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Evaluation of child abuse in two feature films

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Abstract

The child abuse is a phenomenon that leads to ethical and conscientious inquiries. Although it is encountered rather frequently, this phenomenon does not take place as a theme in the means of communication, including the cinema as well. With the purpose of examining how the child sexual abuse phenomenon is handled in two feature films from different cultures, an American movies of 1999 “8mm” and a Turkish movie of 2009 “Ejder Kapanı” (Dragon Trap). The themes included by both movies, such as justice, securing the justice, the relation between justice and law, conscience, ethics, punishment of the guilty, victim’s relatives rage against the guilty, society’s view of crime are analyzed within the moral development theory of Kohlberg.

Keywords: Child abuse, sexual abuse, ethics, justice.

1. Introduction

The child sexual abuse is a subject known for centuries. The child abuse is a serious problem with complex reasons and tragic results, and covering medicine, law, development, and psychosocial issues (Kara et al., 2004). According to the description made by the World Health Organization in the year 2002, “*the child abuse is exposure of the child to any attitudes and behaviors causing adverse effects on the child’s health, growth and development, also including any physical and/or emotional, sexual effects, negligence, or advertising-oriented or all other types of effects that lead to negligence (Özcebe, 2009)*”.

It is sexual abuse to use the child for sexual stimulation and satisfaction, force the child to prostitution, and use the child as a sexual object in the crimes like pornography, by an adult. The sexual abuse does not necessarily include violence; the child’s age is irrelevant (Polat, 2000; Nurcombe, 2000).

In recent years, there is an increase in the child sexual abuse (Ovayolu, Uçan, Serindağ, 2007). In 1998, it was reported that 1.6 per thousand children has been abused sexually in the United States of America. The epidemiologic studies conducted in other countries also give similar rates (Putnam, 2003). In our country, on the other hand, a study conducted in Trakya University has revealed that the rate of domestic sexual abuse is 1.4% (Koten et al., 1996).

The researches conducted in several countries indicate that the problem is much bigger than the estimates. For instance, it has been found out that the violence against children is 21.9% in Kenya; while the physical neglect of the children is 19%, the educational neglect is 11%, and the physical violence due to insufficient monitoring by the family is 48% in Canada (Polat, 2000).

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The WHO estimates that almost 53,000 children were killed in the year of 2002; UNICEF estimates that three million girls are circumcised every year in the sub-Saharan countries as well as Egypt and Sudan; and the International Labor Organization estimates that almost 218 million children were employed while 126 million children were put to work in dangerous works in the year 2004 (Özcebe, 2009)

The purpose of this work is to examine two feature films based on the sexual abuse phenomenon that is one of the most serious problems of the modern world. Although it is one of the most serious problems of the modern world, a crime element such as the sexual abuse is not headline preferred to handle in the daily life, especially in the entertainment sector. Given the fact that the society cannot face this problem and it leads to ethical inquiries, avoidance of the sexual abuse matter may be considered reasonable. Besides, publishing such subjects containing a crime element and using them as material in the entertainment sector is ominous in terms of the legitimization probability of the crime. Thus, the sexual abuse and the reaction against the sexual abuse are examined in this study not over the real phenomena, but instead, over the feature films that are representation of the reality.

An important motivational correlation is observed between the sex crimes and the aggressive instincts (Gölge, Yavuz, 2007). The motivational conditions include also the cultural features in terms of committing a crime and the type of the crime. The cultural conditions, the perpetrator, and the way of committing the crime differ significantly. In this context, the sexual abuse varies by culture. We encounter the sexual abuse in every society as a social problem affecting the children. Today, numerous regions of the world are problematic in terms of satisfying the fundamental rights and needs of the children. However, none of these problems are as cruel and sorrowful as the sexual abuse that is a violation of the child rights directly by a human. The child sexual abuse is a serious mental health for the societies and the gravest violation of the child rights. The sexual abuse behavior, included among the types of abuse, leads to ethical and conscientious inquiries in every society. The child sexual abuse covers the sexual actions made against the will of the target person. In this sense, the sexual abuse can be defined as the use of a child for any sexual purpose or satisfaction, or inclusion or exposure of the child to a sexual action/event (Coşkun 2011).

