

# Political Ideologies in Yeşim Ustaoglu's Films: Nationalism and Feminism<sup>1</sup>

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Yeşim Ustaoglu Filmlerindeki Siyasi İdeolojiler:  
Milliyetçilik ve Feminizm

## Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türk sinemasında 1990'lı yıllardan itibaren yaşanan değişimlerin içinde yer alan az sayıda kadın yönetmenden biri olan Yeşim Ustaoglu'nun filmlerindeki ideolojik içerikler çözümlenmektedir. Bunun için yönetmenin beş filminin ana çatışmaları incelenmiş ve bu çatışmaları oluşturan ideolojik kavramlar (millet ve toplumsal cinsiyet) ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu kavramlar ve kavramlarla ilişkili siyasi ideolojiler (milliyetçilik ve feminizm) açıklanmış, bu açıklamalara dayanarak nitel anlatı çözümlemesi ile filmlerin olay örgüleri çözümlenmiştir. Yönetmenin filmografisine bakıldığında siyasi ideolojiler bağlamında feminizmi destekleyen, milliyetçiliği eleştiren anlatımlara ulaşılmıştır. Ayrıca yönetmenin tüm filmlerinde feminizm siyasi ideolojisinin getirdiği eleştiriler ile örtüşen anlatımlara rastlanmaktadır. Her türlü eşitsizliğin eleştirilmesi bağlamında da filmlerde ideolojik bir tutarlılık olduğu ifade edilebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sinema, İdeoloji, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Milliyetçilik, Feminizm

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the ideological content in the films of Yeşim Ustaoglu, one of the few female directors in Turkish cinema. The main conflicts of the director's five films are analyzed and the ideological concepts (nation and gender) that constitute these conflicts are revealed. These concepts and the political ideologies associated with them (nationalism and feminism) are explained, and based on these explanations, the narratives of the films are analyzed through qualitative narrative analysis. Narratives that support feminism and criticize nationalism are found. In all the director's films, there are narratives that coincide with the criticisms brought forth by feminism. Lastly, there is an ideological consistency in the films in terms of criticizing all kinds of inequality.

**Keywords:** Cinema, Ideology, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Nationalism, Feminism

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma Makalesi

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## 1. Introduction

Cinema has functioned as an ideology-producing medium since its inception. Cinema is also a field in which men dominate production. For this reason, when it comes to cinema and ideology, the first thing that comes to mind is ideological content produced through the eyes of men. It took many years for women to be effective in the field of cinema and to have a decisive influence on the content produced.

The fact that the directors who are decision-making position in the productions of cinema are predominantly male also determines the production of ideological content in cinema. International awards are among the most important indicators of how much space and opportunity is given to women in this field. The Palme d'Or, awarded since 1939 at the world-famous Cannes Film Festival, which can be considered the center of art in cinema, was won for the first time by a woman director, Jane Campion, in 1993, 54 years after its inception. In 2010, 81 years after its inception, a woman director, Kathryn Bigelow, won for the first time the award for Best Director, which has been awarded since 1929, at the world-famous Oscar Awards, which can be considered the greatest prize in commercial cinema. In their decades-long history, women filmmakers have won these two awards only three times each. These examples show how much space and opportunity women have been given in the field of film production in the last century.

The situation of women directors in Turkish cinema is not different from the world. Throughout the more than one hundred years of Turkish cinema history, the number of women directors who have been able to produce in this field is almost non-existent. Women who have been able to exist in the film industry and work in different fields have generally not been able to go beyond helping to produce content that is determined by men. However, this situation began to change in the 90s. In the late 80s and early 90s, women directors such as Biket İlhan, Canan Gerede, and Tomris Giritlioğlu began to direct in Turkish cinema. Yeşim Ustaoglu is one of the female directors who started to make films in this period and continued to make them at intervals over time.

