IDEOLOGICAL PROCESS OF SHOPPING MALLS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF 'GLOCALIZATION'

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ABSTRACT

With the changing meanings of urban lifestyles, cities started to be seen as the main landscapes of consumption and shopping malls became one of the markers of the modern cities. Global trends in urbanization turned shopping malls into the core of the urban experience. With their advantageous physical features, these spaces are strategically located and designed to attract attention and seduce consumer groups. The goal of this critical study is the assessment of ideological process that is assumed to be going on in shopping malls by emphasizing the structural changes of capitalism and questioning how global and homogeneous structure of shopping malls moves towards a process of 'glocalization' that combine the post-fordist capitalist logic with more local, political, cultural and social influences. Within this framework, the limitations of dominant ideology thesis in capitalist societies are analyzed around the theme of globalization. For the analysis, Nicholas Abercrombie's "Popular Culture and Ideological Effects" article and the critiques in the article about the dominant ideology thesis are used as the major references.

Keywords: *Shopping Malls, Globalization, Localization, Consumption, Capitalist Ideology, Glocalization.*

ÖZET
'GLOKALLEŞME' ÇERÇEVESİNDE ALIŞVERİŞ MERKEZLERİNİN İDEOLOJİK SÜRECİ

Kent yaşamının anlamının değişmesiyle birlikte şehirler tüketim olgusunun ana merkezleri haline gelirken, alışveriş merkezleri de modern şehirlerin önemli işaretlerinden biri haline geldi. Kentleşme sürecindeki küresel eğilimler alışveriş merkezlerini kent deneyiminin merkezi durumuna getirdi. Fiziksel özelliklerinin avantajlarını da kullanarak alışveriş merkezleri kent içerisinde stratejik noktalara konumlandırılıp tüketicilerin dikkatini çekerek, onları baştan çıkarmak üzere tasarlanmışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kapitalizmin yapısal değişikliklerine vurgu yaparak, alışveriş merkezleri sure geldiği varsayılan ideolojik süreci değerlendirmektir. Bunun yanı sıra, bu çalışma, alışveriş merkezlerinin küresel ve homojen yapısının nasıl fordizm sonrası kapitalist söylemi daha yerel, politik ve sosyal etkilerle bir araya getiren 'glokalleşme' sürecine doğru yol aldığını

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sorgular. Bu çerçevede, kapitalist toplumlardaki hakim ideoloji tezinin sınırlılıkları küreselleşme teması etrafında incelenme ve analiz edilme fırsatı bulur. Bu analiz için Nicholas Abercrombie'nin "Popular Culture and Ideological Effects" [Popüler Kültür ve İdeolojik Etkiler] adlı makalesi ve hâkim ideoloji eleştirileri temel kaynak olarak kullanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Alışveriş Merkezleri, Küreselleşme, Yerelleşme, Tüketim, Hâkim İdeoloji, Glokalleşme.*

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Shopping Malls as the Main Consumption Sites

The technological improvements of today's post-industrial world have channeled us to escape the obligations that are provided for us. Accordingly, consumption patterns take the role of allowing people to improve their well-being through opportunities that highlight the leisure freedom and the pursuit of happiness (Mullins et al., 1999). With such an exalted role, consumption oriented daily life resulted in new forms of consumption spaces in many cities including, shopping malls, hypermarkets, theme parks, etc. Among these spaces, shopping malls are significant with their improved physical and social environments for consumption and leisure for all the family (Sibley, 1995). Zukin (1998) states that with the changing meanings of urban lifestyles, cities started to be seen as the main landscapes of consumption and shopping malls became one of the markers of them.

Shopping malls offer packaged spaces, in which modern city life can easily be consumed by the citizens. With their advantageous physical features such as architecture, design and atmosphere in many shops, these spaces are strategically located and designed to attract attention and seduce consumer groups (Erkip et al., 2012). These new consumption spaces of the cities also bring a new aspect to the consumption-related activities of public spaces such as socializing, strolling, browsing and hanging out. Shopping center developers believe that a mall should attract as much as customer as possible and must keep those customers in that space (Haytko and Baker, 2004).