The subject of this study is the individual's behavior of satisfying his/her own needs, i.e. egoistic instincts, as basic for the Pre-Conventional Level of Kohlberg's moral development, which is composed of the Dependency and Punishment, Obedience, Individualism, and Self-Interest-based Exchange Stages. The individual can break the law if s/he believes that s/he can go unpunished (Zembar and Unutkan, 2001; Selçuk, 2001). At the Conventional Level composed of the Law and Order, Interpersonal Expectations and Conformity stages, what is important for the individual is to act in conformity with the social expectations. The individual considers the other people's emotions and thoughts as well (Başal, 2004; Aydın et al., 2002; Aral et al., 2001). At the Post-Conventional level that is composed of the Social Contract and Individual Rights, Universal Ethical Principles, on the other hand, the individual tends to make judgments considering the human rights and behave accordingly by developing his/her autonomous system of values (Temel and Aksoy, 2001; Selçuk, 2001; Kulaksızoğlu, 1999).

In this study, two movies based on the theme of sexual abuse crime, criminals, and how these criminals are punished are reviewed. With the purpose of examining the cultural differences or similarities, two movies, one American and one Turkish, are analyzed. Both movies include important themes such as justice, securing the justice, the relation between justice and law, conscience, ethics, punishment of the guilty, victim's relatives rage against the guilty, society's view of crime.

2. Material Method:

In line with the purpose of the study, two feature films based on child sexual abuse are examined and analyzed using the discourse analysis technique. The first movie is "8mm", an American production from the year 1999, directed by Joel Schumacher, and the leading role of which was played by Nicolas Cage. The storyline of the movie is as follows: "Tom Welles (Nicolas Cage) is a young and idealist detective. Very loyal to his wife and daughter, Tom takes a job from an old lady called Mrs. Christian. Mrs. Christian finds his husband's concealed strongbox after his death. In addition to financial items like money, stock certificates, etc., this strongbox also includes a mysterious film reel. Impossible to copy, this reel contains sadomasochist images, at the end of which a little girl has been killed. What Mrs. Christian wants to learn is whether this is real or movie effect. Tom says he needs no more than 3 weeks to uncover it. Although Tom, who has received a blank check for this job, thinks that he has found an important opportunity for the future of his family, the things are much complicated than what he thinks.

The second film is "Ejder Kapanı" (Dragon Trap), a Turkish production from the year 2009, directed by Uğur Yücel, and the leading roles of which were played by Uğur Yücel and Kenan İmirzalıoğlu. The storyline of the

movie is as follows: A series of murders begins in Istanbul, all victims of which are the pedophiles who have come out of prison thanks to amnesty. Immediately before that, 12-year old sister of Ensar (Nejat İşler) doing his military service in the Southeast is raped. And after that Ensar disappears. Together with the murders, the doubts center on Ensar. Deputy Police Chief Abbas (Uğur Yücel) and Chief Inspector Celal the ‘Scorpion’ (İmirzalıoğlu) from homicide assume the investigation. The killer is very clever and acts rapidly. Besides, the people support the killer as he punishes the criminals.

The discourse analysis technique has been used to examine these two movies in line with the purpose of the study. The discourse analysis targets understanding the human within the context of his/her communication (Foucault, 1979; Potter, Wetherell, 1987, 1995). Therefore, it aims revealing the discourse. And the discourse is defined as the time and space commonalities of the entirety composed of the components such as history, culture, language, geography, and religion (Narter, 2003). The themes in the written and verbal materials provide information on the whole discourse. Therefore, this technique has been preferred to analyze these movies.

3. Conclusions

The themes have been determined to reveal the purpose of the study in a manner complying with the discourse analysis technique. These themes are justice, securing the justice, the relation between justice and law, and the conscience. Not all of the said themes have the same weight in both movies. Although some themes are present in both movies, their contents are different.

The justice theme appears as the main theme in both movies. The generally valid mechanisms of delivering the justice are the resources resorted to in both movies. In “8mm”, a private investigator is hired as the end of a little girl killed at the end of a movie containing violence and sex is wondered. In “Ejder Kapanı”, on the other hand, the fiction of the movie is given from the perspective of the law enforcement agency that catches and brings the criminals to justice.

The theme of securing the justice is the striking element of both movies. In “8mm”, it is discovered by the private investigator that the little girl has really been killed. However, the only evidence to reveal the perpetrator is burned and destroyed by the collaborators. The detective who confronts the real criminal has to secure the justice himself. He kills the criminal. When he returns to his family, he is a killer. He has secured the justice, but now the deliverer of justice is a criminal. In “Ejder Kapanı”, on the other hand, when the deliverers of justice have begun to chase the killer, they try to reveal his features and the manner in which he commits the crimes. In the final, they discover that an extremely reliable member policeman has punished the criminals in his own way. In both movies, it is seen that the deliverers of justice challenge, even though with different approaches, the justice mechanisms defined socially and legally.

