge and memories of the 12 September military coup d'état.

Out of 359 reviews, only 20 of them were laying emphasis on the provinciality, regional characteristics. These reviews take a positive stand on the region, their characteristics as demonstrated by reviews. Reviews demonstrate the fact that Turkish society has been somewhat rendered amnesiac when it comes to the issue of the 12 September and military authority as the policies of the military administration (particularly censorship, legal punishments) limited the ways for surfacing memories relating to this past and creating a ground for a 'collective' memory of the 12 September. Therefore, atrocities and policies of the military administration isolated individual from one another, and their memories from surfacing and being expressed, and transferred to upcoming generations. The act of remembering is very limited and it is replaced with entertainment as demonstrated by an overwhelming number of reviews.

The mood of the film and its dominantly comical character, and its effort to entertain the public surpass remembering the 12 September, which points out to the silence of society in contemporary Turkey since the military coup took place. Commercialization of a traumatic past is at issue in *Beynelmilel* as the other 12 September movies released as of 2000. This can be discerned from the reviews as well in that most reviewers do not focus on the 12 September per se and its impacts as depicted in the movie however, acting performances and quality of the movie.

This might be caused by the fact that different generations remember the same past in different manners as a particular past, remembering it and its memories are transformed due to different mnemonic devices as cinema as manifested by *Beynelmilel*. For example, memories of the 12 September will vary vastly among different generations based on whether they experienced and endured the torture and pain afflicted in prisons, or managed to evade the punishment. However, for the second and third generation of those survivors

in addition to the members of other nations, memories of this event will become more and more homogenous as these memories are reconstructed by historians or film directors, and accessed through shared representations of public narratives, images and films. Salience and evaluation of historical memories or history is shaped by generational effects. Therefore, generations and memories are mutually constitutive because of experiential commonalities and similarities in individual memories of historical events. An historical event is possible to be remembered in multifarious ways, which again takes us to the multitude and changing memories of a certain historical event.

It is also appropriate here to touch upon the fact that state policies and censorship might have had an impact on the way this past is depicted and remembered in these movies. As states policies beginning from 1980s forbade any cultural production which denigrated the state, military and criticized them. However, this censorship was abolished in 1998 although it is still possible to view the impacts of censorship on self-censorship when it comes to movies as *Beynelmilel*. Therefore, it is not wrong to state that Turkish amnesia still continues in relation to the events of the 12 September and memories. It is also possible to assert that the 12 September is reconstructed in a way to provide silence, submission and oppression. However, the silence theme is more dominant in both films and the 12 September itself has a direct impact on remembering this event as silence and oppression. I would also claim that humour does not bring up issues of serious confrontation with the 12 September, and thus emphasizes the fact that reviewers do not remember this event as much as they have to. They are silenced and they are treated as tools of state apparatus.

It is for this reason that it failed to create or even challenge the memories of this event as it is not engraved in the minds of younger generations considering the fact that young generations are the most frequent cinemagoers in Turkey (between the age of 16 and 30)<sup>104</sup>. On the other hand, policies of the state (depoliticization by means of spreading fear among the citizenry and curriculums at schools) are the biggest tools of depoliticizing, and creating an amnesiac society. Considering the fact that the past is not a given but reconstructed, it might be said that our memories (individual and collective) of past events can be in different forms ranging from remembering as trauma, myth to refer to the past. In

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<sup>104</sup> "Bilgiç, p.104" cited in Veli Boztepe, "1960 ve 1980 Askeri Darbelerinin Türk Siyasal Sinemasına Etkileri (Impacts of 1960 and 1980 Military Coup d'états on the Turkish Political Cinema)", Marmara University, 2007: 158.

the Turkish context, there are traces of the 12 September memories referred to by some reviewers. However, a general amnesia is prevalent among the reviewers as remembering or forgetting is a social phenomenon according to Halbwachs who asserts that memory is related to the way minds work together in a society and how they are structured by social arrangements. It is not possible for individuals to recollect or remember in a coherent and consistent way out of their group contexts. The Turkish context confirms this assertion as the social frameworks (determined by media, institutions, memory-makers etc) around which the collective memory is shaped does not communicate the 12 September past to the society at large. Individuals acquire collective or cultural memory by means of a common image of their past. This common image in the Turkish context is not communicated among the society at large based on the reviews of the film. However, as demonstrated by different interpretations of the film, the 12 September is depicted, and therefore remembered in multiple ways.

