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The Relationship between Cinema and Social Policy: An Examination within the Context of Welfare Regimes

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Abstract: This study aims to examine how post-1980 social policies in different countries have been reflected in the life experiences of individuals through cinematic representations, within the framework of welfare regimes theory. The main subject of the research is to reveal how social policy practices gain meaning in social reality, not only as institutional arrangements but also through cultural narratives. In this regard, the study aims to make visible the everyday life dimension of social policy by relating the welfare regimes literature to cinema and to contribute to the literature by proposing an interdisciplinary analysis. A qualitative research approach has been adopted in the study; selected films from countries representing different welfare regimes have been analyzed from a social policy perspective. Themes of labour, family, state, social assistance, solidarity, and exclusion have been examined through sample film narratives corresponding to post-communist, Southern European, social democratic, conservative-corporatist, and liberal welfare regimes. The study concludes that welfare regimes are not only institutional structures but also social practices that shape the experiences of individuals, and that cinema offers a powerful analytical field that makes these experiences visible. It was also concluded that the success of social policy should be evaluated not only in terms of material security, but also in conjunction with rights, participation, dignity, and social relations.

Keywords: Social policy, Welfare regimes, Historical perspectives of social policy, Cinema

INTRODUCTION

Social policy studies have long been evaluated through the institutional structures, social spending levels, and legal regulations of welfare states. However, the question of how individuals experience these policies, how they make sense of them in daily life, and how they are reproduced within social relations has often been relegated to secondary importance. In this regard, cinema, as a cultural space that makes social reality visible through aesthetic narratives, offers a significant opportunity to analyze the practical consequences of social policy. To understand not only the structural characteristics of welfare regimes but also the effects these structures have on individuals' lives, it is necessary to examine cultural representations.

Cinema has long been understood not only as a medium of representation but also as a complex cultural and experiential form that shapes how reality is perceived and interpreted. In this sense, its meaning cannot be reduced to the intentions of the filmmaker alone. As Andrei Tarkovsky suggests, cinema exceeds what it appears to be, as its meaning emerges through time and through the interaction between the image and the spectator (Tarkovsky, 1986: 117).

This study addresses the transformation of social policies in the post-1980 period within the context of welfare regimes and analyzes how this transformation is represented through cinema. The research aims to contribute a cultural perspective to the social policy literature by examining the responses of different welfare models in social experiences through film narratives. In this respect, the study proposes a holistic approach to the analysis of welfare regimes, not limiting it solely to economic and institutional indicators, but also encompassing the insecurity, solidarity, exclusion, and struggles for rights experienced by individuals. The research is based on a qualitative research design and employs the comparative film analysis method. Film examples selected from countries representing different welfare regimes have been examined in terms of social policy themes and forms of social representation. This methodological choice aims to demonstrate that social policies are not only legal regulations but also ideological and cultural practices. The overall design of the study is based on an interdisciplinary framework that combines the typology of welfare regimes with the analysis of cinematic narratives.

Cinema played a central role in the cultural Cold War, functioning not merely as entertainment but as a political and ideological tool used to influence audiences and shape perceptions across different regions (Lee & Espeña, 2024: 12–13). Contemporary social policy research increasingly emphasizes comparative and multidisciplinary perspectives in order to address complex societal challenges across different national contexts. The importance of situating national policy developments within global dynamics also highlights the need for cross-disciplinary collaboration in understanding evolving welfare regimes (Sojka et al., 2024: 1).

NOTION AND SCOPE

This section will examine the structural basis of the cinematic works to be studied in the second section.

Welfare Regimes

While the most common approach in the literature for classifying welfare regimes is Esping-Andersen's tripartite typology, criticisms have been developed that this model is insufficient, especially in explaining Southern European countries and post-communist societies. In line with these criticisms, Ian Gough and Maurizio Ferrera have addressed welfare regimes within a five-fold classification framework, taking into account historical, institutional, and regional differences. This approach allows for the analysis of welfare states not only through the levels of social spending, but also based on the organizational forms of social protection and the relationships between family, market, and state (Gough, 2001: 165–168).

The liberal welfare regime has a structure in which market mechanisms play a central role, and the state's intervention in social policy is limited. In this regime, social assistance is generally selective, and the principles of individual responsibility and self-sufficiency are paramount. Social protection mechanisms focus more on combating poverty, and welfare services are largely provided through the market. According to Gough, this model represents a conception of welfare in which social risks are individualized, and inequalities are relatively higher (Gough, 2001: 169–171).

The corporatist (conservative) welfare regime refers to a structure where social rights are defined based on employment status and occupational position. In this regime, social security systems are organized through occupation-based insurance branches, and the family is positioned as a significant welfare provider. The state assumes a role in preserving existing status differences, and redistribution occurs at a limited level. In this respect, the corporatist regime prioritizes the continuity of the social order rather than social equality (Ferrera, 1996: 20–22).

The Southern European welfare regime was considered a separate model by Ferrera and developed to explain the unique welfare structure of Mediterranean countries. In this regime, social security systems have a fragmented structure, with some groups receiving a high level of protection while large segments of the population have limited social protection. The family plays a central role in providing welfare; informal solidarity networks compensate for areas where the state is insufficient. Ferrera emphasizes that this model is characterized by institutional weaknesses, clientelism, and regional inequalities (Ferrera, 1996: 26–30).

The social democratic welfare regime is based on the principles of universality, equality, and a high level of public responsibility. In this model, social rights are defined based on citizenship, and the state provides comprehensive protection against social risks. Education, health, and care services are provided with a high level of quality and accessibility; inequalities in income distribution are reduced through strong redistribution mechanisms. Gough considers this regime as the model in which social welfare is organized in the most inclusive and egalitarian way (Gough, 2001: 172–174).

The post-communist welfare regime, on the other hand, represents a distinct welfare model that emerged during the transition process of Eastern and Central European countries from a socialist system to a market economy. In this regime, welfare institutions were shaped between the universal but low-quality service concept of the socialist period and the effects of neoliberal transformation policies. Social protection systems are institutionally unstable, social spending is limited, and inequalities are high. Gough describes post-communist welfare regimes as models characterized by transitional uncertainties and not yet fully institutionalized (Gough, 2004: 195–198).

Historical Sections of Social Policy

The transformation in production relations following the Industrial Revolution fundamentally changed the structure of working life and led to the systematic inclusion of women and children as cheap labour in the labour market. In this process, the exposure of women and children to low-wage, insecure, and harsh working conditions deepened not only economic but also social inequalities. The inability of family incomes to meet basic needs made the participation of women and children in working life necessary; nevertheless, wage inequality and gender-based discrimination continued to be widespread. Thus, it is seen that a direct parallel cannot be established between the increase in production created by industrialization and social welfare; on the contrary, labour exploitation was concentrated on certain groups (Söner, 2018: 1).

The first half of the 20th century, as a period in which class inequalities, poverty, and social insecurity caused by industrialization intensified, was decisive in the

institutionalization of social policy. Particularly after the Great Depression of 1929, the limitations of the laissez-faire approach became visible, paving the way for the expansion of the state's role in the economic and social spheres. During this period, social policy aimed to maintain social stability through tools such as unemployment insurance, social security systems, and the provision of minimum living standards. Under the influence of Keynesian economic policies, the state was positioned not only as a regulator but also as a welfare provider (Hobsbawm, 1994: 94–98).

The period from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s is often referred to in the literature as the "golden age of capitalism." During this period, welfare state practices became widespread in Western Europe and North America; social policy expanded in line with the goals of universality, full employment, and income distribution justice. Increased social security spending, the expansion of public services, and the strengthening of trade unions are among the key characteristics of this period. According to Esping-Andersen, this process represents a historical period in which social rights were defined on the basis of citizenship and social policy became one of the fundamental elements of social integration (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 47–52).

From the late 1970s onwards, with economic crises, oil crises, and increasing global competition, the concept of the welfare state underwent a serious transformation. In the post-1980 period, with the rise of neoliberal policies, the role of the state in the field of social policy was redefined; market mechanisms and the emphasis on individual responsibility came to the forefront. The restriction of social spending, privatization practices, the spread of flexible employment forms, and the selective nature of social assistance are the distinctive features of this period. Harvey emphasizes that in the neoliberal period, social policy was restructured and subjected to economic efficiency targets, and the understanding of social rights weakened (Harvey, 2005: 76–81).

In the 21st century, social policy is being reshaped within the framework of globalization, demographic transformation, and new social risks. An aging population, precarious employment, migration, and increasing needs for care services have transformed the scope and tools of social policy. In this context, social policy has moved beyond being merely a protective mechanism and has become integrated with social investment, active employment policies, and social inclusion goals. Thus, 21st-century social policy has shifted towards developing a multidimensional approach to ensuring the sustainability of well-being (Morel, Palier & Palme, 2012: 3–8).

