The Status of Women as Subject in the Films of Contemporary Turkish Female Directors

Research Article

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This study focuses on how female characters are represented in the films of contemporary female directors in Turkey. In this study, the films of female directors Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Pelin Esmer, Ahu Öztürk, and Emine Emel Balcı are examined in the context of women's cinema and feminist film reading. In this study, the films Tereddüt ("Clair-Obscur," 2016), Gözetleme Kulesi ("Watchtower," 2012), Toz Bezi ("Dust Cloth," 2015), and Nefesim Kesilene Kadar ("Until I Lose My Breath," 2015) are discussed using sociological film analysis. Unlike mainstream films, the female characters in the narratives of these films do not succeed even when they engage in a struggle for liberation. The female characters are imprisoned in the masculine ideology and find their salvation in relation to being with a man.

Keywords: gender, woman in Turkey, women's cinema, Turkish women directors

Introduction

With new technology and the formation of industrial societies, the differences between men and women have been identified in new frameworks. In the patriarchal-capitalist system where only the perception of biological differences is presented, it has brought new aspirations to the status of women as subjects and has become an invisible problem in many societies. Moreover, the concept of being a subject and being an individual is historically difficult for everyone.

As Turkey has a patriarchal structure, women are compressed into a rigid mold and shaped by following certain roles. When one views the patriarchal society in Turkey, it can be stated that "the obstacle to women's emancipation is the society."[1]

This study focuses not only on the place of women and masculine mentality in Turkey, but also discusses women's struggle against being a subject, and the impact of men in this struggle. In other words, this study analyzes whether women are addicted to men, and if men have become a necessity in women's emancipation struggle. Moreover, it aims to reveal how female characters are positioned and represented in female directors' films. The representation of

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[1] Kaylı, Derya Ş. 2011. *Kadın Bedeni ve Özgürleşme*. Izmir: Ilya Izmir Publishing, 80.

female characters in the public and private spheres and the positioning of women are analyzed in the following films: *Tereddüt* ("*Clair-Obscur*," 2016, dir. Yeşim Ustaoğlu), *Gözetleme Kulesi* ("*Watchtower*," 2012, dir. Pelin Esmer), *Toz Bezi* ("*Dust Cloth*," 2015, dir. Ahu Öztürk), and *Nefesim Kesilene Kadar* ("*Until I Lose My Breath*," 2015, dir. Emine Emel Balcı).[2] Another aim of this study is to explore whether the films directed by female directors in Turkish cinema should be considered as women's cinema or not, as Claire Johnston[3] urges.

Gendered world: (fe)male trouble

According to the Turkish Language Institution, the concept of sex, which emphasizes the innate sexual characteristics of an individual, is defined as the characteristic of creation that gives the individual a distinct role in reproductive work and distinguishes the male from the female. It generally meets certain biological, physiological, and genetic characteristics. Gender, occurring after birth, emphasizes not only the biological structures but also the adoption of gender roles by each sex in accordance with different cultures and societies during the growth of girls and boys. Nancy Chodorow[4] deals with the subject primarily in terms of community psychology; she argues that families' child-raising traditions lead to sex discrimination. According to her, because of their biological structure, the burden of childcare duties fall on women, and being a mother causes the impression that there are psychological differences between the sexes in children. In early childcare, while mothers raise girls with maternal feelings, emotions are suppressed by the family in boys.[5] Simone de Beauvoir,[6] in her book *The Second Sex*, states that in comparison with men, the cultural construction of gender is defined as "other," "incomplete," "passive," "emotional," and "weak" in women in patriarchal societies. Since both individual and social relations are determined by these prejudices, even independent women are influenced by these views. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.*"[7] According to this proposition, being a woman is not a choice, but a cultural necessity. That is, society imposes the way of being a woman on women over time, and they develop an awareness of the roles that women internalize in socialization either consciously or unconsciously. On the other hand, Güven Özdoyran states that femininity or masculinity does not imply ontological stability, as it is a linguistic positioning. However, the meanings that we attach to names are linked to the agents that have those names.[8]

In the late 19th century, Freud, who saw women as masochistic, passive, and solely reproduction problems of the bourgeois, stated that "biology is destiny." In 1974, the British theorist Juliet Mitchell refuted Freud in saying, "biology is

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[2] In the text, the original Turkish names of the films will be used to avoid confusion.

[3] Johnston, Claire. 1979. *Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema*, in *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*, edited by Erens, Patricia. New York: Horizon Press, 133-43.

[4] Chodorow, Nancy. 1994. *Gender Relations and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective*, in *The Polity Reader in Gender Studies*, edited by Polity. Cambridge: Polity Press, 43.

[5] Doltaş, Dilek. 1992. *Batıdaki Feminist Kuramlar ve 1980 Sonrası Türk Feminizmi*, in *Türkiye'de Kadın Olgusu*, edited by Arat, Necla. İstanbul: Say Publishing, 59.

[6] Beauvoir, Simone de. 1972. *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[7] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 66.