The reviews and reactions of the audience do not appear to confirm remembering the 12 September past. Instead, the audience is more focused on the comical and tragic side of the film instead of the 12 September past. This is a precursor to the amnesia encountered in these Turkish cases as reviewers do not have any organic or mnemonic reference to the 12 September past. Therefore, they individually are influenced by a social framework in which the 12 September does not occupy or occupies a limited amount of space in the minds of the Turkish citizenry. In Erl's account, the other level of cultural memory pertains to the symbolic order, the media, institutions and practices (such as commemorative rituals) by which social groups construct a shared past<sup>105</sup>.

As asserted by Halbwachs, a social framework connotes an implicit or explicit structure of common concerns, values, experiences, narratives<sup>106</sup>. These common or shared values and concerns cause a group (nation, ethnic group, generation etc.) to name these as "we". However, in the case of remembering the 12 September 1980 military coup, individuals do not make substantial references to the memories of this event and does not incite any discussion in relation to the coup because the collective memory (encompassed by cultural memory) of this event as depicted in the movies failed to appeal to the audience and trigger their personal memories of this event as there is a lack of internalization of the memories

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<sup>105</sup> Astrid Erl et al. (eds.) *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 4.

<sup>106</sup> Aleida Assmann, 51-52.

of this event. The collective memory has to be acquired via learning<sup>107</sup>. It is for this very reason that remembering this event is a generational issue as the memories of this event were not inculcated into the minds of the individuals at school as the history books lacked information with regard to the modern history of Turkey and the information about the military coup is deliberately omitted from the history curriculums at schools.

This appears to be one of the reasons why the memories of the 12 September failed to stick to the repository of a long-term collective memory which can be transmitted from one generation to the other. Formation of such a long-term collective memory entails elaboration and organization in various forms which include: employment of events in an affectively charged and mobilizing narrative, visual and verbal signs that serve as aids of memory, institutions of learning and the dissemination of mass media, sites and monuments that present palpable relics.<sup>108</sup> Memories of the 12 September does not exist as a part of the Turkish education system as reiterated beforehand contrary to the dissemination of memories through mass media (though not that widespread and frequent). On the other hand, it is also relevant to refer to the germination of new memorial sites as the Museum of Shame in Turkey which opened in 2011. Memories of this event, thus, appear to have been commenced very recently as proven by the trial of the military officials who staged the military coup in 1980. The abovementioned criteria provides a perfect example of how memories can be organized into a long-term collective memory. While cinematic productions and media serve as the mediating tools or instruments of transmitting memory, a lack of an institution of learning among the citizenry contributes to our understanding of the bigger picture as regards to the memories of this event in the minds of the individuals.

## **Will It Be the Last?: Silencing Society in *Bu Son Olsun***

### **Synopsis of film**

*Yaşar, Apo, Cowboy Ali, Cevat and Ertuğrul* are five homeless guys who made the Balat neighbourhood their own. Their only goals are to feed their hunger and to satisfy their only passion in life which is getting drunk with wine. They even use the political climate of the 1980s to their advantage for the search of free wine. These five homeless heroes face the curfew as the 12 September 1980 military coup is staged. But the only place they have

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 55.

is the streets which are now forbidden. As a result of series of humorous affairs the bunch finds themselves in prison as their new home.

They find themselves in an unstable world in prison with an ongoing power struggle. The prison manager *Hızır* is displeased with the newly appointed military controller *Kenan* as his boss. And the rest of the staff in the facility scheme to obtain positions of power in the new order. This creates an opportunity for *Yaşar* and his gang, and they manipulate the climate to have a comfortable atmosphere through playing on the power struggles. Affected in time by the raising tension and the disregard for human life at this new order, *Yaşar* and his friends change their mentality. They decide on an escape plan to release the wrongfully imprisoned and to reunite the lovers, *Sinan* and *Lale*.

### ***Bu Son Olsun* as a 12 September Film**

*Bu Son Olsun* has a dichotomous structure as *Beynelmilel*: before/after, inside/ outside. As a 12 September film, it treats the coup d'état as a given, and focuses on the tragicomic experiences of five homeless men who find themselves in prison in the aftermath of 1980 based on the fact that they are communists.

