A transboundary cinema : Tunç Okan’s trilogy of im/migration

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Chapter II

The Bus: A Film on the Road

Okan made his debut as a director in 1974 with the feature film *Otobüs* (The Bus). *The Bus* revolves around the experiences of nine illegal migrants from Turkey—a largely pre-industrial country at the time— in the modern, post-industrial European capital Stockholm. They are abandoned in an old crumbling bus by their fellow countryman, the bus driver, at the most central public square of the city, *Sergels Torg*, without money and travel documents. The driver turns out to be a human trafficker working for an international human trafficking gang. Being stuck both in a bus, and in a country unknown to them, to which they travelled illegally, the abandoned passengers wait hopefully but fearfully in the bus until their basic needs do not allow them to do so any longer. When they open the door and decide to leave the bus in search of food, water, and toilet, the city responds by opening the Pandora's box, unleashing all its evils onto them. Until they are discovered by the police at the end of the film and forcefully removed from the vehicle, the only secure place known to them in this foreign country, the passengers go through a number of challenging experiences. While some of the passengers make it to the end, others either die, or are caught by the police over the course of the film.

The Bus is a road movie, albeit an unorthodox one. The road movie has never been a popular genre in Turkey's more

than a century-old cinema. *The Bus* is one of the very few road movies the country's cinema has ever produced, and furthermore, it represents a turning point in the country's cinema's approach to the genre. *The Bus* represents a total rupture, not only with the few road movies that preceded it but, more importantly, with Turkey's popular cinema of the period, as a whole. *The Bus* is a forerunner that influenced and radically transformed road movies succeeding it, such as Ökten's *The Herd* (1979), and Gören's *The Road* (1982), both of which are better known internationally than *The Bus* itself.

Okan's debut film is not a well-known film in Turkey, and even less so in Europe. In this chapter, I take this as my starting point and try to answer the following questions: In what sense is *The Bus* an unorthodox road movie, and how does it relate to the Turkish and European (art) road movies of the period? In order to find answers to these questions, I use a comparative approach. After looking at how a road movie is defined both in Hollywood and European contexts, I examine how *The Bus* can be read against the background of the road movie genre defined by these two different traditions, and explain why *The Bus*, as an unusual road movie, has not received the attention it deserves. In this examination, the film's fluid quality will be given particular attention because, even though road movies are known to be transgeneric, by making a road movie that features very little actual journeying, and using elements that are commonly associated with distinct and seemingly incompatible genres, Okan brings the already flexible limits of the genre to a breaking point.

The Bus has so far received little attention and has been left largely unstudied. Other than a very few rudimentary texts that provide an introduction to the film, not much has been written about it. In this chapter, I intend to remedy this and provide a close reading of the film; by doing this, I will explain why the film has been largely ignored.

An Unwelcome Debut

The Bus is an independent film, financed with the personal savings and borrowings of Okan, a Turkish émigré to Switzerland at the time. Okan got his inspiration from a real-life event reported in a newspaper article published some ten years before the film's completion. Apart from a short episode that takes place in Germany, which was added to the film a couple of years after the film's initial completion and public screening, *The Bus* was shot entirely in Sweden with the participation of predominantly Turkish im/migrant amateur actors and crew, many of whom were found through newspaper announcements.[92]

The Bus met its first audience and some of its future distributors at the Cannes Film Festival in France, though not as a part of the festival's official programme, but through private screenings.[93] Despite being the debut film of an unknown and inexperienced director, *The Bus* was subsequently screened at several prestigious international film festivals, where it garnered significant positive reactions. It won several awards, such as the Special Jury Prize at the Human Rights Film Festival in Strasbourg (France), the Don Quijote Award given by the FICC (International Federation of Film Societies) at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (then Czechoslovakia, now Czechia), and the Best First Film Award at the Taormina International Film Festival (Italy). At the International Film Festival of Santarém (Portugal), *The Bus* competed with Akira Kurosawa's Oscar-winning 1975 film *Dersu Uzala*, and received the Best Film Award.

Despite the recognition and success at international festivals, *The Bus* could not be screened in Turkey until 1977 due to a ban imposed on the film by the censorship authority that was active at the time. In its official report, the *Film Kontrol Komisyonu* (Film Control Commission) claimed that the film misrepresents and humiliates Turkish society. In an effort to legitimise its decision to ban the film, the commission cites fifteen different arguments. In one of these, the commission refers to a scene in which

some of the characters are seen, first, urinating into a frozen lake, and later, dining. The commission finds this scene "incompatible with the customs and traditions" of the Turks because the characters start dining "without washing their hands".[94] Furthermore, the commission refers to the same dining scene and claims that the film is "making fun of the diet of the Turks" because the passengers eat "only stale dry bread and onion".[95] Additionally, the commission refers to the scene in which the driver of the bus panics and escapes from the police shortly after entering central Stockholm. According to the commission, the scene is unacceptable because the driver "turns right and enters" into a specific part of the city "despite the traffic signs" prohibiting him to do so.[96] The report claims that the scene represents "Turks as not obeying the traffic rules".[97] Owing to these and other no less absurd arguments, the film was not only barred from screening in Turkey but also from export, for almost three years until the commission's decision was revoked by a court.

Despite the commission's ruling, the film could, fortunately, be screened in many countries, such as France, the Soviet Union, Iran, Czechoslovakia, and Italy, while it was still banned in Turkey. In these countries, *The Bus* received diverse reactions. In Switzerland, according to the publicity brochure of the film, it met a destiny similar to the one in Turkey, and was banned.[98] Even though the brochure and, more importantly, an article

published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* suggest that the film was banned in Switzerland due to its content, a recent book on Okan made it clear that this was not really the case. The film, at least technically, had never been banned in Switzerland, but neither could it be screened freely in the country due to the bureaucratic reluctance to recognise the film as a Swiss production.[99] According to Okan, Swiss authorities refused to recognise the film as a Swiss production and demanded it to be imported to the country even though the film was financed, produced, edited, and distributed in Switzerland by a Swiss company, Helios Film, owned by Okan himself. Okan is convinced that the Swiss authorities' reluctance was the result of racist and xenophobic attitudes in the country's cinema circles, just like the fact that he has never been recognised as a Swiss filmmaker, despite having been long recognised as a Swiss dentist, and a citizen.[100]

> I had lived in Switzerland for a very long time, and I made all four of my films while I was living in that country. Indeed, I still work in Switzerland, but they have never accepted me as a Swiss director. They have not given a penny to help me with my cinema. All my requests for support were turned down. I could never become a Swiss director. (…) However, I was easily recognised and accepted as a successful dentist. I never had a problem with this matter. As a doctor, no one ever told me 'you are a foreigner'. They still don't. When this doctor wants to make art, however, even if he carries a Swiss passport, the ones who distribute the resources for support, or the bureaucrats who make decisions on this matter cannot accept this reality. (…) After all my experiences, I can say with certainty that there has been Swiss racism against a Turkish director.[101]

Despite the risk of a possible jail sentence if caught, Okan smuggled his film into Turkey in a handbag to avoid the country's tight film import regulations. The film was welcomed by

many critics and audiences alike once the ban was lifted and it was freed from censorship. However, recalling its experience in Switzerland, the film also created confusion regarding the question as to whether the film could be considered a Turkish film, or not.[102] In the eyes of the Film Control Commission officials, there was no doubt that *The Bus* was a Turkish film since they put it through the censorship control as such. However, several film critics and national film festivals along with the Tashkent International Film Festival refused to recognise the film as a Turkish film.[103] Considering the fact that there had been other films preceding *The Bus* that were made abroad yet were still considered to be Turkish films, it can be argued that one of the causes of the confusion was the unspecified identities of the film's characters. On top of this, one can add the film's unusual narration and filmic aesthetic as possible reasons. The language of the extremely limited dialogues, unspecific dialects, generic appearances and conducts suggest that the illegal travellers are likely from some rural part of Turkey, or possibly Kurdish, as argued by film scholar Iordanova.[104] But the characters do not show any features that are specific enough to sustain any of these claims. Furthermore, in an interview he gave in 1977, Okan states that the "Turkishness of the passengers is a coincidence" thus making the possible national or ethnic origins of the passengers irrelevant for the film.[105] In the publicity brochure of the film, Okan returns to this question and further articulates his position, stating that the illegal passengers are "the villagers of the Third World who hope to become foreign workers in a consumer society", arguing that they could have very well been Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, or Arab rather than Turkish, and this would not have changed anything in the film.[106]

Despite the intention of the now-defunct Swedish film distribution company Europafilm AB, *The Bus* could not be screened in Sweden. One of the emigrant amateur actors of the film, Hasan Gül, who still lives in Sweden, confidently asserts that this was due to threats of a bomb attack from the anti-mi-

grant extreme right-wing groups active in the country at the time.[107] Noting the strong public support enjoyed by the leftist political movements and governments at the time in Sweden, Gül reasons that the company's decision not to screen the film must have come after a calculation that a physical attack that might have been carried out by the threatening extremists would have been too big a risk to take for the sake of a low-budget independent debut film by an unknown filmmaker.[108]

Irrespective of its characters' possible national or ethnic origins, *The Bus* is an important film for cinema history, as it is one of the earliest films that focus on the question of illegal migration and human trafficking. Other films that share this focus are films like Anthony Mann's didactic propaganda film *Border Incident* (1949), which looks at the illegal workforce migration from Mexico to the United States from the perspective of two undercover police officers who are tasked to bring down a human trafficking mafia, Pietro Germi's 1950 Neorealist film *Il Cammino della speranza* (The Path of Hope), which follows the illegal journey of a group of poverty-stricken Sicilian villagers to France with the hope of finding a better life, and the anti-communist informant Elia Kazan's 1963 America-glorifying film *America America*, which follows an Ottoman Greek in his unceasing struggle to immigrate from the crumbling Ottoman Empire to Kazan's idealised USA.[109] Furthermore, *The Bus* is one of the earliest of rare films that was made by an im/migrant focusing on im/migration. Okan shares this quality with another Istanbulite, Elia Kazan. *The Bus* offers an interesting look at the issues of moving, mobility, migration, trafficking, borders, and border crossing long before these issues were of popular interest for cinema or academia.

