

***Depiction of the Good and Evil Conflict through
Female Characters in Turkish Cinema from Kezban to Iklimler***

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Abstract

The traditional narrative cinema, which is by nature based on fairy tales and legends, mainly focuses on such genres as love, good vs evil conflict, reunion of lovers, and the story of intervening evil characters. In contrast to classical cinema whose primary purpose is to narrate the story in such a way that the viewer can identify with it, independent narrative cinema tries to question the ‘reality’, make an intellectual rather than emotional influence on the viewer, and prevent identification. In classical narration, which can be characterized by idealized characters where individual solutions and main characters dominate, conflict is the most important focus, which almost completely revolves around the good-evil characters created.

When we look at cinema films in Turkey, we can see that films of both categories have been made, although those of traditional narrative cinema predominate. Popular films occupy a significant place in Turkish cinema today, and so did they particularly during the Yesilcam period, considered as the golden age in terms of cinema-viewer relationship. Though not so strong, this good-evil distinction is also observed in films with modern narration, which contrast with popular films in which good vs evil conflict is an indispensable narrative component.

The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent independent narrative cinema, which started to peak especially after the 1990s and which is expected to channel viewers to thinking and questioning through an alternative structure, presents a different approach with regard to the good vs evil character in the process of creating female characters. For this purpose, the good vs evil distinction will be analyzed with respect to the female characters in the films *Kezban*, a typical example of the Turkish popular cinema and the Yesilcam period, and *Iklimler*, an independent production and one of the most important films of the recent Turkish cinema, and it will also be questioned whether independent cinema has created a realistic female character, as opposed to the traditional narrative cinema.

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Introduction

As is with literary works, there are various types of narrative in cinema as well; however, the classical narrative cinema stands out as the dominant mode in terms of addressing and influencing large audiences. Although movies with this narrative mode may seem to be different from each other, they are in fact structurally similar, and the narrative structure and the main features of the characters and the story remain unchanged.

In movies of classical narration, which create an easily conceivable visual realm of themes that make up a major part of the popular culture such as love, sexuality, rich-poor contrast, family, heroism, solidarity, courage, jealousy, greed, competition, etc. (Oluk, 2008;76), the balance at the beginning of the narration starts to corrupt when the first climax appears as the dramatic structure proceeds (Sener, 1997, 23); the character then tries to struggle with the conditions that have led to the corruption; and the initial balance is reestablished at the end (Oluk, 2008; 88). In classical narrative films, in which ultimate attention is paid to the creation of contrasting characters, the viewer does not remain totally passive (Onaran, 1986;80); the patterns and the codes which the classical film is based on are known by the viewer, but the viewer's ensuing mental activity is totally manipulated (Onaran, 1986; 168).

The type of narration offered as an alternative to classical narration is the modern or epic narration asserted by Bertold Brecht. Modern narration seeks to reveal the real facts hidden behind the quasi facts and the web of relationships behind the style, to raise the style itself as an issue of discussion, and to make the viewer think during pauses (Brecht, 1981; 55) by episodic narration. By seeking the query of reality with mental rather than emotional impact on the viewer that relieves identification, modern narration demands mental activity of the audience instead of their emotional participation (Oluk, 2008; 95). Brecht does not entirely reject identification, which constitutes the basis of classical narrative movie, but he suggests a level of understanding that controls it (Brecht, 1981; 66).

Another important difference between classical narration and modern narration reveals itself in narrative characters. The viewer can develop an easier and more intensive empathy towards characters in classical narrations, where the good and the evil are separated sharply and in which not the real world, but idealization is taken as a reference during the generation of characters, who are generally too determined and insistent to be compared to any person from the real world and too perfect and too charismatic to be true (Oluk, 2008; 82-83). Instead of such typecasting adopted by classical narration, the concept of individual created according to the circumstances becomes prominent in modern narration, where characters replace typecasting. Just like typecasting, characters serve the development of events and the conveyance of notions in the story; yet, they are equipped with more humanistic features (Akyürek, 2004, 171-172).

In popular films, it is important to know well who the characters are, since close emotional relationships and actions that prepare the ground for those relations are very important. In this world of fictions, characters mostly act according to cause-effect relationships and almost all of them exist in a world of contrasts and patterns

such as the good and evil and the rich and the poor. Viewers develop an idea about characters from the first moment they meet them until the end of the film. Every character in popular films has the opportunity of representation within the frame of patriarchal ideology; besides, various male and female models are presented for the audience as ideal models, which makes such representations even more important. For this reason, the review of the films covered in this study was based on the creation of the characters.