The film's narrative has a depoliticized character from the perspective of the main characters (homeless men). On the other hand, the characters appear to behave in a neutral way, and their plight (to make ends and meet) confirms the Turkish society's general outlook on the country and politics. As mentioned beforehand, the depoliticized side of the Turkish society is again conveyed through this film. Similar to *Beynelmilel*, *Bu Son Olsun* depicts the coup d'état from a subjective point of view but criticizes the whole society and system. This is what both movies have in common as the other popular 12 September movies.

However, one of the differences distinguishing *Bu Son Olsun* from *Beynelmilel* is related to space issues. Whilst *Beynelmilel* provides the audience with an account of the 12 September from a rural area perspective, *Bu Son Olsun*'s narrative is woven in Istanbul, the biggest city in Turkey and symbolizes proximity to the center. Therefore, the outside force (military or the state) is closer to the citizenry more than ever, and the city does not represent a joyful, happy corner of the country as it is in *Beynelmilel*. Place or space in this sense contributes to creating a different atmosphere in *Bu Son Olsun* than *Beynelmilel*. In

this sense, the film contributes to the idea of multiple collective memories of the same historical event.

*Bu Son Olsun* does not undertake a nostalgic past as opposed to its mood representing the innocent and childish citizenry (represented by the homeless men). Its tragicomical mood and use of humour as a tool to remind individuals of the 12 September is comparative to *Beynelmilel*'s mood which ridicules the military authority and power as a way to handle this traumatic past. As demonstrated by the reception or reviews, comedy supersedes trauma and remembering, and its impact on the collective remembering among the Turkish citizenry is not completely challenging and does bring up matters related to the 12 September past. The mood of *Bu Son Olsun* and its comical elements lead to accepting the event not a serious but comical event considering the fact that comedy is more dominant in the narrative of the film, which causes the 12 September to be remembered as an unserious and comic event. All the same, *Bu Son Olsun* accommodates a political and critical stance towards the military authority and contemporary Turkey. It appears to have a more left alignment however, it holds space for the rightist ideology represented by a group of five individuals who share the same destiny with the leftists in the prison. Nevertheless, any potential conflict between the leftists and rightists is symbolically resolved by means of a collaborative escape plan.

As *Beynelmilel*, the childish citizens are represented (in *Bu Son Olsun*) by the homeless five men and this reveals patterns of national identity by focusing on innocence and childish adults. But in order for memory to be something than a fantasy, what we remember must have taken place somewhere<sup>109</sup>. Places matter as cinematic products have the power to essentially transform or change our mnemonic perceptions of particular places converting them into sites of memory and forgetting<sup>110</sup>. Namely the use of space (Istanbul and the prison) is a direct criticism of the state (since the narrative takes place in the center), and the metaphor of prison is an allusion to the imprisonment of the society at large by the current government policies. As opposed to the happy and light-hearted provincial town, the main source of the problems are related to the urban city and control of the state over the people more easily than ever. However, in *Bu Son Olsun* the outside force (the military) fails to disrupt the childish and innocent behaviour of the citizenry. It

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<sup>109</sup> Gerome Turc, "Memory of places, places of memory: a halbwachslan socio-ethnography of memory", 148.

<sup>110</sup> Kurasawa, 42.

attributes a protective and hospitable value to the provincial town life of the past which functions as a shell protecting its innocence from the outside force (the military and state)<sup>111</sup>. *Beynelmilel* does not put so much emphasis on the past itself but on the remembrance of the past from today's perspective.

### Communicative Memory

Despite the fact that the narrative takes place in an urban setting, the plight of the leftists have local, rural elements. This is confirmed by a traditional and rural instrument *saz*, and use of both regional and urban sounds woven into the film's narrative. Traditional, regional motifs hold significance for conveying the plight of the leftists and their perspective considering the revolution they were planning to stage. The leftist focus on the society at large and they believe that everyone is equal, and this can be discerned from the fact that a young socialist, leftist couple hosts the five homeless men and lectures them in relation to what has been going on in the country and thus attracting attention to liberal policies by drawing upon simple examples as the reason for the rise on goods prices etc by the state.

The words 'fascism' and 'revolution' are two recurring words throughout the whole movie as the focal point of the film is the political reasons and process of the 12 September. However, this process is not communicated as a whole but through fragmented scenes of military intervention in public life and thus apprehension of the 'fascists' labelled by the military forces.