[8] Özdoyran, Güven. 2019. Köpek Dişi ya da Mülklerin En Tehlikelisi Olarak Dil. *Sinefilozofi* 4(7), 619.

destiny, but destiny is based on culture, not biology," opposing the view of psychoanalysis as the legitimation of patriarchal relations.[9]

In this context, although sex seems irreversible in biological terms, the concept of gender has been constructed culturally and is not fixed. Moreover, gender is brought forward to challenge the expression "biology is destiny." According to Judith Butler,[10] gender should not be understood only as a legal conception of culture, but as an implication of gender. It is also the production mechanism that establishes sex. It cannot be stated that the relation of gender to culture is the same relation of gender and nature. In this case, it is revealed that "culture is destiny" in opposition to the rhetoric that "biology is destiny."[11]

Especially in the second half of the 20th century, the paradigms of almost all disciplines were starting to be questioned using the concept of gender, which was highly discussed. According to Tekeli,[12] every discipline that has gained the quality of being a "science" has a hidden male perspective. The world, history, and society are all interpreted from this perspective; laws are shaped with this perspective. By making women invisible, the patriarchal ideology not only ignores women's contributions to history and society but also by legitimizes women's oppression and exploitation by the existing social order; it ensures that all institutions of the order are accepted as they should be, and contribute to the maintenance of the gender hierarchy. In this context, for women, science functions through institutions and order as ideology rather than true science.

In this historical and social structure, women have been able to gain certain freedoms from male hegemony by entering working life. In many cases, the woman is still often looking out for admiration, love, or religion. However, even in the simplest jobs, the woman makes herself a concrete subject and affirms herself. With her working life, she no longer needs a man to act as a liaison between the universe and the woman, and she thus realizes her power. However, it should not be thought that working alone would completely liberate women. The world, which has long been the property of men, still remains a world of men. Today, women make up a considerable part of the exploited laborers in the capitalist order. Moreover, when a woman working at the factory returns to her home, she has to do "overtime" domestic work, and is unable to escape her duties as a spouse.[13]

Due to the diminishing importance of relative muscular strength thanks to the industrial revolution, women began to work in industrial occupations as laborers. Women's entry into the workforce began to replace men as a supportive labor force to close the gap in labor power as men went to fight in the two world wars. However, it was found appropriate to pay wages far lower than for male

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[9] Unat, Nermin A. 1992. *Kadın Araştırmalarının Neden, Amaç ve Kapsamı*, in *Türkiye'de Kadın Olgusu*, edited by Arat, Necla. İstanbul: Say Publishing, 24.
[10] Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
[11] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.
[12] Tekeli, Şirin. 1992. *Bilimlerde Metodolojinin Kadın Bakış Açısından İrdelenmesi*, in *Türkiye'de Kadın Olgusu*, edited by Arat, Necla. İstanbul: Say Publishing, 31.
[13] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 89.

workers, saying that employees often hampered work, worked at lower levels of productivity, and were less skilled than men.[14]

For women who were given the right to education, the classes that considered this right as a priority were the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes. The overall priority in families, education-wise, was for men. If there was a low-income family, priority was given to the boy; the girl was prepared for tasks such as household chores and accompaniment. The woman had to create trust that was not shown to her at any moment and simultaneously has to prove that she is worthy of it. Overcoming all these difficulties, the progression of women who have completed high qualifications and higher education was slower and more difficult than for men. Additionally, the increase in the number of women in any occupation meant that the prestige of these professions decreased accordingly. Nevertheless, a woman who has survived the economic yoke of the man does not have the same status as the man morally, socially, and spiritually. Society continues to look at and evaluate her from a male perspective.[15]

Emancipation brought economic and legal equality between men and women. Women could choose their profession, however, the physical training in the past and the present cannot provide them with the equipment to compete with a man. Women are often forced to spend all their energy, exhaust their vitality, and wear out their nerves just to reach market value. Many women—including teachers, doctors, engineers, architects, and lawyers—have succeeded in this structure, yet however do not see the same reputation as their male counterparts, nor can they reciprocate their labor.

Women in Turkey: Some things given to some, some things learned by others; the lesson is trouble

It is known that in pre-Islamic nomadic Turkish communities, women were not excluded from social life, enjoyed monogamous marriage rules, and were involved in horseback riding, participating in the war and political life. However, with the adoption of slavery in the Byzantine structure of the Ottoman state—which gradually began to deviate from its traditional values after the adoption of Islam—women were removed from social life. Apart from exceptional circumstances, women were not active in administration or social life; instead they used all the learning opportunities of the palace to become slaves who were only responsible for giving birth and raising children. It was not only women who were oppressed and exploited in the Ottoman state. The raia class, which was in constant exploitation in relation to Ottoman property relations, carried the burden of the economy and the army. While there was full male domination in the social sphere, the woman of the raia class were considered "alive, warm goods" and were used in the field during the day and in the household during the night. The reason women could not oppose this upside-down structure was that it was widely accepted that this structure was created by Allah. According to Islamic dogma, women were half-witted and should be kept under control in the management of men, destined to obediently serve their spouses instead of participating in social life, and regarded as equal to gold, silver, and horses, and

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[14] Tekeli, *Bilimlerde Metodolojinin*, 30-35.
[15] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 198.

lower than men. According to Islamic law, two women equaled one man, and women could never divorce from their husbands by their own will. [16]

Although women were active in the palace from time to time in the Ottoman state, talking about women's rights in the social field was formally encountered the Tanzimat (Reform) period. The status of women started to be discussed with the arrival of reformist regulations and the Second Constitutional Monarchy. Until the reformist period, daughters had the right to pay (often too much money) use the field when there was no son. However, with the Land Law enacted in 1856, the right to property was granted to girls through inheritance, and the "bridal tax" imposed on girls was abolished. It was also in this period that, for the first time, the female secondary school equivalent was opened in 1858 in Istanbul.

