

9th International Symposium

Communication in the Millennium

In Cooperation with
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Anadolu University (Turkey), and
İstanbul University (Turkey)

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School of Journalism and Media Studies (U.S.A.)

The Association of Turkish and American Scholars (ATACS)

The international symposium Communication in the Millennium has been organized since 2003 by scholars in Turkey and the United States, and each year the symposium organizers have noticed increasing interest in this academic event. Because of this interest, the co-founders and the organization committee of this symposium decided to form an association where both countries' scholars are represented.

The mission of the ATACS is to advance the communication profession in both countries through well-grounded academic research and to foster communication academics' cooperation. The Communication in the Millennium is the established ATACS project, but the association will be working on different projects to serve its mission in the near future.

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ARABESQUE NARRATIVE IN NEW TURKISH CINEMA: IS IT SYNTHETIC?

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Abstract

Arabesque music has undergone a change under the influence of pop and extravaganza during the 2000s and has evolved into a different structure from its original "pure state". Another area in which this cultural transitivity is apparent is cinema. Since the 1950s, Turkish cinema has been living on melodrama and has the tradition of making films with music under the influence of Egyptian cinema. This background helps arabesque to appear in cinema in the form of music that has become transformed radically in the early 2000s. However, arabesque, which is scrutinized by the intelligentsia extensively, reappears in various forms and narratives as a milieu that pervades the entire story in independent productions, in auteur films, or with a more broad definition, in the artistic cinema of recent Turkish cinema. The arabesque world is recreated in films like Innocence (Demirkubuz, 1997) and Destiny (Demirkubuz, 2006) as well as Three Monkeys (Ceylan, 2009) and My Only Sunshine (Erdem, 2008). This study aims to focus on a different reality constructed in New Turkish cinema, with the example of My Only Sunshine in which there is a hygienic arabesque atmosphere with its cinematographically rich and simple narrative. This hygienic arabesque definition can be related to Sartre's analysis of "le visqueux" (the slimy). To touch the slimy is to take the risk of disintegration. My Only Sunshine is a production that takes this risk willingly and on purpose and in regard of its subject but cannot dissolve in the "slimy" with its cinematically distant and hygienic look.

ARABESQUE NARRATIVE IN NEW TURKİSH CINEMA: IS IT SYNTHETIC?

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Arabesque, as a music genre, has earned a significant place in Turkey within popular culture. The relationship between arabesque music and Turkish cinema, on the other hand, has developed since the 1950s with the rise of melodramatic cinema due to the influence of Egypt films. Turkish pop music or Turkish classical music, having been hybridized since the 1990s, has gradually evolved to arabesque in terms of musical style. Basically, arabesque, besides being just a music genre, is a lifestyle, a view of life.

Within the context of arabesque that has probably penetrated many areas of life in Turkey, this paper is an attempt to try to understand and interpret New Turkish cinema, which has a Western point of view. The narrative structure of the New Turkish cinema is a subject worth examining with all its aspects. During the 2000s, New Turkish cinema has attracted a great deal of interest from critics in both national and international festivals, and at one time it has been claimed that New Turkish cinema was following in the footsteps of Iranian cinema, which had an influence on World cinema. In this study, the concepts of arabesque and New Turkish cinema will be explained; by mentioning the affinity between melodramatic cinema and *Yeşilçam* cinema, it will be discussed that New Turkish cinema uses melodramatic elements in order to invert the codes of melodrama. It is possible to say that New Turkish cinema handles melodramatic stories of the third page news with an extrinsic and distant narrative. In other words, New Turkish cinema constitutes a visual language which is not integrated with the stories that have an arabesque tone. Bauman indicates in "Postmodernity and its Discontents" that our hygiene perception is changed by context; in the same manner, these films almost reconstruct the phenomenon of arabesque in our intellect. The subject matter is an intellectual and synthetic (Özgüven, 2009) or reconstructed (Daldal, 2006) arabesque narrative. *Hayat Var* (My Only Sunshine, Reha Erdem, 2008), which is not dissolved in its arabesque world, depicts this world from within but also with an "extrinsic" point of view. This film will be studied based on Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of "le visqueux" (the slimy).

Arabesque

Arabesque has been influential from 70s to 90s, and it has been considered to be a sociological case by the intelligentsia. (Özbek, 1991; Kozanoğlu, 1992; Belge, 1983, Kahraman, 1995). Arabesque is not just a phenomenon that has been discussed since the 1960s. As Belge indicates (1983:367), this discussion is the result of a long-term value ambiguity. The meaning of Arabesque cannot be reduced to "Arabic style". Arabesque, besides being a music genre, is a "lifestyle" and a "view of life" (367). Arabesque is an urban culture (Özbek, 1991, 109). Arabesque music is not only a product of popular culture that has gained wide currency since 1968, but it also represents the political change during the 1980s. According to Özbek, "between 1968-1979, arabesque was considered to be a cultural product that depicted the rebellious expression of people living in shanties and the lumpen proletariat, and it has been identified with neo-conservative Motherland Party after 1983" (Özbek, 1991, 122). Perhaps it is not possible to claim that, after 1980s, arabesque music acted as a strong means of political expression in the same way when it was first emerged; however, it might be argued that with the change in the audience of arabesque during the 2000s, arabesque's world of expression has also changed or broadened. Concurrently, having changed its musical form, arabesque is no longer like the songs performed by Orhan Gencebay in the late 1960s. It has departed from its