Turkish cinema began to revive in the mid-90s. Increasing film production, new directors making their first films, and increasing cinematic audiences, which had started to decline after the 1970s, made it possible to call this period *new*. Atam (2011) lists the founding directors of this period, which he calls New Turkish Cinema, as Zeki Demirkubuz, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Derviş Zaim, and Yeşim Ustaoglu. The fact that only one of these directors, who started making films in this period and continues to make films today, who have received many national and international awards, and who try to make their productions by staying away from commercial cinema, is a woman can be considered as a continuation of the gender inequality that existed in the field of cinema in previous periods. This situation began to change in the first 20 years of the 2000s. Turkish women directors living in Turkey and other countries are involved in the production in this field by making their first films and continuing to make films. Yeşim Ustaoglu, who started making films in the early years of this change that began in the 90s, continues to make films. Ustaoglu has also achieved many national and international successes with her films. As a result, it can be said that Ustaoglu is an important and prominent female Turkish film director. Therefore, it is important to understand the ideological content of her films.

This study aims to determine how ideology takes place in the narratives in Yeşim Ustaoglu's films and which political ideologies are associated with these narratives. The study method is designed to be qualitative narrative analysis. The choice of a qualitative design for the study is mainly due to the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative designs. According to Neuman (2006), while the quantitative approach aims to measure objective facts, qualitative designs construct social realities and cultural meanings. According to Punch (2014), the most critical impact of qualitative studies on scientific research has been emphasizing the *political* nature of social research. The method

of this study, which adopts a qualitative approach, is narrative analysis. According to Erdoğan (2012), narrative analysis is the analysis of a narrative by considering its features such as the narrator, the structure and the characters of the narrative, conflicts and plot, the narrative codes, the scenario and metaphors, genre or form. In this study, five films written and directed by Yeşim Ustaoglu, *Journey to the Sun* (1999), *Waiting for the Clouds* (2004), *Pandora's Box* (2008), *Somewhere in Between* (2012) and *Clair Obscur* (2016) are analyzed primarily in terms of their main conflicts. The concepts of nation and gender that emerge from this analysis are explained in the literature section of the study, along with the political ideologies that encompass these concepts. The films' conflicts, characters and plots are analyzed in the context of these concepts and political ideologies in the findings section.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Nationalism as a political ideology and the concept of nation

The definition of nationalism is "the understanding of prioritizing the interests of the nation and its country above everything else in material and spiritual terms" (Turkish Language Association [TLA], 2024). This political ideology accepts that the nation and the state are absolute and fundamental values, and they are based on the unity of language, history, and culture (Cevizci, 1999).

According to Baradat (2012), nationalism is the theory of the nation-state and has been very influential in the modern world. After the emergence of the nation-state, the idea of nationalism developed for its ideological legitimization. Baradat states that the ideological components of nationalism, such as "its worldview, its vision of a better life, and its perception of the actions necessary to improve society," are implicit, unlike other political ideologies. On the one hand, nationalism, which focuses on a nation and expects it to be served by the state, can be unifying by placing other identities, values, and interests, other than those belonging to the nation, in a secondary place. In this case, the interests of the state and society coincide with the nation's interests. Differences such as social class, religious belief, and gender are accepted as long as they are compatible with national interests, while those that are not, are suppressed. On the other hand, nationalism can also be exclusionary by expecting individuals to be loyal only to the nation-state and to prioritize their national interests over the interests of other national groups.

Bloor (2010) defines four different types of nationalism based on the relationship between nationalism and four ideological approaches. These are liberal nationalism, conservative nationalism, socialist nationalism, and far-right nationalism. Similar to Bloor, Heywood (2019) analyzes the transformations of nationalism as a result of its relationship with other ideologies under four headings. These are liberal nationalism, conservative nationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, and expansionist nationalism.

Far-right nationalism shares similarities with fascism, according to Bloor (2010), who states that authoritarian ideologies are closely related to nationalism. Bloor notes that liberal, conservative, and socialist types of nationalism are inclusive, while far-right nationalism is exclusive. Based on racism, far-right nationalism seeks to unite the nation through blood and descent. Heywood (2019), who defines this type of nationalism as expansionist nationalism, compares this approach to liberal nationalism. Accordingly, while liberal nationalism supports the right of nations to self-determination, expansionist nationalism is based on national chauvinism. In contrast to liberal nationalism, which can be defined as inclusive, voluntary, rational, and progressive; expansionist nationalism is exclusionary and supports the idea of organic society, reactionary, emotional, and instinctive.

