

Breaking the Female Silence in the New Cinema of Turkey: A Case Study of Film Reception

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Abstract

The mid-1990s witnessed the emergence of the 'new cinema' of Turkey which has introduced the cinema audience the new and multifaceted tendencies in terms of the narration, style and modes of filmmaking. However, for the purpose of this article, the most important 'newness' of the new cinema is the newly emergent female representational form: silent females. The main goal of this article is to explore the female audiences' reception of the female silences manifesting on the new cinema's screen through the outcomes of the group discussions that the five female participants from Istanbul had after the viewing of the five selected films. The female participants 'read' various meanings of the female silences, and 'revealed' the thematic and formal components that are related to the depiction of the silent female characters. However, the most important outcome of the research is that the silent female characters in the selected examples became the medium for the female audiences through which they 'speak' of what they (not) want to see on screen.

keywords: *female silence, new cinema of Turkey, film reception, female audience*

Résumé

Rompre le silence de la femme dans le nouveau cinéma turc : Une étude de cas de réception filmique

Le milieu des années 1990 voit la naissance d'un « nouveau » cinéma turc qui présente à son spectateur ses nouvelles et multiples tendances concernant son discours, son style et ses modes de production. Par ailleurs, la « nouveauté » de ce cinéma la plus importante pour cet article, est l'apparition des femmes silencieuses, nouvelles formes de représentation des femmes. L'objectif principal de cet article est d'étudier la réception par des spectatrices de ces femmes silencieuses qui se manifestent sur les écrans de ce nouveau cinéma, à travers un groupe de discussion composé de cinq femmes ayant vu cinq films sélectionnés. Ces cinq participantes, ont « lu » les différentes significations du silence des femmes et ont révélé les éléments thématiques et formels concernant le caractère des femmes silencieuses. La conclusion la plus importante de cette recherche le caractère des femmes silencieuses dans les films choisis devient, pour les spectatrices le moyen par lequel elles peuvent « parler » de ce qu'elles (ne) veulent (pas) voir sur le grand écran.

mots-clés : *silence féminine, le nouveau cinéma turc, réception filmique, spectatrices*

Özet

Yeni Türkiye Sinemasındaki Kadın Sessizliğini Bozmak: Bir Film Alımlama Çalışması

1990'lı yılların ortaları, sinema izleyicisine anlatım, stil ve film yapım şekilleri açısından yeni ve çok yönlü eğilimleri tanıştıran 'yeni' Türkiye sinemasının doğumuna şahit olmuştur. Bununla birlikte, bu makale için yeni Türkiye sinemasının en önemli 'yeniliği', yeni ortaya çıkan kadın temsil formu olan sessiz kadınlardır. Bu makalenin ana amacı, yeni sinemanın perdesinde hüküm süren kadın sessizliklerini kadın izleyicinin nasıl alımladığını, İstanbul'dan beş kadın katılımcının, seçilmiş beş filmi izledikten sonra gerçekleştirdiği grup tartışmalarının sonuçları doğrultusunda araştırılmasıdır. Kadın katılımcılar, kadın sessizliklerinin çeşitli anlamlarını 'okudular' ve sessiz kadın karakterlerin tasvirine ilişkin tematik ve biçimsel öğeleri 'ifşa ettiler'. Bununla birlikte, çalışmanın en önemli sonucu, seçilen örneklerdeki sessiz kadın karakterlerin, kadın izleyicilerin perdede ne görmek iste(me)diklerini üzerinden 'konuştukları' bir araç haline gelmiş olmasıdır.

anahtar kelimeler: *kadın sessizliği, yeni Türkiye sineması, film alımlama, kadın izleyici*

Introduction¹

Turkish cinema experienced a significant 'revival' during the 1990s when the commercial films have started achieving box-office success and the art house productions gained visibility at the national and international festivals. While the 'new' formulae of polishing the Yeşilçam thematic binary oppositions with the Hollywood visual style (Dorsay, 2004:11) was being produced by the commercial films, art house productions introduced minimalist style and the stories of small lives and of 'other' people to the Turkish cinema audience. Besides, one of the most important 'newness' of the new cinema was an increase in the level of 'testosterone'. Turkish cinema is always a male dominated cinema as far as the industry is concerned. However, the gender imbalance had never been so intense before in terms of the representations and stories, that some scholars describe this period as 'macho cinema' (Dönmez-Colin, 2004) or name some examples of the new cinema as 'male films' (Ulusay, 2004) and 'weepy male films' (Akbal Süalp, 2009:228).