purest state and transformed into a hybrid form as a mixture of pop music and Turkish classical music. Extravaganza music, as an intermediate form, is the hybrid form of arabesque music. According to Gürbilek (1992:31), “it is possible to say that those who once listened to Orhan Gencebay took the music to heart. However, it seems that today’s arabesque has already changed Orhan Gencebay into a quotation. More popular types of today’s arabesque have gradually given up all its ‘sensitivity’ and ‘authenticity’ claims, and arabesque brings itself into existence only as an imitated form of itself” (31). Arabesque, which has been analyzed as a sociological case since the 1980s, has nearly climbed the social ladder in the 2000s, and apart from its main audience, it has started to appeal a new audience in different hybrid forms. During the 2000s, Arabesque music has changed with the influence of pop music and extravaganza. Arabesque singer Müslüm Gürses, who has worked together with poet-writer Murathan Mungan, has departed from his musical environment.¹ On the other hand, Turkish pop signers such as Işın Karaca and Seval Şam have started to remake arabesque songs.

Belge (1983:368) emphasizes that despite all its artificial sides, arabesque must have had the authenticity in order to be popularized in such a way. And he argues that such authenticity is rooted in an intensive sense of longing. *“In a society where for centuries, people were filled with longing to something they could not even explain to themselves and survived many hardships, one should take it normally that it is so vague and inexpressible through words. If it had been possible to extirpate all the clichés of arabesque and the clank of its instruments, etc. in order to reduce arabesque to its abstract essence, I guess there would have remained this intense scream of longing”* (368).

The discovery of this pursuit of authenticity, particularly made by intellectuals, has resulted in today’s evaluation of arabesque classics in different contexts. In Gürbilek’s words (1992:31), *“Arabesque is a place where ‘what emerges today stays tomorrow’, where previous cultures and today’s cultures compromise with each other: It is either that, or the other. Concurrently, what separates arabesque both from the place it emerged and the place it is staying, is the place where it breaks away from its previous culture in which it resists to the new culture that it is acquainted with: It is neither that, nor the other. In fact, there is no such place, or rather it is just a surface, an image; it is the life we live today”*.

Another field where the cultural transition is evident within the field of music is cinema. It is possible to date the sources of interaction between Arabesque music and Turkish cinema back to the years of the Second World War. Turkey has successfully stayed out of the Second World War, and in order to prevent the impact of Nazism, it closed its doors to Europe in the context of film import. Therefore, American films used the route of Egypt when they came to Turkey, and they brought along Egypt films. The Eastern melodramatic contents of Egypt films were admired by Turkish audience, and these films enjoyed box office success. The melodramatic element in these films would be frequently used in Turkish films in the following years, and what is more, it would shape Turkish cinema in future. It is widely accepted that arabesque music, which would emerge in the 1960s, and in a way today’s popular music which has headed towards arabesque in terms of musical style, have originated from Egypt films and their localized versions (Tekelioğlu, 2006; Özbek, 1991). Belge (1983:399) indicates that it is not only the films of Orhan Gencebay that are arabesque because Turkish films “have always been

¹ Müslüm Gürses attracted attention during the late 1980s up to the mid 90s with news reports which said that his young fans were cutting themselves with razor blades at his concerts. Actually, the “sorrowful” and “razor” arabesque reaction was against the “painless arabesque” approach of the official television institute in Turkey. Thus, Müslüm Gürses has become the symbol of the lumpen masses in the world of arabesque music, and has been called “Müslüm Father”. In this respect, Müslüm Gürses, the voice of the lumpen masses, adopted a different platform after 2000 when he performed a duet with Teoman, who has become a significant icon of popular Turkish music, and carried out a joint work with Murathan Mungan.

arabesque” films. Yeşilçam Turkish cinema, heavily influenced by melodrama, has used arabesque in its purest state, yet like arabesque music, it has changed during the 2000s. Arabesque, studied by the intelligentsia comprehensively, reappears in recent Turkish cinema in various forms and narratives as independent productions, auteur films or in a more broad definition, productions that might be called art films, where the atmosphere of arabesque is felt throughout the stories and the films.

Kozanoğlu (2001) points out that arabesque has emerged as a grey-briquetted shanty music, as urban music; however, in the 90s, it has transformed into the music of naked walls made of red bricks that have no aesthetics value. From this analogy of Kozanoğlu, it is possible to infer that the arabesque life reflected in the films of New Turkish cinema is in a way almost a copy of the lifestyle that was built by second and third generation arabesque songs. Dominant urban lifestyles handled in these films, as expressed by Kozanoğlu, are like incomplete buildings where top floors have ironstones.