The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the kind of fiction in which female characters are created while presenting the good-evil contrast in both the classical and modern types of narration, which are regarded to be greatly different in terms of narrative structure, goal, the build-up of the story, and character creation. First of all, the Yesilcam period, considered as the golden years especially with respect to cinema-audience relationship, and the film *Kezban*, one of the most popular films of the period, which was shot repeatedly for many times, were analyzed. The film was evaluated in terms of the structure of the story, especially the creation of women characters, and the use of gender myths in the film. Next, the movie *Iklimler (Climates)*, an example of independent movies which gained a worldwide success was studied from the same perspective.

From Yesilcam to Independent Movie: Women Characters in Movies

An important period of the Turkish cinema history in terms of both the number of films made and the film-audience relationship, Yesilcam lasted from 1960s to 1980s. In her book of a detailed account of the period, *Yesilcam Öykü Sineması*, Serpil Kirel depicts Yesilcam as a structure of a poor financial infrastructure struggling to survive in a vicious circle which depended heavily on funds from other sources than the sector itself, in which personal relationships influenced or changed the production process, where making money was the primary goal of the producers (Kirel, 2005; 39).

With more than 200 films made every year and actors and actresses rushing from one film set to another, Yesilcam led its golden age between 1960 and 1970. Although many films of different genres were made during the period, melodrama stands out as the dominant one. The basic conflict between the good and evil, the heterosexual desire within the frame of the separation and reunion of lovers, the family created by the unification of lovers, and the structure emphasizing that being without a man is a “defect” for women are the common narrative features of Yesilcam melodramas (Akbulut, 2012, p.16). In those films, in which “narrative simplicity” was at the forefront, the personality of the characters is set and confirmed at the very first moment; in other words, “characters retain their either good or evil attitude throughout the film” (Kirel, 2005, 275).

Except in only a few eccentric examples, typecasting, rather than characters, were mostly involved in the films of the period. For instance, the devoted mother figure who rarely leaves the kitchen or only leaves it with an apron on whenever she does and the naughty brother or the femme fatale figures are among important figures that are almost always seen and engraved on viewers’ brains. Therefore, they are also one of the most important typecasting figures for studies on gender (Oluk, 2008; 85).

Accordingly, taking into consideration the way that Yeşilcam placed and depicted women in films and its attitude towards them, women characters can be said to be more prominent in narration especially during the mid-60s and early 70s, although there were basically no differences (Abisel, 2005, 209). In the films of the 1950s and the early 1960s, women were represented in one of two types of characters: one as the ideal woman who never concedes under difficulties, and the other as the wicked one who is always in chase of money (Abisel, 2000, 187). Divided into two as the absolute good and the absolute evil, these women characters were an effective medium to ideology of gendered nationalism and presented various examples of womanhood to women viewers in the films of the period in question (Abisel, 2005, p.212).

The women in the first group were the main women characters who never made mistakes (Piskin, 2008, 44). These innocent girls of the films do not undress, kiss, betray, or wish any harm on others, but they are always kindhearted and self-sacrificing. In this regard, they constituted a character too good to be real or plausible (Kaplan, 2004, 45).

On the other hand, women characters of the second group who identified with their role or those who made mistakes in the course of events were certainly punished at the end of the narration (Abisel, 2005, 301). In the films, in which ending virginity was identified with being dirty, being untouched was praised and virginity was conveyed as a precondition to the existence of women by holding them responsible for saving their virginity (Abisel, 2005, 307).

In those so-called family films, self-sacrifice, honesty and loyalty were implied as indispensable virtues of womanhood, and the inevitability of fate and the woman's self-sacrifice were emphasized. In those narrations, created in a masculine discourse and functioning as a tool to satisfy men's desires and pleasures, women were presented in the same way as men want to see them (Ozsoy, 2004, 286).

With regard to how women were depicted in Turkish cinema during the 1980s, the years of social and financial changes in the country, the films can be covered under two headings. The first one was the type of depiction that constituted the traditional attitude of Yeşilcam, namely the extremist typage of absolute good or absolute evil women, and the second was the more realistic and multidimensional perspective, which depicted women and their problems just as they are in real life, and dealt with them with a different and multidimensional approach (Esen, 2000, 41-42).

