

Justice- Adrift in the Filmosphere

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Abstract

The world of cinema treats 'justice' in a nuanced way. If the film depicts conflict zones, justice sometimes becomes the kernel of the chronicle. *Lemon Tree* (2008) and *Jin* (2013) – from Israel and Turkey are two of the films which convey post-positivist connotations of justice. *Lemon Tree* is an Israeli film directed by Eran Riklis. This film shows the legal efforts of a Palestinian widow to stop the Israeli Defence Minister from destroying the lemon trees in her family farm. The exquisite eco-feminist nuance has made the movie a richly layered parable. Turkish movie *Jin* by Reha Erdem is an ecological tale using the Turkish-Kurdish conflict as the metaphor for the dystopian human world demolishing the floral and faunal symphony. *Jin* feels like a modern-day version of 'Little Red Riding Hood'. Neither poetic nor prosaic, justice is at best 'hung' in these movies. The absence of juridical justice has been tried to be repaid by arboreal righteousness. However, both the women and the environment are endangered in the conflict zones where justice has been reduced to a mere mirage. The films and the characters are a surprising reminder of Sita of Indian epic *Ramayana* and also the conservationist Chipko Movement (1986) of India. The trees, the animals, the birds, the insects along with the women in these two films, silently wait for justice. They are agonized by the culture of war-mongering machismo. Still they exude the zeal to ask for justice, may be restorative or reparative but never retributive.

Keywords: Justice, Films, eco-feminism, *Lemon Tree*, *Jin*, *Ramayana*, Sita, Chipko Movement, warmonger, conflict zones

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Introducing Sita and Jin, the Ecological Sisters

Sita or Janaki was the daughter of Bhoodevi or Dharitri, the Mother Earth. The Hindu Epic Ramayana says it. The life of Sita, Hindu God Rama's consort, was a series of never ending plights- exile, abduction by the demon-king Ravan, then exiled again by Ram to the forest, having doubts cast on her character. Dejected and disillusioned Sita prayed to the mother earth. The earth splits open, and Sita sinks before anyone can react. By refusing to return to Ram, Sita turns away from the convention of the society and returns to the mother earth's womb.

The cine-enthusiasts, who have had the pleasure of watching the Turkish movie 'Jin' by Reha Erdem, may ask at the end, where has Jin, the 17 year old girl gone, back to the womb of the mother earth? She was surrounded by a donkey, a stag, a bear, a leopard and of course the lush greenery on an anonymous forest. They encircled Jin as if they were trying to guard the already wounded, ravaged, and insulted body and mind of the young girl and help her slowly get into a slumber in her mother earth's lap.

The disillusioned Red Riding Hood

Set within splendid mountain landscapes, the largely wordless 'Jin' presents nature's delicate yet astounding beauty as a pensive spectator of mankind's drive toward obliteration. Anti-war in the broadest sense, the film affectingly incorporates animal witnesses whose presence, both remarkable and fitting, adds a universal element likely to enthrall a diverse audience. In the foothills of the Kurdish territories of Turkey, Jin (Deniz, Hasguler), a young rebel, slips away from her small guerrilla group to attempt a return to her family and a regular life. Hiding from both her comrades, to whom she is now an absconder, and the Turkish army, which views her as a terrorist, Jin (whose name means "woman" in Kurdish) takes refuge with the animals of the treacherous woodlands, who are themselves struggling under the brutality of war. In the silence, amongst the eternity of nature, Jin tends to the animals' needs, and they stare back at her, their blank stares, compassionate and critical all at once. With her red head scarf, her encounters with grandmother and her need to return to family, 'Jin' slips into the Red Riding Hood style. However, writer/director Reha Erdem has constructed a reality that nods to the past but eases back on the levels of codification that disguised the tales original purpose. Primarily, Erdem reinstate men into the role of the wolf. Sometimes, the Turkish army emerges as the film's actual 'big, bad wolf'. The film doesn't spell out why she leaves trekking through the opulent landscape, though Jin tells a few people she's going to see her ill grandmother. It is equally conceivable that, at 17, she can no longer put up with the fight.