In this atmosphere that is full of the strong scent of the testosterone, a new female representational form emerges: the silent, inaudible female. From 1993 and on -intensively in between 1996-2004- we witness a striking number of silent female characters on the Turkish cinema screen². Moreover, these examples are specific neither to one genre nor to one kind, and the female silences pervade both commercial and art house productions. In fact, the films that can be considered as the fire workers of the new cinema of Turkey involve silent female characters: In *Eşkiya [The Bandit]* (Turgul, 1996), Keje, chooses not to speak in response to her forced marriage; and in *Tabutta Rövaşata [Somersault in a Coffin]* (Zaim, 1996), the Junkie Woman is mostly depicted while she is looking out of the window in silence. In the examples of the new cinema of Turkey, femininity is associated in various ways with silence: mute

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2 Besides the examples provided in this paper, some of the films that involve a silent female character are as follows: Kumru in *Gölge Oyunu* (Turgul, 1993), Woman in *Laleli'de Bir Azize* (Sabancı, 1999), Nazmiye in *Propaganda* (Çetin, 1999), Nergis in *Şellale* (Aslanyürek, 2001), the woman that Yusuf stalks, Mahmut's lover in *Uzak* (Ceylan, 2002), the woman in the nightmares in *Takva* (Kızıltan, 2006), Havva in *Ulak* (Irmak, 2007), Nevbahar Sultan in *Osmanlı Cumhuriyeti* (Müjde, 2008), Nusret in *Pandora'nın Kutusu* (Ustaoglu, 2008).

characters who are unable to speak such as Meryem in *Masumiyet* [*Innocence*] (Demirkubuz, 1997); voluntary mutes who chose not to speak such as Keje in *Eşkiya*, or uneager to speak such as Francesca in *İstanbul Kanatlarımda Altında* [*Istanbul Under My Wings*] (Altioklar, 1996); and forced mutes who are made inaudible by several techniques, and cannot be heard by the audience even though they are actually able to speak such as the Woman in *Gemide* [*On Board*] (Akar, 1998) and Kirpi in *9* (Ünal, 2002).

Theoretical Accounts on the Silent Characters in Cinema

Michel Chion in *The Voice in Cinema* claims that the mute character, a character without a sound, serves the narrative and plays a subservient role by being there 'to disturb, catalyze, or reveal, he [sic!] is most often *an instrument*' (Chion, [1947] 1999:96). On the other hand, the mute character functions as the generator of doubt (Chion, [1947] 1999:96). (S)He is not only 'unknowable', but also we do not know how much (s)he knows: 'To encounter the mute is to encounter questions of identity, origin, desire' (Chion, [1947] 1999:96). Besides, according to Chion, the role of moral conscience is often attributed to the mute; he[sh]e harbours the great secret, next to him[her] everyone feels unsure and guilty (Chion, [1947] 1999).

Chion's theory is the most significant and comprehensive work on muted characters on screen. However, it can be considered as gender blind as it does not reflect upon the possible differences in terms of the usages, functions and effects of these silences in relation to the gender of the owner of the discursive authority. As Christian Metz in 'Aural Objects' describes, we experience sound as an attribute or characteristic of an object; it is understood in terms of the object that creates the sound (Metz, 1985): 'The recognition of sound leads directly to the question: "A sound of what?"' (Metz, 1985:155). If we recognize the sound only in relation to the object, then not the sound, but to whom it is attributed –both literally and symbolically– becomes important. Therefore, who is put in the speaking position, who is given the authority to speak, and who is made mute on screen are very crucial questions to be put forward.