A Turkish Road Movie

Although it features very little actual journeying, given that the journey does not reach its end-point when the bus halts at an unintended location, there are good reasons to read *The Bus*

against the background of the road movie genre.

The road movie is not a common genre in Turkey's cinema. There are only a handful of road movies made in the country's cinema history. The majority of these films were made after the production of *The Bus.* I could only find three road movies that precede Okan's film, namely Atıf Yılmaz's 1958 film *Bu Vatanın Çocukları* (This Land's Children), Osman F. Seden's 1959 film *Düşman Yolları Kesti* (The Enemy Has Blocked the Roads), and Nevzat Pesen's 1964 film *Hızlı Yaşayanlar* (Those Who Live Fast). In the only written source on the subject, film archivist Agâh Özgüç does not consider the first two of these films as road movies, and marks Pesen's film as the first and the only road movie made in Turkey before 1974.[110] Yılmaz's film follows the journey of two messengers on horseback tasked with delivering a secret message to Mustafa Kemal during Turkey's War of Independence. In the film *The Enemy Has Blocked the Roads*, which has a similar storyline, Osman F. Seden focuses on the dangerous journey of a military officer who travels to Anatolia from Istanbul, which is under occupation of British, French, and Italian forces, in order to deliver vitally important documents during the War of Independence. Nevzat Pesen's film distinguishes itself from these two preceding films with a different storyline. *Those Who Live Fast* is not a war film; it follows the daily struggles of four pickup truck drivers who deliver newspapers to rural Turkey for rival newspaper companies.

Even though the journey, and being on the road, takes up a significant place in these films, all of them are typical Yeşilçam films. As explained previously, Yeşilçam represents a particular approach to cinema which not only mimics, but at times outright copies, classical Hollywood approaches. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as "Turkish Hollywood". Yeşilçam is an escapist cinema. It relies heavily on easily identifiable, clear-cut good and bad characters, star figures, linear narration, and a neat resolution of conflicts, most often achieved by a happy ending. Like many Yeşilçam melodramas, these three

road movies revolve around classical Yeşilçam plots, and utilise classical narration strategies. This can be easily observed in Pesen's film. Like many Yeşilçam melodramas, Pesen's film develops around a love story as two of the drivers are in love with the same female character who works at a petrol station at which the drivers have a stopover every night. Like many other Yeşilçam films, *Those Who Live Fast* is also a star film, meaning that it relies heavily on a star figure—in this particular case, the iconic Ayhan Işık—both in the development of its story and its marketing. The film follows a linear narration leading to a typical happy ending with the marriage of Işık and his love interest after the driver's rival dies in a traffic accident. *Those Who Live Fast* surprisingly generates a kind of low profile social commentary in the background. It lightly touches upon class relations between workers and capitalists, as well as the hunger for speed and efficiency of modern times. This critical perspective, although light, is not typical of Yeşilçam melodramas. As explained in the previous chapter, the 1960s was the period in Turkey's cinema history that social realism became more common in films, thanks to the relative atmosphere of freedom granted by the new constitution. Made in 1964, Pesen's film can be observed to incorporate some of the social realist themes and attitudes of that period.

Despite being a film of a former Yeşilçam star, *The Bus* has little in common with either Yeşilçam cinema, or with the preceding road movies made in the country. It is boldly different from the preceding road movies made in Turkey, not only in its topic, but also in its narration strategy, and filmic aesthetic. Unlike Yeşilçam road movies, it is neither a melodrama, nor does it revolve around a love story. Furthermore, it does not have a clear storyline, and dramatic development in the classical sense, let alone a neat resolution of conflict, or a happy ending. Although it has relatively clear-cut good and bad characters, unlike Yeşilçam road melodramas, it is not a star film that takes shape around a star figure. This makes it difficult for the viewer to identify with any of the characters.

Another aspect, which sets *The Bus* apart from the pre-

ceding Yeşilçam road melodramas is the film's sociopolitically aware and critical attitude. In this regard, one could see *Those Who Live Fast* as an exception. However, it should be noted that Okan's film is much bolder than Pesen's film in its approach to, and critique of, the sociopolitical issues, such as workforce migration, human trafficking, alienation, and commodity fetishism, it addresses; and places them at its centre of focus. As stated by Okan on multiple occasions, he was only able to make his films thanks to the fact that he was financially independent and making these films in countries that were free from censorship.

The American Road Movie

Although there exist a number of important films that give considerable attention and space to journeying and/or being on the road, in his influential study *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie*, David Laderman does not consider any film preceding Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*, and Dennis Hopper's 1969 film *Easy Rider* as road movie in "any deliberate or self-conscious sense".[111] Though recognising their importance as precursors in the development of the road movie genre, Laderman prefers to call these films—among the most notable of which are Mervyn LeRoy's 1932 film *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, William Wellman's 1933 film *Wild Boys of the Road*, Fritz Lang's 1937 film *You Only Live Once*, and John Ford's 1940 Steinbeck adaptation *The Grapes of Wrath*—"social conscience films" instead.[112] For Laderman, these are not road movies because "the road becomes coded as a brutal necessity for survival and escape from oppression", and is "not glorified as an alternative lifestyle or freedom from society's conventions" in these works.[113]

Bonnie and Clyde, and more so *Easy Rider*, represent a radical departure from the preceding road movies. Penn's and Hopper's films distinguish themselves from the preceding works with their sharp social and political criticism, countercultural rebellion against conservative social norms, and the characters' distinct motivations to hit the road.[114]

Bonnie and Clyde, which predates *Easy Rider* by just two

years, follows the journey of two characters: a petty criminal on parole and a waitress bored to death by her job. The characters hit the road and start driving aimlessly after they decide to rob a grocery store, simply because they are bored. More than once, the couple encounters the chance to stop driving and return to their boring, but nonetheless safer, daily lives, however they choose to continue driving and robbing banks until they are violently killed by law enforcement officers.

Easy Rider revolves around two bikers who start their journey from an undisclosed location, which appears to be somewhere in Mexico, and hit the road aiming to reach a carnival in New Orleans on time, after successfully smuggling cocaine into the USA and quickly swapping it for cash. The bikers drive on empty highways—for many, the symbol of freedom—passing through picturesque landscapes surrounded by deserts and mountains. As one of the bikers declares at one point, their journey is "all about freedom". After reaching their intended destination and joining the carnival, the bikers continue driving aimlessly until they are shot and killed by a random *redneck* travelling in a pickup truck.

Bonnie and Clyde and *Easy Rider* share the quality of being on the road as a free choice. In these films, the characters "travel for travel's sake", and the travel functions "as an 'end' in itself" instead of serving a practical function.[115] This feature is much more pronounced in *Easy Rider* because, even though the characters decide to hit the road out of boredom and strong yearning for freedom and rebellion in the first place in *Bonnie and Clyde*, after their first robbery they are forced to keep on driving in order to escape the pursuing law enforcement officers. The characters in *Easy Rider*, on the other hand, are never forced to be on the road. They are on the road because they choose to do so. This condition is not previously employed explicitly in any other American film. Preceding films, without exception, revolve around characters who are forced to travel due to different circumstances, often of a social nature. For instance, while LeRoy's

and Lang's characters hit the road to escape from law enforcement officers with the hope of avoiding jail, Wellman's and Ford's characters travel due to poverty, with the hope of finding a better life.