In the debates that began during this period, the western Turkish intellectuals argued that the main reason for the under development of the Ottomans was that women were a lower existence, and that it was thanks to the clergy. They said that constitutionalism meant the implementation of sharia Islamic law, and that women should not have any education other than religion, should cover their faces and hair, and their presence in social life with men was met with heavy criticism. The Second Constitutional Period was a period in which women begin to gain social visibility. In the following years, with the start of the Balkan wars, women from the noble sector formed associations with an understanding of social work, and with the First World War, they started to enter business world by serving from behind the scenes.[17] In 1911, the first high school was opened for girls, and in 1915, the first university for women.

With the newly established Turkish state, the modernization process was initiated under the leadership of Atatürk. Reformations were made to create a western and modern nation-state. At the beginnings of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk attached importance to women in social and business life.[18] Atatürk wanted to see Turkish women as the most enlightened women in the world. Although the progressive group within the Assembly claimed that every Turk had the right to participate in the election of deputies and demanded that in the 10th Article of the constitution "Turkish citizens" should include women, the article was changed to "every man is Turkish…" One of the most important developments in the Republic in 1924 was that women gained the right to education, a basic right of citizenship. Then in 1926, with the Civil Code, polygamy was abolished, civil marriage was allowed, divorce was taken out of male monopoly, and women were granted election rights. Female inheritance was achieved, inequality between men and women and the equivocation of two women to every one man in the testimony was abolished.[19] Another important factor in changing the status of women in Turkey in 1930 was right to elect and be elected in the municipal councils. Women who used this right for the first time in the 1933 municipal councils had the right to elect and be elected as deputies

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[16] The verses mentioned respectively Nisa/34, Baraka/282, Ali İmran/14, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (DİB)* (accessed: 17. January 2020).

[17] Tekeli, *Bilimlerde Metodolojinin*, 38.

[18] Gürkan, Hasan. 2019. The Experiences of Women Professionals in the Film Industry in Turkey: A Gender-Based Study. *Acta Sapientia Film and Media Studies Journal* 16, 205-19.

[19] Altındal, Aytunç. 1991. *Türkiye'de Kadın*. Istanbul: Anahtar Kitaplar, 29-30.

in 1934 and the 1935 elections; this right let them enter parliament with 18 deputies out of 383.

Following the first years of the Republic, women gained social and political rights; however, these rights were granted by the state in a way that descended from the top, not from the will of women as in many other countries. When Nakiye Elgün, one of the first women who entered the parliament in 1935, was asked to comment on the 1927 elections, she replied by revealing passive acceptance of the situation: "Why aren't there many women in the parliament? Because the law is not convenient. Then, this is not the time for us. Our government has given us all the rights that women deserve; even more."[20] Expressing the importance of women's participation in working life at every opportunity, Atatürk also endeavored to protect women and young people in business life. The first regulation on the working life of women was the 1936 labor law.

During Turkish modernization, women were given a westernized and modernized role, but the limits of this role were drawn by men. The nation-state project enabled women to maintain their traditional roles in modern forms and to determine the role patterns that apply to women. Even though women have the right to education and to elect and to be elected, the patriarchal structure in the society and the Islamic dogma could not be erased; the social status that women gained by using these rights remained only to the extent that male hegemony allows it.[21]

Women's rights acquired in the Republic became wider after the 1980's. With the new civil law adopted in 2001 and the women's movement, discussions on differences in education between women and men, social life, the exercise of political rights, and economic independence enabled Turkish women to become equally free as individuals and in comparison to modern western women. Nevertheless, in today's Turkey, women's economic and social life—for various reasons—cannot be as active, complicates the representation of women in the political sphere, and cannot escape being molded by the hands of patriarchal structures.

An insight into the history of women in Turkish cinema
Turkish cinema has existed as a masculine space since its inception. Women have long been positioned as secondary compared to men in cinema, especially in the intolerant attitudes supported by religion. Female characters are presented in roles in which male supremacy supports; women are left behind in the background, even if they are in the leading roles. While women's representations have been formed on the basis of a good and bad dichotomy, they have been sentenced to a male-centered life. Traditional Turkish female typologies in Turkish cinema include bad women that symbolize loss of innocence, seduce men, and make all kinds of evil. These depictions of women are a narrative built by mainstream Turkish cinema. In this paper, since I am discussing the depiction of women in women's films as an alternative discourse, it can be summarized that the history of the depiction of women in Turkish

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[20] Tekeli, *Bilimlerde Metodolojinin*, 40-42.
[21] Altındal, *Türkiye'de Kadın*, 45-47.

women's cinema is as follows: in reaction to the Social Realism that sprouted in Turkish cinema in the 1960's, it tried to find a self-image that could define both Turkish society and Turkish cinema.

The social realistic approach has increased the visibility of women and has illustrated their problems. The use of eroticism increased in films made with a social realistic approach; the female body is used naked and the sexuality of the woman is not hidden. In these films, the representation of women is as a good mother and a mild-mannered employee in working life, as determined by the patriarchal society; her position in modern society is questioned.