Kaja Silverman, in her book *The Acoustic Mirror*, claims that the male subject, as the holder of the discursive power, is ideally depicted when he is heard but not seen (Silverman, 1988:164). According to her, the female subjectivity is most fully achieved when it is most visible, therefore showing the

female character without being heard would make her inaccessible to male interpretation, and therefore position her away from male control by activating the hermeneutic and cultural codes defining woman as a dark continent (Silverman, 1988:164). For Silverman, female character's voice can only escape signifying the female body, and the female body escapes signifying the lack by a disembodied voice since it positions her beyond the reach of the male gaze (Silverman, 1988:164). Likewise, in 'The Voice in the Cinema' Mary Ann Doane suggests that the silent cinema's uncanny effect emerges from the separation of the actor's speech from its image (Doane, 1980:33). She argues that the cinema based on a 'material heterogeneity' –image and sound duality- takes the risk of exposing itself as not unified (Doane, 1980). For that reason sound has to be 'married' to the image in order to conceal its duality. Doane claims that cinema's repressive patriarchal politics can only be broken by breaking this unity (Doane, 1980).

Silverman's argument about positioning the female away from male control by permitting her to be seen without being heard accords with Wendy Brown's claims on silence as a 'shelter from power' (Brown, 2003) as silence prevents her from being 'known' completely. Likewise, Linda Dittmar suggests in her article 'The Articulating Self' that accessing to voice does not necessarily bring a power position since most of the female characters' speeches are cast 'as corporeal, subjective, and unreliable' throughout the history of the cinema (Dittmar, 1998:393). Dittmar gives the 1970s and 1980s feminist cinemas in the West as an example for the oppositional usage of silence, and suggests that the silent female form can be the clue for 'a holding of oneself apart, a resistance that cherishes one's inviolability' (Dittmar, 1998:393). But, as Amy Lawrence criticises Silverman by 'oversimplification', the disembodied voice is not 'always potentially good for women' (Lawrence, 1998:408). The sound–image unity confirms the status of speech as an individual property right (Doane, 1980:34) and it is important if this individual is for the most part male.

These are the significant theories on the formations and functions of the silent characters in cinema. Nevertheless, they are based on the implied spectator, i.e. 'textually constructed spectator' (Hansen, 1989:169), arisen from textual analysis and do not reflect on the experiences of the 'real' audiences. As Ann Gray indicates,

such analyses have tended to assume an ideal (female) reader, inscribed within the feminine subject position offered by the text and further emphasized by the assumed cultural competencies of the reader. The risk inherent in this enterprise is the conflation of the “implied” and the “real” reader (Gray, 1987:33).

Many researchers, who do not rely only on texts, have worked with female audiences –using different methodologies such as interviews, focus groups, participant observations (Bobo, 1988; Hobson, 1990; Radway, 1984, Schlesinger et al. 2003). Being motivated by the abovementioned theoretical accounts on female silence on cinema screen and methodological approaches on film reception, but also wondering the thoughts, talks and ‘voices’ of the female audiences, this study started with the aim of exploring how the female audiences ‘read’, what they think and ‘speak’ of the silent female characters in the new cinema of Turkey. Women ‘read’ films, they produce their ‘own’ meanings, and therefore they become ‘present’ in the cinematic experience even though what is shown on screen do not have, or tries to erase, a female point of view.

Method and Approach

For the purpose of this study, a film reading workshop focusing on the female characters in the new cinema of Turkey was announced through the email group of Filmmor Women’s Cooperative. In the workshop announcement, it was indicated that the workshop was open to the female audiences who want to talk, discuss, and have something to say about the female characters in the new cinema of Turkey. I am aware of the possible lacks and gaps in the outcomes because of the audiences’ pre-given knowledge of the main topic of the workshop as it is on the female characters. On the other hand, any indication about the silent female characters or the female silence on new cinema’s screen was not provided to avoid any possible bias and presumptions. The women who wanted to participate contacted directly to the convenor of the workshop, i.e. the researcher. There were four criteria for the recruitment of the participants. In order to avoid any possible bias and also the personality of the researcher, the first criterion was the condition that the people who know the researcher in person cannot participate. Second was the voluntary participation of the participants. And the third was the limit of the number of people who would participate in the group, which was decided as 7 people, as to give every participant enough time to talk and also to provide a ‘natural’ and ‘friendly’

atmosphere for the discussions. And the last criterion was the continuity. The participants had to participate in all the film viewings and the discussions afterwards so that they could make a comparative reading among the different examples of silent female characters. Other than these, there were no 'selection' criteria for the participants and they were taken on a first come first served basis. However, on the first day of the workshop 2 women did not show up, and the workshop started with 5 women. Throughout the workshop, 2 women watched all the films, and each of the rest was absent in one film viewing in different days for several reasons.