The specific format that is epitomised by Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and Hopper's *Easy Rider* is the product of a new era in Hollywood, which emerged during the late 1960s.[116] The period between the late 1960s and 1980s is regarded as a special period in the US film history, during which a new generation of young filmmakers entered the industry and produced films that deviated from the classical norms of the Hollywood studio system established in the late 1920s that lasted until the late 1960s without much significant change. The period came after a series of factors brought the classical Hollywood era to an end. I prefer to call this period *New Hollywood*, following Thomas Elsaesser.[117] The classical Hollywood studios' failure to capture the attention of a new, young, and educated post-war generation, raising popularity of European and Japanese commercial as well as arthouse films, and the advent and popularity of television can be counted among these factors. Abandonment of the highly restrictive Motion Picture Production Code in 1968, which determined meticulously what a Hollywood film could and could not show since 1930, and the US Supreme Court antitrust case that ended the Hollywood studios' long-standing practice of owning their own theatres as well as holding exclusive rights to decide which theatres could screen their films, should also be added to the list. Much like *the* event that started the period, *the* event that ended the New Hollywood era is still a subject of debate. While some point to the release of Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde* as *the* event that started the period, some others point out Mike Nichols' film of the same year, *The Graduate*, or the abandonment of the Production Code in 1968. Likewise, while some, such as Thomas Elsaesser, considers Roman Polanski's 1974 film *Chinatown*, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1975), and Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975) as *the* films that ended the period, others

mark "the end of the period with the release of writer-director Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* in 1980, one of the worst box office failures in the history of American cinema".[118] Despite the unsettled discussions surrounding it, the period is an important and influential event in the history of American cinema. What Laderman considers to be *the* road movie is one of the most important manifestations of this influence.

Although it emerged as a distinct genre in the late 1960s, what Laderman considers as the road movie is built on the elements created or perfected by many different classical Hollywood genres, such as the western, gangster films, film noir, screwball comedies, and family melodramas.[119] This can be observed both in *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider*, as Penn's film openly recalls gangster films, while Hopper's recalls the westerns. Even though it corporates many different elements associated with different genres, what distinguishes the road movie from the preceding films, as Laderman observes, is the fact that the road movie develops around the core of "rebellion against conservative social norms", follows character(s) who travel due to free choice, and utilises "the journey as a means of cultural critique".[120] According to Laderman, the road movie genre begins only when the protagonist of *The Grapes of Wrath*, "Tom Joad's son comes of age as a hippie", hops on a motorcycle out of free will, and "recrosses America" in resistance to the conservative values in society, just like the characters in *Easy Rider*.[121]

On the European Roads

Although what Laderman considers as the road movie is often argued to be a "peculiarly American" genre "that catches peculiarly American dreams, tensions, and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of other nations", the most "distinctly American" features of the post-war American road movie, such as generic ambivalence, critical attitude, and aimless mobility are, in fact, "imported" and can be traced back to French New Wave cinema, particularly to Jean-Luc Godard's

1960 film *Breathless*.[122] The road movie in Europe is shaped by significantly different motivations, goals, figures, signifiers, and strategies. Europe offers a diverse body of road movies that have developed "alongside the Hollywood road movie, being influenced by and influencing it at the same time" thanks to the contribution of auteurs like Bergman, Antonioni, Wenders, Fellini, Godard, and Kaurismäki among others.[123]

> Generally speaking, European road movies seem less interested than their American counterparts in following the desperately rambling criminal exploits of an outlaw couple; or, in romanticizing the freedom of the road as a political alternative expressing youth rebellion. Rather, the exploration of psychological, emotional, and spiritual states becomes more important to the Continental drive. Overall the European road movie associates road travel with introspection rather than violence and danger. (…) The European road movie foregrounds the *meaning* of the quest journey more than the *mode* of transport; revelation and realization receive more focus than the act of driving. (…) Instead of emphasizing the high-speed, thrill-seeking driving typical of American road movies, these films emphasize introspection and reflection; passage through the landscape becomes an allegory of a lost soul seeking the meaning of life.[124]

As Devin Orgeron observes, many European road movies utilise the journey in such a way that the vehicle functions as a "sort of mobile psychoanalytic couch".[125] Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film *Smultronstället* (Wild Strawberries) is one of the most iconic examples of such films. *Wild Strawberries* follows the long car drive of an elderly professor from Stockholm to the southern Swedish city of Lund. The film is more concerned with the main character's journey into the past than the physical car drive itself, as the professor revisits memories and reflects upon his past experiences during the journey.

The vehicle of choice is another significant difference between the European and the New Hollywood road movies. In most New Hollywood road movies, as well as in some classical Hollywood ones, the characters use automobiles and motorcycles to travel, whereas in European road movies, the vehicle of choice is often "public transport (trains, buses), if not hitchhiking or travelling on foot".[126] Obviously, the vehicle of choice in a particular road movie can vary greatly depending on the specificity of the journey and the characters, however, unlike in Hollywood road movies, in European road movies, one cannot observe the same insistence on driving a private car or motorcycle. Hollywood's insistence on, or rather, obsession with the private car or motorcycle is an expected and understandable result of the myth of freedom that in part builds on the individualistic narrations of Western films. Indeed, this individualistic myth of freedom is not only central to the Hollywood road movie, it is also one of the founding myths of the United States of America as a nation, the so-called "land of the free". Hollywood is one of the most important channels through which this myth is maintained, re-interpreted, and disseminated. Furthermore, it should not come as a surprise to see the rise of road movies revolving around automobile or motorcycle driving individuals in post-war Hollywood given the fact that Hollywood is the popular cinema of a nation that built the Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways network, and aggressively promoted car ownership in the post-World War II period.

New Hollywood road movies often revolve around rebellious or outcast characters who hit the road in their search for freedom. This is rarely the case in European road movies. European road movies often follow the journey of a rather ordinary person "who is on the move, often for practical reasons (for work, immigration, commuting or holiday-making)".[127]

An Unorthodox Road Movie

Although it features very little actual journeying, *The Bus* demonstrates many characteristic features of a road movie. Okan's de-

but film is also contemporaneous with some of the most distinct examples of road movies made in Europe, such as Wim Wenders' *Alice in den Städten* (Alice in the Cities, 1974), *Falsche Bewegung* (The Wrong Move, 1975), and *Im Lauf der Zeit* (Kings of the Road, 1976), and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Professione: Reporter* (The Passenger, 1975). However, *The Bus* is quite an unusual road movie and has very little in common with the European and New Hollywood road movies of its period.

As observed by both Laderman and Orgeron, European road movies, unlike the post-*Easy Rider* Hollywood ones, are often concerned with the introspection and retrospection of the characters. This is the case for all the European road movies named above. Antonioni's *The Passenger* follows the journey and the experiences of an Anglo-American journalist after he assumes the identity of a dead arms dealer who has connections with the rebels in the civil war in Chad. Despite the political background against which Antonioni forms his narration, *The Passenger* is more concerned with existentialist identity questions and retrospections of the main character than with the sociopolitical issues it takes as its background. The same observation is true for Wim Wenders's road movie trilogy. Although these films feature a certain level of political awareness and social commentary (mostly expressed through critical visual or verbal references to American colonialism, American cultural imperialism, and Germany's Nazi past) Wenders's trilogy is more concerned with the soul-searching and retrospections of the characters than the sociopolitical issues depicted in these films' backgrounds. One cannot observe a comparable utilisation, either of the journey or of the vehicle, in *The Bus.* Although in many respects it demonstrates characteristic features of the European road movie tradition, Okan's film distinguishes itself from this tradition with its open political orientation, critical attitude, and sociopolitical commentary.[128]

The Bus places its focus on a travelling group, not on a particular individual. This is one of the features that distinguish

European road movies from their Hollywood counterparts.[129] Okan takes this European road movie convention to its extremes, and does not allow any single character to outshine. In this respect, *The Bus* is fundamentally different from both Hollywood and European road movies. Classical Hollywood and New Hollywood era road movies, as well as European ones, almost always revolve around one or more central individual characters, even if those characters are part of a larger group, so the audience can easily identify with one or more character(s). Germi's *The Path of Hope* is one such film. Like *The Bus*, it follows the journey of a group consisting of rather ordinary people who are forced to travel. Unlike in *The Bus*, however, in Germi's film, Saro and Barbara quickly gain significant importance and become the central characters around whom the film develops. One can observe a comparable development also in Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Okan avoids such a development in *The Bus* by

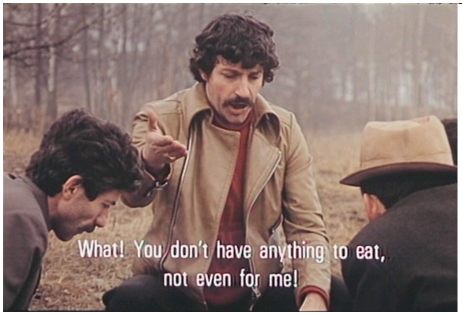
constantly changing the camera's attention from one character to the next. This action makes it virtually impossible for the viewer to develop any kind of identification with, or attachment to, a particular character. If any of the characters gain more visibility, hence importance, Okan restores the balance by applying an unusual method: killing the character. This happens three times in the film. The first two characters who gain the extensive focus of the camera are removed from the film by unexpected deaths. The third, and arguably the most important character of the film, the bus, is smashed to pieces by a giant press at the very end of the film.