It was attempted to represent women as the subject in those films, taking women as a whole with their good and evil sides. When it comes to 1990s, while the sector continued to produce popular films on one hand, Turkish movie was at the same time faced with a different structure. The alteration and reformation concept which started in 1987-88 – but radically accelerated after the year 1994 – differed greatly from the previous period in many aspects and triggered the start of a generation, or period, called “Bagımsızlar”, apart from the traditional cinema sector. Totally different from the previous periods regarding form, style, and the way they conceive cinema, as well as filmmaking, management, and financial sources, this generation came into being as a natural and inevitable result of the demand for filmmaking, and partly as a

consequence of the collapse of the cinema sector at the time or its inability to produce new films through previous relationships as it used to be (Evren, 2004; 14-15).

Having not been raised under the master-apprentice relationship of the traditional Yesilcam, independent movie-makers, who felt no need for classical producers but achieved different projects instead, changed Yesilcam and finally established a new system (Evren, 2004; 16-17). Not the events experienced by the characters, but the general human conditions within the events are the main focus of this “art” movie, which abandons narrative causality and includes multiple narrations and multi perspectives to facilitate the understanding of life in its multidimensionality and requires a critical awareness of the viewer, and whose narrations has no emphasis on a specific concept of ending (Akt. Akbulut, 2012, 114).

However, according to Akbulut, there are in fact specific bonds between the two types of movies, even though the word “new” in the phrase “New Turkish Movie”, which is used for the years after 1990, states a collapse in Yesilcam films. Melodrama, an indispensable part of Yesilcam also exists in New Turkish Movie and some features of melodramatic narration can be seen in such films (Akt. Akbulut, 2012, 115). Kovacs related the association between melodrama and art movies to modernism and he stated that the origin of the most common modern art movies was the classical melodrama. According to the writer, “Melodrama, together with the type of crime, was a genre which existed on the gap between commercial popular movie and art movie and was the major genre that had bridged the two since that gap rose; it is the genre that not only cherishes modernism but also that which lives within modernism.” (Kovacs, 2010, 89). This correlation that Kovacs made between modern art films and melodrama overlaps the New Turkish Movie called modern movie, and as Akbulut states, it is possible to have various connections between Yesilcam and the present modern movie. In the film analyses in the following part of this study, these connections will be made clear in terms of the presentation of women and the validity of social gender myths.

A Classic in Yesilcam, Kezban

The film Kezban (1968), directed by Orhan Aksoy, has its special place among the classics of Yesilcam period, and the story of the film has been repeated many times; besides, Kezban in Paris and Kezban in Rome were also shot in response to the interest in the film.

The Story of the Film:

Adapted from a novel, Kezban tells the story of a beautiful young peasant girl living with her mother. Only when her mother dies does her father learn that he has a daughter and come to the village to take her with him, but Kezban still does not know that this man is her father, thinking that she is going to live with a rich relative of hers. On her arrival, Kezban is insulted by Lale, who doesn't know that they are sisters, and by her friends. Kezban never forgets especially what Ferit says to her. After a while, Kezban feels uncomfortable there and gets enrolled in a French school as a boarder in order to improve and change herself and continue her education life. Kezban graduates from school after years when Ferit also returns after finishing his medicine education abroad. she has now changed and grown into an educated and well-groomed young lady drawing the attention of many men. Ferit is also impressed by

Kezban, but he has to get engaged to Lale on the request of their families. One night, Ali, Kezban's father, suddenly becomes ill, and when he is about to die, he tells the truth to Kezban and Ferit; he entrusts her daughter to Ferit and bequeathed a fortune to her. After a while, when Lale discovers the intimacy between Ferit and Kezban, she makes Kezban leave the house. Ferit tells her the truth, and Lale, who is engaged to Ferit only to separate him from Kezban, regrets and goes up to Kezban and apologizes to her. Ferit and Kezban unite, and Lale meets Necmi, whom she loves truly.

Kezban, a classical Yesilcam film, features the typical characteristics of the classical narration and melodrama, as regards the elements such as a village girl, the physical and mental changes she undergoes in order to deserve the love of the man she is in love with, intervening separations, sufferings, and the "happy ending" gained by the reunion of lovers.

The Depiction of Characters:

There are four important male characters. What they have in common is that they are all rich, educated, handsome, and talented. Although they are never displayed in their working environment, their jobs are made clear to us through conversations. They are also loyal to the women they love and so romantic as to desire their happiness more than anything else. Although there appear little misunderstandings in the process of the narration, these are immediately dealt with and male characters are presented as "ideal" men with no faults.