The workshop was conducted in 5 days, 3 weekends. The dates were October 17, 18, 24, 25 and 31, 2009. Each day one film was watched and the order of viewing was chronological: *Eşkîya* (Turgul, 1996), *Masumiyet* (Demirkubuz, 1997), *Gemide* (Akar, 1998), 9 (Ünal, 2002) and *Bulutları Beklerken* (Ustaoğlu, 2003). After viewing the selected film together in Filmmor's meeting room, a two hour long group discussion was made in each day. In total, the recorded discussions were about ten hour long.

The group was consisted of 5 women: Betül is 36 years old. She was graduated from sociology department, and now working as a free-lance writer. She is interested in films, stories and works on women. Deniz is 20 years old. She is studying psychology at Boğaziçi University, but she wants to do something in cinema rather than psychology. She wants to write scenarios and shoot films. She participates in filmmaking workshops at Filmmor. Ezgi is 20 years old and studying Western Languages and Literature at Boğaziçi University. She says that she has been following the women's agenda from TV, journals and books, but now thinks that it is time to be actively in it. Besides, she is also newly interested in cinema, in writing scenarios. Hande is 28 years old. She was graduated from Visual Arts and Communication Design, and now working as a communication designer. She made short films five years ago while she was in the university, and also she did acting for about seven years. Now she wants to go back to film making. She is also participating in the film reading workshops at Amargi Women's Academy. Hümeýra is 23 years old. She is a graduate student in the Faculty of Communication at Marmara University. Her dissertation is about women directors and representations of women in documentary film. She shoots amateur short-films. She wants to make a carrier in documentary filmmaking.

As it is clearly seen from the information above, this study does not claim that it represents the reception of the female audience in Turkey, or even in Istanbul, as it lacks diversity in terms of age, education, or participants' relation to cinema. Instead, it must be considered as a first step to understand how female audience 'read' these on-screen silences.

There are several criteria for the choice of films depending on the subject matter of this research. As I am conducting my PhD research on the silent female characters in the new cinema of Turkey, first of all I wanted to reflect the diversity and complex web of relations that these silent female representations introduce. Therefore I chose films that have different aspects as well as share similarities in terms of thematic and formal conventions related to these silent female characters in order to pave the way for a comparative reading, and to have a chance to reveal both the contradictory and collapsing positions in the same representational form. Besides, I chose the films by the well-known directors of the new cinema of Turkey, from both art house and commercial productions so that they present the thematic and stylistic features of the new cinema. In addition, if we consider the fact that the 'success' is one of the crucial components of the new cinema's 'revival' discourse, all of these films can be referred as representatives as they achieved success either in international and/or national film festivals and/or at the box-office.

Women 'Read' Female Silences

As it was mentioned above, the participants were not been informed before that the subject matter of this research is the silent female characters in the new cinema. Nevertheless, after the viewing of the first film *Eşkıya*, the first comment was made on the silence of Keje, the female character who chose to be silent for about thirty five years as a response to her forced marriage. Hümeyra said:

In the scene where Keje saw Baran and begins to talk after thirty five years, she says 'my voice sounds unfamiliar to me, as if someone else is talking and I am listening to'. That was the summary of women's being obliged to be silent, not being able to tell what they want to say. After years, for the first time she tells what she wants, it makes her feel as if someone else is talking. That impressed me so much.

According to Liebes and Katz, one of the distinct modes of reading is a 'referential reading' in which the viewer makes a connection between the fictional world on screen and her/his experiences, knowledge, opinions and feelings (Liebes & Katz, 1986; 1989; 1990). Hümeyra's referential reading was fed by 'cultural experience' which is one of the three realms of experiences (the others are the personal and universal experiences) suggested by Hoijer that effect the viewer's meaning construction (Hoijer, 1992). According to Hoijer, 'cultural experience' involves wider social norms and representations including the gender you belong to (Hoijer, 1992:586). After Hümeyra's comment that connected Keje's silence with the women's situation in the society, Hande told that the same scene and Keje's silence also impressed her so much. She said that she herself also chose to be silent, but she was not sure if she did it as a reaction or not. Hande's reading of female character's silence with a reference to her own life exemplifies a reading fed by a 'personal experience' (Hoijer, 1992). Hande continues as follows:

Here, Keje becomes silent as a choice, as a decision. That impressed me... In her own condition, the woman has an attitude against that man, and as a consequence of that attitude, the man is cut up... It is a powerful attitude.