In road movies, the vehicle is often conceptualised as "a mechanised extension of the body", with the help of which the body of the traveller goes further and faster towards their destination (if there is any).[130] In *The Bus*, the vehicle of transport is positioned markedly different in comparison to New Hollywood road movies. The bus in Okan's film is anything but an extension of the traveller's body, as it is positioned as an independent body in itself among the bodies of other characters. As the name of the film emphasises, the vehicle is the most important character in the film; it is not an extension, because the term *extension* suggests certain qualities that the bus in the film does not show. An extension, according to the Oxford dictionary, is a part that is added to something.[131] As the definition suggests, an extension is something secondary to what it is added to. In this sense, motorcycles in Hopper's *Easy Rider* can be accurately referred to as extensions. In *The Bus*, however, the order of hierarchy between the bus and the other characters is not that clear. Furthermore, the term extension also implies replaceability, the possibility of changing this secondary part with something else. This kind of relation between vehicle and characters can be observed in Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*, in which the couple changes vehicles on several occasions during their journey. This is not the case in *The Bus*; the vehicle in the film is the same one from the beginning until the end. Indeed, the film does not end before the bus is de-

stroyed by a giant press. In both *Easy Rider* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, the films end when the main characters die. The same thing is true for *The Bus* given that the film ends when the main character, the bus, dies.

In both New and classical Hollywood road movies, the story often develops around the tension between a couple sitting in the front seats. Obviously, in *The Bus*, there is no couple in the front seats. Yet, the film establishes a similar tension between the driver and the trafficked passengers on a more symbolic level. Okan's rigorous efforts in avoiding identification with any one character help in forming this tension by preventing it from turning into one individual's conflict. The tension between the driver and passengers finds its most visually visible form in the scene when the travellers gather around a campfire—which is itself another common Hollywood road movie convention—to have their last meal just before their arrival to Stockholm. After his complaint about the insufficient amount of food that is left, the driver is silently protested by the passengers, especially by the passenger who wears a hat. The hat-wearing passenger is shown in a shoulder shot made over the driver's shoulder. This particular shot places the passenger and the driver in clear opposition to one another. At its core, the shot signals an opposition of values and world views. With his greed and individualism, the driver is designed as a signifier to stand for the supposed corrupting nature of post-industrial capitalism, while the passengers are designed to stand for the traditional values of pre-industrial times, such as solidarity, sharing, and innocence. Furthermore, beyond this specific scene, the film is, in part, built around the tension between the driver, who is in a position of power, and the passengers, who are powerless in relation to the driver, yet are determined to change this unfavourable power relation by gaining their economic independence through money, which they hope to earn in their new country.

By driving an old bus with illegal migrants and parking it at the most central square of an industrial European country's capital, *The Bus* invites the audience to think about several im-



portant issues, from human trafficking to neo-colonialism, modernism to alienation. Location plays a crucial role in this invitation. Placing the illegal migrants at the most central square of the city, the film provides visibility for these issues and symbolically elevates them into the centre of public debate, with all their political and philosophical implications.

Obviously, *Sergels Torg*, the public square at which the bus is abandoned by the driver, is not the intended final destination at which the illegally travelling passengers wish to arrive after their long and painful journey. Although no explicit information concerning the intended final destination of the passengers is provided in the film, certain details, especially in the monologues of the bus driver, can give a rough idea about the location. While having the final lunch with the passengers by a lakeside just before their arrival to Stockholm, the driver comforts the tired and hungry passengers by saying, "Never mind. You will start working tomorrow anyway. There is plenty of food here".[132] Judging from these words, one can assume that the passengers have been promised jobs in Sweden, most likely somewhere close to Stockholm. The abandonment of the bus at the square creates an interesting sensation both for the passengers and the audience. A sensation that is a mixture of relief of the arrival and the anxiety of being stuck. The abandonment of the bus at the square provides a very strong visual indicator for the doomed prospect of these travellers, who are stuck in between

the faraway place that they come from and the near, yet unreachable, place they dream of.

Not only symbolically, but also as an architectural space in itself, *Sergels Torg* is a very powerful choice. The rusty old bus with its faded pastel colours, curves, and soft lines creates a strong visual contrast with the public square's sharp geometrical pattern consisting of black and white triangles. The image itself immediately implies a clash, as it becomes clear later in the film. This is a clash in many layers: a clash between locals and migrants, between pre-industrial and post-industrial, between old and new; between human and machine, between the Orient and the Occident.[133]

A Road Movie with Social Concerns

The Bus is one of the earliest films concerned with international human trafficking, labour migration, and exploitation. Okan sets his aim in the film as "to underline the grim clash between the people of a technically overdeveloped society and people of an underdeveloped society by positioning them in opposition to one another".[134] He does so against the background of state-sponsored international labour migration, institutionalised through temporary foreign workers recruitment programmes, which emerged as a rather common practice in the late 1950s and 60s in Western Europe. The earliest example of such programmes, the *Gastarbeiterprogramme* (Guest Workers Programme) of then West Germany, came into existence when the country signed bilateral recruitment agreements with several then underdeveloped or developing countries, such as Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Morocco. These agreements were designed to fulfil the extreme labour shortage in the country resulting from the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) after World War II. Many other industrialised European countries, such as The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden, followed the West German example and introduced similar temporary recruitment programmes. This new reality paved the way for a workforce migration unprecedented in Europe since the

slave trade of the colonial era.

However innocent it may seem, with the not-so-distant colonial past of Europe in mind, it is not implausible to consider the *Gastarbeiterprogramme*, or similar temporary workforce recruitment programmes, as new forms of slave trade with a human face.[135] The temporary nature of these programmes exposes Europe's still fresh colonial reflexes and deeply embedded slave master's logic, which sees the migrant workers as disposable. As Swiss playwright and novelist Max Frisch put it in his famous quote "Wir riefen Arbeitskräfte, und es kamen Menschen", with a presupposition of a fundamental difference between a *worker* and *human*, Europe asked for workers, however, inadvertently got human beings instead.[136] Prominent Marxist art critic and writer John Berger finds this slave master's logic embedded in the very core of the temporary workforce migration programmes.

> What distinguishes this migration from others in the past is that it is temporary. Only a minority of the workers are permitted to settle permanently in the country to which they have come. Their work contracts are usually for one year, or, at the most, two. The immigrant worker comes to sell his labour power where there is a labour shortage. He is admitted to do a certain kind of job. He has no rights, claims, or reality outside his filling of that job. While he fills it, he is paid and accommodated. If he no longer does so, he is sent back to where he came from. It is not men who immigrate but machine-minders, sweepers, diggers, cement mixers, cleaners, drillers, etc. This is the significance of temporary migration. To re-become a man (husband, father, citizen, patriot) a migrant has to return home. [137]

According to this logic, Berger observes, the temporary migrant workers are seen as disposable and immortal:

> immortal because [they are] continuously inter-

> changeable. They are not born: they are not brought up: they do not age: they do not get tired: they do not die. They have a single function—to work. All other functions of their lives are the responsibility of the country they come from.[138]

The Bus places its story against such a grim background and investigates human trafficking in a new light. In this investigation, naturally, political borders and border crossings play a crucial role. Interestingly, Okan takes a curious approach and looks at borders and border crossing through the eyes of the human trafficker, not that of the trafficked. There are two occasions in the film in which international borders and crossing of these borders are directly addressed. The first one takes place at the very beginning of the film and is seemingly concerned with border crossing into Sweden. At this occasion, neither the border nor the crossing is visually presented; instead, the experience is communicated through the monologue of the driver. The second border crossing in the film takes place when the driver travels by plane to Hamburg after abandoning the passengers at the square in Stockholm. This time, the crossing is visualised. Indeed, the scene in which the border crossing takes place is executed brilliantly and provides important ammunition for the film's political criticism.