Cinema and Social Policy

Cinema has increasingly been conceptualised as a cultural institution and a socially situated practice, embedded within specific geographical, historical, and social contexts (Manning, 2020: 1). Film theory has been fundamentally shaped by semiological approaches that analyse cinema as a system of signification rather than a simple reflection of reality. As developed in the work of Christian Metz, cinematic meaning emerges from underlying structures and codes that organize images, narratives, and spectator engagement, positioning film as a complex symbolic system rather than a transparent medium (Buckland & Fairfax, 2017: 13). Film history should not be understood as a fixed or objective record of the past but as a constructed and interpretative process shaped by available materials, institutional frameworks, and historiographical choices. As Hagener and Zimmermann (2024)

argue, the writing of film history involves selecting, organizing, and interpreting fragments of the past, resulting in multiple possible narratives rather than a single unified history (Hagener & Zimmermann, 2024: 13–14).

Cinema should be understood as a dynamic and evolving medium shaped by a wide range of historical, cultural, and technological influences. As Eisenstein argues, cinema cannot be reduced to a linear history of films or authors but must be approached as a complex system emerging from multiple genealogies of media, art forms, and representational practices (Eisenstein, 2016: 20–21).

Cinema should not be understood solely as a representational medium but as a technological and epistemological system shaped by its material conditions. As Turquety (2019) argues, the transition from analogue to digital cinema has transformed not only production and distribution practices but also the very definition of cinema itself, raising questions about medium specificity, perception, and reproducibility (Turquety, 2019: 11–13).

British cinema has frequently been interpreted as a cultural medium reflecting social transformations, and the films of particular periods can be reconsidered not only as historical documents but also as aesthetic artefacts representing audience engagement and social realities (MacKillop & Sinyard, 2003: 2). In a historical context, social policy has taken shape as an institutional intervention area against the structural inequalities created by capitalist production relations. Problems such as harsh working conditions, widespread unemployment, and poverty for the working class have become structural issues threatening the social order, not just at the individual level. Therefore, social policy initially emerged as a field aimed at regulating the imbalance in labour-employer relations; over time, it transformed into a broader protection mechanism encompassing women, children, the elderly, and other disadvantaged groups. Thus, social policy can be considered a historical necessity representing the institutionalization of state intervention against the social risks created by industrialization (Söner, 2018: 2).

The relationship between art and social life is underlined, emphasizing that works of art are not mechanical copies reflecting social reality one-to-one, but aesthetic representations reconstructed through the artist's "intellectual-emotional prism" (Makal, 2020: 3). In this context, art functions as a historical testimony that indirectly but powerfully reflects the social, economic, and political conditions of the period in which it is produced.

The relationship between art and labour is examined from a historical and theoretical perspective; it is particularly emphasized that art is not an area independent of social production processes. It reveals that art is not only an aesthetic activity but also a form of labour shaped within specific production relations. In this context, the artist's production is considered as a process in which both mental and creative labour are embodied; the emergence of the artwork is considered together with social conditions, class structure, and economic relations (İnce, 2009: 18). Therefore, art is positioned not only as a product of individual creativity but also as a historical practice representing the aesthetic manifestation of social labour processes.

Cinema has played a crucial role in representing periods of political transition, particularly in contexts shaped by imperial decline and decolonization. As demonstrated in

analyses of British and Indian cinemas, film becomes a site where shifting power relations, colonial tensions, and emerging national identities are negotiated and reinterpreted within changing historical conditions (Jaikumar, 2006: 1).

By demonstrating that the relationship between art and labour cannot be considered independently of its historical and social context, it is necessary to emphasize that artistic production is shaped within specific production relations. It states that art is not only a product of individual creativity; on the contrary, it is a labour process shaped within the framework of social division of labour, class structure, and economic conditions. In this context, the artwork is considered a reflection of both material production relations and ideological structures on the aesthetic plane (Yüksel, 2017: 15). This study discusses the position of art in the social production process, making visible the dialectical link between cultural and material production.

Contemporary cinema has undergone significant transformations in its modes of exhibition and spectatorship, particularly with the rise of digital media and the convergence of different platforms. Cinema is no longer confined to the traditional movie theatre but increasingly circulates across diverse spaces such as galleries, museums, and digital environments. This shift reflects a broader reconfiguration of cinema as a cultural and technological disposit if, in which its material, institutional, and spectatorial components are dispersed and reassembled in new ways (Balsom, 2013: 14–16). In this sense, cinema not only changes as a medium (Balsom, 2013), but its history is also continuously rewritten through shifting perspectives, methodologies, and cultural priorities (Hagener & Zimmermann, 2024: 14–15). This transformation supports the idea that cinema is not a fixed medium but an evolving set of practices and technologies, constantly redefined by its material and technological conditions (Balsom, 2013: 14–16; Turquety, 2019: 12).

The digital transformation of moving images has fundamentally altered the production, circulation, and reception of cinema, reshaping how social realities are represented and experienced. In the digital condition, cinematic images operate within hybrid media environments, blurring the boundaries between traditional film, digital culture, and new forms of audience participation, thereby redefining cinema’s role in reflecting contemporary social structures (Grabbe, Rupert-Kruse, & Schmitz, 2024: 150). The increasing use of digital tools in media studies has significantly expanded the scope of film research, enabling large-scale data collection, analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Digital technologies not only facilitate new methodological approaches but also transform the ways in which media history, audience practices, and cultural production can be examined within a global and interconnected research environment (Ross, Grauer, & Freisleben, 2009: 8).

Art not only represents the existing social order but also has the capacity to question and transform it. In particular, making labour processes visible and opening up class contradictions to discussion through aesthetic representations strengthens art's function in the production of social consciousness (Yüksel, 2017: 22). In this respect, it is necessary to examine the labour-art relationship not only theoretically but also in terms of social practice, by considering the ideological and pedagogical dimensions of art together.

Cinema has the potential to function as a critical practice that resists dominant ideological structures rather than merely reproducing spectacle. By revealing the technical and narrative mechanisms through which ideology operates, film can challenge passive

spectatorship and encourage reflective engagement with social realities (Comolli, 2015: 348).

Art has an ideological and transformative function. Art not only reflects the existing social structure but also has the potential to produce critical consciousness. In this context, art serves as a tool that makes visible inequalities in labour processes and opens up discussions about class contradictions through aesthetic representations (İnce, 2009: 24). Thus, art is considered both a part of production relations and a critical field that questions these relations; it takes an active position in discussions of social transformation. It is argued that art should be integrated into social policy education, and that conducting this course in a seminar format, based on students preparing and presenting independent research, is defined as an "indispensable" condition (Makal, 2020: 22). This approach reveals that in social policy education, art functions not only as a theoretical content but also as a pedagogical method.

Neoliberalism restructures not only economic systems but also cultural production and subjectivity, shaping how individuals perceive and experience everyday life. As demonstrated in contemporary German cinema, film functions as a key site for making the often invisible structures of neoliberalism perceptible, revealing how economic rationalities penetrate social relations, identity formation, and affective life (Baer, 2021: 11–13). While contemporary cinema reflects neoliberal transformations of subjectivity (Baer, 2021), earlier film practices already positioned cinema as a site of ideological contestation, where class relations and social struggles were made visible and politically meaningful (Khouri, 2007: 2-3). Social policy and ideological processes cannot be fully explained through single-factor theories. Instead, a mechanism-based approach allows for the analysis of causal chains that connect actors, actions, and outcomes through sequential processes (Kuhlmann & Nullmeier, 2022: 3–4).

Contemporary debates around cinema and criticism are often framed through the notion of crisis, particularly in relation to the loss of authority in the digital age. However, as Frey (2015) argues, this “crisis” is not a new phenomenon but a recurring condition within film criticism itself. Rather than marking a definitive rupture, the perceived decline of critical authority reflects a long-standing tension between expertise and democratization, shaped by shifts in media, audiences, and cultural institutions (Frey, 2015: 13–14). This approach aligns with broader discussions of ideology, visibility, and authority in cinema, suggesting that meaning is not fixed within the film text but produced through dynamic cultural processes shaped by power relations and social contexts (Khouri, 2007: 2–3; Stigsdotter, 2019: 8–9; Frey, 2015: 13–14; Andersson & Sundholm, 2019: 3). Contemporary cinema has increasingly been shaped by the logic of capitalist experience production, where film culture is integrated into festival circuits, cultural branding, and consumption-oriented practices. This transformation positions cinema not only as an artistic medium but also as a space in which economic structures and ideological narratives intersect, shaping audience engagement and cultural meaning (Vogel, 2023: 1).