The concept of nation, which is at the center of the nationalist political ideology, can be defined as "A society formed by individuals with a unity of culture. A society that forms a state. A community of citizens living together in a country (Timuçin, 2004)". Accordingly, the nation differs from the state,

which is an administrative apparatus, in that it reveals a unity of culture. When the concept is discussed in the context of political ideologies, it is closely related to ethnicity and race. Ethnicity is defined as "...a term that describes people who believe or are seen by others, as having common characteristics that distinguish them from other collective structures in a society to which they belong and within which they exhibit distinctive cultural behaviors... (Marshall, 1999)". According to Williams (2012), while the word was used in the sense of pagan or "a person who does not belong to the same religion" until the 19th century, the meaning of "racial characteristic" overtook the others during this period. Marshall (1999) notes that the term ethnicity exists in contrast to race. Accordingly, members of an ethnic group may share other cultural characteristics, such as religion, language, occupation, or political views, in addition to being defined by their racial characteristics. The dictionary definition of race is "A group of people with common physical and physiological characteristics inherited through heredity (TLA, 2024)". The concept of race is associated with political attitudes such as racial discrimination (unequal treatment of a group simply because it has physical or other characteristics of a particular race at the societal level) and racism (a belief system...that supports racial discrimination by associating the characteristics that are the subject of racial discrimination with negatively valued social, psychological, or physical characteristics) (Marshall, 1999).

Nation is a key concept for the nationalist political ideology, which is based on the idea that "the central principle of political organization is the nation (Heywood, 2019)". While this concept can be inclusive within a nationalism approaching liberalism when it is addressed with the concept of citizen, it can be exclusionary when it is addressed with the concepts of "ethnicity and race" within a nationalism approaching fascism.

## **2.2. Feminism as a political ideology and the concept of gender**

Feminism is defined as "a movement of thought aimed at increasing women's rights in society, raising them to the level of men's rights, and ensuring equality (TLA, 2024)". As a political term, according to Heywood (2019), feminism is an invention of the 20th century and is considered in relation to efforts to improve the role of women in society. Sargent (2009) argues that feminism is a well-established ideology that focuses on specific core issues but also has variables that move in different directions. Focusing on the position of women in society and the roles they play, feminists agree on the need to change the patriarchal system and male domination that affects all social institutions.

Mitchell and Oakley (1998) define the focus of feminism as the social difference between women and men, and the meaning, causes, and consequences of this difference. Thus, in contrast to the ideological approach that asserts that there is a biological opposition between the sexes that determines social life, feminism argues that social relations shape the conflict between women and men. At the same time, this conflict between men and women is not static like a biological opposition; it interacts with its surroundings, changes and transforms them, and influences history and social change. According to them, while feminism deals with this social conflict based on gender, it also aims to develop an understanding of it. This requires a re-examination of ideology, art, sociology, and history. In this way, the feminist approach aims not only to develop a new understanding of the social system but also to change the system of thought that underlies the questioning that is done in developing this new understanding.

According to Heywood (2019), the four main themes that feminism as a political ideology addresses are *redefining the political*, *patriarchy*, *sex and gender*, and *equality and difference*. Heywood notes that in traditional approaches, the *political* is located outside of private life and in public life. Accordingly, politics is considered an activity in political parties, government institutions, and the public sphere where public debates occur. Personal relationships and family life, which are seen as

part of the private sphere, are seen and positioned outside of politics. Feminist thought, on the other hand, maintains that politics is an activity that takes place within all social groups and is not limited to government or other public institutions. According to this idea, politics exists wherever and whenever there is social conflict (Heywood, 2017).

The definition of *patriarchy* is “The order that takes the father as the basis of lineage and attributes children in the family to the paternal line; paternalism (TLA, 2024)”. In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy refers to the domination and oppression of women by men in society. Through social institutions such as the family, state, economy, culture, and language; material and symbolic resources in areas such as power, income, welfare, etc. are unequally distributed between men and women (Edgar, 2003). Although degrees of oppression vary across cultures and time, feminists believe men dominate women in all societies (Heywood, 2019). Similarly, Bloor (2010) defines the main elements of feminism as “criticism of patriarchy” and “the goal of liberating women and creating a better society”.