According to these diverse definitions of malls it is possible to argue that through the dissociation from the act of shopping, there is something else going on in shopping malls other than mere shopping that mediates the materialist relations of mass consumption in contemporary capitalist social order and also mediated by those relations of capitalism (Goss, 1993). The goal of this critical study is the assessment of ideological process that is assumed to be going on in shopping malls by emphasizing the structural changes of capitalism including the questioning of

terms such as standardization, homogeneity, plurality and diversity. The multiplicity of standardized attractions that reduce the uniqueness and locality within and among shopping malls is the main starting point for this paper in order to question how global and homogeneous structure of shopping malls moves towards a process of 'glocalization' that combine the post-fordist capitalist logic with more local, political, cultural and social influences. Within this framework, then, it becomes possible to criticize the dominant ideology thesis of capitalism around the theme of globalization. While doing such an analysis, the limitations of "dominant ideology thesis", which are discussed by Nicholas Abercrombie (1990) in the article of "Popular Culture and Ideological Effects", are analyzed as the major reference points.

Three Aspects of Ideology

Global trends that affect the process of urbanization and the consumption-oriented organization of daily life lead to the formation of similar cities. Spaces such as shopping malls, hypermarkets and theme parks became the central core of those cities (Erkip et al., 2012). Shopping malls deserve a special attention as an appropriate site for the existing globalization. Shopping malls, which can be categorized under the contemporary, internationally driven disorganized capitalism of Lash and Urry (1987), can be claimed as being characterized by flexibility at all levels, visual forms of consumption and a global and cross-cultural structure. With global capitalism that intertwined with visual images, the amusement of society is turned out to be a central issue. Isolated and controlled environments of shopping malls display the fantastic images of the global capitalism to many people that spent a lot of time in malls (Langman, 1992).

The mall can be claimed as being designed with a goal of trapping the consumer in the world of consumption, in which both the homogenization of culture and alienation of the individual is going on through the manipulation of desire. Accordingly, shopping malls can be argued as one of the major 'consumption' oriented places of the modern capitalist societies where the significance of leisure is emphasized. According to these descriptions of shopping malls, it is possible to examine them as a part of modern mass culture through which dominant ideology thesis can easily be criticized with its 'production' oriented focus and underestimation of significance of leisure and pleasure in consumption (Abercrombie, 1990). To deepen this discussion about the limitations of the ideological structure of capitalism within the framework of globalized mall spaces, it might be useful to follow Hall's (1980) three aspects – production, text and

appropriation - that are distinguished to carry out a sociological analysis of a cultural form. As Hall (1980) mentions, even though these three moments can be looked at independently, while considering the relationship between cultural form and ideology, it is significant to look at how these moments fit together. Abercrombie (1990) also points out a further differentiation of three aspects of ideology which correspond to Hall's (1980) text, production and audience moments, i.e., *textual ideology*, *ideology setting* and *ideological effect*.

According to Abercrombie, *textual ideology* is the ideology encoded in the text. It might be a film, TV program, photograph, novel or a piece of music. In addition, it that scope I believe that it is also possible to read a 'designed space' as a text .Two important aspects of textual ideology are coherence and dominance (Abercrombie, 1990). According to Abercrombie, for a text to be ideological some minimum degree of coherence seems to be necessary. For the notion of dominance, we can talk about a dominant or preferred meaning which is powerful to organize other subordinate meanings. For the *ideology setting*, Abercrombie (1990) talks about the mechanisms within a production process which encode a particular ideology in the text. He gives the examples of television drama series which involves producers, directors, actors, cameramen etc. He states that "each of these groups of people will have its own occupational culture and artistic and commercial aims" (p. 212). However, then it become important to question how such a fragmented process generates a product with an ideological coherence which makes a further questioning of the discussion of textual ideology.

"*Ideological effect* refers to the process whereby a textual ideology affects an audience in such a way that an order of domination is secured" (Abercrombie, 1990, p. 203). What Abercrombie points out in reference to ideological effect is the importance of passivity of audiences in absorbing the ideological content of the text; for instance absorbing the ideological content of TV, film, music or a place without reflection. In that sense, what was established is that an audience is affected by an ideology simply by identifying textual ideology. All these three aspects of ideology

According to above mentioned descriptions of these three aspects of ideology, it is possible to say that all three in a sense fit together in order to foster each other while criticizing the functioning of dominant ideology within the structure of capitalism. Shopping malls as 'designed spaces' with their physical and social environments can be discussed around these three aspects of ideology in order to question whether shopping malls can be ideologically incorporating, and while doing this, the process of globalization/localization in the malls will be assessed in

order to question whether mall space at one time can function ideologically while at another it does not.