The second mode of reading in Liebes and Katz' reception theory is a 'critical reading' (Liebes & Katz, 1986; 1989; 1990). This type of reading refers to a discussion of a viewing which considers the film 'as a fictional construction with aesthetic rules' (Liebes & Katz, 1990:100). After Hande, Ezgi's first comment was about the depiction of female characters in binary oppositions:

In general, the point that I criticize in this film that it shows the woman either as a mother and a saint waiting for her lover or as a prostitute. It is also the same way in literature. The woman is portrayed as a mother and pure, white, wise. She is waiting her lover, not cheating on him with anyone else. She waits him thirty five years. I do not think this is believable. It depicts on the one hand this woman, on the other the prostitutes or the absolute evil like the woman who cheats on Uğur Yücel. There is no mid-point for women. That annoys me so much. As it is the male gaze at women, it annoys me both in this film and also in the films that we watch or in the books that we read.

Liebes and Katz define two types of critical reading: semantic and syntactic. Semantic criticism involves remarks about the text's message, the

aims and motivations of the director. Ezgi's criticism of the film for having a male point of view and for depicting women in binary oppositions can be seen as an example of a semantic criticism. Betül added that the film had a male point of view since there were always words like 'Istanbul the whore'. As regards to the silence, Betül said that she did not think that the using of silence was a kind of expression of power in this film since it did not seem like a choice. She found it as passivity as no one in this film has power to control his/her own life. Deniz began to speak after Betül, and noted that the film had a pretty male point of view that depicts women as passive, immobile and pure while portraying male characters as mobile and strong. She added that the film for the most part based on the binary oppositions of man and woman, and of east and west.

These were the first comments of the participants, most of which depends on a referential reading, and that determined the main titles -in relation to the silent female characters- that they spoke of throughout the whole discussion sessions.

Female Silence: Power or Passivity?

For the meaning of the silence of the female characters in (especially) *Eşkiya* and *Masumiyet*, the participants had a clash of ideas with each other. For the silence of Keje, Hande said that she felt close to Keje's choice of silence and liked the way she hold power by being silent, while Betül told that Keje was depicted as if she was powerful, but in reality it was passivity. Betül explained that she could not decide whether it was power or passivity since Keje had not reacted, she did not even try to escape. In opposition to Betül's comment, Ezgi suggested that Keje's silence was a kind of reaction, a kind of possibility in her conditions as she did not talk to the people that she did not want to communicate. Even though Ezgi thinks that it was her decision, she added that the alienation of Keje to her voice after beginning to talk was the atonement of her silence. According to Ezgi, by this scene, it was suggested that the silence was not the solution. Deniz told that she was also confused about Keje's silence. She said that it might be a kind of resistance, but she did not want to celebrate it as a powerful attitude. Hande noted that there was another female silence in *Eşkiya*, the aunt's silence. She said that the aunt kept silent in another way, that she did not want to ruin her own life and became silent about her nephew's being raped. Hande read this silence, unlike the silence of Keje, as passivity.

For the silence of Meryem in *Masumiyet*, who has been shot in the tongue by her brother in an honour crime, and become mute as a consequence, Hümeyra said that as Meryem's silence resulted from a psychical disability, it was different from Keje's silence. However, Ezgi noted that there is a similarity between Keje's and Meryem's silence since Meryem was also using silence as a reaction. She remarked that Meryem might be psychically mute, but she voluntarily closed herself to communication with her husband and brother. She added that she found it a good way of reaction. Hümeyra also thought that it was a reaction, a reaction to be made mute. Hande found it similar with Keje's silence as it was again a kind of resistance. For the scene where her brother comes to apologise her, she said:

I put myself in her shoes. I have a brother and he shot me in the tongue. In these kinds of situations, I may forget everything and burst into tears with that emotion. And then I say 'God damn it!' That's why I found it powerful that the woman did not do this kind of emotional stuff and hold her head high.