The scene opens with the landing of a plane at an airport in Hamburg. A group of passengers, among them, the driver, are seen leaving the plane and entering the airport building for passport control. They form a queue in front of a border control officer's desk, who inspects the travellers' documents one by one, and lets them into the country. The procedure is not a tight one, at least, this is the case until the arrival of the driver. The officer does not even open some of the passports to grant entry to their holders. When the driver arrives at the desk, the officer remembers the importance of his job and starts taking it seriously. Differing boldly from the other passengers in his outfit and appearance, the driver hands over his passport. The officer

gives special treatment to the driver's document. He slowly and carefully studies it, as the queue starts to build up behind the driver; after some time, the officer allows the driver to enter the country. However, one gets the impression that the driver is

granted entry only to prevent the European travellers in the queue from waiting any longer. In the airport building, the driver is stopped again, this time by another officer in uniform. The officer escorts the driver into a room and opens his handbag. The bag is packed to the brim with money. The driver looks happy and smiles. The officer asks in German: "What is this?" The driver happily and proudly replies in thickly accented German: "I am bringing money to Germany". Not impressed by the answer, the officer asks the driver to undress. The driver is in shock; his face falls, and he attempts to question the officer's request, but the officer mechanically repeats his demand. Another officer joins them, and upon seeing the second officer, the driver gives in and starts to undress. Interestingly, Okan does not show the driver while he undresses in the scene. Instead, he depicts the process from the point of view of the undressing driver. We only see the driver's arm throwing his clothes, one by one, at the officers who stand by a desk and inspect them. This particular viewing angle suggests that it is not only the driver who is under investigation and is being forced to undress; it is also the viewer. Upon completing the search, the second officer approaches the now fully naked driver and asks him to open his mouth. He searches the driver's mouth, nose, ears, and hair in a very ungentle manner. Without giving any information or warning, the same officer forces the naked driver to bend over in order to prepare him for a body cavity search. The driver resists; he asks what the officers are planning to do. They do not speak or give any information. While one of them forcibly holds the driver in bending position, the other puts a pair of plastic medical gloves on his hands and performs a rectal search without the driver's consent. After the completion of the forced search, the driver manages to free himself and cries: "Are you crazy? I am bringing money to your country, but you are giving me a finger in the ass!" The officers do not show any reaction to the driver's protest, mechanically, they declare that the search is over and the driver may dress and leave.

The scene opens a new front in the film's critique of

modern Western society. It does so by employing a set of signifiers, and referring to practices, which Michel Foucault calls *biopolitics*. Biopolitics, as Foucault observes, is a "set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power".[139] Foucault observes that biopolitics gives the modern state the possibility to assert control not merely over their subjects' life and death, but their very ways of living.[140] With their sophisticated routine search and control practices, airports are among the places where biopolitics is most visible in concrete terms.

In accordance with the general principles of biopolitics observed by Foucault, the driver is transformed into an object of study, and classified. His appearance and biological features, such as his hair and eye colour, play an important role in this process. In the same way, the driver's passport is a key signifier in the scene. As a sophisticated form of documentation which contains biometric data of its holder, the passport is one of the essential biopolitical instruments of the modern state in its control and regulatory practices. As Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish*, documents like passports are the outcome of a meticulous process of examination "that places individuals in a field of surveillance", and "situates them in a network of writing" in the authorities' attempt to "capture and fix" individuals.[141] Though in a different context, a similar observation is noted by Orhan Pamuk when he noticed that his eye colour was registered wrongly in his first passport. Pamuk observes that the passport "is not a document that tells us who we are but a document that shows what other people think of us".[142]

The airport scene, particularly the part featuring the full-body strip search performed on the driver, recalls the practices applied during the selection process of guest workers and can be read as a reference to the *Gastarbeiterprogramme*. After signing bilateral temporary recruitment agreements with the guest worker sending countries, Germany established official recruit-

ment centres in these countries in order to regulate the selection and flow of the workers. These centres were tasked to put candidates through medical examinations and tests to confirm that they possessed required health conditions and skills. The scene in which the driver is subjected to the body cavity search recalls medical examinations performed in these centres. This medical examination process was documented best by photographer Jean Mohr. In one of Mohr's well-known photos entitled *Medical Examination, Istanbul*, a handful of guest worker candidates are seen standing only in underwear in front of a German doctor who meticulously examines the genitals of one of the candidates.[143] According to many former guest workers who had to pass through similar examinations, the mentioned photo, albeit shocking, is far from fully representing reality, since the candidates were often examined completely naked.[144]

The portrayal of illegal migrants in the film also calls to mind Georgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer.* In his book *Homo Sacer*, Agamben examines the ancient Roman law figure *homo sacer* (the sacred man) with the help of the *zoē-bios* dichotomy. It is a useful concept for thinking about the relationship between bare life (*zoē*) and political life (*bios*). The *homo sacer* is a reduced man. A man without *bios*. He is no different than an animal, the carrier of bare life. The *homo sacer,* a figure who is stripped of his political existence, can be killed with impunity according to Roman law.[145] Given that they are not the citizens of the country to which they travelled illegally, and their passports—the documentation of their *bios*—have been confiscated and *trashed* by the human trafficker in an early scene, the passengers of *The Bus* can be conceptualised as modern-day *homo sacer*. Without their passports, the passengers are stripped of their political existence, excluded from political affiliations, and deprived of all functions and rights, which any recognised citizen is entitled to enjoy. In this view, what is left of the passengers after the disappearance of their passport is their *zoē.* They are reduced to carriers of bare life; thus can be killed with impunity.

Medical Examination, Istanbul by Jean Mohr

An Endorsement or A Critique?
Heteronormativity and Homophobia in *The Bus*

Apart from a very few defying examples, such as Ridley Scott's 1991 film *Thelma & Louise*, and Gust Van Sant's 1991 film *My Own Private Idaho*, most road movies develop around heterosexual characters and heteronormative values. In this regard, *The Bus* is no exception. It retains the same heteronormative narration pattern that most road movies have. Furthermore, Okan positions a homosexual character in an attempt to underline the supposed morally corrupt state of the imaginary West. This is most visible in the scene where one of the passengers (performed by Okan himself) meets a local man, seemingly a homosexual, in a public toilet. The local man approaches the passenger and tries to look at his genitals while he is urinating. Despite the fact that he notices the man looking at his genitals, the passenger does not give

any reaction other than a puzzled look. After an unsuccessful attempt to communicate with him, the local man gently drags the passenger to a nightclub. The passenger shows no sign of resistance. In the nightclub, customers (both male and female) watch pornographic films while drinking and dining. Some customers go even further and have sex in front of others. While this rather unusual entertainment takes place, the passenger tries to fulfil his days-long thirst and hunger. Meanwhile, the homosexual character starts to show his sexual desire for the passenger by touching his legs and genitals. Noticing this, the shocked passenger, screaming like a trapped wild animal, jumps from his seat and storms the tables full of food. He quickly tries to stuff himself. The customers of the club condemn the passenger by declaring him "disgusting" and "barbarian".[146] Bodyguards show up and drag the passenger away by force. Taking him to a dark room, they beat and stab the passenger in cold blood until he dies.

In this scene, the homosexual character is presented not only as the signifier of the supposed moral corruption of post-industrial Western society, but also as a source of castration anxiety for the passenger, both metaphorically and literally. When the homosexual character tries to touch his genitals, the passenger gets more and more anxious. He perceives his masculinity under an imminent threat. This literal and metaphorical threat is underlined by a short black-and-white clip inserted into the scene depicting a woman and a man working in a cotton field. Since neither the man's nor the woman's face is visible, it is not easy to know who the people that appear in the clip are. However, the way in which the clip is inserted, and the fact that the clip is black-and-white, evokes the impression that the man in the clip is the passenger himself before travelling abroad. This assumption is supported by the fact that the very same clip appears at the beginning of the film in the scene where the passengers stop by a lake. In the scene, the passenger is seen thoughtfully looking at the frozen lake and smoking. The black-and-white clip

is inserted into the film for the first time at this moment. This particular usage of the clip enables one to assume that the woman in the clip is the passenger's wife, or lover, whom he left behind. If this is the case, it can be said that by reminding the viewer of the passenger's heterosexuality, the nightclub scene establishes the homosexual man as an imminent threat to the passenger's masculinity.

At first glance, the anxiety the passenger experiences in this scene calls to mind Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of *homosexual panic*. Homosexual panic, Sedgwick argues, is an always present "threat of being (called) a homosexual" which, all men, "aside from the historically small group of consciously and self-acceptingly homosexual men", face in all their relations with other men.[147] In her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, she writes that homosexual panic is "the most private, psychologised form" of "vulnerability" experienced by "many twentieth-century western men" "to the social pressure

of homophobic blackmail".[148] In the light of Sedgwick's concept, one can argue that Okan's heterosexual character experiences male homosexual panic triggered not only by a hypothetical, but also a tangible, "threat".

As quoted earlier, in an interview he gave in 1977, Okan stated that he aimed to "underline the grim clash between the people of the technically overdeveloped and underdeveloped societies" in *The Bus*.[149] Keeping Okan's expressed motivation in mind, the interactions between the homosexual man and the passenger, and the passenger's anxiety due to his reception of a threat directed at his masculinity, can be read as an embedded extension of the clash that Okan aims to underline, rather than endorsing a homophobic position. The clash is, in part, a result of an inability of developed and underdeveloped societies to understand one another. This inability is openly signalled in the interactions between the homosexual man and the passenger in the toilet scene when the local character unsuccessfully tries to communicate with the passenger. There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the cultural codes of his new country on the part of the passengers, including the codes of sexuality. The passenger becomes a victim of his incomprehension.