In this study, arabesque will be discussed not as a music genre as it is widely understood, but as a mode of expression - in Belge's words – as a certain lifestyle and a view of life. In this respect, films that express or cite the world of arabesque and its lifestyle through form and content with the defined arabesque narrative, constitute the primary focus of this study. In this context, the connections between New Turkish cinema and melodramatic cinema of Yeşilçam will be emphasized, and marks of arabesque narrative will be traced in the films. The approach of *Hayat Var* to the arabesque world with its extrinsic and Western point of view will be discussed. The differentiation, even the chasm between the narrative style that has become evident through certain films of New Turkish cinema and the world they depict, will be mentioned.

New Turkish Cinema

In the periodization of Turkish cinema history, particularly the period that started after 1970 when “Umut” (The Hope, Yılmaz Güney, 1970) was made, has been referred to as “Young /New Cinema Period (1970-1984)” (Özön, 1985:377). The military coup of 12 September has left a deep mark on Turkish cinema during the 80s. The 90s when Turkish cinema was unable to produce even 10 films per year were also the years when Turkish cinema has strived to survive against major American film studios. However, since the second half of 1990s, Turkish cinema has started to overcome its crisis. This new period that started with “Tabutta Rövaşata” (Somersault in The Coffin, Derviş Zaim, 1996) after 1995, has come around by the films of independent filmmakers like Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and interchangeably named as “New Turkish Cinema” (Suner, 2005; Chaudhuri, 2005; Dönmez Colin, 2006; Büyükdüvenci ve Öztürk, 2007; Kahraman, 2008; Bayrakdar, 2009; Suner, 2010), “New Wave Turkish Cinema” (Büyükdüvenci and Öztürk, 2007; Suner, 2009), “The Cinema of New Turkey”² (Taşçıyan, 2009; Arslan, 2009). The 1990s are important not only for independent productions or art films, but also for popular films such as “Eşkiya” (The Bandit/Yavuz Turgul, 1996) or “İstanbul Kanatlarım Altında” (Istanbul Beneath My Wings/Mustafa Altıoklar, 1996) that has brought together Turkish audience and Turkish cinema. In this period, also named as “Post-Yeşilçam” (Evren, 2006) when Turkish cinema has been restructured and

² The conceptualization as “The Cinema of New Turkey” has recently become more widespread. The 30th Istanbul International Film Festival, organized in 2011, brought together recent Turkish films in a segment under the title of The Cinema of New Turkey. The title of the panel organized at Boğaziçi University Mithat Alam Film Center in 2009, participated by directors Alper Özcan, Hüseyin Karabey, İnan Temelkuran and Seyfi Teoman, was also The Cinema of New Turkey. To The Cinema of New Turkey panel and presentation organized at the same center in 2010, directors Aslı Özge, İlksen Başarır, Mahmut Fazıl Çoşkun and Pelin Esmen have participated.

different styles of production have been integrated to each other, the definition of New Turkish Cinema/Cinema of New Turkey applies to the films made by the directors of independent or art films, rather than to popular films.³ On the other hand, The Cinema of New Turkey is used as a definition to be considered together with social and political events emerged in the context of reel politics, and at the same time it covers the rise of Kurdish cinema in the 2000s (Yücel, 2008; Arslan, 2009) with or without an emphasis on ethnicity.

The 2000s have been considered as sort of Renaissance for New Turkish cinema (Dorsay, 2004; Dorsay, 2011). The achievements of filmmakers like Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Semih Kaplanoglu, Yesim Ustaoğlu, Derviş Zaim and Zeki Demirkubuz, especially in international film festivals, have enabled the critics, who have been greatly interested in Iranian cinema during the 90s, to turn their eyes to Turkish cinema in the 2000s. When Büyükdüvenci and Öztürk (2007:45) use the names of New Turkish Cinema or New Wave Turkish Cinema, they indicate "a critical cinema that seeks originality instead of imitating traditional models and at the same time acts as an instrument in the quest of people's and society's self-discovery and reconstruction". They point out that this new cinema is director oriented, and it has aesthetical and ethical concerns. However, it is stated that New Turkish cinema owe much to European art cinema, particularly to Italian Neo-Realism and French New Wave (Jameson, 2006, 16). For instance, the cinematic narrative style of Nuri Bilge Ceylan is compared to Antonioni and Tarkovsky (Büyükdüvenci and Öztürk, 2007:46). Although Ceylan has said that his cinema is influenced by directors such as Ozu, Tarkovsky, Bresson and Bergman, he has also implied that one can find traces of Yılmaz Güney and Lütfi Akad in his cinematic narrative. Semih Kaplanoglu emphasizes that his generation that emerged during the second half of the 90s has picked up where Erksan, Güney and Akad left off (Bora, 2010:36). As his masters, he refers to directors two generations before his time.⁴ Jameson (2006:17) indicates that New Turkish cinema (like Iranian cinema) has made its mark with a unique combination of tradition, modernity and postmodernity. In this respect, directors, as they also state, are influenced by traditional Turkish cinema.