Ideological Process of Shopping Malls

For the ideal type of modern city, it is possible to form correspondences between the built environments and urban lifestyles that can be accepted to be influenced from the interpretations of modernity. Starting with the period between 1880 and 1920, main urban spaces are formed around department stores, restaurants, hotels and some public parks. New shopping spaces, notably, department stores and shopping arcades or galleries are the markers of the modern city. This new availability of consumer goods to customers seems to democratize the desire by producing an alternative form of encoding to the dominant ideology which is flourished from production oriented life style. However, there is a dangerous side of those varied delights of the department stores and shopping arcades. They comprise morally dangerous 'dream world' for the consumers by encoding two coherent meanings. On the one hand, the emphasis is on pleasure and joy which is based on 'the significance of emancipation by the leisure time', on the other hand the mentality, which explains consumption with the mode of production and the desire for money and material things is highlighted. This is how 'bourgeois' respectability is tried to be instilled into a growing urban public (see Zukin, 1998 for details). In that sense, it is possible to argue that two important aspects of textual ideology - coherence and dominance – demonstrate itself within the very structure of shopping malls. With the period of late modernity, in the mid 20th century, with a shift from great metropolises to the suburbs and to suburban type of decentered, automobile-bound cities and their shopping arcades, the dreamlike quality of the malls is tried to maximize shopping through a socially and visually standardized and homogeneous mix of stores and formats. The more capitalist discourse organizes the malls with encoding the message of consumption of bourgeoisie lifestyle and pleasure, the more coherent and standardized the malls become.

At this point, it is necessary to underline the process of globalization that characterizes the mall spaces with an internal logic based on a free market ideology. It is possible to talk about the shopping malls together with the phrases such as speed-up, internationalization, mobility, global village, overcoming spatial barriers and 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989). In this respect, any kind of images, from any part of the earth, can be seen as available for ever-increasing numbers of shopping malls worldwide in a coherent, dominant and standardized form as textual ideology refers. The institutional arrangements as a part of the ideology setting in

the worldwide permit mobility of people across national boundaries that maintain this globalization process of those spaces. Of course, information and communication technology is also making it possible to maintain this form of disorganized capitalism by working as the necessary mechanisms to encode the textual ideology. The stores, products, services offered and the architecture are similar across different malls and even countries that create a homogenized mall culture. The use of plate glass, cast iron, steel construction, colored electric lights, naming etc. are all commodified sign systems of architecture (Jameson, 1989) within the framework of capitalism that spread all the malls worldwide by highlighting standardization and homogenization under the title of globalization. The main reason of this can be given as a high percentage of malls are planned and built by a few transnational architectural design firms that are another part of the ideology setting. In other words, shopping malls that can be assumed to be globalized spaces and may be "artifacts of globalization" (Clark, 1996) are closely connected to the changes in the structure and spatial relations of capitalism as mechanism that promote this assumption.

The mall space is ideologically constructed to the extent that it affects the mall users as consumers so that existing potential relations are absorbed by them. If we look at the complex structure of malls with variety of facilities, it is possible to see how they are successfully constructed as a commercial strategy with a goal of creating an ideological effect on the mall users.

Consumers prefer settings that offer a favorable climate, a high potential for social interaction, ease of access, a perceived freedom from safety concerns, and a large selection of consumable goods and experiences with reduced price. In response to these preferences, the promise of a wide assortment of stores and merchandise available in a single location together with interiors that have evolved comfortable, architecturally rich through lavish materials, sophisticated design elements and ambitious managers and staff who aim to institute many special events in order to answer the needs of customers begin to characterize the malls (Bloch, Ridgway and Dawson, 1994). And this takes the attention to the diverse groups of users with diverse forms of expectation from the mall space and different forms of attitudes, behaviors they faced with respect to their expectations, and socio-demographic differences. For instance, Massicotte, et al. (2011), by pointing out teenagers as usually less knowledgeable consumers than adults, argued that the social dimension of shopping is more important for them compared to adults. In addition, they add that:

[…] teenage and adult shoppers have different shopping motives and thus process the information about mall atmospherics differently. Adult shoppers use mall atmospheric cues to make inferences about merchandise quality in the mall (central processing), whereas teenagers use the same cues to make inferences about the social dimensions of the mall (peripheral processing) (p. 79).

Moreover, Jackson et al. (2011), while referring to the literature that emphasizes the differences between older and younger generations in experiencing and evaluating the mall atmosphere, revealed in their research that there is no difference between generations concerning hedonic and utilitarian benefits derived from a visit to the mall, but generational differences in attitude toward mall hygiene factors, locational convenience and entertainment features did exist.