Rural femininity, sexuality of women, and problems of women such as social pressures, being a second wife, and commodity are found in Turkish cinema through social realistic cinema. While mainstream Yeşilçam[22] cinema continues to produce more films, realistic representations provide an important development in terms of questioning the relationship between cinema and women. Even though the representations of women that emerged thanks to the social realistic approach continued to exist in the 1970's, the period is marked by the family comic strips, arabesque films that continue to use melodrama patterns, and most importantly, sex comedies that overthrow women's identity.

In terms of the representations of women in the 1980's, women in Turkish cinema are (partially) liberated, and the modern/traditional duality came to the forefront, replacing than the good/bad duality. Female representation in Turkish cinema, which was largely influenced by American cinema in the 1990's, returns to traditional gender patterns. While the education of women whose characteristics such as sexuality and obedience are emphasized, their participation in working life is ignored, and new rules such as class, ethnic, and religious distinctions have been put in place of gender roles—all while depicting the drama of individuals lonely in the face of the brutality of urban life. In the 2000's, power and popularity were exalted in the new social structure, where individuality, the power of money, and showiness come to the fore.[23]

Film and its relation with sociology

There is a strong relationship between film and social structure. For this reason, films bear the traces of the culture of the period in which they were produced. To address this point, film studies help viewers find and interpret social phenomena. As Robert P. Wolensky[24] states, the scope of film studies is to find and interpret sociological implications in films.

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[22] *Yeşilçam* (mostly between the 1960s and 1970s) refers to its most popular era in Turkish film history.

[23] For more discussion and information on women in Turkish cinema, please see also: Abisel, Nilgün. 2005. *Popüler Yerli Filmlerde Kadının Kadına Sunuluşu: Aşk Mabudesi, Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar*. Ankara: Phoenix Yayınları; Akbulut, Hasan. 2008. *Kadına Melodram Yakışır/Türk Melodram Sinemasında Kadın İmgeleri*. Istanbul: Bağlam Yayınları; Daldal, Aslı. 2003. Türk Sinemasında Toplumsal Gerçekçilik: Bir Tanım Denemesi, *Birikim Dergisi* 172, 104-12; Özen, Emrah. 2001. *Türk Sinemasında 'Akım-Hareket' Değerlendirmelerine 'Toplumsal Gerçekçilik Akımı' Özelinde Eleştirel Bir Bakış ve Bir Model Önerisi*, in *Yıllık 1999 Mahmut Tali Öngören'e Armağan*, edited by Ankara University Communication Faculty, 147-66.

[24] Wolensky, Robert P. 1982. *An Introduction to the Use of Educational Film in Teaching Sociology: Using Films in Sociology Courses*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, 5.

However, Nicholas Demerath[25] argues that films present narrative documents of existing reality. Therefore, although movies are fiction, they still serve as a bridge between the fictional world and the real world. Demerath mentions that films not only depict social conditions but also touch on the personal conditions and sensibilities of the audience. In other words, the fact that a person has a variable identity, such as being female, male, LGBTI, or having ethnic and religious identity, changes the meaning created by the film.

In addition to what I have mentioned above, film is a work of art and the product of creative work. In this sense, interpretation opens up multiple dimensions and involves the interpretation of subjective and objective contexts, but it is also interdisciplinary. Psychoanalysis, feminist theory, ideological analysis, semiotics, and sociological readings all contribute to the interpretation of films.

In this study, the sociological film interpretation method is used. This method allows the comparative analysis of film content in terms of social reference. As a tool, films are watched in terms of their social context and origins. Cognitive attention focuses on the relationship between film content and social reality. What is meant here by social reality is the film's production conditions, financing, policy, etc., including all the media surrounding the film.[26]

The reasons to include the four women in this paper and their films are as follows:

- These four female directors are the most well known female directors in contemporary Turkish cinema.
- The films of these female directors were made close to each other (2012, 2015, 2015, and 2016) in the post-2010 period.
- Female characters are placed in the center of the narratives of these films (by contrast, there are no female characters in the center of any of Ustaoğlu and Esmer's films.)
- Based on the definition of women's cinema in the literature, these films center on the woman and reflect the realities of womanhood in a realistic language.

At this point, the latest films of the four Turkish female directors are discussed with the term "being woman" of the characters in the narratives. To this end,

- The latest films of these female directors are examined.
- These films were selected by grouping them according to their subject (each of these films can be described as a woman's film).
- Each film post-2010 sheds light on the reality of Turkey.

As a result of the film analysis, inferences are made in order to address the following questions:

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[25] Demerath, Nicholas. 1981. Through a Double-Crossed Eye. *Teaching Sociology* 9, 69-82.
[26] Flicker, Eva. 2003. Between Brains and Breasts - Women Scientists in Fiction Film: On the Marginalization and Sexualization of Scientific Competence. *Public Understanding of Science* 12, 307.

- Is it male-dominated world? Where are the women?
- Can these women be free without men?
- Does women's cinema exists in contemporary Turkey?