The Transformation of Melodrama in New Turkish Cinema

Melodrama is defined "as a play where the tension is created through sorrowful coincidences and immediate impact is aimed by relying on extreme sorrowful situations, and where music is used in order to increase the play's sentimentality. Although it pretends to be a serious play, it only scratches the surface, and it is based on artificial characters" (Çalışlar, 1995:420). Domestic violence, motherlessness (orphanhood), rape, love, death, infidelity constitute the basic paths of melodramatic cinema. "In melodrama, the private and the personal (relations) represent the political, ideological and social existence" (Akbulut, 2008: 44). The personal desire based on love and social prohibitions, and the tension between the individual and society form the basic conflict of melodrama (58). Some of the codes of melodrama include concentration on family, exaggeration (excess) (73), an ethically polarized world based on good/evil division (65), the use of music in a narrative manner (74), stylized mise-en-scène (75) (Akbulut, 2008, 44-79).

³ In this regard, see Daldal (2010) for an analysis of New Turkish cinema within the frame of the national cinema concept, and for various trends within this period see Akbal Süalp (2010a;2010b;2011)

⁴ At this point, it is remarkable that New Turkish cinema directors do not mention directors such as Ali Özgentürk, Ömer Kavur or Yavuz Özkan, who have continued to make films during the 1980s before them. Besides, Erdogan (2006:148), in his article titled "Narratives of resistance: national identity and ambivalence in the Turkish melodrama between 1965-1975" compares Yeşilçam cinema with the cinema of the 1980s/New Cinema, and he states that Yeşilçam took Hollywood as its model, whereas New Cinema remained close to European art cinema. It seems that 1980's New Cinema and New Turkish Cinema of post-1995 period are not much different since they both rely on authorship, take European art cinema as a model and rather than using traditional production-distribution-exhibition chain, they use festivals and competitions to gain wide acceptance and visibility.

Thomas Elsaesser observes that family melodrama “dealing largely with the same Oedipal themes of emotional and moral identity, more often records the failure of the protagonists to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu. The world is closed, and the characters are acted upon, and each other’s sole referent, there is no world outside to be acted on, no reality that could be defined or assumed unambiguously. (cited in Erdoğan, 150)

According to Steve Neale, “melodramas are marked by chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last minute rescues and revelations, dues ex machina endings”. Nezih Erdoğan (2006:235) states that Neale’s definition of melodrama is perfectly suited to *Yeşilçam*: “*Melodrama, in short, is perfectly suited to Yeşilçam, which sticks to narrative traditions inspired by legends, fairy tales and epopees (rather than by, say, tragedy which emphasizes the inner conflicts and transformations of its characters. (...) Yeşilçam exploits melodrama in articulating the desires aroused not only by class conflict but also by rural/urban and eastern/western oppositions (...)* *Yeşilçam was a hybrid cinema; it produced a cinematic discourse blending Hollywood-style realism with an unintentional Brechtian alienation effects*”.

Zeki Demirkubuz is a director who is known for his use of classical *Yeşilçam* codes in a different context, and who has transformed *Yeşilçam* melodramas with his films like *Masumiyet* (Innocence, 1997) and *Kader* (Destiny, 2006). “Demirkubuz does not only use the recognizable similarities between his storylines, characters, decors and the classic *Yeşilçam*. He also uses the *Yeşilçam* melodramas themselves as the uncanny, disturbing, recognizable elements from the collective consciousness of the audience. He uses *Yeşilçam* melodramas as the signifiers of the unexplainable irrationality of human psyche which is the main part that Demirkubuz searches for” (Pehlivan, 2007:65). In contrast to the exaggerated facial expressions and the body language of the characters in melodramatic cinema, the striking silence, even the speechlessness of Demirkubuz’s characters is another sign of a terminal point. The silence of Demirkubuz’s heroes almost features a kind of resistance to the characters that we are accustomed to see in *Yeşilçam* cinema, where they frantically try to explain themselves and their mental states in detail. “The excessive exaggeration, tendency to explain every detail and expressing every emotional state turn into a complete silence, exaggerated stillness and expressing nothing in Demirkubuz’s film” (Pehlivan, 2007: 68). When Demirkubuz’s characters watch old Turkish films in front of the television, in a sense they watch the reflection of their situation, and they display their submission to their fates in a desperate manner as well. In this context, Demirkubuz transforms melodrama with his cinematic narrative. Many films in New Turkish cinema also transform the codes of melodramatic cinema in the context of the world they tell and what this world represents.