Discussions about the definition of *sex and gender* are other defining elements of feminism. The definition of sex is “a feature of creation that gives the individual a distinct role in reproduction and distinguishes between male and female (TLA, 2024)”. The concept of gender is not included in the Turkish dictionary. By drawing a clear line between the concepts of sex and gender, feminists oppose the idea that there are inevitable consequences of biology. The concept of sex, which refers to the biological differences between men and women, points to natural and unchangeable differences. Gender, on the other hand, is a cultural concept that refers to the different roles that society assigns to men and women. According to feminist thought, gender differences are imposed on people through contrasting stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Patriarchal approaches ignore the differences between sex and gender and assume that social distinctions between men and women are based on biological and anatomical differences. Feminism critiques this assumption, arguing that gender differences are politically and socially constructed. The concepts of *equality and difference* are also key elements in feminist debates. Feminist approaches to the overthrow of patriarchy and the end of sexist oppression generally demand that women be equal to men. Some feminist approaches, on the other hand, tend toward the idea of difference rather than equality. According to these approaches, women’s differences rather than equality should define feminist thought (Heywood, 2019).

According to Baradat and Phillips (2017), feminist thought, which has produced a dynamic and complex ideology, aims to end gender inequality while at the same time struggles against racial, ethnic, and other forms of inequality. In doing so, feminism seeks to liberate women from the artificial constraints that have historically been placed upon them and to empower them to take responsibility for their personal, professional, and political destinies.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of gender, which is central to the feminist political ideology, is not included in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Association. Cevizci (1999) defines the concept as “the parallel but socio-culturally unequal division between masculinity and femininity, where sex corresponds to the biological division between male and female”. Ann Oakley, who introduced the concept of gender into the sociological literature (Marshall, 1999), defines sex as a word that refers to the biological differences between men and women, such as visible differences in sexual organs and differences in reproductive function. Gender, on the other hand, is a cultural issue; masculinity and femininity are socially, not biologically, constructed (Oakley, 1985).

Gender is a key concept in the feminist political ideology. The social differences between men and women are discussed through the concept of gender within this political ideology. Similarly, the social and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity are discussed in relation to the concept of gender. Unlike other political ideologies and social movements, feminism emphasizes the gender hierarchy

(Özgün, 2014). Accordingly, in the social structure divided into two genders, the hierarchical functions that develop in relation to this division determine biological differentiation. Thus, in the social structure, cultural impositions are formed for women that will make them *social women*, while for men that will make them *social men* (Mathiue, 2015). Gender roles refer to “behavioral patterns that society expects of women and men”, and these roles are shaped by male-dominated, patriarchal systems and social and cultural inequalities between men and women (Gülseven, 2017). Gender roles indicate how men and women should behave, and the different roles society expects them to play (Marshall, 1999). These expectations also relate to the masculine and feminine values accepted in male-dominated societies. In general, “being strong and smart, being active, not avoiding conflict, being able to use violence, having competitive skills and a passion for success, having technical knowledge and expertise, having a desire to take risks and pursue adventure, and having a desire for heroism” are considered masculine values, while “emotionality, passivity, peacefulness, being understanding and compassionate, seeking guarantees and assurances rather than adventure, giving importance to reconciliation and cooperation” are considered feminine values (Sancar, 2013). Similarly, traits such as “reason, rational thinking skills, ability to risk, competition and make the right decision” are considered masculine values specific to men, while traits such as “compassion, making sacrifices for others, being compliant and obedient” are considered feminine values specific to women (Gülseven, 2017).

Sancar (2012) argues that in modern capitalist societies and in Turkey, many areas are characterized by gender differences and in this context, forms of labor are also gendered. Accordingly, unpaid domestic labor in the family is based on women’s sacrificial and loving work. Women’s labor is rewarded with “marriage, the husband’s responsibility to provide for the family and emotional appreciation”, while men’s professional careers in the public sphere are rewarded with “money, an independent family life, social tolerance and privilege”. Devreux (2015) summarizes this division of roles as the masculine role of the father, who “provides the family’s income and is responsible for establishing its ties with society”, and the feminine role of the wife-mother, who “devotes herself to domestic life and caring for people and fulfills her affective function within the family”.