Findings

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner state that representations are inherited from the culture in which they are embedded and internalized, and become part of the self.[27] This assumption directs us to the idea that the representations, which are located in a culture and become decisive in the formation of the self, are formed by the creators of the culture. Feminist theorists point to men as the creator, transponder, and protector of the culture and the patriarchal system they have constructed, to the extent that the system and the representations that the system imposes reflect the nature of the represented—the threat of the patriarchal existence. They also open the discussion to see if it is configured accordingly by depriving all kinds of resources. Undoubtedly, the representation to which feminist theory primarily draws its attention is that of a woman; they discuss how representations, the creator of which is the patriarchal system, are structured and put into circulation when it comes to women. Cinema, which has had patriarchal dynamics since its existence, is one of the most influential cultural arenas where women's representations are created and presented by men. For this reason, how women are represented in cinema has become one of the important issues of feminist theory. S. Ruken Öztürk, in her book "*Being a Woman in Cinema,*"[28] suggests that the representation of women is compatible with patriarchal ideology in cinema, which is one of the most influential art branches of our time, and that it is not only the classical narrative cinema that is identified with Hollywood but also art cinema. She proves that we may encounter (perhaps implicitly) this reality in many important works. Art cinema, which is thought to be incompatible with dominant ideology, cannot go beyond the patriarchal ideology.

It is crucial to mention the films' plots in order to understand the aim of this paper well. The film *Tereddüt* tells a story about a young female psychiatrist (Şehnaz) from Istanbul starting work in a provincial town, but not far from the city. While she performs her duties on weekdays in the small town, she returns to her house in Istanbul on the weekends. She lives with her husband Cem, who seems flawless from the outside. However, she feels that there is something wrong going on inside. When a young woman (Elmas) is brought to the hospital one day, Şehnaz's relationship with her opens a completely different door to herself; at the same time, Elmas, who is about to lose her mental balance, starts to unravel the knots in her soul with the help of Şehnaz. *Gözetleme Kulesi* tells a story about a young woman and a young man. Nihat works as a guard at a fire watchtower that looks over a forest. Seher, on the other hand, works as an assistant on a bus and later as a cook at a restaurant. These two people, who meet each other while running away from others, have to continue their battle together against their feelings of guilt. *Toz Bezi* deals with the story of two women who try to understand life between different poles of Istanbul and to carve out new ways to live. Nesrin and Hatun, who live in Istanbul, are two close

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[27] Ryan, Michael and Douglas Kellner. 1990. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 37-40.
[28] Öztürk, Semire Ruken. 2000. *Sinemada Kadın Olmak*. Istanbul: Alan Publishing.

friends who work as cleaning ladies. While Hatun's only dream is to buy a house in one of the rich neighborhoods she works in, Nesrin, who lives with her little daughter, tries to make sense of why her husband left the house. *Nefesim Kesilene Kadar* deals with the story of Serap, who works in a textile factory. She is obliged to live with her older sister and brother-in-law because she wants to live with her father, who is a long-distance driver. Serap realizes that while saving money to make her dream come true, her father is not as enthusiastic as her.

The key themes of the research questions are argued below:

A male-dominated world: where are the women?
Since it is not enough to look at the discourses of power between men and women in order to make sense of the relationships created between the sexes on a social level, it is important to examine how the private sphere and the public sphere are constructed with different economic, political, cultural, and legal principles. To what extent can women build their own autonomous identities in these films?

The film *Tereddüt* tells a story from a different socio-cultural structure of the patriarchal order in Turkey and discusses the intersection of two different women's lives. Şehnaz is a woman who stands on her own feet, a psychiatrist, is modern looking, and has a partner with a good social status. A woman who can be considered has characteristics opposite of those that Şehnaz carries is Elmas. Elmas is a religious-looking woman who dropped out of high school and was married to a man in his 30's; she made a transition to another life within the borders of tradition. Elmas wakes up on the balcony at the end of a stormy night with her husband and her mother-in-law dead. Elmas, who was traumatized by that night, is hospitalized and thus crosses paths with Şehnaz. Şehnaz's life is also not perfect—she has problems with her husband, and the film proceeds to go over the problems of these two women.

The character that director Ustaoğlu sees as the main problem is Elmas. Ustaoğlu analyzes the effect of Turkey's overall social structure, including work and family life, on Elmas. Her mother-in-law, who is the defender of the patriarchal structure, constantly urges Elmas to be a "good wife" and a "domestic slave," who can only do housework. Since she is but a child, who has not yet reached adulthood, has not yet been able to meet the "womanly" standard shaped by the dominant ideology. She smokes secretly on the balcony, has teenage acne, dances while cleaning, and plays around while making the bed. Although these antics of Elmas are tolerated by her husband, the work done by her mother-in-law is not appreciated.

The silent cries of Elmas, pleading "My God, please don't let him come near" are not met with a response. Even when her husband says, "What is it? Don't be afraid of me," sexual intercourse inevitably involves coercion. The husband, who sees his needs as grounds for rape—which is considered legitimate within the marriage structure—demonstrates the brutality of the structure he stands for by saying "throw coal to the stove" and "go and take ablution". As Monique

Wittig[29] put it, the sexual experience of Elmas is not a moment of individual, subjective expression, but a social (patriarchal) institution of violence.

Elmas, who became alienated by the trauma she experienced, realizes during the therapy that she feels responsible for these experiences. She feels the reason why she was sent away from home when she was a child was neither her mother nor father; she attributes the problem to her own stupidity and the sins she has committed. Although she learns that she can be accused of murder and that her age has been forged, yet she cannot tell the truth in court because she has sworn in; although she has learned that revealing this she would gain a great advantage. However, the young girl is so faithful that she cannot protect her interests and talk about her sexuality. Although Elmas did not achieve independence as a result of this disaster, she was freed from imprisonment for a short period of time; however, she has neither an education nor a profession. Her fate will not be of her own agency, and she will either be sent to her family to wait for a new husband, or she will be kept under surveillance by the state for a while and the existing social structure will be reenacted by the state again.