The military discourse focused on communism again as one of the main ideologies of the time and which led to the conflict between the leftists and rightists. In addition, there are scenes in which the military authorities exert physical violence on the prisoners. However, these scenes are not explicitly shown to the audience. The audience is precluded from witnessing physical violence in action. They are only hinted at the fact that the prisoners are in trouble.

References to the liberal order in contemporary Turkey are frequent throughout the whole movie. To exemplify, as the representative of state power and authority, the prison manager makes direct references to anarchy and communism. On the other hand, fascism

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<sup>111</sup> Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, 28-29.

and revolution are highlighted, and these words are highly discernible as they are coded on building walls. On the other hand, elements related to Turkish national identity are revealed in *Bu Son Olsun* as would be in all other films. Particularly the prison manager, doctor and colonel serve as the ubiquitous representatives and agents of state power.

Another example for communicative memory comes from the leftist-rightist compromise in prison. Despite the fact that they were in opposition to one another, these two groups end up collaborating for their freedom. The narrative seems to be neutral towards both groups however, the leftists seem to be clever, responsibility-ridden, rational whereas the rightists are portrayed as irrational, conservative and uneducated. As *Beynelmilel*'s, the narrative of *Bu Son Olsun* favours the leftists over the rightists despite its so-called neutral perspective on the 12 September, thus construing the event from a leftist perspective.

On the other hand, treating the 12 September as a given causes the narrative of the movie to fail to convey what the 12 September is. As a matter of fact, the 12 September as a traumatic event does not go beyond the comedy prevalent in the film.

### Memory of Objects

Pierre Nora seems to confirm Halbwachs' opinion that history is dead whilst memory is alive<sup>112</sup>. He contends that history and memory are opposed terms in perceiving the past and points out that memory is embodied in living societies. He highlights the materiality of memory and how it is reinforced by a sense of place by stating that it sticks to places, therefore it is living and continuous as long as it is transmitted to other generations. According to Pierre Nora, memory clings to places as history to events. Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image and object. We do not possess any organic relationship to history. It is for this reason that it is considered 'dead'.

In order to set up a relevant setting in relation to the importance of space in memory-making and proximity of the center to the people, the film is embellished with politically imbued costumes reminiscent of the 1980s Turkey. As in *Beynelmilel*, the leftist groups are recognized through their moustache, khaki coats as opposed to the rightist groups who wear a different shape of moustache. In this way, the main political rationale (as reiterated by the military administration in the 1980s) behind the coup d'état is brought to the

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<sup>112</sup> Guynn, *Writing History In Film*, 168-173.

audience's attention from both political groups' perspective as opposed to *Beynelmilel* which leans to depicting the 12 September from a socialist, leftist point of view. On the other hand, the space issue in *Bu Son Olsun* is rendered as a fixed symbol and, therefore objectified element for memory-making in the movie. The urban city, *İstanbul*, is an important symbol and object, for it conveys the idea of trauma and symbolizes the state authority.

Nevertheless, it should be highlighted at this point that the film does not contain rich elements of collective memory etched on objects. There are certain and obvious examples of objects which lead the audience to ponder upon a certain meaning evoked by a certain object such as the uniform. The uniform is laden with a meaning referring to the power relations and power struggles between the officials as seen in the scene where the prison manager is intrigued to wear the colonel's uniform, and thus exert his power on the prisoners. The uniform confirms the state power and authority over the society, and this sheds light on the current political situation in Turkey considering the democracy issues (particularly apprehension of thousands of journalists and tens of academicians) and state power in public life.

Contrary to *Beynelmilel*, *Bu Son Olsun* does not rig its narrative with many objects laden with memories of the 12 September. Communicative memory appears to be prevalent in the narrative of the film. However, it might be asserted that the use of certain objects such as old newspapers, magazines, posters etc. point at nostalgic elements which hint at the use of memory in a different sense via objects (in order to establish the 1980 past through popular objects as newspaper, magazines etc to attract the audience's attention). However, the newspaper also functions as a communicative device to convey the political events taking place in the 80s such as the *Maraş Massacre* in which thousands of people were killed by the police in an uprising against the state.