In *The Bus*, Okan constructs a heteronormative and homophobic position through his characters' behaviour. Indeed, this heteronormative, homophobic, and sexist stance is not unique to *The Bus*. It is of a recurring nature, and, albeit in different forms, present in all three films. In these works, there are certain characters who express, either verbally or with their actions, positions that can be seen as sexist and homophobic. *The Bus* manoeuvres on a thin line between endorsing sexism and homophobia and using sexism and homophobia for the purpose of cultural critique. Although, at first glance, the film might give the impression that it does the former; if one looks at the film attentively, one can see that the balance in the film tips in favour of the latter. Okan confirms this reading and explains that these sexist and homophobic positions and remarks performed or ex-

pressed by his characters are far from reflecting his own views on the matters, as he does not endorse any sexist or homophobic positions. Instead, he utilises these positions and remarks in his films to illustrate the widespread sexist and homophobic tendencies present in migrant communities in Europe.[150]

As Orgeron observes, one of the core themes of the post-war road movie is the problem in human communication caused by modernity, and the impossibility of communication in modern times.[151] This theme, indeed, is also one of the main themes in Okan's film. This is manifested in several scenes in the film. The above-described scene is one of them. In one of the others, the hat-wearing passenger gets lost in the streets of Stockholm while escaping from a policeman in the dark. While searching his way back to the bus, he comes across a local man who is walking his dog. In an unidentifiable but certainly rural-sounding dialect of Turkish, the passenger tries to ask the local man how he could find his way back to the bus. Unable to understand him, the local man gets scared and runs away. Beyond any particular scene, the film is entirely built around the theme of the impossibility of communication, as it is concerned with the clash between the people of developed and underdeveloped societies and their inability to understand one another.

Given these sociopolitical issues it takes as its background, its politically charged content, and its critical approach, *The Bus* places itself into a special place among European road movies. Though sharing many similarities with films made following European road movie conventions, it is not concerned with identity issues, introspection, or retrospection. Instead, it focuses on particular sociopolitical issues. In this regard, the film distinguishes itself from the European road movie tradition through social commentary. *The Bus* positions itself very closely to what Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy call the "social problem film". According to Roffman and Purdy, "the problem film combines social analysis and dramatic conflict within a coherent narrative structure. Social content is transformed into dramatic

events and movie narrative adapted to accommodate social issues as story material through a particular set of movie conventions".[152] Focusing on sociopolitical issues and offering political commentary are much more common in pre-New Hollywood road movies, which Laderman calls "social conscience films".[153] *The Grapes of Wrath* is one obvious example of this type of film. Interestingly, *The Bus* is similar to Ford's in several respects. First of all, like *The Bus*, it follows the journey of a group of rather ordinary people who are forced to travel in the hope of finding a better life. Second, like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Bus* not only takes a real social issue as its point of departure, it also forms its narration by using that issue. In this regard, *The Bus* is an unusual film in comparison to the European road movies of this period, as the film puts emphasis on entirely different issues (im/migration) and takes an angle that is more common to the social problem film, thus becomes 'too political' for European tastes. *The Bus* can be seen as a European variant of a social problem film. Furthermore, just as *The Grapes of Wrath* is a precursor to what Laderman calls the true road movie, *The Bus* can be taken as a precursor to European road movies that address the political issues of refugees and im/migration, such as Markus Imhoof's 1980 film *Das Boot ist voll* (The Boat is Full), Xavier Koller's 1990 film *Reise der Hoffnung* (Journey of Hope), and Dardenne Brothers' 1996 film *La Promesse* (The Promise).

The Bus is an isolated case in the history of the European road movies. It tests the limits of the road movie genre when the journey of the bus comes to a halt in an unintended location almost immediately after the film starts. Even though there exist films that Laderman calls "semi-road movies" with "not much emphasis on driving", such as Alex Cox's *Repo Man* (1984), Okan's film positions itself differently.[154] For, the removal of driving, or journey, scenes do not change the film substantially. Travelling in the film functions rather like a prelude to another type of film. Once the bus arrives at the square, it becomes immobile, and a new kind of film starts. A film one might find

uneasy to call a road movie. However, since the journey has not reached its end-point when the bus halts at the square, one can argue that it is still very much a road movie. Furthermore, there is still an urge on the part of the passengers to move on. Even though the travel from Turkey to Sweden is an essential feature in the film, it is remarkable that *The Bus* hardly shows anything of the travel itself. This unusual integration of the road and journey into the film's corpus grants *The Bus* a special place among road movies, making it an unorthodox road movie, a film at the very edge of the road movie genre.

The Bus is an untimely film that developed a genuine critical sensitivity for the issues of moving, mobility, migration, human trafficking, borders, and border crossing long before these issues evoked the interest of cinema, academia, and the general public. This untimeliness becomes even clearer when it is compared to European road movies made in the late 1980s and later, such as Theo Angelopoulos's 1988 film *Landscape in the Mist*, Gianni Amelio's 1994 film Lamerica, Michael Winterbottom's 2002 film *In This World*, Ismaël Ferroukhi's 2004 film *Le Grand Voyage* (The Great Journey), and Emanuele Crialese's 2011 film *Terraferma*. While many of *The Bus*' European road movie contemporaries were concerned with introspection and existential identity issues, and its New Hollywood road movie contemporaries, such as Richard C. Sarafian's 1971 film *Vanishing Point* and Monte Hellman's 1972 film *Two-Lane Blacktop*, were still continuing to entertain the rebellious escape fantasies, Okan's film placed its focus on politically charged social issues, such as illegal migration and human trafficking, almost two decades before these issues start to appear in European road movies. This untimeliness is probably one of the main reasons behind the film's failure to generate the attention it deserved.

Although one cannot observe any significant change in the production numbers of road movies, or the genre's commercial popularity, or lack thereof, in Turkey's cinema after the release of the film, *The Bus* nonetheless represents a turning point for the road movie in the country. This is manifested by the fact

that road movies made after *The Bus* have more in common with this particular film than with those preceding it. Ökten's *The Herd* and Gören's *The Road* are two such films made after *The Bus*, and as I will demonstrate in one of the following chapters while comparing these films to Okan's third film *The Yellow Mercedes*, *The Bus* has clearly influenced both of these films.

A Fluid Journey

The Bus is a fluid film that does not subscribe fully to any squarely defined genre convention or filmmaking style. One of the sharpest shifts in the film's employment of genre conventions comes directly after the immobilisation of the bus at the beginning of the film. Even though the journey of the bus itself stops at the square, the film continues to 'travel' through the conventions of diverse genres and filmmaking styles.

In one of the early scenes, the bus drives through the city before it stops at the square. Attached to the bus, a fixed angle camera records the city life from the perspective of the vehicle. According to Okan, many of the shots in this particular scene, as well as some others elsewhere in the film, were made with a hidden camera. This was in part due to the fact that the film crew could not obtain necessary permits from the municipality for filming in the city and at the square, and in part, due to the fact that Okan did not have the financial means to hire extras and do rehearsals.[155] For this reason, this part of the film can be seen as a documentary film, using guerrilla filmmaking methods. Guerrilla style filmmaking gets its unique characteristics from its two distinct qualities: shooting film without prior permission and/or shooting without informing the subject(s) being filmed. Okan utilises both of these characteristics in *The Bus* as he shoots the streets of the city and its inhabitants both without permission and without providing any prior warning. Okan has stated that he used guerrilla filmmaking methods not only because of necessity due to lack of permission or financial means, but more importantly, because of a conscious decision as he "strived to make a realistic film observing the principles of

Italian Neorealist cinema, a realistic film like Vittorio De Sica's 1948 film *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves)".[156] Indeed, Okan makes generous use of several characteristic features of Neorealist films in *The Bus* given its "loose and chance-based" story revolving around working-class subjects, its insistence on location filming, its interest in the study of alienation, its "critical perspectives on (…) society informed by leftist politics", and its "lack of moral judgement of characters and situations".[157]

Although it utilises several features that are characteristic of Italian Neorealist cinema, Okan's flirt with documentary-style filmmaking takes him into the aesthetic and ideological realm of other cinema movements as his realistic cinema is not limited only to the use of hidden camera, or to the principles of Italian Neorealist cinema. In one of the later scenes, Okan records some drunken people at the square. This time, the camera is not hidden; on the contrary, it is made explicitly visible. Drunken people who gathered at the square where the bus is abandoned are not acting. They dance and fight in front of the camera, for the camera, even, and more importantly, because of the camera. Okan uses his camera as an inciter by making it explicitly visible and entices people to behave in a way that they would not do otherwise. This kind of use of the camera is almost identical to that of the Cinéma vérité movement. As one of the distinct features of Cinéma vérité films, the presence of the camera is not only acknowledged but furthermore conceptualised as "a catalyst, encouraging subjects to open up" in the process of unearthing the "truths beneath the conventionalities of daily life".[158] In this particular scene, not only through his camera use but also his use of lighting, and his editing preferences, Okan openly refers to Cinéma vérité as he uses flat lighting and imperfect exposures along with long takes recorded using a shaky, handheld camera.