Şehnaz, who does not share the same socio-cultural status as Elmas, is surrounded by a modern patriarchy. Şehnaz has a partner who constantly watches porn, tries to inflict masculine power on the body of his wife, who is an unsatisfactory partner in sexual intercourse. She is a character that has put her own feelings and satisfaction on the back burner and is devoted to the satisfaction of her man; she also doubts that she is deceived. Her husband often goes out of the city and continues to communicate on the Internet during this time. When they are together, they depict a happy, modern life in which the man prepares the meal and sets the table for dinner together. As a result of a good sexual experience Şehnaz has with a doctor who is a colleague of hers, we understand that the relationship between Şehnaz and her husband—although we don't doubt their love for each other—is not only a good relationship. Responding to the problems of others, Şehnaz understands her unhappiness and imprisonment after the good sexual experience she had with another man. After this affair, when Cem (Şehnaz's husband) returns from the city, the couple's problems arise while having a meal. Cem, as an authority figure, realizes that Şehnaz who sees him as a port, will leave him. Şehnaz's decision reveals the subtle dominance Cem has previously hidden. Despite Şehnaz's decision to leave, he does not let Şehnaz go and the situation turns into a nightmare when Cem resorts to violence. Cem grasps the woman as if she has shackles on her feet. It prevents Şehnaz from escaping periodically during the night, but when the morning comes, Şehnaz quietly leaves the house. In the final scene of the film, Şehnaz, who goes to unkown with her car, both cries and laughs, and is able to realize at the end that she had happy moments not only because of the other man, but also because of the profession she performed for years.

In the first part of the film, we see a water scene in Şehnaz's dream. Water appears in the film as a metaphor. Echoes of this can be found throughout the film in reoccurring imagery such as the sea, water, and waves. In the film, grayness and sensuality prevail. The sounds of water and waves as they hit the shore and the rocks can be interpreted as the tears of Şehnaz in the film. We see

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[29] Wittig, Monika. 1992. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.

that Şehnaz goes to the seashore in one scene and runs away when water comes to her feet. She is drowning in her life trying to be as free-spirited as water.

In another film, *Gözetleme Kulesi,* a silent rebellion, liberation struggle, and efforts to cling to life are demonstrated in the traditional family structure and culture of Anatolia. Seher is a university student studying literature while living with her uncle in Bolu; and she then leaves school and works as a deputy at a local bus company. It is obvious that the director Pelin Esmer tries to create a strong character who will continue her struggles at all costs (Seher, in her role as a bus deputy, is not seen at work, according to the expected role of women in the society). In the first scenes of the film, she is subject to soft harassment by the driver who is positioned higher than her. We understand that she is pregnant when we see her vomiting and the swelling of her navel; she goes to her family's house when the bus service is canceled. In a conversation with her mother, she says she wants to go home with her four girlfriends and to help her father financially, but her mother, speaking as a bigoted spokesman, says, "What do people say about you? Your uncle has been kind to you, he has shared his food with you, don't you like this? You should thank him, your uncle is trustworthy." Although the mother understands the situation, she cannot express it clearly and opens the issue to the father when Seher leaves. The father's words are almost identical. He defends the notion that her uncle's house is the safest and most comfortable place to stay as a stray daughter of an unemployed father; the mother relays this and Seher leaves the house quietly. "The personal is political" discourse that emerged as the slogan of second wave feminism can be referenced in regard to the baby and Seher's uncle. In the film, the audience never sees the uncle. However, the uncle is the reason for the whole situation, although he does not appear. Just like the social norms that are invisible, but guide our lives.

When the cook at the roadhouse leaves the job, a more comfortable job opportunity is created for Seher. Here she hides her pregnancy until the time of birth comes; she leaves her child and puts a necklace around her neck. As she moves towards her new life without a burden on her back, Nihat, the other main character of the film, who caused the death of his wife and child and who works in the forest surveillance business, realizes the situation and says "You are bleeding, you cannot go anywhere," then leading her to the watchtower. Nihat gets the baby Seher left at the fountain the same night and takes it back to her, convincing her to look after the baby. Seher, who wants to escape from Nihat in the last scene of the film and start a new life, is cut short when a lightning bolt strikes at her feet with a terrible storm accompanying her. Reminiscent of Zeus' lightning, this scene compels Seher to stay with Nihat and become a family. Even though Seher abandons the child and tries to escape later—saying that the baby is from her uncle—Nihat convinces her to stay and the camera zooms in on Seher and her baby sleeping while Nihat wakes up on a beautiful day and watches them in the final scene of the film. Seher, who wishes to stay outside of all social norms and be independent, is sentenced to be in a family with an Olympian will.

Seher finds a male influence or an advocate of masculine hegemony throughout the film while trying to fight her own struggle. She finds a job thanks to the help of her uncle, she is compared to her brother by her father, and finally she leaves everything and abandons her baby alone. For Seher, who got rid of the pressures

at the end of the film and accepted her life, freedom is limited to taking refuge with a man (Nihat).