Arabesque Narrative in New Turkish Cinema /Arabesque Atmosphere

It is very remarkable to note that the Turkish cinema after 2000 has carried the third page news and their melodramatic contents into the film plots, and this is depicted mostly through the view of a city that has turned into the suburb. Both popular Turkish cinema and art cinema have directed their attention to urban/rural dichotomy. However, it would be more true to say that art cinema is particularly focused on the lives of the ones who are stuck in the city, who live in the suburbs. In other words, the city which has turned into a big suburb with all its decayedness is no longer the space of hopes, it is the space of disappointment. One of the most important elements of this tone of despair is arabesque narrative. The term ‘arabesk’ (...) later

came to describe the entire migrant culture formed at the peripheries of Turkish cities (Özbek, 1997:212).

Whether it is *Masumiyet* or *Kader*, Zeki Demirkubuz has depicted a dark world, the events and lives of a third page news and heroes who have drifted in those lives, and he has become one of the cornerstones of New Turkish cinema. Serdar Akar, too, stands out in a similar way, with a dark, mysterious world of harsh realism. After his portrait of a pastoral world in *Kasaba* (The Small Town, 1997), Nuri Bilge Ceylan gradually enters the dark fields of the city and its people in *Üç Maymun* (Three Monkeys, 2008). Nuri Bilge Ceylan, like Zeki Demirkubuz who is one of the prominent names of New Turkish cinema, also turns his camera to poor areas of the city and the lives of people living in the suburbs. In New Turkish cinema, we witness the lives of people in the suburbs of İstanbul in *Tabutta Rövaşata* (Somersault in The Coffin, Derviş Zaim, 1996), *Masumiyet* (Innocence, Zeki Demirkubuz, 1997), *Kader* (Destiny, Zeki Demirkubuz, 2006) *Barda* (In Bar, Serdar Akar, 2007), *Üç Maymun* (Three Monkeys, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2008) or *Hayat Var* (My Only Sunshine, Reha Erdem, 2008). These films not only portray the new faces of poverty through harsh realism, but they also combine melodramatic stories of the poor world with an arabesque atmosphere that almost absorbs the viewer into a whirlpool. These human portraits and their stories depicted within the banality of everyday life have become the basic materials of the New Turkish cinema. Arabesque atmosphere, in a decisive manner, makes poverty and pain become more evident. The ringtone that features the music of Yıldız Tilbe in *Üç Maymun* is where this atmosphere becomes concrete. In *Hayat Var*, the arabesque music used in the film, as Reha Erdem says, is the vulnerable side of the film. In a sense, it is the place where the reserved attitude of intellectual view is shattered. It is the point where the depicted lives, with all the psychological aspects, are understood from the inside.

Akbal Süalp (2009:233-235) argues that in order to understand the trends in New Turkish cinema and particularly the arabesque phenomenon we should examine the trends of "film noir" and "melodramatic cinema", which has become evident after 1980, as well as the socio-economic and cultural structure of the era. In a sense, he interprets the spirit of the era as a background. In this context, he emphasizes the rise of capitalism and the new right in the world, the depolitization, oppressions and the destruction of the social state in Turkey, which started after September 12, 1980, as well as the process encountered in the southeast of Turkey, and the general reluctance to face the past. He claims that this situation has created both disregard and the reaction of neglect in a hysterical and passionate manner, and that this shame and neglect have disabled our language, our stories, our narrative and our stand. He also says that apolitical and mostly male melodramas have become widespread, and the volume of self-pity and self-dramatization, which also have historical connections, has increased through gestures and mimes (2009:233-235).

Within this framework, she associates these films with film noir and melodrama, and considers them arabesque: She interprets the examples of New Turkish cinema as "films that combine arabesque sentimentality with the film noir aesthetics". *"This style is based on a restlessness, which is insecure, unemployed; it has rapidly migrated from the countryside to the cities, and it is stuck at the edge of the city, defeated again. This restlessness pities itself, it wants to be pitied; it makes pain a cry, a song, and it tries to heal its deep wounds by constantly listening to them. It does not have the strength to cry out but it nevertheless desires it to be known. Since popular cinema or music has never produced an analysis in any stage of the history, it has undertaken a comforting role through the angry language of the suffering. Therefore, these films are arabesque. Whether under heavy living conditions several generations*

have been fermented with this arabesque or not, we could still say that people get addicted to this arabesque mood.” (233).