Okan's use of documentary-style filmmaking is so fluid that, at times, it borders on what Colin Young calls *the observational cinema*. According to Young, observational cinema is deeply

related to Italian Neo-
realism and Cinéma vérité, but it distinguishes itself from these movements by the fact that, in this kind of cinema, the "subject directs the filmmaker, rather than the other way around".[159]

Not long after the scenes in which the documentary film approach is dominant, *The Bus* suddenly turns into an absurd slapstick comedy. This is most obvious in the scene when the passengers leave the bus to explore a close-by subway station. At the beginning of the scene, the passengers come across an escalator moving continuously and noisily towards the underground. After a bit of struggle, and some funny interactions with the escalator, they manage to get on the escalator and descend towards the subway platform. Upon their arrival, they are noticed by a group of locals waiting on the platform, who, for an undisclosed reason, have scary masks with them. Noticing the passengers, the

locals put their masks on and decide to have some fun. Seeing this unexpected masked group, the passengers fearfully try to escape. While on the run, some of the passengers notice some fruit and food left on a bench. With the pressure of days-long hunger, they stop by the bench and compete with each other to grab something to eat. They try to bite whatever they can grab. This is not possible, however, because these realistic-looking fruits and food items are, in fact, toys made of plastic. At every bite, the plastic toys whistle. Understanding that they cannot be eaten, the passengers give up on trying. The mask-wearing locals, however, do not give up on chasing them. They encircle the passengers and start dancing noisily around them, as if they are performing a primitive religious ritual. After finally escaping from the locals, the passengers run towards the escalator to reach the bus. However, in a panic, they take the wrong one and struggle to climb the constantly descending escalator until they manage to leave the station.

"Slapstick is a mode of performance that relies on broad physical comedy. This [type of] comedy is often derived from performed violence and comic pain and is likely to involve trips, falls, beatings and throwing of items".[160] Slapstick is a transmedia phenomenon, different iterations of which exist in different media forms, such as theatre, television, and cinema. In cinema, slapstick is often associated with the early years of cinema history, particularly with the silent movie era.[161] However, this association is far from fully reflecting reality. Although slapstick comedy indeed lived its golden age during the silent movie era, it adjusted itself to changes and managed to survive to this day. Another inclination concerning slapstick in cinema is the assumption that it is a specifically American form.[162] This assumption is also inaccurate given that slapstick comedies appeared in European cinema as early as, and even earlier than, they did in Hollywood, and it continued to develop in a recognisably distinct fashion on both sides of the Atlantic. European filmmakers such as Max Linder and Jacques Tati approached

slapstick comedy in a way that these European films, as Alan Dale notes, "with their close ties to contemporary visual art and literary movements, have graphic, narrative, and moviemaking power unmistakably more sophisticated than [one finds] in the American movies".[163]

Especially in the above-described scene these slapstick qualities can be observed clearly. The passengers' interactions with the escalator, the absurd situations they end up in owing to the masked locals, the plastic fruits, and the way the passengers are bullied are clear. Okan's approach to slapstick is much subtler and more refined than the slapstick in the early years of cinema, and it recalls Jacques Tati's approach to slapstick. This is especially true when the ultramodern cityscape of *The Bus* is considered in relation to the slapstick acting style employed in the film. Okan's use of the ultramodern cityscape is very similar to that of Tati. Like Tati, Okan offers a critique of modern society through his characters' interactions with the ultramodern city and the absurd situations that stem from these interactions. Just as Tati's Monsieur Hulot is lost in modern Paris, Okan's characters are lost in another modern city, Stockholm. Okan's Stockholm, very much like Tati's Paris, is dominated by glass, steel, and concrete. One can imagine Okan's passengers as distant relatives of Tati's Monsieur Hulot from the rural countryside.

Despite the scene's dominant texture and feeling that is reminiscent of Tati's slapstick approach, it does not take Okan much effort to switch to the look and feel of yet another distinct film genre in the same scene, namely that of dark comedy. Dark comedy, sometimes referred to as *black comedy*, is a complex and a "fluid concept".[164] Linda Horvay Barnes observes that dark comedy can be "best perceived in terms of dialectics: as a process in [filmic] development and a product of contemporary social conditions".[165] Although there is not a single comprehensive definition that covers all aspects of the concept, available definitions often agree on some fundamental features. Patrick

O'Neill observes these fundamental components as follows:

> [B]lack humour is based firstly on an essential incongruity—the comic treatment of material which resists comic treatment—and secondly on the evocation of a particular response, namely the reader's [or viewer's] perception that this incongruity is the expression of a sense of disorientation rather than frivolous desire to shock.[166]

Given these fundamental components, one can formulate a working definition of dark comedy as a form or a sub-genre of comedy and satire that treats material, which is generally considered to be taboo, unsuitable, or unfit for comic treatment, in a humorous or satirical manner in order to disorient and confuse the audience in their feelings about and reactions to the situation. Based on this working definition one can observe dark comedy elements in Okan's film. The nightclub scene is arguably the scene in which the dark comedy features of the film are most concentrated.

Okan's persistent employment of disharmony in *The Bus* brings the mind an another mode of narration, the grotesque, as Philip Thomson points out that "[t]he most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparates".[167] Furthermore, Thomson observes that the grotesque is fundamentally different from other modes of narration, which utilise a similar disharmony, in its lack of resolution of this disharmony.

> [T]he special impact of the grotesque will be lacking if the conflict is resolved, if the text [or film] concerned proves to be just funny after all, or if it turns out that the reader [audience] has been quite mistaken in his initial perception of comedy in what is in fact stark horror. The unresolved nature

> of the grotesque conflict is important, and helps to mark off the grotesque from other modes or categories of literary [filmic] discourse. For the conflict of incompatibles, fundamental though it be, is not exclusively a criterion of the grotesque. Irony and paradox depend on this sort of conflict or confrontation, and all theories of the comic are based on some notion of incongruity, conflict, juxtaposition of opposites, etc. (…) [W]e may confidently take it that the lack of resolution of the conflict is a distinguishing feature of the grotesque.[168]

As a film that constantly oscillates between dark comedy and slapstick, *The Bus* can be defined as grotesque, as it does not deliver any clear resolution to the conflict between the horrific and the comic. This unresolved conflict is bold and confusing. This is made manifest once more by the fact that the film was screened in Italy as a horror film under the title *The Tragic Bus*.[169]

In addition to these, one can also observe surreal elements in the film, especially in the subway station scene in which the mask-wearing locals sadistically derive joy from the suffering of the helpless passengers. While complementing the slapstick feeling of this particular scene, the surrealist elements also help the film in establishing its grotesque narration.

Keeping in mind what we have discussed about the film so far, one can conclude that *The Bus* is a rare kind of European road movie, which, on one hand, follows the European road movie conventions, while on the other hand, tests the limits of the film genre itself by reducing its emphasis on actual journeying and the road to an absolute minimum. Unlike its European road movie contemporaries, it is a sociopolitically concerned film. It takes a contemporary social issue, namely human trafficking, as its centre of focus and develops its narration around this particular issue to a degree that it comes very close to being a social problem film.

Notes

[92] Okan, Tunç. *Otobüs*. Pan Film. 1977. Page numbers are absent.
[93] Ibid.
[94] "Sansürde / OTOBÜS". *Gelişim Sinema,* December 1984. 23.
[95] Ibid. 23.
[96] Ibid. 23.
[97] Ibid. 23.
[98] Okan, Tunç. *Otobüs*. Pan Film. 1977.
[99] La Bardonnie, Mathilde. "Un film sur les immigrés n'est pas un film " suisse" in *Le Monde*. 10 February 1976.
[100] Luxembourgeus. 82–83.
[101] "İsviçre'de tam dört film yaptım. Çok uzun süre de orada yaşadım. Hala da İsviçre'de çalışıyorum ama beni hiçbir zaman İsviçreli bir yönetmen olarak kabul etmediler. Bana tek kuruş yardım yapılmadı sinema konusunda. Her yaptığım başvuru reddedildi. Hiçbir zaman İsviçreli bir yönetmen olamadım. (…) Başarılı bir doktor olarak rahatça kabul edildim İsviçre'de. Hiçbir sorunum olmadı bu konuda. Kimse bana doktor olarak "Sen yabancısın". falan demedi, demiyor da. Ama o doktor, İsviçre pasaportu da taşısa, sanat yapmaya kalkıştığında destek pastasını paylaşan kişiler ya da bu konuda karar veren bürokratlar bunu kabul edemiyor. (…) Bunda benim pek bir suçum yok ama yine de olanlarda bir Türk yönetmene karşı bir tür İsviçre ırkçılığı vardı da denebilir".
Translation mine. Luxembourgeus. 83–84.
[102] "Otobüs filminin kopyalarını Türkiye'ye gümrükten deklare etmeden koltuğumun altında ben kendim geçirdim".
Ibid. 77.
[103] Dicleli, Özgür. "Taşkent Film Festivali'nde Türkiye'yi "Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım" temsil edecek" in *Cumhuriyet.* 28 March 1978. 6.
[104] Iordanova. "The Bus", 120.
[105] "Türk olmaları bir rastlantıdır…" Translation mine.
Oral, Zeynep. "Tunç Okan: Tüketim toplumu insanları ile azgelişmiş toplum insanlarını karşılaştırdım", *Milliyet Sanat*, 17 December 1977. 7.
[106] "Otobüs ya da insan sevgisi" in *Tunç Okan, Otobüs*. Pan Film, 1977.
[107] Interview with Hasan Gül on 6 June 2019 in Stockholm.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPpvvd4GMOM. Accessed on 23 July 2019.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Kazan, Elia, and Jeff Young. *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films : Interviews With Elia Kazan.* Newmarket Press, 1999. 273.
[110] Özgüç, Agâh. *Türlerle Türk Sineması: Dönemler, Modalar, Tiplemeler.* Istanbul: Dünya Kitaplar, 2005. 225.
[111] Laderman. 26.
[112] Ibid. 24.
[113] Ibid. 26.
[114] Ibid. 1–4