Not only women but also men are affected by patriarchal social norms. According to Sancar (2013), in male-dominated societies, men who have difficulties in adopting dominant masculinity values such as “being strong, succeeding, solving problems through force rather than persuasion, acting according to their interests rather than their feelings, institutionalizing relationships based on competition and hierarchy, caring about acting independently, knowing how to manage others”, men who do not have a career, who are unemployed and poor, are considered powerless men and have no right to enter the community of men in that society.

### 3. Findings

Yeşim Ustaoglu’s films *Pandora’s Box*, *Somewhere in Between*, and *Clair Obscur* are analyzed in this study with the concept of gender. This is because the main conflicts of the films are based on gender relations. Gender relations determine the conflicts in *Pandora’s Box*. Nusret, the mother of three siblings, was abandoned by her husband when her children were young and had to raise them as a single woman. This situation, created by the man’s insensitivity and indifference, which determines the film’s story, caused the woman to be forced by circumstances to “devote herself to domestic life and her children”, resulting in the children developing problematic relationships with their mother and their environment. Nesrin, the eldest child, is married and has a college-aged son. However, Nesrin behaves as if her son, Murat, is a small child and tries to be aware of his every move and control his every behavior. Her husband, Faruk, asks her to give their son space, but Nesrin does not listen to him. Nusret believes that her daughter’s behavior stems from her dysfunctional family. She tells her, “I had

a hard time giving birth to you, and you clung to me. You want everyone to cling to you". She expresses that Nesrin's attitude toward her own family is wrong.

Nesrin, who has problems in her marriage, cannot be sexually intimate with her husband Faruk. On the other hand, she tries to control her son Murat's life through her role as a mother. However, this attitude pushes Murat further away from his family. Dedicated to her domestic life, Nesrin has no interest in anything other than her home and family. This makes Nesrin obsessed with directing and controlling the members of her family. In addition to her son Murat, she feels that she has the right to interfere in her siblings' lives. In an argument with her sister, her brother Mehmet says, "You give orders to everyone. Murat, your husband, me, everyone".

The middle sister, Güzin, is in love with a married man. The man she is with does not pay enough emotional and physical attention to Güzin, neglects her, and does not care about her. Despite this, Güzin continues the relationship and is criticized by her siblings. Güzin's experience can be seen as an emotional and psychological violence in which she does not receive love and sympathy. The younger brother Mehmet, on the other hand, has problems with the gender roles imposed on him as a man. Mehmet who does not fulfill society's expectations of men, who does not strive to be a strong, successful man with a job and a career, who has minimal relationships with his environment and tries to live by satisfying his basic needs, is criticized by his siblings for this reason. Güzin gets angry with Mehmet while they are talking about another topic and says, "You are not even able to pay your own rent. Don't preach to me". Güzin belittles her brother. Nesrin, who is uncomfortable with her son Murat spending time with her brother Mehmet and becoming like him, answers Mehmet's question, "Aren't you afraid that Murat will become like me?" with "Yes. It is better for me to die than to see Murat become a parasite like you". Nesrin clearly states that she does not like her brother Mehmet's social status and does not want her son to be a man like him.

Gender relations, extramarital affairs, and the concept of honor determine the conflicts in *Somewhere in Between*. Zehra and Olgun work at the same place. Olgun likes Zehra. However, the two young people have different plans for the future. Olgun dreams of a life considered appropriate for a man in his society. He wants to be rich and gain prestige, buy a house and a nice car, live with his mother, marry a suitable woman, and make her happy by fulfilling all her needs. Zehra, on the other hand, thinks differently. Instead of marrying a suitable man, working for her home and family, and raising children; she wants to save money, leave her home and life, and travel the world. Olgun belittles these dreams of hers. "Where are you going to go on your own as a woman?" he says, showing that in the society they live in, it does not seem appropriate or possible for a woman to live the life she wants on her own. Zehra distances herself from Olgun because of this disagreement. Through her friend Derya, Zehra meets Mahur. Mahur, a truck driver, lives his life on the road. A relationship develops between Zehra and Mahur almost without speaking. They begin to be together sexually. For Zehra, Mahur is the person who will take her away from her place and her life. In a moment they are together sexually, Zehra says to Mahur, "Take me with you". While talking with Derya about her relationship with Mahur, she says, "He loves me too. We will go away from here. Far away". She explains the meaning of her relationship with Mahur.