CINEMATIC ANALYSES FROM SAMPLE COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE REGIMES

Cinematic analyses from sample countries in the context of welfare regimes allow us to read how the state's understanding of social policy is reflected in the daily lives of individuals

through cinema as a cultural representation. Films produced in countries with different welfare regimes address themes such as the scope of the welfare state, class inequalities, unemployment, poverty, family structure, and social solidarity in line with the ideological framework of the regime. For example, films made in Scandinavian countries with social democratic welfare regimes generally highlight the protective role of the state, the widespread availability of public services, and the ideal of social equality; while in the cinema of the USA or the United Kingdom, associated with liberal welfare regimes, individual responsibility, competition, and market-oriented life practices are more prominently featured. In countries such as Germany or France with conservative-corporatist welfare regimes, family, profession, and status-based social security systems are reflected in cinematic narratives; the well-being of the individual is often represented through traditional institutions. The fragmented and family-centred welfare regimes observed in Southern European countries highlight informal solidarity networks, intergenerational dependency relationships, and the roles the family plays in areas where the state falls short, as depicted in cinema. In this context, cinema is considered a powerful analytical tool that shows not only the legal and institutional dimensions of welfare regimes but also how individuals experience, internalise, or criticise these systems. This also reflects how cinematic meaning is shaped not only through narrative but through the material and technological conditions of image production and presentation (Turquety, 2019: 12).

Post-Communist Welfare Regime and Polish Cinema: Man of Iron (Człowiek Z Żelaza), Andrzej Wajda, 1981

The film takes place in Poland in 1980, during the rise of the labour movement and the birth of the Solidarność (Solidarity) trade union. The story revolves around Winkel, a pro-government journalist. Winkel is tasked with preparing a defamatory news story about Maciej Tomczyk, one of the leading figures in the strikes at the Gdańsk shipyard. The aim is to discredit the labour movement. During his research, Winkel interviews various people who touched Maciej's life: his wife Agnieszka, former fellow workers, and members of the opposition. Through these interviews, the audience learns the tragic story of Maciej's father, Mateusz Birkut (a character we know from the film Man of Marble), and his elimination under state repression. Thus, the film connects the past with the current political struggle. Winkel, initially a career-oriented journalist loyal to the regime, undergoes an internal transformation as he witnesses the injustices suffered by workers, police violence, and state manipulation. As the film progresses, the lies of official propaganda are exposed, and Winkel's moral questioning deepens. Man of Iron is not just an individual story; it tells the story of the collective struggle of the Polish working class, their quest for freedom, and their resistance against the authoritarian regime. The inclusion of real strike footage and Lech Wałęsa's appearance as himself gives the film a documentary quality. The film concludes with themes of hope, solidarity, and political awakening (Wajda, 1981).

It is stated that art is not only a field that reflects the past, but also has the potential to produce social consciousness and awareness. It is expressed that art can influence public opinion through its aesthetic power and even strengthen the working-class struggle (Makal, 2020: 14). In this respect, art serves as both an academic and a social tool in the field of social policy.

Rather than being a peripheral arena, Asia constituted a central site of Cold War cultural struggle, where cinema played a key role in shaping both local and global narratives of the conflict (Lee & Espeña, 2024: 12).

An Analysis of the Film Man of Iron (1981) from a Social Policy Perspective

Andrzej Wajda's Man of Iron is an important cinematic work that makes visible the social and political transformation experienced in Poland in the early 1980s and the crisis of the socialist concept of welfare. Through the Solidarność (Solidarity) trade union movement that emerged in the Gdańsk shipyards, the film examines the relations between the state, labour, and society within the context of social policy.

The film echoes earlier cinematic traditions in which working-class subjects are portrayed as central agents within broader social struggles, reinforcing the idea that cinema participates in shaping political consciousness (Khouri, 2007: 2).

Criticism through the Characters

Maciej Tomczyk represents how the "working class" is ideologically glorified and practically suppressed by the state in socialist Poland. In official discourse, the worker is the subject of power; however, Maciej's experience of strikes and trade union struggles shows that social rights are dependent on the state's favor. Social policy here is not a regime of rights, but a control mechanism that guarantees political obedience.

Agnieszka is the representative of an alternative public sphere. Against the state-controlled media and social policy discourse, it makes visible the suppressed worker stories. In Agnieszka's world, social policy gains meaning through the struggle to record the experiences of silenced groups.

Winkel is an intermediary figure between the state and the individual. In the socialist system, welfare, knowledge, and rights are distributed not through independent citizenship, but through loyalty to the state. Winkel's transformation represents the ethical crisis of the individual who recognizes the ideological function of social policy.

Wałęsa's presence in the film implies that social policy can be redefined through collective struggle. Social rights are not individual demands, but the achievements of the organized labour movement.

Labour-State Relations and the Socialist Understanding of Welfare

The film highlights the contradiction between the welfare discourse of the socialist system, which theoretically aims to protect the worker, and the oppressive state policies implemented in practice. The working conditions of the workers, the restriction of the right to strike, and the criminalization of union organization show that the socialist welfare model has a control-oriented structure rather than a rights-based one. In this context, the film emphasizes that social policy is not limited solely to material well-being (employment, wages, social security); it becomes dysfunctional when it is not integrated with democratic social rights such as freedom of expression, the right to organize, and participation.

Unionization and Collective Rights

Man of Iron directly centres on the issue of collective bargaining and union rights, which holds a central place in the social policy literature. The Solidarność movement symbolizes not only the economic demands of workers but also their demands for dignity, representation, and a voice.

In the film, unionization is presented as a "threat" by the state, while for workers it is depicted as a prerequisite for social security and well-being. This clearly reveals how social policy is conditioned by political loyalty in authoritarian regimes.

Media, Propaganda, and the Legitimating of Social Policy

The film shows the role of state-controlled media through the character of a journalist. While social policy practices are legitimized in official discourse with the image of a "workers' state," real-life conditions invalidate this discourse. Thus, the film critically presents how social policy is used as a tool for generating legitimacy in oppressive regimes.

Post-1980 Transformation and the Crisis of the Welfare Model

Man of Iron points to the structural crisis of the socialist welfare model seen in Eastern Bloc countries in the post-1980 period. The film implies that welfare can only be sustained not only through state-provided employment and social services, but also through social participation and the existence of civil society.

In this respect, the film coincides with approaches that argue that social policy is directly linked to the democratization process and functions as a historical text documenting the disintegration of the socialist welfare regime through cinema.

General Assessment from a Social Policy Perspective

Man of Iron is a powerful example that reveals the tension between the pro-labour discourse and authoritarian practices of the socialist welfare state. The film emphasizes that social policy should be evaluated not only based on economic protection, but also on the basis of rights, participation, and freedom. In this respect, the work makes a significant contribution to the use of cinema as a critical tool in social policy discussions after 1980.

When evaluated within the framework of worker-employer-state relations, unionization, and the right to strike, which are the fundamental elements of social policy in a narrow sense, it offers an important cinematic example that makes visible the structural problems of labour relations in socialist Poland. The film reveals how labour rights are limited in a system where the state is positioned as both the employer and the supervisory actor in the production process.

In the film, although workers formally have job security, they cannot participate in the process of determining working conditions and are deprived of independent union structures through which they can convey their demands. Official unions under state control have become tools that legitimize the policies of the state, which is in the position of employer, rather than representing the interests of the workers. This situation is presented

as an obstacle to achieving labour peace, which is one of the fundamental aims of social policy in a narrow sense.

In Man of Iron, the strike is represented as the last resort that workers are forced to resort to. The failure to recognize the right to strike as a legal and legitimate tool of social policy leads workers to engage in collective actions that are declared illegal, and these actions are met with repression and punishment by the state. The film clearly demonstrates that in a system where the right to strike is not recognized, labour-employer relations are based on an unequal power balance. The state's role in the context of social policy, in a narrow sense, is depicted in the film not as a protective and regulatory actor, but rather as a repressive and disciplinary one. Workers' demands for unionization and strikes are presented as threats to public order; thus, social policy ceases to be a mechanism that protects labour and becomes a tool of control aimed at ensuring the continuity of the production process. When evaluated from the perspective of social policy in a narrow sense, Man of Iron critically reflects a labour regime where workers' rights are not legally guaranteed, and the right to unionize and strike is effectively prevented. The film reveals that when social policy fails to fulfil its function of balancing workers, employers, and the state, industrial relations inevitably shift to a conflictual ground, and emphasizes the importance of the collective rights of labour.