The common point in the films is not a narrative style. What is more, it is the points of view that reproduce an introversive discourse that resulted from a conscious stand. This view is “extrinsic”. *“In the characters and the points of views of these films, the concept ‘extrinsic’ is seen as a distinctive attitude. Being ‘extrinsic’ does not need to have a past that based on a physical geography; it takes its source from a tendency which does not belong to anywhere and that it seeks a third space, that is to say, a situation related to the experience itself. Because of this experience, people have become extrinsic while passing through its context.”* (235)

While we say that there is an “extrinsic” view or “synthetic” narrative in New Turkish cinema, it should be helpful to compare the content and the form of the films as well. As in all narratives, the form of narrative in cinema is basically formed in accordance with the requirements of the content. In other words, what is to be narrated also determines how it is narrated. At this point, it could be said that, in some of the films of the New Turkish cinema, a deep chasm has occurred between the narration and the content in a provocative manner. When Z. Bauman (1998) states a striking situation in relation to our hygiene perception in his work called “Postmodernity and its Discontents”, he reminds us that our perceptions are changed by context. *“Things which are ‘dirt’ in one context may become pure just by being put in another place-and vice versa (...) Beautifully polished, shining shoe become dirt when put on the dining table; returned to the shoe-stack, they recover their pristine purity. An omlette, a mouth-watering work of culinary art when on the diner plate, becomes a nasty stain when dropped on the pillow”* (Bauman, 1998: 6). From this point of view it is possible to make an analogy related to the content and the narrative structure in New Turkish cinema. We can say that the melodramatic stories of the third page news are depicted with an extrinsic and distant cinematic narrative; in other words, they form a visual language that has arabesque atmosphere, and it is not completed with the stories. In a way, the shoe is put on the table through an intellectual and synthetic (Özgüven, 2009), or reconstructed (Daldal, 2006) arabesque narrative. However, with this context the hygiene perception that Bauman depicts is reversed and the arabesque culture almost advances in the visual language. If we accept the notion that arabesque is kitsch and kitsch corresponds with the elements of sociological development of Turkish society (Kahraman, 2002:251), we can perhaps reach the point where we cannot mention such an elevation. According to Kahraman, “If we define kitsch as a form of activity and if we emphasize that kitsch surrounds every corner through the general tendency of consumer society, then we should indicate two conclusions; first of all, we are all living with kitsch and we produce kitsch; secondly, with a semantic shift, the thing that we call arabesque should generally be defined as kitsch (251)”.

All the arguments that take place within the frame of New Turkish cinema and the concept of arabesque basically emerge in the axis of East-West dichotomy and the modernization efforts that have continued for 150 years are based on it. The tension that Turkey is still living comes from being in the middle of East and West, as well as getting caught up between the modern and the traditional, and one can say that this is depicted very effectively in New Turkish cinema. The reality, which the said tension has created, is the lifestyle of arabesque. It is almost inevitable for New Turkish cinema not to depict the tension of East-West, the modern and the traditional and as a concrete situation, arabesque. In Gürbilek’s (1992:20-21) words, arabesque has been “the name of finding a place in the image market, finding your way in a foreign culture, it’s the desire to ruin its culture and make it resemble to arabesque; and above all, it’s the effort of the real owners of the city to name, to repulse this raid of foreigners”. The potential

of arabesque, which can make anything resemble to itself and can penetrate anywhere, in a way brings to mind Jean-Paul Sartre's *le visqueux* ("the slimy") analysis. "If I dive into the water, if I plunge into it, if I let myself sink in it, I experience no discomfort, for I do not have any fear whatsoever that I may dissolve in it; I will remain solid in its liquidity. If I sink in the slimy, I feel that I'm going to be lost in it, that I may dissolve in the slime precisely because the slimy is in process of solidification. (...) To touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess" (608-610). In this sense, New Turkish cinema touches the slimy. Particularly, the cinema of Demirkubuz does this in a fearless manner. Although it touches the slimy, it does not dissolve in it. On the other hand, Reha Erdem's film called *Hayat Var* is different; it is like it has almost dived into the slimy in a glass capsule. Therefore, it does not have a connection with the slimy. The extrinsic point of view clarifies here, at this very point. It looks at the world it enters "from inside" but in a distant manner, in other words, in an extrinsic manner. In this sense, *Hayat Var*, which has a rich and simple narrative in terms of cinematography, constitutes a hygienic arabesque atmosphere with its distance to the world it depicts.

Synthetic Arabesque in *Hayat Var*

Before starting the topic of synthetic arabesque in *Hayat Var*, it may be helpful to deal with the general characteristics of Erdem's cinema.

Although Reha Erdem has similar features with other directors in the New Turkish cinema, he is a unique director that stands out with his differences. His films focus on people who are troubled with "growing up". He depicts people who could not live as adolescents or who live in the adolescent period. In a sense, like the title of his film, he seeks an answer to the question of "What is a human anyway?" It is the cinema of weak men and relatively strong female characters who are reckoning with themselves, with their environment and who have troubles in their inner world. It is not only the cinema of heroes, but also of characters, and many of them can be interpreted as anti-heroes. It is a cinema that deconstructs the human being, questions the existence, and it also features a strange sorrow.