In *Gemide*, the Woman is able to speak, but she does not speak throughout the whole film for the reason of not knowing Turkish. The confusions about the meaning and/or the function of the female silences in *Eşkiya* and *Masumiyet* did not apply to the female silence in the example of *Gemide*. Hande said that it was a different kind of muteness since her talking ability was taken from her by making her a foreigner among the men who do not know her language. After Hande's comment, and after viewing three films that involve a silent female character, Ezgi said that it was interesting to see the women in mute characters in all of these films, that there was always muteness and passivity. And she complained about the depiction of the Woman remaining unresponsive, passive to the horrible events that she had undergone. She said that there was not even an unhappy expression on her face. Hande remarked that she did not even have an escape plan, and that she did not even scream when her mouth was not tied up. Hande also commented that this manifesting silent was pretty annoying.

Femininities in Binary Oppositions

The second issue raised by the participants in relation to female silences was the representation of femininities in binary oppositions. This issue was for the most part discussed after *Eşkiya* and *Masumiyet* since in the other

examples, as Deniz noted, there was always only one female character in the films. Ezgi agreed with Deniz's point about the man-woman and the East-West oppositions, and added: 'We can see the depiction of the same binary opposition for the women in the film: the woman from the East is waiting for her lover, but the woman from the West is cheating on her lover'. Hande commented on the female character acted by Yeşim Salkım that she liked her having sex with whom she wanted. Deniz summarized her point as follows:

In the film, there are two relationships lived in between two men and a woman. I think that they represent the East and the West. In one relationship, everything is lived in rush and Yeşim Salkım is the woman who does not wait her lover and cheated on him. On the other hand, Keje is waiting, and that relationship is portrayed as a big love... and the woman who is waiting becomes the only one who is alive at the end.

In Deniz's reading we can clearly see all the binary oppositions to define the women in the film and also the 'proper' positions that are written for female characters: the silent woman who is waiting, i.e. passive, from the East, i.e. subjected to the traditional rules, and alive versus the evil-dead- sexualized woman who is the 'other' of the silent one.

A different aspect of the picture was drawn by the participants for the women's representation in *Masumiyet*. Hümeýra pointed out the binary oppositions suggested between the silence and the scream of the women in the film. She said that in *Masumiyet*, Uğur was definitely not a silent character, rather was a screaming one. According to her;

Zeki Demirkubuz gave two examples; one is Uğur and the other is Meryem, one is screaming and the other one is silent in the face of the circumstances, these are like black-and-white. That's what the film makes me think. Uğur and Meryem, they both exist. That's a social reality.

Betül told that the struggle of the women in the men's world was what the film gave her: 'There are two different poles, on the one side is Uğur who is screaming and provoking, and on the other is Meryem who is silent. But at the end, they are both melting in that world'. Ezgi remarked that the female character Uğur was using a pretty 'male slang'. Then she asked if the director offered a choice by giving the two examples, one was using the 'male slang' and the other one was silent. However, she felt content that the female

characters in this film were multilayered in comparison with the other film, that they had both good and bad features, rather than representing the pure evil or the pure angel.

The 'Sly' Relationship: Female Silence, Female Threat and Female Punishment

For the films *Gemide* and *9*, the participants emphasized the connection between the silent female characters and how they are considered as a threat to the order. The silent female characters who pose a threat are depicted in two intertwined ways: one is presenting the silent female as a trouble maker, and the second, as a stranger.

Deniz remarked that the Woman in *Gemide* was shown as the threat and the trouble maker even though the male characters were actually the ones who bugged around. While Ezgi was discussing the conflicts between the Captain and the crew, she also complained about the relationship between the silent character and her portrayal as a trouble maker: 'Why is the woman presented as the source of these conflicts all the time?' Deniz said that woman might be silent in all of these films but there was 'slyness' behind it as she was presented as the responsible of the troubles that the male characters had. She gave Keje as another example: 'She has been silent for ages nevertheless she could push a man into conflict with another man after his release of the prison after thirty five years. Here, the woman is the object that endangers the men's lives'.