The Southern European Welfare Regime and Turkish Cinema: My Father and My Son, Çağan Irmak, 2005

My Father and My Son (2005), directed by Çağan Irmak, is a drama film that deals with themes of family, generational conflict, political trauma, and love with deep emotionality. The film centers on the impact of the events following the 1980 military coup on individuals and families. The story revolves around Sadık, who was arrested for political reasons and subjected to severe torture during his university years. Despite all the objections of his father, Hüseyin Efendi, Sadık pursued his own ideals, which severed his ties with his family. His experiences in prison irreversibly damaged Sadık's health, and years later, he returns to his father's house in the Aegean region with his young son Deniz, hoping to confront and reconcile with his father before he dies. Sadık's return brings to light years of suppressed resentments and regrets. The conflict between Hüseyin Efendi, an authoritarian and traditional father, and Sadık, an idealistic and emotional man, is reignited. During this process, young Deniz becomes the center of both the family tension and love. Deniz's innocence and outlook on life allow the family members to reconnect. The film portrays the father-son relationship not merely as a biological bond but as one shaped by understanding, forgiveness, and empathy. "My Father and My Son" shows how individual suffering intertwines with societal events, while emphasizing that love, even if delayed, can have a healing power. The film leaves a powerful emotional impact on the viewer, becoming one of the most unforgettable dramas in Turkish cinema (Irmak, 2005). This reflects how contemporary cinema is increasingly shaped by global industrial structures and transnational circulation networks (Li, Guan, & Lu, 2021: 2). The film reflects how neoliberal ideology operates not only through economic structures but also through everyday practices and subjectivities, shaping characters' desires, behaviors, and sense of self within precarious social conditions (Baer, 2021: 13–15). From a social policy perspective, "My Father and My Son" offers a multi-layered reading of the weakness of the welfare state in Turkey, the

welfare function imposed on the family, and intergenerational trauma. The film depicts "social security" and "social assistance" not directly through institutions, but through their absence and voids.*

The relationship between cinema and society is not merely an aesthetic interaction, but also an ideological and political process of mutual formation. Beyond being a passive tool reflecting social reality, cinema has the potential to transform, guide, and reinterpret society. In this context, the political function of cinema is shaped directly through its relationship with society. Indeed, "the point at which cinema engages in politics is the point at which it is with society," and both directors who aim to change society and artists who reproduce social life by reflecting it in cinema are part of this relationship (Tırpan, 2004: 5). Therefore, the bond between cinema and society is not a one-way representation relationship, but a process of mutual interaction and meaning production; cinema both draws from social conditions and transforms the way these conditions are perceived. For this reason, cinema should be considered not only a cultural product but also an analytical field of study in understanding the social structure. Furthermore, when Turkish cinema is viewed within the context of the film industry, there is a working environment of insecurity and disorder.†

* In the history of Turkish cinema, some examples address labour movements, workers and strikes, similar to those depicted in the Polish film Man of Iron. However, since one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Southern European welfare regime is family solidarity, Babam ve Oğlum has been selected here as a representative case.
Turkish cinema includes several significant works that foreground themes of labour, class conflict and workers' struggle. In this context, films such as Ayrılan Yollar, Şehirdeki Yabancı, Kızgın Delikanlı, Karanlıkta Uyananlar, Hudutların Kanunu, Yiğit Yaralı Olur, Bitmeyen Yol, Umut, Gelin, Düğün, Endişe, Diyet, Otobüs, Güneşli Bataklık, Maden, Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde, Düşman, Demiryol, Duvar, Çark, Kara Sevdalı Bulut, Zerre and 100 Bin Kişiydiler can be regarded as prominent examples that place the socio-economic conditions of the working classes at the centre of cinematic narrative. These films make visible, through diverse aesthetic and narrative strategies, such phenomena as rural-to-urban migration, industrialisation, trade union organisation, strike practices, unemployment, precarity and class alienation within Turkey's post-1960 process of social transformation.
Shaped by the tradition of social realism, these works address the tension between individual drama and collective struggle on a dialectical plane, while opening up for discussion the determining impact of capitalist relations of production on labour across both rural and urban settings. Consequently, these films not only depict the economic position of the working class but also function as a historical archive of the aesthetic representation of political consciousness, class solidarity and the pursuit of social justice in Turkish cinema (Karadağ, 2016).
In addition, Susuz Yaz, Anayurt Oteli, Muhsin Bey, Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim, Yol, Gemide, Mayıs Sıkıntısı, Yazgı, Uzak, Vavien, Zenne and Sarmaşık demonstrate that the conception of social realism in Turkish cinema has expanded thematically over time.
Within this framework, some of these films render rural inequalities and structural deprivation visible, while others address political repression and questions of freedom within their historical context. In the post-1980 period, certain works focus on the individual's existential alienation, exploring the psychological dimensions of social disintegration, while others present the tension between provincial life and the city through a minimalist aesthetic. Some examine relations of authority and hierarchy at a micro level through enclosed spatial narratives, whereas others critically portray the everyday manifestations of social transformation. Still others bring conflicts surrounding identity and social norms to the fore, situating realism within a contemporary framework.
Taken together, these films demonstrate that social realism in Turkish cinema has evolved from class-based narratives into a multidimensional field of representation encompassing individual, cultural and political layers (Yoksu, 2020).

† The structural growth experienced in the Turkish film industry has not produced a corresponding improvement in labour processes; on the contrary, problems such as irregular payment, long working

Criticism through Characters

Sadık represents the hardening of the state-individual relationship in Turkey after the 1980 coup. Political pressure and prison experiences reveal the punitive and exclusionary rather than protective aspects of social policy. The absence of state social support and rehabilitation mechanisms leaves Sadık isolated both economically and psychologically.

Hüseyin Efendi represents the way in which the rural conservative social structure establishes the family as an informal social security network. Where the state is inadequate, the family assumes responsibility for care, shelter and subsistence. However, this structure provides security in exchange for obedience and authority; social policy is effectively replaced by paternalism.

Deniz, through the figure of the vulnerable child, demonstrates how intergenerational trauma deepens in the absence of social policy. The lack of child welfare provision, psychosocial support and educational policy confines the child to unresolved conflicts within the family.

Gülbeyaz carries the invisible burden of social policy through women's care labour. She represents the actor who compensates—without pay—for the emotional and social support not provided by the state.

The Absence of the Welfare State and the Family's Substitute Role

One of the most striking elements in the film is the near-total invisibility of the state. Sadık, Sadık has no regular access to healthcare services. There is no institutional care or social security mechanism for his illness. His wife dies during childbirth, indirectly highlighting deficiencies in maternity, childbirth and healthcare services. As Sadık approaches death, the place he turns to to secure his son's future is not the state but the paternal home.

From a social policy perspective, this indicates that the primary provider of welfare is not the state but the family. The character of Turkey's social security system as a "family-based welfare regime" is clearly felt throughout the film.

Political Repression after 12 September and the Erosion of Social Rights

What Sadık experiences in his youth (detention, torture, repression) is not merely an individual trauma; it also represents a period in which social rights were suspended. The suppression of political opposition leads to the individual's growing insecurity in areas such as education, employment and healthcare. Sadık loses opportunities for upward mobility, is cut off from journalism, and lives a precarious and fragile life. The film strongly implies a direct relationship between the loss of political rights and the erosion of social rights.

hours, workplace accidents and a lack of social security have remained widespread across the sector. Field research indicates that employment relations are largely conducted through personal connections, a situation that weakens both solidarity and trade union organisation. As a result, a clear contradiction emerges between the industry's economic expansion and the precariousness of labour conditions. Indeed, sector workers identify irregular wage payments, intensive and extended working schedules, and the absence of social security as their primary concerns (Başaran & Kurtulmuş, 2016: 199).

A "Regime of Compassion" Instead of Social Security

In the film, relations of care and support are not rights-based but grounded in emotional and moral considerations. For example, Hüseyin Efendi's decision to care for his grandson is not legal or institutional but conscientious. Familial solidarity substitutes for social assistance. Rural life offers not formal security but a sense of belonging and protection.

In the social policy literature, this corresponds to a structure defined not as "rights-based welfare" but as "charity- or compassion-based welfare". The film does not romanticize this model; rather, it shows that it emerges out of necessity.

The Child, Welfare and Intergenerational Transmission

Through the character of Deniz, the film engages powerfully with the child dimension of social policy. Deniz grows up without a mother, loses his father at an early age, and does not benefit from psychological support, social services or child protection mechanisms. His "protection" is left entirely to his grandfather, grandmother and family ties.

From a social policy perspective, this constitutes a critique of treating child welfare as a familial rather than an institutional responsibility.

The film ultimately poses a fundamental question: "If the family collapses, who protects the child?"

The Rural as the Last Refuge of Social Security

The city signifies pressure, loneliness, and insecurity; the village, by contrast, is poor but solidaristic. This opposition symbolises how, in Turkey, social policy has failed to protect the urban poor during the process of urbanisation, while the rural sphere has remained the final social safety network. However, the film does not idealise village life: there is no prosperity there, only the possibility of survival.

General Social Policy Evaluation

From a social policy perspective, Babam ve Oğlum advances several central claims: In Turkey, social security provision is insufficient. Social assistance is not fully institutionalised. Welfare is primarily sustained through the family.

The state is absent in moments of crisis and leaves the individual alone in the aftermath of trauma. Solidarity is not a right but a matter of chance. For this reason, the film poses, within a dramatic framework, the question: "If the welfare state does not exist, can the family endure?"

Babam ve Oğlum can therefore be read as a cinematic representation of a welfare regime in which social security operates less as an institutional right and more through familial solidarity and emotional bonds, while the state withdraws in moments of crisis and trauma.