The prison represents the power of the state and its authority and suppression. Turkish society is trapped, restricted under the roof of the state power and authority. Nevertheless, the innocent and depoliticized character of the society is communicated by means of the depoliticized discourse of the main characters. The characters hardly make any reference to the 12 September, fascism, communism and revolution discourse.

On the other hand, *Atatürk's* portraits (the founder of the Republic of Turkey dressed in military garments) is another cursor to the dominant and mainstream military discourse in Turkey. Violent side of the 12 September is not ubiquitous in the film narrative. The audience is only hinted at the violence and deprived of torture or beating scenes in the film. As reiterated before, memories of an historical event depicted in a filmic product, while reminiscing the past, endow the audiences with a perspective on the present. A conversation between one of the main characters and the prison manager shed light on the current situation in Turkey. This conversation is as follows:

*Prison manager: "How are you?"*

*Old homeless man: "Like the homeland".*

*Prison manager: "What is wrong with the homeland? Everybody is doing fine except for a bunch of anarchists".*

### **Reality On the Ground Two: Comparison of My Readings To the Reviews**

*Bu Son Olsun* reviewers seem to be making direct references to the 12 September, its impacts and its results. Nevertheless, these reviews do not go beyond liking the movie and finding acting good etc. For this very reason, it might be said that the movie failed to do what it really wanted to convey and ignite a discussion among the Turkish audience. However, it should also be underlined that the quantity of the reviews do not suffice to make a huge generalization considering the reviews on two prominent movie databases which are *IMDB*, *beyazperde.com* and *sinemalar.com*. However, the facebook page of the film seem to confirm these findings compared to the ones found on the abovementioned databases.

On the other hand, it is discernible from the reviews that the reviewers made more references to the 12 September as a tragicomic period which goes hand in hand with the film itself. Tragicomicness, coup d'état, comedy, sadness, dramatic, revolution are among the words used in the reviews however, they are not more than five fingers in a hand. Comedy, drama appear to be the most-referred words compared to the words 12 September, revolution, left-right. In this respect, the film seems to have achieved its goal as *Beynelmilel*: to make the audience laugh and think. Nevertheless, both films fail to trigger a discussion related to 12 September or even question this period.

It is not wrong to state that generational differences seem to have had an influence in the six years after *Beynelmilel* was released. There have been many political and social developments in Turkey such as the commitment to the EU accession, democratization efforts (an opening for such minorities as the Kurdish, the Alewites) and trial of the perpetrators or ‘stagers’ of the military coup in 1980s. Despite the fact that the media has covered the military coup trial in their daily newsfeed, there was too little interest in the trial. This points to the generational issue and the impact of collective memory on the society at large. As mentioned beforehand, in order for collective memory to have a long-term effect, there are certain criteria as determined by Aleida Assmann. One of these is educational, which is, in my eyes, the most significant. The issue of education (and thus whether the audience has been exposed to or experienced the 1980 military coup or not) demonstrates the lack of memories of this event and how depoliticized the audience behaves as regards to their reviews online. This is confirmed by *Bu Son Olsun*’s narrative which depicts the Turkish citizenry as a depoliticized and childish society.

The attempts to ignite a discussion about this issue and create a collective memory among the individuals appear to have failed as demonstrated by the reviews which focus on the acting, quality of the film. Out of 224 comments, only 58 contain direct references to the genre of the film (categorizing it as *comedy-drama*), 15 to *the 12 September*, 5 to *revolution*, 4 to *left-right conflicts* in 1980s, 4 to *fascism*, 1 to *history*, 4 to *political*, and the rest of the comments make direct references to the quality of the film and acting.

One of the reasons leading to this type of outcome might be the fact that torture and beating scenes were left out of the film, and instead left to the imagination of the audience. The reviews and reactions of the audience do not appear to confirm or challenge the memories of this event among the society at large. The focus of the audience is more on the tragicomic aspect of the film than the 12 September itself. Impacts of the 12 September and the state policies demonstrate that the Turkish citizenry bear collective amnesia rather than collective remembering. Despite mnemonic opulences in *Bu Son Olsun*, collective remembering does not occur as a social phenomenon whilst collective amnesia prevails among the reviewers. This confirms Halbwachs’s assertion that memory is related to the way minds work together in a society and how they are structured by social arrangements.