The Nature's daughter's metaphorical yearning for sustainability

Alert to the dangers from Turkish soldiers in the area, she's surprised quite a few times by the forest's inhabitants, such as a gigantic stag, a bear and a falcon whose squealing protests when she steals two eggs leads her to put one back. This respectful affinity with the animals is interrupted when soldiers approach while she's up a tree. The falcon, as if acknowledging her reverential behaviour, stops its cries and the men go by. This shot is a faint reminder of a kind of trait that speaks of a development that

meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; that is of course, simply put, sustainable development; the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs (<http://www.un-documents.net>).

Continuing on her voyage, she steals some clothes so can pass as a civilian, also taking a school exercise book that reminds viewers that Jin is still a girl, despite her uniform. Following a hesitant encounter with a large brown bear, she finds a road and hitches a ride to town. The men she meets see her as an easy target for their sexual advances. Between fending them off and dodging road blocks, she's given no choice but to return to the mountains.

'Active Kindness' and Unity with Nature

Active intellect or *al-'aql al-fa'al* plays a pivotal role in Islamic metaphysics and psychology, chiefly in the Peripatetic tradition. Its origins can be traced back to the Aristotelian notion of *nous poietikos* in *De anima* III.4–5. Expanding upon the doctrine that 'that which thinks and that which is thought are the same', Aristotle draws a distinction between a potential intellect which *becomes* all things and an active (eternal and divine) intellect which *makes* all things. Aristotle posits this 'active intellect' in order to account for the possibility of thought, which stands in need of an explanation because it is a kind of process or movement, and as such, is characterized by change. All change requires an efficient cause to bring it about, so there must be some efficient cause by which the conversion of intellect from potentiality to actuality is affected. In Islamic philosophy, this notion of the active intellect is taken up and typically situated within a Neoplatonic cosmology (the tenth and final intellect to arise through the process of emanation, often associated with the moon and the angel Jibril), as a kind of link between the human and the divine (Groff, 2007). Interestingly, kindness is no less valuable aspect than intellect in the present scenario. To the eco-feminists, kindness is an inseparable attribute of both nature and women. So it will not be too far-fetched to place Sita and Jin in the peripatetic tradition of 'active kindnesses just like 'active intellect'. The active intellect explains the possibility of prophetic revelation – as the reception of intelligible by the imagination – within the context of an Aristotelian worldview. The cinematic revelation of ecological crisis through the medium of Jin also connote the aspect of 'active tenderness' or 'active kindness' and similarly received by the tool of imagination.

The Flora-Fauna Sonata and a False Note of 'Polarisation'

Reha Erdem's subtle skill at incorporating the animals, especially but not limited to the wrenching final shot, is in many ways opposite of the alluring insertions in 'Life of Pi'. Here woodland creatures act as melancholy spectators to the destruction they've long been familiar with, looking with silent reproach at the incomprehensible inhumanity. 'Jin' implicitly addresses the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, yet the forest's soothing obscurity allows for concepts to be opened more broadly. While this human side of *Jin* is both fascinating and rewarding, it is the broader, very visual construct that is the most mesmerising. For the majority of its run time, Erdem's film is filled with near wordless shots of the Turkish countryside, its flora and fauna. The suggestive juxtaposition of war and nature bears the bulk of the film's emotional

load. The enchanting rolling steppes and lush forest is exquisitely captured by the director's long time collaborator Florent Herry. His soaring camera imperially captures the overwhelming grandeur of this quaint province. Enhanced further by Hildur Guonadottir's elegant score, *Jin* is an impressive portrait of the organic exuberance of nature, uncouthly punctuated by the sound of human conflict. The empathetic animals which enter *Jin*'s world, reflecting ecology astutely resigned to the destructive faculty of mankind. However, '*Jin*' is an indolently paced but well worth the time and effort. It is an astonishing, contextualising and a perspective building piece of cinema.

Despite this gracefully fashioned sonata of flora and fauna enduring within this landscape, *Jin* quickly becomes a rather exhaustive experience. Its venture into civilisation consists of repetitive events with the excruciatingly gloomy atmosphere of misogynistic and tyrannical harassment. Sometimes it gets monotonous to watch the men as 'wolves'. Katherine Davies and other ecofeminists argue that though there is a deep connection between women and nature, it is socially manufactured. Revaluing this bond is important, but it is also crucial to change relationships between men and women and between men and nature. Most ecofeminists believe that men have as much potential as women to adopt a deeper environmental awareness, but they will need to work harder to fully embrace those values. (<http://www.thegreenfuse.org>)