As for females, Kezban is the first women characters in the film. The character Kezban, typical of Yesilcam, displays a personality free of defect, innocent, always kindhearted, self-sacrificing, and never wishing harm. Yet, after she finishes the boarding school, we see her changed in terms of physical appearance and jaunt. We do not see her working, talking about her job, or continuing her education life, nor do we see her doing anything that suggests she is willing to do it. She now exists through her physical change and love. As for Lale, Kezban's sister, the other important woman character in the film, she is the opposite of Kezban. She is a young lady who is rich, spoiled, irresponsible, lazy, envious, and reveler. She always fails her class and never finishes her school. Her father holds up Kezban as an example to her. Whereas Kezban is a symbol of innocence, Lale is so free and easy with men that even while she is engaged, she kisses and goes out with another man. Lale is equipped with negative features in contrast to Kezban's grace and virtues. The same situation is also true for Lale's friends from high school; they are also presented as evil characters placed against Kezban.

The Good-Evil Contrast:

When the male characters are examined, no evil characters are found. Although Ferit is depicted as a spoiled son of a rich family who makes fun of the appearance of Kezban at first, soon afterwards, he apologizes for his attitude and wins Kezban's heart. Another male character in the film is Ali, Kezban's father. Ali had an affair with Kezban's mother in his youth, but left her after a while; however, he did not know that she was pregnant and gave birth to Kezban. He undertakes his daughter's responsibility many years later, only after her mother dies; he adopts her, helps her complete her education and leaves her a fortune when he dies without making any

discrimination between his daughters. For this reason, the overall impression is made that Ali is also a good character.

The good-evil contrast is created through women characters. This contrast is ensured through Lale, who has totally negative features against Kezban's innocence and uniqueness. While Kezban is affectionate and kindhearted, Lale is so envious and evil that though she does not love him, she wishes to get engaged to Ferit just to prevent him from being with Kezban. Lale, within the frame of this depiction, falls in the typical typecasting of evil woman in Yesilcam who tries to separate lovers.

Iklimler

Iklimler (2006), a film by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, a director also well-known outside Turkey for New Turkish cinema, has won a lot of prizes in domestic and foreign festivals, including the Cannes (FIBRESCI).

The Story of the Film:

In the film *Iklimler (Climates)*, which narrates the story of Isa, an academician, and Bahar, an art director for soap operas, the couple meet during subsequent periods in Kaş and Ağrı, two cities in Turkey with different climates. The setting change in terms of both time and space, but Isa remains unchanged.

In this film, through the character Isa, Ceylan exposes the spiritual loneliness and distance of an individual caused by modernism and suggests that there are no intimate relationships or emotional intimacy between the man and woman characters we are used to seeing in Yesilcam melodramas and that "happy love does not exist", as opposed to what is stressed in Yesilcam melodramas.

The Depiction of The Characters:

Bahar and Isa are the main characters of the film of seemingly a relationship between a man and a woman. Although the film seems to tell the story of a relationship, the events and the relationship are, in fact, generally depicted from a masculine viewpoint. Other characters in the film are Serap, Güven, Isa's roommate from university, and the couple in whose house they stay when they are in Kas. Serap stands out as the most important co-starring character.

According to Akbulut, male characters in Ceylan's film do not act in the modern society in the same way as the men with a certain socio-cultural background do in a semi-feudal, traditional society, which implies that manhood faces a crisis. In the film, which can also be regarded as a melodrama of men, the relationship of power between men is conducted through women. However, this discourse of Ceylan generates a gendered discourse by displaying men as innocent and childish against women (Akbulut, 2012; 121). Only the character Isa, who is also lonely and distant in his affairs even during his closest moments to women, keeps himself away from any emotional warmth.

On the other hand, women characters are created with full of emotional rise and falls and uncertainty. What Bahar can do is unpredictable; she does not leave her lover although she knows that he cheats on her. However, she cannot come to terms with

the situation, either. She expresses their unhappiness as a couple through her words and actions. When Isa tells her on the beach that he wants to get divorced, she says, "I don't mind". Afterwards, she tries to hide Isa's eyes while he is riding his motorbike on their way back from the beach and laughs. When they fall down and Isa assaults her, this time she cries. She acts inconsistently also when Isa goes to Agri to meet her at the end of the film. Bahar cries when Isa tells her that he has come there for her, that he has changed now, and that he wants her to go back to Istanbul with him. She rejects Isa's offer by saying, "It is too late"; however, that night she goes to the hotel where Isa stays.