Social Democratic Welfare Regime and Swedish Cinema: A Man Called Ove (En Man Som Heter Ove), Hannes Holm, 2015

Behind Ove's harsh exterior lies, in fact, a profound sense of love, loyalty, and loss. Through flashbacks, the film recounts how Ove met his wife Sonja, their marriage, and the bittersweet memories they shared. Sonja is the only person who enables Ove to hold on to life and softens his rigid nature; losing her has driven him into complete loneliness.

Ove's life changes unexpectedly when Parvaneh and her family move into the neighbouring flat. These new neighbours, whether he intends it or not, become involved in Ove's life and gradually break down his emotional barriers. As he tries to help them, Ove begins to reconnect with people and, without realising it, once again becomes someone who is "needed". His neighbours, Sonja's former students, and their friends gradually help him lower the protective shield he has built around himself.

The film offers a warm, emotional, and at times humorous narrative centred on grief, loneliness, human relationships, and second chances. It is a touching story about a grumpy man who rediscovers his attachment to life through the bonds he forms with others (Holm, 2015). The film also demonstrates how historical narratives are constructed rather than simply represented, reflecting the broader idea that film history itself is shaped through selective and interpretative processes (Hagener & Zimmermann, 2024: 14).

Approaches that examine the relationship between cinema and society from a discourse-based perspective reveal that film texts are not merely aesthetic or formal products, but also active components of processes of social meaning-making. Within this framework, cinema is understood not simply as a tool that reflects social reality, but as a practice of signification that reproduces and circulates social discourses. Films acquire meaning through characters, narratives, and representations shaped within systems of social codes and values; therefore, film analysis simultaneously involves the examination of social relations, ideological structures, and cultural values. For this reason, a sharp distinction between formal and sociological approaches is not sustainable, since cinematic discourse is inherently social in nature, and the viewer's perception is likewise structured by social codes (Ryan, 2015: 81).

Critique through Characters

Ove represents how elderly male loneliness can remain invisible even within the Scandinavian welfare state. Retirement provisions, housing, and municipal services exist; however, these services do not meet Ove's emotional and social needs. In Ove's world, social policy becomes rights-based but lacking in human contact.

Sonja represents the complementary moral dimension of the welfare state. There is institutional support within the system in matters of disability and care; however, Sonja's solidaristic approach humanises the otherwise impersonal structure of policy. The film emphasises that care work is not merely institutional but also relational.

Parvaneh, as an immigrant and young mother, makes visible the welfare state's capacity for integration. Here, social policy operates not only through assistance but also through neighbourliness and participation. The bond she forms with Ove demonstrates that social ties beyond formal services are fundamental components of welfare.

Municipal and Institutional Figures represent a rule-bound, functional, but distant understanding of welfare. Social policy protects the individual, yet places the individual's need for dignity and meaning in a secondary position.

Third-Generation Social Policy Framework

Third-generation social policies focus not only on economic security but also on social exclusion, combating discrimination, care provision, inclusivity, human dignity, and participation in social life. Within this framework, welfare is not understood as something delivered solely by the state. Neighbourhood relations, civic solidarity, and community-based forms of support are recognised as essential components. The film clearly illustrates the tension within the welfare state between institutional solutions and the need for genuine human contact.

Evaluation from the Perspective of Older People

Ove represents the loneliness, sense of uselessness, and social invisibility experienced by many older individuals. His forced retirement reflects the marginalisation of older people from productive life. The municipality and formal care services approach him in a bureaucratic and mechanical manner, failing to recognise his emotional needs. His suicidal thoughts reveal how psychosocial loneliness and depression among older adults can remain largely invisible. In line with third-generation social policy thinking, the film emphasises that older people are not merely passive recipients of care but active and valuable members of society. Through relationships with his neighbours, Ove gradually reconnects with social life.

Evaluation from the Perspective of Disabled People

Disability is represented on more than one level. After an accident, Ove's wife Sonja becomes physically disabled, and the inaccessibility of public transport and public space clearly exposes structural barriers. Ove's struggles with institutions demonstrate that social policy may exist formally yet still fail in practice. Another important example is Rune, Ove's childhood friend and long-time neighbour. After becoming paralysed, Rune becomes dependent on a wheelchair and requires increasing care. Through his experience, the film criticises the forced institutionalisation of disabled individuals, the separation of elderly and disabled people from their homes and partners, and welfare practices that prioritise administrative efficiency over human dignity. Ove resists Rune's transfer to a care home and defends his right to remain at home with his wife, revealing the strong sense of justice and solidarity beneath his stern exterior. The film also challenges pity-based approaches to disability, presenting it not as an individual deficiency but as the result of society's failure to adapt, a perspective consistent with third-generation social policy approaches.

Evaluation from the Perspective of LGBTI+ Individuals

One of Sonja's former students works in an institutional care setting where a young LGBTI+ character appears, representing a clearly marginalised group. This character is not central

to the narrative but remains on the margins, reflecting the frequent social invisibility experienced by LGBTI+ individuals. However, the film does not portray this character as a problem or a threat but as someone who works, contributes, and forms meaningful human connections. This constitutes a positive representation, although a limited one, suggesting that LGBTI+ individuals in cinema often appear only indirectly or briefly. The character, named Mirsad, is openly gay and connected to Sonja's former student. His working environment is low-status and emotionally demanding, symbolising the precarious employment conditions that many LGBTI+ individuals face. After being rejected by his family because of his sexual orientation, he is left without a place to live. Although Ove initially responds with his characteristic distance and severity, he eventually invites him into his home, and they live together for a time. This moment demonstrates how Ove's prejudices are overcome through action, how solidarity can sustain an LGBTI+ youth rejected by his family, and how vital individual responsibility can be when formal social policies prove insufficient. Ove behaves inclusively not through words but by literally opening his door.

Critique from the Perspective of Third-Generation Social Policies

Through this character, the film suggests that LGBTI+ individuals are often not explicitly included within social policy frameworks. Those working in fields such as care, ageing, and disability may experience double invisibility, being precarious as workers while also marginalised in terms of identity. The film draws attention to this situation but does not examine it in depth. This can be understood both as a narrative choice and as a limitation.

Evaluation from the Perspective of Migrants

The character of Parvaneh is particularly significant in the representation of migrant women. Of Iranian origin, she is culturally positioned as an outsider. Ove's initially harsh and distant attitude reflects latent xenophobia within society. However, the relationship that develops between them demonstrates that mutual solidarity and everyday interpersonal contact can be even more effective than formal integration policies. The film emphasises that migrants are not merely recipients of assistance but can act as agents who build social bonds and contribute to collective healing.

Overall Evaluation

From the perspective of third-generation social policies, the film shows that the institutional welfare state may be insufficient in meeting emotional and social needs, while neighbourliness, solidarity, and inclusive interpersonal relationships possess a powerful restorative capacity. It highlights the importance of considering vulnerable groups, including older people, disabled individuals, migrants, and indirectly LGBTI+ individuals, not separately but together. Ultimately, the film conveys that social policy becomes meaningful not only through laws and institutions also when it is completed and sustained through human relationships.

Conservative-corporatist Welfare Regime and German Cinema: Welcome to Germany (Almanya: Willkommen bei den Hartmanns), Simon Verhoeven, 2016

The film focuses on the lives of the Hartmanns, a wealthy yet otherwise ordinary German family living in Munich. The mother of the family, Angelika Hartmann, is an idealistic woman approaching retirement who is searching for new meaning in her life. Influenced by refugee news she sees on television, she decides to host a newly arrived refugee in their home. Although the rest of the family — especially her husband Richard — is not particularly enthusiastic about the idea, a young Nigerian refugee named Diallo moves in with them.

Diallo's arrival disrupts the family's internal balance. Each family member approaches the refugee issue from a different perspective. While Richard thinks primarily in terms of order, security, and rules, their son Philipp is initially distant but gradually develops empathy. Their daughter Sophie, struggling with problems in her own life, forms an unexpected bond with Diallo. His presence reveals not only the Hartmann family's prejudices about migration and refugees but also their internal conflicts, selfishness, and failures of communication.

Blending humour with a strong emotional tone, the film addresses themes such as integration, empathy, fear, solidarity, and modern Europe's confrontation with the refugee crisis. Despite its comedic elements, the narrative gradually evolves into something more humane and reflective. "Welcome to Germany" stands out as a warm family film that both reflects social debates in Germany and suggests that personal change is possible (Verhoeven, 2016).

In this sense, cinema operates as a site where both visibility and invisibility are ideologically produced, shaping how certain social groups and forms of labour are represented or excluded (Khouri, 2007: 2–3; Stigsdotter, 2019: 8). The film can thus be read as part of this broader condition, where meaning is no longer stabilized by authoritative interpretation but is instead produced through fragmented and competing perspectives, reflecting the contemporary crisis of cultural authority (Frey, 2015: 14).