Any approach to the emancipation of any part of society, based on a polarized view of social veracity like men versus women or majority versus minority, sometimes boost the dominant structure to create a queer dualism. It abets the 'I' to push the 'other' out. Interestingly, the director himself has stated his reservations regarding the polarisation:

"Throughout human history, fairy tales, legends and songs have always held the same message; don't hurt anyone, don't kill! But because of the 'other' he has consistently created across all lands, cultures and climates, mankind has never progressed beyond preaching the message. He can't.... For he has always seen those who speak a different language, who are a different colour, who hold different beliefs, who choose a different sexual orientation - in other words, the 'other' - as a threat to himself. And fear of this threat has driven him to threaten the "other", to try to destroy him. Wherever you look in the world, the extermination of the "other" continues, as ever, today." (<http://www.bostonturkishfilmfestival.org>)

Harmonizing the agony of Women and Nature in conflict zones

Lemon Tree is a 2008 Israeli movie directed by Eran Riklis. This apparently apolitical film shows the legal efforts of a Palestinian widow to stop the Israeli Defence Minister, her neighbour, from destroying the lemon trees in her family farm. At the same time, she develops a bond with the minister's neglected wife Mira (Rona Lipaz-Michael), who considers the order to chop down the trees arbitrary and unnecessary. The Israeli Defence Minister, pointedly called Israel Navon (Doron Tavor), moves to a house on the border between Israel and the West Bank, with the building sitting on the Israeli side just next to the dividing line. The Israeli Secret Service views the neighbouring lemon grove of Salma Zidane (Hiam Abbass), a Palestinian widow whose family has cared for the area for generations, as a threat to the Minister and his wife. The security forces soon set up a guard post and a barbed wire fence around the grove. They then obtain an order to uproot the lemon trees. Salma decides to work with the young lawyer Ziad Daud (Ali Suliman) and take their case all the way to the

Court. The court case receives prominent media attention. A final camera shot reveals the lemon trees to have been cut down (<http://www.washingtonpost.com>). A hypothetical representation of the Israeli-West bank separation wall punctuates the slices of the film. Hiam Abbas acts with impeccably calculated minimalism. Salma has suffered a lot. She lost her husband, her kids are far away, and she lives all alone. Besides, director Eran Riklis subtly suggests, the double jeopardy of being a Palestinian among Israelis, and a Woman among Palestinians. Browbeaten Salma argues in vain with the legal and military power of a society that treats her as an enemy. On the other hand, the defence minister, and even his sympathetic wife, claim to be powerless as well, unable to change an intricate situation. Salma doesn't say much at all yet every emotion is lucid. Her dignity is impressive but it makes her defeat much harder.

The relationship between Salma and Mira is portrayed with sheer subtlety. The two do not meet exclusively. Salma never says anything to Mira and Mira just about makes one general statement when she apologizes to Salma for taking lemons from her grove without permission. But Mira can't stop thinking about Salma. Mira can't even keep herself from attending the final hearing despite warning from friends and family. When the court decision comes, Mira decides to leave Israel Navon. The connection between the two women becomes clearer with this move at the end - a defeat not just for Salma, for Israel too, because his wife leaves him and he is walled-in. The hope-defeat dyad created by these two women is astounding. Since Salma has lost her trees, she decides to let go of practically everything else as well. She burns the clothes in her house and also Ziad's picture in the newspaper. This time there are no tears and once again, the poise is astonishing.

So, the question is- how long women in conflict zones can live in a state of 'betweenness'- locked between public and private, reason and unreason, home and exile, freedom and confinement (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). The irony of *Lemon Tree* is that what it achieves as film only adds, in the end, to the sense that nothing can unravel the cruel chaos. Nonetheless, *Lemon Tree* is a richly layered feminist parable. We never miss the exquisite eco-feminist subtext within the film. The arboreal affinity between Salma and the lemon trees and Mira's empathy towards them, a silent bonding of the trio- Salma, the trees and Mira, their agony caused by the culture of hatred and war-mongering machismo clearly indicate the connotation of eco-feminism.