Not only Bahar but also Serap is depicted as an inconsistent character. Serap is depicted as the evil character of the film, who has been dating with a friend of Isa's, Güven, for a long time but cheats on her lover with Isa. Serap, who is first attracted to Isa's courtesy when they meet again, later tries to tempt him herself.

The Good-Evil Contrast:

Absolute good or absolute evil characters are not observed in this film, which makes it totally different from Classical Yesilcam films of idealized characters; In spite of this, the good-evil contrast in the film is conveyed through women characters. Ebru Ceylan, who writes the script with Nuri Bilge Ceylan and plays the character Bahar, makes the distinction between Bahar and Serap in her words: The name Bahar has been given to the character because "*the character represents innocence in the film and the name Bahar (Turkish word for Spring) sounds like a name of innocence*" (2006, 17). It can be seen that innocence-evil distinction has been made starting from the names of the characters and relationships have been built up according to this distinction. While Bahar is associated with innocence, Serap is depicted as evil. Among the components in the film that corroborate the vision of Serap's evil character is the wild love scene of Isa and Serap, the courtship they pay to each other, her vamp appearance, and betrayal.

In an interview, Ebru Ceylan expresses her opinion about this issue in her words:

There are some blurred close-ups in the hotel room. This implies on one hand that they have made love, but they wake up dressed in the morning, which confuses us. On the other hand, we see an extremely wild love scene with Serap. These two scenes are inevitably considered together. Why is it that there is not a love scene placed in the relationship?

E.C. It has basically two reasons. The first is that, with regard to the representations of the two women, Serap represents brutal facts. A wild love scene was needed at that point to create a dirty feeling about her. As for the character Bahar, a more abstract and purer emotion was required for her. Bilge did not want anything that would directly be associated with sexuality because Bahar means innocence to Isa. The second reason is that I never strip for screen (... ..)

These points made by Ebru Ceylan are important because she is the scriptwriter and they reflect the viewpoint of a female. We can see that women characters are consciously created as such by scriptwriters who acknowledge modern cinema and produces films of this kind. This discrimination between innocence and "brutal facts"

that Ceylan emphasizes places women under one of two headings just as it used to be in Yesilcam films, thereby regenerating the gendered discourse. Serap, who is first attracted to Isa's courtesy, then tries to tempt Isa even though she has a lover, which describes a similar character to the evil blonde specific to Yesilcam melodramas who leads a free sexual life.

Conclusion

Kezban and *Iklimler* are two films shot at different times with narrations of different characteristics. In the light of the review covered in the study, it is also noticed that there are similar characteristics between the two films, though they are different from each other in terms of the structure of the narration and the construction of the story.

When we analyze the films *Kezban* and *Iklimler* from the point of view of the conservative patriarchal structure of melodrama, it can be seen that the relations between modern art films and melodrama as suggested by Kovács based on modernism can also be observed in these films in terms of the depiction of women and function of gender myths. The opposing characters in both films are women, and all the negative qualities are donated to a single character. This situation is presented clearly in *Kezban*, one of the most important films of Yesilcam; while approved qualities such as innocence, self-sacrifice, love, and kindheartedness are associated with one character, other qualities such as envy, laziness, betrayal, and self indulgence are attributed to the other. With its modern narration, the film *Iklimler*, is mainly formed within a structure distant from idealized characters; however, the same contrast can also be seen when the women characters are closely examined. As the scriptwriter, Ebru Ceylan, emphasizes, while one side represents innocence, the other symbolizes "vicious feelings". This relation is created through women based on their sexuality, just as it was in Yesilcam; for instance, the character *Serap*, who is depicted as a vamp cheating on her lover and leading a free sex life, represents the evil against *Bahar*, the protagonist.

When it comes to the identification of woman, *Iklimler*, which is a film with modern narration, fails to reveal a different point of view from that of Yesilcam, which had classical narration, thus regenerating the existing models by duplicating them, whereas it is supposed to question the "reality", to have a more intellectual than emotional effect, to eliminate identification, and to demand intellectual action rather than emotional participation of the audience. For this reason, as regards the identification of women characters, the vision of the world presented in this film is considered more "dangerous" than the philosophy of life presented in Yesilcam and the film *Kezban*, because *Kezban* is viewed with the relative awareness that it has the typical characteristics of classical narration and melodrama; however, *Iklimler* conveys this traditional patriarchal viewpoint to the viewer stealthily through its objection to the popular narration and the use of perfect aesthetics of the cinema and its success in festivals; thus, when it comes to women identification, the questioning attitude of modern narration disappears.

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