Another film, *Toz Bezi,* tells a story about two women who live in one of the remote neighborhoods of Istanbul and work as cleaning ladies. Both are trying to make their own money. When Nesrin advises her husband that he should find a job, he leaves her, and she is left trying to hold on to her life with her child. The other female character, Hatun, works with the dream of owning a house in Moda (one of the luxury districts of Kadıköy, Istanbul) where she goes to clean, and to offer her child a good future. The two women are both the "other" in different ways: they are individuals who distinguish themselves from the rest of the society in certain identities and are separated from others. This "otherness" situation stems primarily from their ethnic origin and being women. When Hatun is compared to the Circassians in one of the houses where she goes to clean, she begins to define herself as Circassian.

Nesrin, who watches over a house with her child in the opening scene of the film, constantly searches for her husband (as we infer) by going to where he works, asking her relatives, and wishing that he return home. When she sees her husband on the street, she goes after him and calls out to him, but the man does not stop and continues on his way. Nesrin slowly understands that her husband will not come back anymore. Rent and all of the child's care and daily needs are on the shoulders of Nesrin. Seeking an exit from this situation, Nesrin asks for help from a woman who is educated, self-sufficient, and of socio-economically higher class. Her advice to Nesrin is to find a job with insurance. When she mentions the issue of finding a job with insurance to Hatun, she gets the answer "I have insurance." Nesrin responds, "You will stay around if Şero (Hatun's husband) brother's insurance leaves you." But Hatun seems confident, and even if Hatun says that "what she cooks is eaten and what she stitches is worn," Hatun starts to look for an insured job as well, with suspicion internally. After she starts looking for such a job, she learns that this situation does not go beyond mere advice—having only graduated primary school, it is difficult to find an insured job.

For these women, who are in the final rings of the capitalist system, the best option for shelter is the shadow of a husband. The idea that a man should be ahead of woman in hard times hits them in the face as an inevitable fact and is accepted by both women. Following this realization, Nesrin thinks that she has been left because she is not a good enough partner and she cannot sufficiently satisfy her husband sexually; this is an example of gender impositions, the unequal status of men and women, and masculine hegemony. However, the situation is similar to the abandonment of the man who cannot fulfill his "masculinity duty." Nesrin, who does not even have the slightest power to rebel and be liberated, suddenly abandons her child and travels towards the unknown. While she doesn't have a clue where she will go, she leaves her child with Hatun. She finds herself alienated from all the concepts surrounding her, from her child, her environment, her work, and even herself, and wants to escape quietly.

There is a hierarchical structure between Nesrin and Hatun in the film, which meticulously conveys key women's issues. Nesrin is a woman who has just migrated to the city and has a lower level of status than Hatun. Because Hatun

has lived in the city for years and is a woman who knows almost all the codes of the city, she better understands the lifestyles and economic structures of the people in the houses where she works. In this sense, she also mentors Nesrin. The dreams of the two women also shape their efforts to hold onto life and the hierarchy between them. The hierarchy between Nesrin and Hatun and the women whose houses they clean is important because it reveals the hierarchical structure between the lower and middle-upper classes. It can be stated that there is a woman-centered class labor story in the film *Toz Bezi*.

The last film analyzed, *Nefesim Kesilene Kadar,* tells the story of Serap, a young woman working in a textile mill and living with her elder sister and brother-in-law. She wants to start a new life with her father, who is a long-distance driver, and to accumulate the money he earns, but her father always delays her career change with various excuses. Serap hides her money before entering the house because her brother-in-law and older sister are waiting for money, and when she enters the house, they look through her bag. Serap, who grew up in the orphanage, longs for a family; more precisely, a devout father to whom she can lean on.

Serap works in a neighborhood of Istanbul. She tries to change her destiny and confronts us as a powerful character, but unfortunately, her struggle remains but a passive resistance in Turkey and many patriarchal societies. Serap stands out in passive resistance against Sultan, who is the manager of the factory, using a "masculine" management style (in capitalist production); she is kept under surveillance and control by her brother-in-law, father, and many structures of society.

Serap resists the phenomenon of alienation of women from their own bodies within capitalist production and imposed by society. Dilber, who is her friend from work, gives Serap's body waxing; Serap alternates between being surprised and liking this experience. Another resistance to social rules is her dressing style. Her father buys the things that Serap wears. In this situation, Serap cannot live her life as she wishes with a more intentional attitude; it can be observed as introversion caused by a lack of belonging. The idea of exiting the situation that Serap is in and standing on her own feet does not come to her mind. She thinks that she can only achieve salvation with the help of her father. Serap's idea of personally changing something in her life only arises when she realizes that her father is constantly lying and distracting her. She spends her money to rent a house and start a new life. She starts to take revenge on the people around her after she experiences destruction, she sees the man whom she likes but to whom she never shows herself, and reports Dilber to the foreman, Sultan. The next crisis is a young man who sees every woman as an opportunity to have a sexual experience. One day, even though he did not approach Serap, this man invited Serap into his car while she was walking on the road, and she got into the car as a result of his insistence. Serap initially declines his offer of drinking something, but when the man makes a collection along the way, she sees money in the envelope, changes her mind, and drinks something. The duo goes into a nook in an underground entertainment place and spends time here. Taking advantage of the man's thoughtlessness and the influence of alcohol, she takes the money from the car parked on the side street, then breaks his glass, and continues as if she was unaware of anything. Serap then goes to exact her

last great revenge on her father. She considers her father the sole source of her existence and solely responsible for all these experiences. The father claims to take some kind of goods abroad, and comes back two months later. But Serap no longer believes in these lies; she knows that he is smuggling historical artifacts, and makes a denouncement to the police.