Considering the fact that the way the 12 September is depicted in *Bu Son Olsun* influences the way individuals perceive, remember or forget this seminal and traumatic event, it is

crucial to highlight the fact that *Bu Son Olsun* does not challenge the memories of this event and engage in a political discussion or ignite any challenging ideas related to the 12 September. *Bu Son Olsun* confirms the widespread attitude of the reviewers. The audience does not appear to be focusing on the 12 September and its tragicomic impacts on the society at large, and the depoliticized society is once again confirmed by the reviews which do not contain serious references to the 12 September past per se.

## Conclusion

By means of collective memory theory to construe how the depiction of the 12 September military coup in *Beynelmilel* and *Bu Son Olsun* are reflective of those held in society, this study has analyzed collective attitudes expressed via cinema to determine the changes or stabilities in these attitudes. In this study I have benefited from concepts associated with memory studies, particularly collective memory, cultural memory, objects of memory and communicative memory. Drawing on these concepts, I have applied a qualitative content analysis and an interpretative approach to two cinematic products released in 2006 and 2012, namely *Bu Son Olsun* and *Beynelmilel*. I have also demonstrated the fact that the 12 September has had an impact on the communication between generations by means of restricting, controlling or regulating information and memory. I have also found out how both cinematic products illuminate the current political and social context in Turkey. Furthermore, investigating the representations of the 12 September in the films allowed me to spot and evaluate the existence of common elements, symbols and images in relation to the 12 September. It is discernible from both films that they do not constitute a repository for ‘collective memory’ but *fragments* of individual memories which are made public. Long-term collective memory elements appear to be lacking in the Turkish case, which hints at the multiple representations, amnesia and fragmented memories of the event. Fragmented memories of the 12 September is mostly put forward by *Bu Son Olsun*’s fragmented narrative.

These cultural products serve as representations of social and historical details of Turkish culture during the 12 September military coup. Through my close analysis of the films drawing on the abovementioned memory concepts and reflection upon their reception, I have been able to track the influences of the films on the memories of the 12 September in the public sphere. This way I have developed an understanding of the depiction of 12

September and its reception. Responses of the audience, the cinematic products themselves amount to a better and deeper understanding of the possible readings available to audiences beyond this particular film text, and also provides a context for the analysis of the reactions to *Beynelmilel* and *Bu Son Olsun*. As seen from the reception of both cinematic products, amnesia instead of collective remembering is prevalent among the Turkish audience exposed to both these films. The memories of the 12 September do not appear to be challenged at all. These might be related to multiple reasons, which is another research avenue waiting to be discovered.

The depoliticized character of the Turkish society as depicted in both films is again confirmed by the reception of them, and I have demonstrated that the way both these cinematic products depict the past has not triggered any serious discussion in relation to the memories or remembering this particular past. These might be caused by several reasons ranging from the generation issue to the way 12 September is depicted. Both films do not have a deeper insight into the 12 September past. As mentioned beforehand, formation of a long-term collective memory requires organization and elaboration such as the institutions of learning and the dissemination of mass media, sites and monuments etc. Long-term 12 September memories have not been able to be established as the event has been suppressed and hidden from the education system and not disseminated in public as much as it should be. Therefore, it might be concluded that remembering or rather collective amnesia is a generational issue caused by the above reasons.

Analysis of film texts and their reception provides a way to evaluate cinema's impact on or confirmation of cultural memory. This methodology facilitated the examination of both cinematic products in the time of their production so as to show how these popular products serve as a group of intertextual palimpsests of remembering and forgetting, and are constantly redefining, reimagining the past. Although the films reflect upon the 12 September, they take different perspectives in depicting this past and do not provide the audience with a deeper insight into this traumatic past. As products of popular culture, these films also reflect upon the audience demands (comedy, tragedy and drama). Despite the fact that Turkey has stepped further to the arms of democracy by bringing the perpetrators of the 12 September to trial, there are still issues related to democracy, repression and silencing. For this reason, both movies can be categorized as contemporary critiques of the political and social situation in contemporary Turkey. These films serve as a looking-glass into the recent history of Turkey as well as demonstrating social, political

and cultural elements. Analysis of these films and their reception is crucial in terms of identifying shifts in cultural memory, documenting these shifts in understanding certain histories and probing intertextual shifts which elucidate how cinematic products might be interpreted or comprehended by their audiences. The memory boom reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue, and to reassess it as part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider historical perspective. It also provides affinities, loyalties and identity in a future post-individualist age.

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