Accordingly, it is possible to argue that with the participation of diverse groups of users including different gender and generational groups to whom the mall appeals mostly, the ideological effects of the mall space and its dominant messages seem to be transformed and resisted. In other words, even though the marginalized groups of the society seem to be absorbing the dominant message within the form of textual ideology in shopping malls, with their different forms of inferences and interpretations, they also highlight the fact that there is not necessarily one, single, coherent and unambiguous message to be absorbed in the mall space on the contrary to the argument that is tried to be justified by the dominant ideology thesis. In this respect, this situation leads to a vicious circle within which diversity of interpretations among mall users and the effect of ideology have also resulted in an increase in the number and diversity of mall users. Hence, as in the case of audiences for TV, as Abercrombie (1990) exemplifies, mall users have started to be differentiated in respect of social composition and, more important than this, in respect of response.

Abercrombie (1990) in his article by referring to the studies of Morley (1980) talks about how the reactions of audiences can be classified into three types: dominant, negotiated and oppositional. If the audiences respond in the dominant mode, they are using the values, attitudes and beliefs that are dominant in the society. If they are in the oppositional group, their way of thinking contradicts with the dominant mode. If they are using the negotiated mode, neither dominant nor oppositional mode, they live with dominant values without necessarily accepting or believing them. Within the diversity and plurality of mall users, it is possible to find out consumers belonging to all these three groups. Dominant members of the society including mainly white, male, middle class adults are usually accepted as the dominant user groups of the mall spaces (Sibley, 1995; Vanderbeck and Johnson,

2000). For the oppositional groups of mall users, the elderly, the young, women and members of sexual and ethnic minorities are considered. The negotiated ones are the consumers who have some complaints about the dominant ideology that have effects on them but having no opposite position to resist this ideological effect. Therefore, these groups of people can seem to belong to both dominant and/or oppositional groups. Existence of these three diverse groups of mall users can also be an important indication of the limitations of dominant ideology thesis for a group of people who have always potential of resisting and transforming the ideological effect of the dominant cultural encodes.

With increasing social diversity and pluralization within the mall space, it is possible to talk about changing strategies of mall managers, designers and architectural firms to include these diversified consumers to the mall space. In this respect, what should be considered is also diverse, plural and incoherent ideology settings or mechanisms that try to encode different messages which coincide with the diverse, plural and, even, incoherent ideological positions that answers different expectations. In other words, we can argue that shopping malls are trying to serve heterogeneous mall users with some diverse strategies and mechanism, like preserving locality, in addition to their homogeneous, standardized, global characteristics. According to this, as Abercrombie also points out, incoherence, diversity and pluralization that characterize the textual ideology, ideology setting and ideological effect of the ideological process, which is assumed to be taking place in shopping malls, make it difficult to secure within the theme of a 'dominant ideology'. At this point, in order to question the conditions of the proposition that shopping malls are ideologically constructed spaces that serve to encode different forms of interpretations, transformations and resistances related to the encoded messages, it is necessary to look at the issue of locality within the framework of global complexity. Thus, it might be possible to see whether it is sufficient to reflect the mall space with a great deal of diversity, pluralism and incoherence by turning the mall space against its globalized standardizations through localization.

Ideological Position of Shopping Malls within the Process of Glocalization

While analyzing the influence of globalization on shopping malls in association with the structural changes of capitalism, usually a little room is left for the issue of locality and local cultures. However, the current global complexity involves the opposing forces of globalization/localization and heterogenization/homogenization (Ger, 1997). These dualisms, in fact, can show themselves within the very structure of shopping malls. In other words, on the one

hand malls are analyzed as the representative of a global logic of capitalist accumulation that results in an immense standardization and homogenization, on the other hand there are local characteristics that differentiate malls all around the world by leading to diversity, incoherence, plurality and heterogeneity. This structure of the malls involving the dialectic of globalization/localization with the global cultural flows of capitalism usually reflects itself as a struggle over locality (Yeoh, 1999). In other words, diverse mall users want to see and experience the style, products, services that is provided in different parts of the world in a similar fashion, but at the same time, they want to preserve traditions and cultural specificity. According to this, it is possible to claim that local customs that are accepted in malls of different countries grow everyday. For instance, in the Turkish case, diverse and plural ideology setting that show itself in the form of leading entrepreneurs who have given their companies' names to the shopping malls (such as *Carrefour Sa*, which belongs to Sabancı Holding in Turkey) try to serve to this locality.