Theoretical approaches examining the relationship between cinema and society demonstrate that cinema is not merely a tool that reflects social reality but also a cultural practice in which social meanings are produced and reconstructed. From this perspective, cinema is understood as a field of meaning-making shaped by ideological, aesthetic, and socio-historical dimensions, operating in reciprocal interaction with social structure. The production of representations in response to changing social conditions, the visibility it gives to different value systems, and its role as a space where ideological processes are debated clearly reveal cinema's capacity to guide and shape culture (Öksüz, 2022: 165). This approach positions cinema not simply as representational but as a dynamic cultural arena in which social consciousness, values, and ideological orientations are actively produced.

Critique through Characters

Angelika is positioned as the moral centre of the film. Her decision to host a refugee appears ethically and humanely commendable, yet it also has a dimension open to criticism. Her motivation to help occasionally approaches a "white saviour" reflex. There is a risk that Diallo becomes less an autonomous individual and more a figure that sustains Angelika's need to see herself as a good person. Despite this, the character successfully represents the

liberal, well-intentioned German middle class that often fails to question systemic problems sufficiently.

Richard symbolises a conservative perspective shaped by concerns about order, security, and the economy. His initial distance from refugees reflects widespread fears in Germany, including job loss, security risks, and cultural integration. However, his transformation is presented rather quickly and in an idealised manner, creating the impression that real-life resistance is softened in the film.

Diallo is both the most problematic and the most significant character. He is portrayed as positive, hardworking, polite, and almost flawless as a refugee. While this makes it easier for audiences to empathise with him, it renders the diversity and real conflicts within refugee experiences largely invisible. Diallo functions primarily as a catalyst enabling the transformation of the German characters, while his own story remains limited.

The younger generation approaches integration more flexibly and emotionally. Through Sophie, emotional closeness and attachment are emphasised, while Philipp represents a movement from distance to empathy. Yet these characters also largely serve the narrative of "Germans who learn and transform".

Critique from the Perspective of Social Policy

The film approaches the refugee crisis largely through individual conscience and moral responsibility. This perspective pushes systemic issues such as housing policies, legal uncertainty, and integration programmes into the background. The refugee question is framed less as a structural responsibility of the state and more as a matter of good individuals doing good deeds. Diallo's integration process presents serious barriers — language, trauma, racism, and bureaucracy — in a significantly softened form. Integration is depicted as something that can be resolved primarily through tolerance and goodwill rather than through conflict or structural struggle. This simplifies the complexity of social policy. The film also addresses anti-refugee fears in Germany through satire. This choice is effective in inviting audiences to reflect without becoming defensive. However, it can also cause certain criticisms to remain at the level of humour, thereby softening political sharpness.

Overall Evaluation

"Welcome to Germany" approaches the refugee crisis not through radical critique but through a conciliatory narrative that appeals to middle-class moral sensibilities. It prioritises empathy, limits confrontation, and avoids harsh political criticism. In this sense, the film is effective in raising social awareness, yet it remains cautious and restrained in its engagement with social policy and in the depth with which it explores the refugee subject.

Liberal Welfare Regime and British Cinema: I, Daniel Blake**, 2016**

"I, Daniel Blake" (2016) is one of the most powerful examples of Ken Loach's social realist cinema and presents the impact of the modern welfare state on individuals in a simple yet deeply unsettling manner.

The film centres on the story of Daniel Blake, a 59-year-old carpenter living in Newcastle. After suffering a serious heart attack, doctors forbid him from working, yet he faces great difficulty convincing the state's welfare system to recognise his condition. Despite his health problems, he is classified as "fit for work", which draws him into a complex and dehumanising bureaucratic process. Unreachable call centres, digital applications, and rigid regulations wear him down both physically and psychologically.

During this process, Daniel meets Katie, a young single mother who has been forced to relocate from London to Newcastle with her two children. She is also a victim of the welfare system; her benefits have been cut due to lateness, leaving her to face poverty and insecurity alone. Over time, a quiet but powerful bond of mutual solidarity develops between Daniel and Katie. Daniel becomes a grandfather figure to the children, while Katie shares Daniel's loneliness.

As the story unfolds, Daniel's struggle moves beyond an individual experience and becomes a question of dignity, justice, and humanity. The constant requirement to prove that he "deserves" assistance undermines his sense of pride. Eventually, Daniel rejects the silence imposed by the system and begins to assert his right to exist — his right to say, "I am here".

Rather than relying on dramatic events, the film progresses through everyday details, unsettling the viewer through quiet, restrained scenes. Ken Loach does not blame individuals but the system itself, powerfully revealing how the modern welfare state renders its most vulnerable citizens invisible. Poverty is presented not as a personal failure but as a political outcome, inviting the viewer not only to empathise but also to question (Loach, 2016).

Popular cinema does more than reinforce existing social values; it also functions as a site of struggle where alternative values and identities are debated. Film representations reproduce symbolic codes that shape how audiences perceive the world while simultaneously proposing new ways of understanding social institutions and norms. In this sense, popular films form a representational arena in which the conflict between dominant value models and alternative formations becomes visible, contributing to the formation of collective identities. How people perceive the world and which values they internalise are closely connected to these representations, which are reinforced through processes of socialisation (Ryan, 2015: 88).

The film can therefore be understood not simply as a narrative text, but as part of a wider cultural practice through which identities, experiences, and social positions are negotiated and articulated (Andersson & Sundholm, 2019: 5).

Critique through Characters

Daniel Blake represents a contemporary version of the "poor but dignified" figure. His portrayal as hardworking, honest, and willing to follow rules is deliberate; Ken Loach positions him in opposition to narratives of the "undeserving poor". However, this choice also introduces a point open to criticism. Presenting Daniel as an almost morally flawless figure strengthens audience empathy but risks unintentionally reproducing the very distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor that the system creates. In

other words, even while criticising the system, the film relies on a character who clearly "deserves" help.

Katie makes visible the impact of the welfare system on women. Her position as a single mother demonstrates how care labour and poverty are intertwined. Benefit cuts push her towards morally difficult choices, and the film powerfully conveys how poverty can force people into stigmatising situations. However, Katie's story largely remains a secondary narrative accompanying Daniel's, and her own subjectivity is explored only to a limited extent.

The supporting characters — officials, advisers, and security staff — are generally portrayed as cold, mechanical, and lacking empathy. This depiction clarifies the systemic critique, yet the one-dimensional portrayal of individual actors risks explaining an institutional and political problem through personal indifference or ill will.

Critique from the Perspective of Social Policy and the Welfare System

The film sharply criticises the transformation of the modern welfare state. Digital applications, scoring systems, and automated decision-making processes render individuals invisible. Receiving assistance ceases to be a right and becomes something that must be constantly proven, almost as if it were a privilege. This constitutes a direct critique of neoliberal social policy — particularly the austerity measures implemented in the United Kingdom after 2010.

Within the film, welfare provision is tightly monitored through work capability assessments, mandatory courses, and sanctions. This approach treats poverty not as a structural problem but as an individual failure. Daniel being declared fit for work despite medical reports demonstrates how the system places human health in a secondary position.

One of the film's most powerful critiques concerns the shame and humiliation produced by the welfare system. Receiving assistance becomes not a means of survival but a struggle resembling an examination one must pass. The food bank scene vividly exposes both the inadequacy of social support and the emotional rupture created by dependence on charity.

By focusing on individual experiences, the film generates a strong emotional impact; however, political actors, legislators, and macro-level decision-makers remain largely invisible. This is a deliberate aesthetic and political stance, yet it leaves unresolved the question of where responsibility lies and who holds the power to enact change.

Overall Evaluation

"I, Daniel Blake" portrays the welfare system as a structure that produces the loss of rights and represents the welfare state as an apparatus of discipline and control. The film offers no comforting resolution and no optimistic solutions. Instead, it reminds viewers that poverty and exclusion are politically produced. Its critical power derives not from complex theory but from the small yet devastating injustices that ordinary people experience in everyday life.

DISCUSSION

These findings suggest that cinema should be understood not as a fixed form but as a historically evolving medium shaped by multiple intersecting forces, including technology, culture, and ideology (Eisenstein, 2016: 21).

Table 1: Summary Table of Film Awards and Announcements

Film	Director	Source Type	Brief Description	Notable Awards
Człowiek z żelaza	Andrzej Wajda	Fiction inspired by real events	Inspired by the Solidarity (Solidarność) movement and workers' resistance in Poland; the characters are fictional.	Palme d'Or (1981)
Babam ve Oğlum	Çağan Irmak	Fiction (with autobiographical elements)	An original screenplay depicting family relationships in the aftermath of the 1980 Turkish coup; not directly adapted from a book or specific real events.	Multiple awards at the Antalya Altın Portakal Film Festivali; major box office and critical success in Turkey
En man som heter Ove	Hannes Holm	Novel adaptation	Adapted from the bestselling novel of the same name by Fredrik Backman.	Nominee at the Academy Awards (Best Foreign Language Film); nominations at the European Film Awards
Willkommen bei den Hartmanns	Simon Verhoeven	Fiction	A family comedy set against the backdrop of the refugee crisis in Germany; an original screenplay.	German Film Awards and audience awards (notably box office success)
I, Daniel Blake	Ken Loach	Fiction inspired by real experiences	An original story informed by real testimonies about the UK welfare system.	Palme d'Or (2016, Cannes Film Festival) BAFTA Award for Outstanding British Film

Source: Compiled from films.