In *9*, Kirpi is the female character who is made silent through a cinematic technique. The film is about the interrogation after her being raped and murdered. From the beginning of the film, every character talks about her whereas we see her in mute pictures shot by Firuz's camera. For the silence of the female character in *9*, the participants suggested the intertwined nature of being a stranger and being a threat. Ezgi said that Kirpi was a threat to the piece and order of the district as she was a stranger. She noted that Kirpi was seen as a mad woman as she did not behave according to the norms of the society, as she was a free woman. Hümeýra noted that Kirpi was described as mad or alien by the people of the district, 'but not human' as Ezgi added. Deniz compared Kirpi with the Woman in *Gemide* and commented that they were both a stranger, a threat and the trouble maker. Hümeýra added that she drew an analogy between Kirpi and the other female characters in the films they viewed:

They all have very much in common. All of them are independent, and they are punished because of being one's own person. It is a kind of atonement. They are either a prostitute or a mad woman. And in the end, they are either killed or raped.

Accordingly, the stranger woman as a threat –by being a potential trouble maker- has some crucial features, besides being silent, namely being free, therefore mad, and being killed and/or raped in the end as a punishment of posing a threat by her independence.

On the other hand, according to the readings of the participants, silence itself is also used as a way of punishment for the woman who is independent, for being a threat. Hümeyra said that Meryem was punished by being made mute because of her affair. Hande commented on the intertwined relationship between female silence, being a stranger and the punishment in *Gemide* and said: 'The Woman had already undergone tortures. Moreover, she did not know Turkish, and by this way she was put in a worse condition'. Likewise, Kirpi was silenced, apart from being raped and murdered, as a kind of punishment as Ezgi indicated: 'Every character in the film gave -rightly or wrongly- a statement. But, the woman who had been raped and murdered could not say anything'.

In the meantime, the participants suggest that there is a difference among these films in terms of depicting the gender based violence. According to Ezgi, it was such a horrible thing that in end of *Gemide*, the male characters who tortured and raped the Woman were not punished that they got away with it. She thinks that there is also aestheticization of the rape scenes which annoyed her so much:

I think the rape scenes must have shown disgusting. I find it so wrong to show it in an aesthetic way. He [the director] might have shot it from a different angle or focused on the face of the man. He might have shot the man's body hair. The audience must have been annoyed.'

She continued as follows:

As if he [the male character] was performing an art there. If you [the director] include swearwords in the film, you are that realistic, then you must show the rape scenes with the same realism. Show it from an opposite angle. Show the blood instead of her breasts.

After the viewing of *9*, Ezgi compared the depiction of the female body and the rape scenes in *Gemide* and *9*. 'There is no "here is the woman's body" kind of scene here in this film and I really like that. Because that really bothered me in the film of yesterday [*Gemide*]. Hande also compared two films for the same reasons:

At first, I thought that we would see the same 'sex-doll' thing here too. I thought that it would again focus on only this topic. I thought we would again see the images of flesh, again some guys would rape a woman in a cannibalistic way. But after watching, here again she is called mad, alien ... but it was not that intense... there are various layers in this film in addition to the layer about the woman. I thought that it would be single-layered like yesterday's film.

For *9*, Deniz said that the film stressed on the women's issues. She added that making the film start with the rape of a woman was on purpose. Ezgi noted that the purpose was to make the audience question the rape and also the rape of a stranger woman since the woman who was exposed to rape was not Turkish and not from their district.

As a consequence, it can be argued that the participants' 'read' and 'reveal' the 'sly' relationship between the female silence, female threat and female punishment, and stress the difference among the films by considering *9* as critical to the gender based violence while reading *Gemide* as aestheticizing it.

What the Female Audiences (not) Want to See on Screen, or 'Bulutları Beklerken'

Throughout the discussions, until the viewing of *Bulutları Beklerken*, the participants always complained that the films were 'male films' and about 'male stories', they used a 'male slang' and told the story from a 'male point of view', they had male characters in the leading roles for the most part, and that they were shot mostly for the 'male pleasure':

There is only one woman, the story always revolve around the male characters. And that woman is a vehicle to tell the male stories and the men's battle of being a manly man. The films like as if they [the directors] were making very good analyses, as if they were objective. However, by

the way they depict, they give pleasure to the male audience –Deniz, in the discussion after the viewing of *Gemide*.

The participants considered *Bulutları Beklerken* 'different' than the other films in several aspects. After the viewing, the first comment came from Deniz, she said that *Bulutları Beklerken* became a kind of catharsis film after the four films that they had watched.