After Mahur leaves without saying anything, Zehra learns that she is pregnant. She tries to hide it because she had an extramarital affair and got pregnant. Instead of going to the hospital, she and Derya go to a woman who works as a midwife in her house. Zehra tries to have an abortion but fails because it is too late. Derya has gone through something similar in the past. She had an extramarital affair and gave birth to a child. When the father of the child abandoned her, she thought that she could not raise her child as a single, lonely, and unmarried woman and gave the child up for adoption. In the society they live in, it is unimaginable for them to be a single mother raising an illegitimate child alone. They never discuss such a possibility. Derya tells Zehra that she too will have to give her child up for

adoption. While Zehra is in this situation, Olgun proposes to her. When Zehra tells him that she is pregnant, he becomes furious. It is unacceptable to Olgun that the woman he wants to marry is having an extramarital affair and is pregnant as a result. Since Derya introduced Mahur to Zehra, he thinks Derya is responsible for what happened. He attacks her and says, "Come here, you bitch. You made that girl a whore". Olgun goes on a rampage and attacks the people around him and is caught and imprisoned. When he goes to prison, Zehra gets depressed and stays at home. She tries to make Olgun forgive her by writing letters to him. She does not take care of herself and miscarries her child when her body becomes weak. The extramarital affair and subsequent pregnancy are also unacceptable to Zehra. In a conversation with a psychiatrist at the hospital, she says that she cannot remember what she has gone through and accepts that what she has done is wrong in terms of the concept of honor, saying, "I only know that I am dirty". In the beginning, Zehra distances herself from Olgun because her dreams for the future do not match his. In the end, due to the difficulties and social sanctions she encounters in trying to live the life she wants, she finds the only salvation in marrying Olgun.

Domestic violence against women and forced marriages at a young age are the conflicts in the film *Clair Obscur*. At the age of 13, Elmas is forced by her father to marry a much older man. At this age, she became a victim of domestic violence, such as inadequate physical and emotional attention within her own family, lack of love, sympathy, and understanding, and exposure to emotional and psychological violence. These elements of violence continue to be present in Elmas' life in the family into which she was forcibly married. She is forced to serve her mother-in-law against her will. She does the housework and takes care of her sick mother-in-law. In addition to neglect and emotional and psychological violence, Elmas is also subjected to sexual violence by her husband, who forces her to have intercourse with him. Her husband, who believes that Elmas is too young to go shopping alone, often forces her to have sexual intercourse. Şehnaz, who is in a different socioeconomic status than Elmas, realizes the problems between her and her husband after she moves to another district for work. She tries to communicate with her husband but is met with insufficient physical and emotional attention. Although her husband ejaculates during sexual intercourse and has orgasm, Şehnaz cannot achieve sexual satisfaction. But her husband doesn't care that she's not satisfied. She does not receive any sympathy or understanding in this regard. When she tries to move away from her husband and break up with him, she first encounters humiliation, belittlement, and threats. Later, the distress between them escalates and Şehnaz is subjected to physical violence through beatings and is also held against her will.

Ustaoglu's films *Journey to the Sun* and *Waiting for the Clouds* are analyzed in this study with the concept of nation. This is because the main conflicts of the films are based on the nationalities of the main characters. The problems and tensions between Kurds and Turks in Turkey constitute the conflicts in the film *Journey to the Sun*. In one of the first scenes of the film, the crowd that takes to the streets after the victory of the Turkish national soccer team attacks the car and its driver by asking, "Are you Kurd?" on the pretext that a car does not honk its horn. They accuse the person, who they think is not happy about the national team's victory, of being Kurdish. In the following scenes, Mehmet is mistaken for the owner of the gun found in the public transportation vehicle he is riding in and is arrested because of a misunderstanding. Although he has nothing to do with any crime or the weapon found, he is mistreated as a terrorism suspect simply because he physically resembles Kurds. He is detained for a long time and tortured. Although he is not guilty of any crime, his ordeal continued after his release. The room he shared with three others was marked with a red cross on the door by unknown persons. Because of this mark, he is forced to leave his home. He sees the same markings when he goes to bury his friend Berzan in the town where he lives. These markings are a sign of discrimination against Kurds, who are believed to be linked to terrorism. Mehmet, who is not Kurdish and has no connection to terrorism, still faces many negative situations because of his skin color and



false accusations. He is fired from his job and struggles to find another one. When he sets out to bury Berzan, he is mistreated by the soldiers simply because he looks different. What Mehmet encounters as he approaches Berzan's hometown; military roadblocks, surveillance zones, and tanks passing through the city center are clear indicators of the oppression being experienced.