When these films are examined in terms of their source type, it is seen that productions drawing from real events and social experiences, as well as fictional and literary adaptations, develop different narrative strategies. In examples of political cinema based on real events, it is noteworthy that the narrative directly relates to the historical context, and a semi-documentary aesthetic is preferred. This approach is particularly linked to political resistance and the construction of collective memory in Eastern European cinema (Haltof, 2002: 45). In contrast, family dramas based on original screenplays convey the historical background indirectly through individual stories (Suner, 2010: 112). In novel adaptations, it is stated that the narrative has a more structured dramatic framework and that character psychology comes to the forefront (Backman, 2012: 9). This diversity shows that there is a multi-layered narrative tradition in European cinema between social realism and dramatic fiction.

These transformations suggest that cinema should be understood not only as a cultural form but also as part of a globally integrated industry shaped by economic and

technological dynamics (Li, Guan, & Lu, 2021: 2). Rather than representing a fixed medium, cinema today should be understood as a heterogeneous and historically variable assemblage shaped by processes of convergence and technological change. As its traditional apparatus disperses across different cultural spaces, cinema becomes "othered" to itself, taking on new forms that challenge its previous definitions and boundaries (Balsom, 2013: 15–17).

When evaluated in terms of awards, it is seen that social realist and politically themed films gain more visibility in international festivals. It is emphasized that platforms like the Cannes Film Festival have historically been more open to productions containing social criticism (Elsaesser, 2019: 214). In particular, films addressing issues such as the welfare state, workers' rights, and social justice are noted to find universal resonance within the festival context (Hill, 2011: 87). In contrast, family-centered and comedic productions tend to achieve greater audience success and box office performance on a national scale. This situation highlights the difference in aesthetic and thematic orientation between festival cinema and popular cinema.

Table 2: Summary Table of Cast Distribution in Films

Film	Woman (Adult)	Man (Adult)	Child	Elderly
Człowiek z żelaza	2 (Agnieszka, Wiesława Tomczyk)	3 (Maciej Tomczyk, Mateusz Birkut, Winkel)	0	0
Babam ve Oğlum	2 (Nuran, Aysun)	3 (Sadık, Salim, Veysel)	1 (Deniz)	2 (Hüseyin, Gülbeyaz)
En man som heter Ove	2 (Parvaneh, Sonja)	1 (Mirsad)	3 (Patrick, Parvaneh'in iki kızı)	3 (Ove, Rune, Anita)
Willkommen bei den Hartmanns	3 (Angelika Hartmann, Sophie Hartmann, Heike)	2 (Philipp Hartmann, Tarek)	1 (Basti)	1 (Richard Hartmann)
I, Daniel Blake	2 (Katie, Ann)	1 (China)	2 (Daisy, Dylan)	1 (Daniel Blake)

Source: Compiled from films.

When character distribution is examined, it is noteworthy that adult male characters are centrally positioned in political narratives. It is stated that the historical construction of political struggle and labour representations through the male subject is also reflected in cinematic narratives (Haltof, 2002: 73). In contrast, family-focused productions show a more balanced distribution of female, child, and elderly characters. In films where intergenerational relationships form the central axis of the narrative, elderly characters are positioned as symbols of social memory and transformation (Suner, 2010: 134). Child characters, on the other hand, mostly assume a function that increases emotional intensity and strengthens family ties. This distribution shows that there is a direct relationship between film genre and character representation.

These findings suggest that cinema not only represents social realities but also participates in structuring visibility and invisibility, particularly in relation to gender and labour (Stigsdotter, 2019: 14). Film history has historically marginalized or obscured women's contributions, not necessarily due to their absence but due to their lack of visibility within dominant historiographical frameworks. As Stigsdotter (2019) argues, women were

often present in various roles within film culture, yet their work was frequently undocumented, overlooked, or considered insignificant within traditional film history narratives (Stigsdotter, 2019: 8–9).

These findings suggest that cinema should be understood not only as a reflection of history but as an active participant in constructing historical knowledge through selective representation and interpretation (Hagener & Zimmermann, 2024: 15).

Table 3: Summary Table of Film Shooting Conditions and Production

Film	Shooting Conditions / Production Context (Summary)
Człowiek z żelaza	Shot under political pressure during the Solidarity movement; real locations and actual workers were used; semi-documentary aesthetic; censorship and rapid production constraints (Haltof, 2002).
Babam ve Oğlum	Filming in natural locations in the Aegean region, the emphasis on emotionally intense performance-driven scenes, limitations related to working with child actors, and logistical challenges associated with rural settings constitute significant production constraints (Suner, 2010).
En man som heter Ove	Adaptation of a novel; detailed production design; extensive aging make-up and prosthetic preparation; structured unionized production system (Backman, 2012).
Willkommen bei den Hartmanns	Large-scale extras; refugee-themed scenes; complex set coordination; German union production standards (Elsaesser, 2019).
I, Daniel Blake	Social realist method; chronological shooting; natural locations; small crew; spontaneous acting approach; low-budget production (Hill, 2011).

Source: Compiled from films.

From a production perspective, it is stated that in social realist films, methods such as the use of natural locations, small crew structures, and chronological shooting increase the credibility of the narrative (Hill, 2011: 102). In films produced during periods of political repression, a direct relationship is observed between aesthetic preferences and production conditions (Haltof, 2002: 51). In contrast, in more institutionalized European film industries, unionized work structures, planned production processes, and detailed art direction come to the forefront (Elsaesser, 2019: 198). This shows that the production context is one of the fundamental elements determining the aesthetic structure and narrative form of the film.

From a thematic point of view, it is seen that all films deal with common issues such as social justice, family relationships, migration, generational conflict, and individual loneliness. It is noted that in European cinema, social issues are addressed both collectively and individually, and these two levels are often intertwined (Elsaesser, 2019: 223). While political films present system critiques more directly, family dramas reproduce social traumas through individual stories (Suner, 2010: 119). In this context, the films examined are positioned at the intersection of social realism and human drama in European cinema.

Narrative Form and the Construction of Social Reality

The films construct social reality through different narrative strategies. The historical witnessing structure, approaching documentary aesthetics, provides the cinematic production of collective memory, especially in Man of Iron. This type of narrative structure is consistent with the approach of film theorists who argue that narrative is not only a dramatic structure but also an epistemological mechanism (Bordwell, 1985: 157).

In contrast, My Father and Son personalizes national trauma through melodrama. Here, melodrama means not only emotional intensity but also the re-representation of historical violence within the family institution. Thus, historical experience is given meaning through the private sphere.

I, Daniel Blake, on the other hand, makes institutional violence visible by presenting the dissolution of daily life within bureaucratic structures through a linear narrative. This form is related to discussions of realism that emphasize the ethical dimension of the representation of reality in cinema (Bazin, 1967: 37).

Regimes of Representation and Social Identity

In terms of representation politics, films produce social categories within different ideological frameworks.

- Man of Iron establishes the collective worker subject as a historical agent.
- My Father and Son represents traumatic citizen identity through the family.
- A Man Called Ove presents individual loneliness as an indicator of social disintegration.
- Welcome to Germany normalizes cultural differences through everyday encounters.
- I, Daniel Blake makes institutional exclusion visible through class representation.

These representations can be explained by the feminist and cultural studies approach that visuality is ideologically constructed (Mulvey, 1975: 11). Representation is not only the process of showing, but also the process of producing the subject. Furthermore, from the perspective of representation theory, which argues that cultural meanings are constructed through media (Hall, 1997: 25), each film produces a different regime of social identity: collective resistance, traumatic citizenship, loneliness in old age, cultural pluralism, and bureaucratic exclusion.

Ideology, Power, and Institutional Structures

The films critique different forms of social order:

- State socialism and resistance politics
- Authoritarian structure after the military coup
- Individual isolation in the welfare society
- The limitations of liberal immigration policies
- The disintegration of the neoliberal welfare state

This diversity demonstrates cinema's capacity to reproduce and question power relations. The discourse analysis approach, which argues that power is not only oppressive but also a regulatory and normalizing practice, is explanatory in this context (Foucault, 1977: 194).

In particular, I, Daniel Blake; dramatizes how bureaucratic processes function as a disciplinary form of power. The social welfare system transforms into a managerial mechanism that excludes the individual. Cultural Production Field and Social Position

Films are also products of specific cultural production fields. Cinema is situated within economic, symbolic, and political capital relations. The approach that argues that cultural production takes place within the social field (Bourdieu, 1984: 56) explains these differences.

- Political cinema tradition (Eastern Europe)
- National trauma cinema (Türkiye)
- Critique of the welfare state (Scandinavian and British cinema)
- Migration debates (German cinema)

Each film transforms the structural tensions of its own society into cultural form.