[115] Ibid. 2.
[116] Mazierska, Ewa, and Laura Rascaroli. *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006. 2–3. and Laderman. 4.
[117] The period is "variously referred to as the American New Wave, New Hollywood, postclassical Hollywood, and the American Renaissance". Boon, Kevin Alexander. "The Auteur Renaissance, 1968–1980", 81.
[118] Elsaesser, Thomas. "American Auteur Cinema The Last — or First — Picture Show!", 37. and Boon, Kevin Alexander. "The Auteur Renaissance, 1968–1980", 81. respectively.
[119] Ibid. 35.
[120] Laderman. 1.
[121] Ibid. 42.
[122] Cohan, Steven and Ina Rae Hark. "Introduction", 2. and Orgeron. 50.
[123] Mazierska, Ewa, and Laura Rascaroli. 4.
[124] Laderman. 248.
[125] Orgeron. 52.
[126] Ibid. 5.
[127] Ibid. 5.
[128] Of the road movies made in Europe that are contemporaries of *The Bus*, Godard's *Week End* is perhaps the film which is most comparable with *The Bus*, despite the fact that these films have more differences than commonalities. *Week End* is a dark comedy that follows a bourgeois couple, Roland and Corinne, on their journey to Corinne's parents' home in the countryside in order to secure the inheritance of her dying father, ready to murder her parents if necessary. Although they deal with completely different plots and characters, the films also have similarities. First of all, both films revolve around characters who travel for practical reasons and economic motivations. Second, like Okan's film, *Week End* is critical and sociopolitically aware. Despite the fact that the characters belong to different social classes—one being a bourgeois couple and the other being workers from an underdeveloped country—a Marxist class perspective of society is embedded in both films. Both films are critical of capitalist consumerism. This is best observed through the characters' relationship with people and commodities. In Godard's film, the characters are concerned with commodities to such a degree that they would steal luxury bags and shoes from wounded victims of a traffic accident instead of helping them. In Okan's film, the bus driver is a character with similar qualities, as he is concerned more with money, luxury commodities, and technical gadgets than the people that he swindles and abandons. The films are also comparable in their genre defying cinematographic experimentations. Both films oscillate between dark comedy, grotesque, absurd, and surreal elements and aesthetics; like the mask wearing locals of *The Bus*, Godard's film is home to suddenly appearing bizarre surreal characters, such as figures from history and literature, or revolutionary hippies who survive through cannibalism. Despite these similarities, it should be underlined that Godard's *Week End* and Okan's *The Bus* differ in a lot of other aspects, starting with the obvious; unlike *The Bus, Week End* is not concerned with issues of migration or border crossing. Furthermore, …

Week End is not really an exemplar of the European road movie, as it is a radical and highly idiosyncratic criticism of the bourgeoisie, while *The Bus* has a stronger connection with social problem films like *The Grapes of Wrath* and Pietro Germi's *The Path of Hope.* Nonetheless, addressing the similarities that exist between *Week End* and *The Bus* is important, if only to emphasise that even the most comparable European road movie contemporary with Okan's film has indeed very little in common with *The Bus*.

[129] Laderman. 248.

[130] Corrigan, Timothy. *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991. 146.

[131] "Extension". *Oxford dictionary of English*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010. 618.

[132] "Boşverin ya. Nasıl olsa yarın işe başlıyorsunuz. Yemek bol, on günde domuz gibi olursunuz". Translation mine.

[133] Sergels Torg is not only the most central part of Stockholm, it is also the symbol of commerce and the gateway to prostitution given its proximity to the red light street of the city, Malmskillnadsgatan. The square is also a symbol for drugs, since all drug deals were made here until the beginning of 2000s. Furthermore, Sergels Torg is also a symbol of change in Stockholm, a controversial one, since the old city of Klara which were torn down in order to make place for the new and modern. This was a very controversial decision, and was almost followed by a similar demolishing of Gamla Stan. So there are several layers of meaning here, at least from a Swedish context, which makes this very place significant in diverse ways.

[134] "Başlangıçtan beri yapmak istediğim bir çatışmayı, bir büyük uyumsuzluğu, aykırılığı ortaya koymaktı.Tekniğiyle, aşırı gelişmiş tüketim toplumuyla az gelişmiş toplumun insanlarını karşı karşıya getirmekti. Bunların birbirleriyle olan kendi içlerindeki çelişkiyi, aralarındaki korkunç çatışmayı vurgulamak istedim". Translation mine.

Oral. 7.

[135] In his 1985 book *Ganz unten* (Lowest of the Low) German investigative journalist Günter Wallraff, disguising himself as a Turkish Gastarbeiter, has documented unacceptable living and working conditions these temporary workers had been subjected to in Germany. A recent study made by Swedish Nation Radio's Finnish language division, Sisuradio, shows that Wallraff's findings are not unique to Germany, as Finnish guest workers who migrated to Sweden for work between 1968 and 1971 are shown to have a shorter life expectancy than the corresponding age group who were born in Sweden.

https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=185&artikel=7346494. Accessed on 15 February 2020.

[136] "We called for workforce, and human beings came".

Hollifield, James F, Philip L Martin, and Pia M Orrenius, eds. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*. United States: Stanford University Press, 2014. 336.

[137] Berger, John, Jean Mohr, and Sven Blomberg. *A Seventh Man: A Book of Images and Words about the Experience of Migrant Workers in Europe.* Middlesex: Penguin, 1975. 58.
[138] Ibid. 64.
[139] Foucault, Michel. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977–1978.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 1.
[140] Moreno, Jonathan D. "Chimera in Bioethics and Biopolitics", 380.
[141] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 189.
[142] Pamuk, Orhan. "My First Passport".
[143] Berger, John, Jean Mohr, and Sven Blomberg. 48–49.
[144] Yurdakul, Gökçe. *From Guest Workers Into Muslims.* Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 26.
[145] Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer*. Stanford CA: Stanford University, 1998. 47
[146] "Äckligt" and "barbar". Translation mine.
[147] Andeweg, Agnes. "The Ghost in the Closet: Kellendonk and the Gothic". 143, and Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. 186.
[148] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York, NY, United States: Columbia University Press, 2015. 89.
[149] Oral. 7.
[150] Luxembourgeus. 208-209.
[151] Orgeron. 10.
[152] Roffman, Peter and Purdy, Jim. *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties*, Indiana University Press, 1981. viii.
[153] Ibid. 24.
[154] Laderman. 265.
[155] Luxembourgeus. 64-65.
[156] "Ben İtalyan Yeni Gerçekçi sinemasında, *Bisiklet Hırsızları* filminde olduğu gibi gerçekçi bir sinema yapmayı amaçlamıştım".
Ibid.
[157] Shiel, Mark. *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding The Cinematic City.* Wallflower, 2006. 45.
[158] Kuhn, Annette, and Guy Westwell. "Cinema Vérité". *A dictionary of film studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 80–81.
[159] Young, Colin. "Observational cinema". 108.
[160] Peacock, Louise. *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain*. 2014. 27.
[161] Dale, Alan S. *Comedy Is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies*. U of Minnesota P. 2000. 1.
[162] Paulus, Tom, and Rob King. *Slapstick Comedy*. Routledge, 2010. 8.
[163] Dale. 22.
[164] Barnes, Linda Horvay. *Dialectics of Black Humor, Process and Product*. Las Vegas: Peter. Lang, 1978. 112.
[165] Ibid. 112.
[166] O'Neill, Partrick. "Comedy of Entropy: Contexts of Black Humour", 91.
[167] Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. Methuen, 1972. 20.

[168] Ibid. 21
[169] Luxembourgeus. 188.