From the viewpoint of justice-law relation, it is revealed in both movies that although the persons who are in charge of securing the justice represent the laws securing the justice, they do not behave in compliance with the laws. And this brings forward another important theme: the relation between the “personal conscience” and the “laws” representing the social conscience. The theme of conscience, the emotional, i.e. personal, bond both justice deliverers have established with the victims did not prevent them from committing a crime. Therefore, it can be suggested that the justice delivery mechanisms constitute a structure to be questioned continuously through the personal conscience.

Although the American made “8mm” and the Turkish made “Ejder Kapanı” contain different cultural elements, they are two movies questioning basically the relation between justice and conscience.

Discussion

At the end of the study, it can be suggested the questioning between the justice and the conscience is a universal question and on the agenda as an important headline in the modern world.

It is known that the scientists have suggested different views in different periods on the development of morality and conscience. Freud states, within the framework of the psychoanalytic approach, that the ethical judgments and standards appear in consequence of identification with the father towards the end of the phallic stage. According to the behaviorist perspective, the individual earns the ethical judgments through conditioning. For instance, if a child is rewarded when s/he draws a picture, s/he will regard this behavior as right and continue to do it. And s/he will regard the intolerable behaviors as wrong. According to the social learning approach, on the other hand, the ethical judgments are earned through modeling. For instance, a child’s attitude towards lying can be created by imitating

his/her father. Piaget, on the other hand, has tried to explain the moral development by suggesting that it continues gradually in parallel to cognitive development and develops hierarchically ordered stages, and specified that the principles that are valid for the cognitive development are also valid for the moral development. And enhancing Piaget's theorem, Kohlberg has also emphasized the intellectual factors in moral development, and formed his own development notion accordingly.

Piaget regards the moral development as a construction process, while Kohlberg regards it as a process of discovering the universal ethical principles (Kabadayı, Aladağ, 2010). Piaget and Kohlberg have explained that the moral development is formed in an approach displaying parallelism with the cognitive development. The universality of moral development means that this development picture is valid from numerous societies, culture, and religions. Investigating the moral thoughts is various countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Mexico, and Turkey, Kohlberg has discovered the existence of similar development processes in all of them. He has also revealed that the development process is not dependent on any religion or lack of religion. "According to Kohlberg, the people in all cultures use the same basic moral concepts like justice, equality, love, respect, and authority" (MERCİN, 2005).

As we specify in our study, the child sexual abuse is a serious mental health for the societies and the gravest violation of the child rights. The sexual abuse behavior, included among the types of abuse, leads to ethical and conscientious inquiries in every society. It will be right to say that such inquiries have a common feature independent of societies and religions.

In both movies analyzed in our study, the emotional bond the persons who are in charge of securing the justice have established with the victims did not prevent them from committing a crime. From this viewpoint, it can be suggested that the justice delivery mechanisms constitute a structure to be questioned continuously through the personal conscience, and that this questioning does not vary by society.

In the event that a subject has contradictory correct aspects that can be discussed by two persons, the "moral dichotomy" appears. Kohlberg's moral dichotomies cause that the values like law and life confront each other. There are situations where one of the parties will have advantages to the disadvantage of the other (Beyaz, 2010). The advantage thought to be earned here is easing the individual conscience by applying the solution deemed to be moral despite the laws. If the unease felt gains widespread acceptance, the conscience may come before the laws. When it is child sexual abuse, the personal conscience may overcome the laws representing the social conscience. This is an important point while creating the laws on this issue.

Both movies are difficult to watch and disturbing. Both the sexual abuse in the titles and the process of punishing the criminals who have committed this crime are rather exhausting. Especially the use of children at somewhat pornographic level exhausts the spectators and leads them to search their own hearts. And in both movies, the justice has been delivered within own process of the movie and the spectators have completed the movie with a feeling of relief.

Conclusion:

Making feature films based on the child abuse crime will obviously enable to make inquiries on this issue. It will be right to pay attention especially to the issues such as justice and punishing the crime, and to conduct new studies on this issue. The content analysis and statistical evaluation of the study is continuing

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