The main conflict in *Waiting for the Clouds* stems from the troubles Ayşe experiences after her brother Niko leaves her. Ayşe's real name is Eleni, but she has to hide her real name. The events that Ayşe experienced as a young child have affected her entire life. During World War I, the Ottoman government expelled the Greek population, considered dangerous in areas of strategic military importance. Government deported them to the interior of Anatolia, which, according to the narration in the film, led to the deaths of many Greek citizens. Ayşe also lost many members of her family during this Greek deportation. Her father was shot in the mountains. Her mother and sister died on the road. The Ottoman government considered its own citizens, the Greeks, to be a different nation and dangerous because of their ethnic and cultural differences. In deporting the Greeks, they removed not only young adult men who could fight against them but also women and children from their homes. During this expulsion, some of the Greek citizens lost their lives due to cold, hunger, and attacks. When Ayşe talks about her past, she says, "Why did they do this, Niko? They promised us that we would only walk for a few days. Then we would go back. What happened then? We walked all the way to Mersin and buried our dead in the snow". Of his family, only his brother Niko and himself survived. A Turk named Süleyman took them into his house. But Niko did not want to stay there and ran away. Ayşe did not dare to follow him. She experiences the pain and regret of this situation for the rest of her life. Niko and Ayşe, who were exiled and lost their families because they were seen as a different nation that could be hostile, were also separated from each other. The remorse of this separation affects Ayşe's whole life. After what happened to her, she lives without roots and identity, forgetting who she is.

Tanasis, who was deported at the same time as Ayşe, escaped to Russia as a young boy with other Greek orphans, thanks to a Turk named Muharrem. After going to Greece, he was sent back to Russia because of his political beliefs. Before returning to Greece, where he is readmitted due to a change of government, Tanasis visits the country from which he was "first expelled", where he talks to Muharrem and meets Ayşe. Tanasis, who had to flee Anatolia because of the deportation, has never forgotten the land of his birth, his first home. The ethnic discrimination that Ayşe and Tanasis experienced in the early 1900s continues similarly in the same land but in a different country. After it is discovered that Ayşe is a *giaour* of Greek origin, the two men argue with Muharrem in the tavern and go to Ayşe's house to harass and harm her. Ayşe's neighbors, who know Ayşe as a Turkish woman, also move away from Ayşe after learning that she is a *giaour*.

In Yeşim Ustaoglu's films *Journey to the Sun* and *Waiting for the Clouds*, there are narratives related to the concept of gender in addition to the concept of nation. Problems related to gender relations are the secondary conflicts of the films. In *Journey to the Sun*, Mehmet is a man who is not respected in the society in which he lives. His girlfriend's boss looks down on him, and the police think they can push and shove him around as they please. Mehmet, who does not conform to social norms, is not accepted by his girlfriend's family. Poor and unemployed, Mehmet is not a suitable and acceptable candidate for a husband. In this context, Mehmet, who does not meet society's expectations of what a man should be, faces a major secondary conflict besides the central conflict. In *Waiting for the Clouds*, Ayşe fulfills what society expects of her as a woman in the first part of the film. She gets along well with people around her, cares for her sister, and looks after the neighborhood children. However, she stops these behaviors in the later scenes of the film. She isolates herself from those around her. She does not live up to people's expectations. This causes her to receive negative reactions from people. In both films, when the characters are unable or unwilling to fulfill the gender roles assigned to them,

they are ostracized by society and forced to engage in other conflicts that affect their lives in addition to the main conflicts.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In *Pandora's Box*, a feminist narrative is constructed that criticizes the problems experienced by individuals in a family regarding the established gender roles in society, such as “woman”, “man”, “mother”, “father”, and the fact that individuals are forced to assume these roles, that these roles are internalized and become an imposition, or that they cause exclusion if they are not accepted. In *Somewhere in Between*, there is a narrative that criticizes the social status and duties of men and women, the restriction of women’s sexual freedom and the obstacles that prevent them from living the life they want as individuals through gender relations and the concept of honor in Turkey. In *Clair Obscur*, a feminist narrative is constructed that criticizes the domestic violence and forced marriages at a young age that women are subjected to through gender relations in Turkey. The feminist political ideology aims to “liberate women” and free them from “patriarchal oppression” based on the idea that “men dominate women in all societies, although degrees of oppression vary across cultures and time” (Heywood, 2019).