Abaza (2001), while talking about the involvement of local elements to the global and standardized malls for the case of Egypt, he calls the process as hybridity in consumerism. According to him (p. 114):

> "… a McDonald's, a shopping mall or a consumer brand is recycled according to local tastes. A Wimpy or a McDonald's in Singapore is Asianized and adapted to local culinary tastes and in Cairo it is Egyptianized. It is the creation of something new, having to do with an imagined representation of an American culture fusing with invented Egyptian artifacts…What interests us is how the hybridization of tastes and reifications of Egyptian cultural symbols are marked locally".

In Turkey what Abaza (2001) told can be best exemplified with Mc Turco Menu of McDonald's and Sultan Menu that Burger King served during Ramadan in several shopping malls. They are something totally new and different than American culture that has fused with invented Turkish food. This is a good example of how global and local meets within the process of hybridization which is very far away from the implications of dominant ideology of the capitalist discourse. In addition to this more product-based combination, how this global and local interaction reflects itself in spatial arrangements can also be illustrated within the shopping malls in Turkey which reflect the emergence of an international taste through their food courts and restaurants. In other words, as Abaza (2001) argued, hybrid tastes are observed in the mix of international brands and local ones. Especially, during Ramadan which coincided with the New Year in 2000 and 2001, the organization of space in such shopping malls demonstrated how global and local has interacted with each other through the use of both Muslim and Christian traditions. On the one

hand Christmas was tried to be reflected in the decoration of the malls with Christmas trees, as it was reflected mainly and mostly in other malls worldwide, on the other hand, Ramadan was also a part of that decoration, for instance, with a Turkish coffeehouse as highlighting the local elements under Muslim traditions.

As the above mentioned examples indicate, shopping malls cannot be seen as a simple imposition of dominant capitalist ideology and globalization on subordinate classes. As Antonio Gramsci tells concerning the relationship between bourgeoisie and working class, one cannot speak of domination there but rather the struggle for hegemony. And that hegemony can only be achieved to the extent that it can accommodate subordinate class values. Therefore, what we are talking about is a case of negotiation between dominant and subordinate class values; each is transformed by the other and resist against the dominant ideology (cited in Abercrombie, 1980). I think this argument can be used to understand the ideological position of shopping malls that are constructed with both global and standardized messages of capitalism but, at the same time, include local elements. Then, what we face within the mall space is a "globalized locality" or 'glocalization' of the mall that "suggest the possibility that individuals with very different lifestyles and social networks can live in close proximity without untoward interference with each other" (Albrow, 1997, p. 51).

The reasons of using those local elements can be explained with plural, incoherent, heterogeneous and diverse meanings in order to affect the plural, incoherent, heterogeneous and diverse mall users. However, I believe it is still significant to question whether such an integration of local elements in order to catch up with the diversity, plurality and heterogeneity is sufficient for the assumption of shopping malls' ideological functioning as resisting and transforming the ideological effects of dominant culture since what we see is something neither totally global and standardized, nor it is totally local and diverse; therefore we call this process and strategy as glocalization. In this process, 'subordinate', diverse and heterogeneous values seem to be accommodated and hegemony that is aimed to maximize consumption is tried to be constructed through these local encodes. However, at that point some those local forces, messages and encodes has started to become dominant and coherent since it might not possible to be that plural, that heterogeneous, that diverse and that incoherent to comprise all the local elements within a culture. For instance, Ramadan coincided with the New Year and the use of both Muslim and Christian traditions with some decorative elements in mall seem to be accepted as sufficient to cover the locality and diversity within Turkey. However, it is not possible to say that such kind of an application is addressing 'all

the Muslims' in Turkey, since there are sects among Muslims which do not celebrate Ramadan. In other words, despite accommodation of local customs, there are thousands of other customs that cannot be incorporated into mall space. Therefore, in that sense it is very possible to argue that trying to resist or transform the ideological effects of the dominant culture might itself result in attempts for justification of the ideological effects of that culture for different groups of people.

To sum up, it is also important to note that the influence of local forces which are trying to be integrated to the globalization process of shopping malls makes the situation more complicated since shopping malls that has become glocalized by the interference of elements of diversity, incoherence, pluralization and heterogeneity, seem to be still problematic concerning the diversity of the mall users and their inferences about the mall space. Now we are not only encoded with the message of power of global forces, but also power of local forces including local entrepreneurs, firms, companies, and affluent. Therefore, I think, it is possible to argue that shopping malls, in some sense, are continuing to be functioning ideologically with its modern cultural impacts that serve for both global and local forces; even if they seem to be incoherent, diverse, plural and heterogeneous with their glocalized textual ideology, local mechanisms and diverse mall users, message of consumption is still valid with its standardized forms without having sufficiency to cover all the diversity within a culture.

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