Ayşe/Eleni, the leading role in the film, chose to be literally silent after her sister's death, and also she was silenced symbolically by the assimilation policies of the government as she is not allowed to speak her mother tongue Greek. Ezgi noted that the female silence that they had mentioned about the other films was also present here, but it was a woman's film in comparison to the other examples. Betül said that Ayşe/Eleni was always silent, on one hand she could not speak her own language for years, which was a kind of continuum, on the other she was silent as a way of protestation: 'By her silence, as if she was saying "let me alone, you do not know what I have been through". There is a strong attitude there...it is a personal attitude. I think it is so much different from the other female silences. It is much more reactionary'. After Betül, Hande continued:

The start of her silence is about self-defence. Because she is in a place where her language has not been tolerated. That's why she has been advised to be silent. But in some point she starts talking. I think she is angry with the other women because of not being understood. And so she chooses not talking with them.

Deniz agreed with Betül and Hande, and said that she chooses silence because of not being understood by the other women. She added that the other silent female characters did not have a 'voice', but here she was the one who chose to be silent on purpose. For the difference of Ayşe /Eleni's silence, Betül said: 'I saw a passive aspect in the silences of Keje and Meryem. This woman does also not live in good conditions but she goes to Selonika on her own'. Ezgi suggested another different aspect of Ayşe/Eleni's silence: 'There is no male intermediary. Becoming silent is not because of a man, or as a reaction to a man. It is her inner reaction to the things happened to her'. Betül added on Ezgi's point: 'The woman can stay alive in every condition. Her silence is more internal. In the other examples, it was a reaction against the other people's actions'. Hande told the effect of the film on her as follows: 'She [Ayşe/Eleni]

went to live what she had in her mind. There are so many spaces for her to tell her story and that makes me feel like “going and shooting a film”.

The participants proposed other possible readings for the meaning of Ayşe/Eleni’s silence. Ezgi said that in her opinion, there might be a hidden story behind Ayşe/Eleni’s relationship with her sister since there is also a silence between them. Hande commented that that silence might arise from the difficulty of the fact that Ayşe/Eleni had to look after her. Betül said that she thought it was caused by the remembrance of the old and painful days.

Other aspects of Ayşe/Eleni’s silence have also been revealed. Deniz indicated that unlike the other examples, she was not waiting for anyone, rather she was the one who went away. Betül also emphasized a point about depicting femininities in binary oppositions that there were various male and female characters and that the director did not present one type of femininity.

Conclusion

In the discussions after the viewings of the films, the participants commented on the meanings of the female silences and on how the silent characters were depicted on screen. On the other hand, after the viewing of *Bulutları Beklerken*, they revealed what they (not) want to see on screen while they were comparing the depiction of the female silence in this film with the other examples. First of all, the participants gave ‘reactionary’ female silence a positive value. Even though in most of the examples, there was an ambivalence among the participants about the meaning of the female silence, whether it was resistance or passiveness, they considered that the female silence might be a strong attitude when it was used against the order she had been subjected to. However, they all revealed that they were content to see a female character who was ‘going away to Selonika on her own’ rather than passively ‘waiting’ for her lover. Therefore, even though the characters were depicted as ‘silent, the participants looked for a female ‘voice’ in the film. They did not want to see ‘male intermediary’ for the reason or choice of female silence, or for the punishment of the silent female character.

In this research, the participants ‘revealed’ what they want to see on screen in the last day’s discussion where they compared the silence of Ayşe/Eleni with the other examples. The silent female characters of the

selected films became the medium through which the female audience 'speak' of what she (not) want to see on screen. Hence, this research one more time reveals that female audience 'read' films. They 'react' to the ways of depiction of the female characters. They are not passively 'deceived' by the story of the film. Tül Akbal Süalp poses a very important question on the silence of the female characters: "Which unspeakable words and unarticulated dilemmas are represented by silent women, or what is it that the director could not say?" (Akbal Süalp, 1998:13). The female audience 'reveal' the gender order of the film and articulate what the director does not want to put into words. They 'reveal' what they want to see. In the scene where Ayşe/Eleni and her brother come together after years, she puts on the table the only family picture she has as a response to her brother showing her a family album that lacks her picture. Hande commented on this scene: 'She says: "Look, I have a story too and you are in it. See me!' Her comment very well resumes what these participants want to see on screen: I also have a story, maybe it is silent, see it!

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