A girl under the age of 18 who stayed in the same orphanage as Serap comes to the Serap's workplace. Serap teaches her the job, and at first does not want to show her acquaintance with her, rejecting her past. Serap also gradually gains self-confidence as a form of revenge. While we didn't see her laugh throughout the movie, at the end when she teaches the new girl a job, a smile appears on her face as a sign of pride. There is no longer a male figure to hold on to and she has decided to stand on her own feet. But she finds salvation not through woman's liberation, but by being in charge like Sultan. She has decided to abide by the masculine capitalist order and has gradually begun to accumulate the necessary skills to rise within the system.

Does women's cinema exist in contemporary Turkey?
Hülya Uğur Tanrıöver argues that the issue of difference in cinema and whether the film is a result of the director's gender or sexual orientation is one of the main concerns of feminist film work.[30] On the other hand, Alison Butler's definition of women's cinema is worth discussing.[31] Butler describes women's cinema as films made by women or interested in women's issues. Stating that there is no genre or movement in the history of these movies, Butler also says that women's cinema does not have national borders. She calls them films that do not have aesthetic specificity but discuss cultural traditions and engage in political discussions.

This study, based on the films of contemporary female directors in Turkish cinema, aims to discuss whether the term "women's cinema" exists (as a counter-cinema) as Johnston mentions. Claire Johnston argues that in mainstream films, women's life experiences are not conveyed and that there is an ideological reason for their representation in traditional gender roles. Johnston states that representation is not only a mirror of real life but also an ideological indicator.[32]

Johnston states that women are standardized, and she suggests an entertaining cinema that challenges traditions. In mainstream cinema, women appear as an extension of the male gaze discussed by Mulvey[33] and Johnston; she criticizes the role attributed to women in films at this point. Johnston states that despite the emphasis on women in films, women do not exist as women. However, Johnston urges for women's cinema that uses the film as a political tool and as entertainment. Johnston emphasizes the importance of developing a cinema that opposes and questions the dominant cinema and its male-dominant base. She terms it avant-garde and counter-cinema, which relate to left-wing cinema.

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[30] Tanrıöver, Hülya Uğur. 2006. Women as Film Directors in Turkish Cinema. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 24(4), 1-15.
[31] Butler, Alison. 2002. *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*. London and New York: Wallflower, 3.
[32] Johnston, *Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema*, 140-43.
[33] Mulvey, Laura. 2009 (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* in *Film Theory and Criticism*, edited by Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 262-72.

When examining the films of these contemporary Turkish women directors, it is of course possible to mention women's cinema. Especially in the narrative, females are the main characters and their struggle is narrated in a narrative language. Referring to Johnston, the audience is somehow included in the narrative of these films. However, in regard to the struggle of women, these films do not have "amusing" features. They show us only social realistic features. This is because the films included in this study illustrate womanhood in Turkey and women's quest for freedom in a realistic language. The films show the oppressed (women) in terms of their stories, and by documenting this oppression in a fictional language, the events and places in these films reflect the truth. However, women in these contemporary Turkish women's films are not portrayed as strong and independent. Since the (patriarchal) society does not allow them to be independent individuals, women in these films are constructed as the "other"; in this sense, the female audience does not want to identify with the women characters in these films. However, as Özdoyran[34] stated in his comprehensive study, the change of female representations in the media shows that these categories of representation are not essential; on the contrary, they are produced cyclically and historically. At this point, women's narratives, which were represented through the masculine gaze from the 1950's to the 2000's, have increased with the shift in the masculine position of the camera that came in the 2000's. In short, female narratives and representations change with the changes the masculine gaze undergoes. The films produced by recent Turkish female directors can in fact be called women's films.

Conclusion
This study discusses gender inequality and the situation of women in Turkey in four different films. Although there are individual differences among women, it can be stated that society is the biggest obstacle in women's emancipation. The films analyzed show that every individual in the society is rooted in the dominant culture and patriarchal ideology. Based on these films, it can be said that women are under the control of men in fighting their independence and emancipation. Women remain in the male-dominated system and it is hard to become aware of their own selves. Although women are struggling for their independence, there is male dominance that either melts into the system or absorbs their problems. Women who have achieved economic equality with men also realize that they remain trapped in the circle with men. Women's awareness on another life and their desire to act for it may return to an unequal demonstration of power, or women accept the existing system somehow. In this context, being an individual woman is only a discourse. The concept of individual freedom should be reconsidered for women who think they have achieved this. The rights—economic and political equations—obtained seem to be bestowed only as part of the quiet share of the patriarchal order. Through these films, it is necessary to understand the desire of female characters to surrender themselves to a free female myth. This can be explained by the necessity of all female characters to achieve subjectivity, that is, to be a class member, to be an individual. Women perceive life differently than men due to the pressure they face in the male

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[34] Özdoyran, Güven. 2020. *Marx, Marxizm, Medya ve Kültür,* in *Medya ve Kültürel Çalışmalar: Teori ve Güncel Tartışmalar,* edited by Özdoyran, Güven. Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi, 53-84, 69.

dominance of Turkish culture. For this reason, it is natural for female filmmakers to create different identities and discourses. Female directors approach women's problems differently than male directors do.

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