'Shakti' or the strength of the cine-women and the Chipko Movement

The rock-solid conviction of Salma Zidane and Jin might remind the enthusiasts of the Chipko Movement (1986) the utterance of Itwari Devi, the eloquent Chipko leader: "Shakti (strength) comes to us from these forests and grasslands; we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal shakti, and we derive our strength from it. We watch our streams renew themselves and we drink their clear and sparkling water - that gives us shakti. We drink fresh milk, we eat ghee, we eat food from our own fields -all this gives us not just nutrition for the body, but a moral strength, that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. That is why 'primitive', 'backward' women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce them themselves are leading Chipko. Our power is nature's power, our shakti comes from prakriti. Our power against the contractor comes from these inner

sources, and is strengthened by his trying to oppress and bully us with his false power of money and muscle. We have offered ourselves, even at the cost of our lives, for a peaceful protest to close this mine, to challenge and oppose the power that the government represents. Each attempt to violate us has strengthened our integrity. They stoned us on March 20 when they returned from the mine. They stoned our children and hit them with iron rods, but they could not destroy our shakti.” (Shiva, 1988).

The Politics of Extermination and its Witnesses

Grippingly, in both the films, the protagonists are strikingly dispassionate about any kind of political ranting. Jin was in search of a normal life, away from grenades and machineguns. On the other hand, Salma fought within the established legal framework. Both the directors defied orbiting round the war-populist cine-sphere. Most of the famous films on Israel-Palestine conflict like ‘Paradise Now’ (2005) and ‘Omar’ (2013) by Hany Abu-Assad or ‘For My Father’ (2008) by Dror Zahavi are basically films with the Palestinian protagonists who fight for their rights outside the legal framework and are members of armed groups. Conversely ‘Encounter point’ (2006) by Ronit Avni and Julia Bacha solely addressed the pressing need for total abnegation of violence. Similarly, very few Turkish movies have dealt with the issue of a rebel’s disillusionment.

Many social ecologist and feminists have criticized ecofeminism for focusing too much on a ‘mystical’ connection between women and nature and not enough on the actual conditions of women. On the contrary, many other argued that spirituality and activism can be combined effectively in ecofeminism.

The world today is much more incendiary by the promotion of mono-dimensional cataloging of human beings, which combines a queer intellectual haze with increased scope for the exploitation of that nebula/miasma by the champions of violence. In such a scenario, the ‘mystical’ tool can be exploited by the movie-makers as meaningful films can carry amaranthine appeal of peace and non-violence and can very well act as a very powerful political instrument that too being apolitical. Thus the hope for justice never dies.

In the two films, the trees, the animals, the birds, the insects along with the women silently wait for justice. They are agonized by the culture of hatred and war-mongering machismo. Still they exude the zeal to defy, zeal to ask for justice, may be restorative or reparative but never retributive. That is why Jin nurses the wounded Turkish soldier. She never allows the pangs of vengeance overpower her serenity. Director Reha Erdem hopes for another kind of utopic justice:

“Even those not personally involved in the extermination support it, consciously or unconsciously, through their insensitivity and lack of reaction. You might think there were no witnesses...”

It strikes me, however, that for millions of years the most honourable witnesses have been animals. Although they themselves are direct victims of the exterminations, they are witness to the savagery and pain through their stares, their bearing, and their

wounds. Doesn't the most hopeful way of avoiding the next extermination start by finding witnesses to the previous one?" (<http://www.bostonturkishfilmfestival.org>) However, these 'honourable witnesses' have also seen the human's evolve to be more brutish. Perhaps these silent witnesses symbolize the victims of carnages who are psychologically, physiologically or politically unable to voice their sufferings during the massacres. If the voiceless victims are empowered to express their anguish, perhaps the next extermination can be avoided.

'The grass is also like me'- the utterance of the Eco-Femina

The central female characters of these two films left the audience shaken. They swirled the viewers' deepest emotions. They energized them with the most essential vigor- the zeal to defy. They have not been portrayed in the films; they themselves have portrayed the films. Intriguingly, they have turned the voyeurs into spectators. Jin and Salma can be revered with Pakistani poet Kishwar Naheed's words:

The Grass is Really like Me

The grass is also like me
As soon as it can raise its head
the lawnmower
obsessed with flattening it into velvet,
mows it down again.
How you strive and endeavour
to level woman down too!
But neither the earth's nor woman's
desire to manifest life dies.

Take my advice: the idea of making a footpath was a good one.

Those who cannot bear the scorching defeat of their courage
are grafted on to the earth.
That's how they make way for the mighty
but they are merely straw not grass
-the grass is really like me.
(<http://meredithgender.blogspot.in>)

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