His cinema is capable of a certain aesthetics feel, his use of *mise-en-scène* is always under control and he manages to create a magical atmosphere in each of his films. The sound in his films is not an element that reinforces the impression of reality and it appears as an important narrative unit. Opening credits are mounted on the soundtrack in a way that it foreshadows the film's atmosphere and its time and space. Like Ali's breathing in *Korkuyorum Anne* (Mommy I'm Scared, 2004), the sound of the gulls in *Kaç Para Kaç* (A Run for Money, 1998), the wind in *Beş Vakit* (Times and Winds, 2006) and the ferry horn in *Hayat Var*... Although it is an urban cinema, it deals with the country in *Beş Vakit*; the border in *Kosmos* (2009) and the city's neighborhoods in *Hayat Var*. Nature takes its place in the films not as a sequence caught spontaneously, but as the form of a world/environment under control and it is created in accordance to the intended atmosphere. In all of his films, nature takes place not only as an element of aesthetics, but also as a narrative unit of the story. Consequently, in his films time does not flow like the real time of the life. It features a different time perception.

Hayat Var depicts fourteen-year-old Hayat's transition from childhood into womanhood. She lives with her father and bedridden grandfather in a wooden house built at the mouth of the stream that flows into the Bosphorus. Her father secures his family's survival in the city by fishing with his small boat, and at the same time he carries prostitutes to the cargo ships in the Bosphorus and meets the various needs of these ships illegally. Hayat was born in this harsh,

tough and merciless world, but she holds on to life. She does not lose her courage, her resistance and her hope against all the injustice in the world.

Some parallelism can be drawn between *A Ay* (Oh Moon, 1988), Reha Erdem's first film, and *Hayat Var*. *A Ay* is the adolescent story of a twelve-year-old girl called Yekta. Yekta lives with her aunt who cannot live without her rituals and her family mansion. Her other aunt is an English teacher that lives in Büyükkada and she wants Yekta to live with her in order to save her from this isolated and asocial life. However, Yekta does not want to live with her since she believes that her mother will someday return to the mansion. In both films, the Bosphorus is used differently from the Bosphorus narrative that we are accustomed to see in classical Yeşilçam cinema. Despite the similarities in the narrative between *A Ay* and *Hayat Var*, there are some stylistic differences: the world depicted in *A Ay* refers to the days of poverty of a family, which is aristocrat in Western terms. The film makes references through classical music, poetry, painting, the mysterious aristocratic life of the Bosphorus with the décor and art direction that depict this life cinematographically. On the other hand, *Hayat Var* has a completely different atmosphere. It reflects the taste and the lifestyle of the poorest class in society. An adolescent story that evolves from the music of arabesque singers such as Orhan Gencebay and Mine Koşan, pimp father, child worker, cop stepfather, cheap candies and toys to dresses with cheap flowers and the red lipstick is depicted. *"In the same way that A Ay reaches out from Turkey to western myths and mysterious cinema tradition of the West, Hayat Var, too, is like a comment that comes from the West on Yeşilçam melodrama and provincial İstanbul... The emphasis on nobility and mystery found in the first film is replaced by banality and the simplicity that assert themselves in different ways... The Noble, the gothic, the mysterious vs. the simple, the kitsch and the cheap"* (Kaya, 2009:36-37). Özgüven (2009:23), too, makes a connection between *Hayat Var* and *A Ay*; he states that *Hayat Var* depicts the adolescent stories of "a little girl living in a shanty by the Bosphorus that seems to take Hülya Avşar's arabesque classics as an example, rather than following Sevim Burak".

The terminal point where the similarities and the differences between these two films can be seen is the transition from classical music to arabesque. The narrative structure of *Hayat Var*, built around arabesque, connects it to one of the basic features of New Turkish cinema. *Hayat Var* is a film that enables readings on the existential problem of Hayat, who lives far from the city, by the Bosphorus, in a loveless world, and she becomes a woman without living her childhood in the men's world. The arabesque in the film, in Reha Erdem's own words, is "the place where the film puts a soft pillow". *"There is something in that film that suits arabesque. (...) to me, those voices, those cries, those struggles suit the film well. The film seems to hold on to those songs, it seems that there is such a need in that world (...) those songs is the place into where the film puts the soft pillow"* (Yücel, 2009:167-168).

In the films there is a big difference between the soundtrack and the visual structure. Two different narratives emerge. The soundtrack in *Hayat Var* tries to put the film on a firm ground by pulling its feet. The "extrinsic view", which we frequently repeat within the frame of the New Turkish cinema, unveils in Erdem's film through the soundtrack. The music in *Hayat Var* is excessive. It has its own narrative. The usage of music in melodramatic cinema, in Elsaesser's words, shows "excess beyond the reality" (cited in Akbulut: 74-75).

The soundtrack in the film consists explicit sound effects and arabesque songs, rather than dialogues. The majority of these arabesque songs are the ones sang by Orhan Gencebay in the 70s and the 80s. These songs, familiar to a generation, refer to the aesthetics of grey-briquetted walls which symbolizes '70s Turkey. In a sense, an era is elevated in a longing manner. What is more, Orhan Gencebay "who keeps a distance between himself and the

audience, addresses them from a certain distance, calls those who are oppressed to unite under his identity, is the last example of the idols that has become the candidate to be their conscience" (Gürbilek, 1992: 105). And such an idol belongs to the world of the past.