In these films, whose main conflicts are based on gender relations, the problems experienced by Nusret, Nesrin, Güzin, Mehmet and Murat in *Pandora's Box*; the results of Zehra’s efforts to live a different life from the one imposed on her in *Somewhere in Between*; the problems experienced by Elmas and Şehnaz in *Clair Obscur*, the things they are forced to do against their will, all kinds of domestic violence they are exposed to and their reactions to this violence draw parallels with the criticism brought forth by feminism.

The film *Journey to the Sun* constructs a narrative that critiques ethnic, exclusionary, and far-right nationalisms. Mehmet, who is non-Kurdish, born and raised in Izmir, is mistaken for a Kurd and he is discriminated simply because he is dark-skinned. In the plot, which begins with a misunderstanding, things Mehmet goes through can be explained by the types of nationalism which criticized by the director.

In *Waiting for the Clouds*, as in *Journey to the Sun*, a narrative is established that criticizes ethnic and exclusionary nationalisms. Through the characters of Ayşe and Tanasis, the film deals with the exclusion of Greek citizens due to their ethnic and cultural differences and the difficulties they experience in two different periods in Anatolia, sixty years apart. The reasons for the difficulties experienced by Ayşe and her family, and similarly by Tanasis, and the behaviors they are subjected to are related to the same types of nationalism which are criticized.

In two films (*Journey to the Sun*, *Waiting for the Clouds*) the political ideology far-right nationalism is criticized. The other three films in the director’s filmography (*Pandora's Box*, *Somewhere in Between*, *Clair Obscur*) contain narratives that support the feminist political ideology. Accordingly, feminism is the only political ideology supported in the narratives in the director’s films. When the director’s filmography is evaluated as a whole, and her other two films are re-examined considering these results, character developments and scenes that support the critiques brought forth by feminist political ideology are found. In the first part of *Waiting for the Clouds*, the main character Ayşe is accepted by her society because she possesses values attributed to women, such as “sensuality, compassion, sacrifice for others, compliance and obedience”. However, when Ayşe begins to behave differently in the later parts of the film, when she distances herself from people and becomes uncomfortable and reacts to their behavior, the people around her begin to distance themselves from her and gossip about her. If these changes are read as a feminist critique, Ayşe is accepted when she behaves according to social norms but is ostracized when she does not do what is expected of her as

a woman. In *Journey to the Sun*, Mehmet is not considered a suitable husband by his girlfriend's family and her boss. The main reason for this is that he does not have the qualities expected by the male-dominated structure of the society in which he lives. According to Connell (1987; 2005), for a man to gain status and respectability in a society, he must be "young, urban, white, heterosexual, and have a full-time job". In this context, unemployed, poor, dark-skinned Mehmet, who comes to the city from a small town, is an element excluded from the dominant masculinity in society. These narratives in *Journey to the Sun* and *Waiting for the Clouds* fall under the scope of the criticisms brought forth by feminism. All Ustaoglu's films contain narratives that support the feminist political ideology. While in some films these narratives determine the main conflicts, in others they are included in the plot as secondary conflicts.

The type of nationalism criticized in Ustaoglu's films is far-right nationalism, which is exclusionary and closer to fascism. It is possible to establish a connection between the political ideologies supported and criticized in the director's films. As stated in the literature, feminism, which aims to end gender inequality, also struggles against racial, ethnic, and other forms of inequality (Baradat & Phillips, 2017). For this context, the director constructs narratives that critique gender inequality, and the director's films also include narratives that criticize types of nationalism that are exclusionary and based on the idea of inequality between nations, which can be considered as an indicator of ideological consistency.

#### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

#### **Authors contribution statement**

The contribution of the 1st author to the article is 100%.

#### **Competing interest**

The author declares no competing interests.

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