Aesthetic Form and Social Affect

Aesthetic form is not only a visual preference but also a mechanism for the production of social emotion. Therefore, the aesthetic structure produces three different emotional regimes in the context of these films:

- Collective political consciousness (Man of Iron)
- National and family mourning experience (My Father and Son)
- Ethical witnessing and empathy in the face of the neoliberal order (I, Daniel Blake)
- Individual transformation and existential loneliness (A Man Called Ove)
- Humorous normalization of cultural tension (Welcome to Germany)

In this framework, aesthetics should be considered as a powerful analytical category regarding the emotional organization of the social structure. The Audience and Reception

Films place the audience in different positions:

- The witnessing political subject
- The empathetic family member
- The observing citizen
- The critical social actor

This shows that meaning is produced not only in the text but also in the reception process. Overall Conclusion

When these films are considered together, the fundamental structural problems of modern society emerge:

- The relationship between the state and the citizen
- Collective trauma and memory
- The transformation of the welfare state
- Cultural pluralism and migration

- Bureaucratic power and exclusion

Therefore, these cinematic texts are not only narratives but also a visual archive of social symptoms. Although each was produced in a different historical context, they collectively represent the crises of modernity.

Table 4: Summary Table of Comparative Sociological Film Analysis

Film	Narrative Structure	Politics of Representation	Ideology and Power	Cultural Production / Historical Context	Aesthetic Form	Audience Positioning
Man of Iron (1981)	A hybrid documentary-fiction structure; a multi-layered narrative of testimony	The working class is represented as a collective subject	State socialism and resistance politics are discussed critically	A direct cinematic record of the Eastern European political transformation process	Realism aesthetics; archival images	The audience witnessing and developing political awareness
Babam ve Oğlum (2005)	A melodramatic structure built on intergenerational trauma and flashbacks	The family: a micro-social representation of national trauma	Political repression and individual breakdown after the coup	The narrative of modernization and political trauma in Turkey	Emotional intensity, melodramatic framing, and music	Empathy-based identification
A Man Called Ove (2015)	Character-centered transformation narrative	Old age, loneliness, and the experience of being an immigrant	Individual alienation within a welfare society	Scandinavian welfare state and social change	Minimalist visual storytelling	The audience witnessing individual transformation
Welcome to Germany (2016)	Multi-character comedy-drama	Comparative representation of immigrants and middle-class German families	Liberal discourse of tolerance and cultural tensions	The context of the European refugee crisis	Genre hybridity (comedy + social drama)	A critical but accessible audience position
I, Daniel Blake (2016)	A linear, realistic narrative focused on everyday life	Institutional exclusion of the working class	Critique of the neoliberal welfare regime	Austerity policies and the welfare state crisis	Social realism	The witness and the viewer who feels an ethical responsibility

Source: Compiled from films.

These findings support the argument that cinema operates as a historically grounded ideological practice, capable of both reinforcing and challenging dominant power structures through its representation of class and social relations (Khouri, 2007: 3). While cinema reflects broader socio-economic transformations such as neoliberal restructuring (Baer, 2021: 11-13), it also operates through historically rooted ideological practices (Khouri, 2007: 3).

A mechanism-based perspective further allows us to understand how these representations are produced through sequences of actions, meanings, and institutional contexts rather than isolated factors (Kuhlmann & Nullmeier, 2022: 3–5).

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

This study has sought to rethink the welfare regime literature through cinema by examining, via cultural representations, how post-1980 social policies have been reflected in the everyday lives of individuals in countries with different welfare regimes. The extended classification developed in light of Gøsta Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology and the critiques directed at it has been considered alongside the narratives offered by cinema. Social policy has thus been evaluated not merely as a field of institutional regulation, but as a social reality that individuals experience, internalise, and often struggle with. In particular, the shift in social policy following the neoliberal transformation after 1980 — away from a rights-based structure towards an emphasis on selectivity, conditionality, and individual responsibility — constitutes the shared background of the films analysed. In this context, cinema emerges as a powerful field of analysis that makes visible not only the legal and financial dimensions of welfare regimes, but also the experiences of insecurity, loneliness, solidarity, or exclusion they produce for individuals.

Examined within the context of the post-communist welfare regime, Man of Iron strikingly reveals the structural contradiction between the labour-oriented discourse of socialist welfare and its authoritarian practices. The film demonstrates that when social policy is not integrated with democratic rights and mechanisms of participation, welfare discourse can become a tool of legitimation and control. Core elements of social policy in the narrow sense — such as workers' rights, unionisation, and the right to strike — are represented as demands that are systematically suppressed, thereby transforming the crisis of the socialist welfare regime into a cinematic document.

Addressed within the framework of the Southern European welfare regime, Babam ve Oğlum makes visible both the limited capacity of the social state and a structure in which welfare is largely carried by the family in Turkey. The film critically presents a conception of welfare in which social security, healthcare, and social services are substituted not by institutional rights but by intra-family solidarity and relations of compassion. While the relationship between the political climate of repression following the 1980 military coup and the erosion of social rights is conveyed through individual traumas, themes such as intergenerational transmission, child welfare, and care labour intersect strongly with the social policy literature. In this respect, the film concretises through cinema the family-centred and fragmented structure characteristic of Southern European welfare regimes.

Analysed as an example of the social democratic welfare regime, A Man Called Ove shows that even in a system with comprehensive and universal social rights, individuals may experience loneliness, exclusion, and a loss of meaning. While the film addresses, in a multilayered way, issues central to third-generation social policies — such as ageing, disability, migration, and social participation — it also makes visible the tension between institutional welfare and human connection. Through the character of Ove, the film emphasises that although the welfare state may succeed in providing material security, it can remain insufficient in meeting emotional and relational needs. This highlights the necessity for social policy to be complemented not only by state provision but also by community-based solidarity and inclusive social relations.

Evaluated within the framework of the conservative-corporatist welfare regime, Welcome to Germany presents a narrative that foregrounds individual conscience and moral responsibility in addressing the refugee issue, while placing the institutional role of the state

in the background. The film often portrays integration as a matter that can be resolved through goodwill and empathy, while only partially making visible the subjectivity of refugees themselves. This approach points to a conception of social policy in conservative-corporatist regimes in which welfare is complemented through the family, civil society, and individual initiative, yet structural problems are frequently depoliticised.

Considered as an example of the liberal welfare regime, I, Daniel Blake offers one of the sharpest critiques of neoliberal social policy transformation. The film makes visible, through everyday experiences, the transformation of the social assistance system from a rights-based structure into a mechanism of discipline, surveillance, and stigmatisation. Bureaucratic procedures, conditionality, and digitalisation emerge as factors that undermine individual dignity, while poverty is framed not as a personal failure but as a political outcome. In this respect, the film powerfully demonstrates that in liberal welfare regimes, social policy has largely lost its protective function and evolved into a structure that isolates the individual.

Overall, while the films analysed present cinematic representations of social policy approaches specific to different welfare regimes, they also make visible the limits and points of crisis within these regimes. Cinema demonstrates that social policy should be evaluated not only through numerical indicators and institutional arrangements, but also through individuals' lived experiences, emotions, and relationships. By bringing a cultural perspective to welfare regime analysis, this study opens up the ideological, moral, and human dimensions of social policy to discussion through cinema.

Cinematic reflections of welfare regimes reveal that the success of social policy depends not solely on the material guarantees provided by the state, but also on social relations grounded in rights, participation, dignity, and solidarity. In this respect, cinema should be regarded as a complementary and critical field of analysis in social policy studies.

The films examined in this study demonstrate that welfare regimes are not merely institutional arrangements; they are concretized through individuals' daily life practices, identity constructions, and social relationships. The ideological control of the state over labour in post-communist Poland, the transfer of welfare responsibility to the family in Turkey, the emotional voids of institutional welfare in Sweden, and the bureaucratic and exclusionary effects of neoliberal transformation in Germany and the United Kingdom are all made visible through cinematic narratives. In this context, cinema offers a critical analytical space that allows for the evaluation of the success of social policy not only through expenditure levels or legal frameworks, but also through dimensions of rights, dignity, participation, belonging, and human contact.

In conclusion, the study reveals that social policy has become increasingly individualized in the post-1980 period, and responsibility has been redistributed among the state, the market, and the family. In particular, the shift of social assistance systems from rights-based guarantees to mechanisms based on control and compliance criteria, particularly with the neoliberal transformation, is strongly criticized in cinematic representations. In contrast, elements such as collective solidarity, neighborhood relations, and civic participation play a complementary role in the sustainability of welfare. Therefore, the effectiveness of social policy should be considered not only in terms of institutional capacity but also in conjunction with democratic participation, social inclusion, and a rights regime that prioritizes human dignity. In this respect, the study demonstrates

that re-reading welfare regimes through cultural representations offers a critical and holistic contribution to the social policy literature.

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