Reha Erdem's cinema mainly carries the codes of the modern cinema whose origins come from the West. Visually the film contains cinematographic elements of the West; on the other hand, the arabesque in its soundtrack establishes a deeper relation between the film and its viewers. With its soundtrack *Hayat Var* is "familiar" to cinema viewers from Turkey. "The people, the stories that the film depicts; the situations, the cultural patterns, intellectual and emotional tendencies that it presents" (Acar, 2009:45) are particular to Turkey and its people. According to Acar, "It is perhaps because of this reason that when we watch a Reha Erdem film, we feel closer to the world without really going away from here (Turkey)" (45).

The arabesque music that we listen through Hayat's self-murmurings gradually expands its space in the film and turns up the volume. In the scene that comes right after Hayat rescues her father from being beaten up, we see her having difficulty in breathing when her injured father and bedridden grandfather lay their heads on her knees. After this dramatic scene of Hayat where she feels suffocated due to the extreme pressure that she cannot cope with, the music starts to take a more effective part in the film with the arabesque song performed by the children's choir. In the final scene, the music reaches to its most expressive state.

Another element that makes *Hayat Var* synthetic is its style of usage of İstanbul and the Bosphorus, which are the main locations of the film. We watch the Bosphorus from a perspective that we never see, inside the Bosphorus, among the cargo ships. However, Erdem deliberately withholds from the viewers the images of İstanbul that we are accustomed to see. In the company of large cargo ships, the cries of the gulls and the sounds of the sudden sirens in the middle of the silence that make people jump, Hayat, who goes to school with his father's small boat between the huge bodies of cargo ships passing through the Bosphorus, enables us to see İstanbul from a different perspective. However, the place that Hayat looks at is not İstanbul. Hayat does not live in a house with her father and grandfather, but lives at a "crossing area" in the middle of the Bosphorus' chaos. It's like İstanbul's urban identity has almost changed; it is no longer the city that we are familiar with. Such a disengagement from İstanbul's reality, in a way, supports the synthetic structure.

The soundtrack surprises the viewers with a good Foley arrangement: The ship horn, the engine of the boat, police sirens, the sounds of the planes, the thunder, gulls, sounds of the waves, cats meowing, dogs barking, the voice of the turkey, dialogues from old Turkish films, the song of Hayat's baby doll, the breathing of Hayat and her grandfather, and finally the arabesque music. Although all these elements are arranged very successfully, it does not ring true, it is not convincing. Another element that distorts the credibility of the soundtrack is the detailed design of mise-en-scène. In this design we cannot see the imprint of the natural that would create the impression of reality. In the streets, grocery stores, the school road and many similar common spaces of the city, we see nobody that would be the sign of life either by appearing there coincidentally or by passing through at the back of the frame. An artificial environment is created with the arrangements of space and mise-en-scène. This film is almost without space and without time, and in terms of sense and emotions, its relationship with arabesque becomes synthetic.

The only ground on which *Hayat Var* establishes relation with the reality has been the old Turkish films in a fairy tale setting, and it is a common feature of the other films in New Turkish cinema. In Zeki Demirkubuz's *Masumiyet*, the deaf relation between the people waiting at the hotel lobby and the *Yeşilçam* melodramas they watch on TV has transformed into one of the primary themes of the New Turkish cinema. Why *Yeşilçam* creates a sense of authenticity and why New Turkish cinema is equipped with *Yeşilçam* references, these are the questions of another study. However, it is clear that New Turkish cinema has discovered the unique aesthetics of these melodramas that have a fairy tale tone in order to express many things.

Conclusion

New Turkish cinema, with its intellectual knowledge, with its cinematographical approach of the West, and with its keen eyes, attracts attention in the world cinema in terms of independent productions. However, this attention-grabbing cinema is a cinema influenced by extremely local elements, yet it tries to depict these through a universal language. Such a narrative is an interesting and "unique" cinematic narrative. Like the other films of the period, *Hayat Var* is influenced by melodrama, it touches arabesque, and it knits the distressful state of being and İstanbul's neighborhoods by leaving a provincial mark. However, *Hayat Var* reconstructs arabesque synthetically. New Turkish cinema depicts its subjects which are based on individual but mostly social basis through a cinematic narrative that does not speak with the same language. This hybrid structure of the New Turkish cinema fits arabesque music that uses the fast beats of Western music, and yet it is Eastern with its lyrics and atmosphere (Belge, 1983:405). Both arabesque and New Turkish cinema, in cultural terms, express Turkey between the East and the West. Although this hybrid production in music form is kitsch, this hybridity in cinema rises in value as high art. Perhaps, New Turkish cinema finally faces with all its elitist reflexes, with its "Eastern and provincial" side, and with all the things suppressed by elitism.

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