

ON BOREDOM IN *WINTER SLEEP*

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ABSTRACT: In this work, we focus on the film *Winter Sleep* (2014) by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose works place special emphasis on various aspects of boredom. As one of the main figures in slow cinema, Ceylan, in this influential work of art, enable us to explore boredom through three main characters: Aydın (Haluk Bilginer), Nihal (Melisa Sözen) and Necla (Demet Akbağ). By taking a closer look at the film, we analyze both symbolism and the behavioral side of boredom as well as how the main characters, in our view, experience and represent distinct types of boredom. In this framework, we examine the issue of boredom and, sometimes, related despair as a result of social change. At the same time, this work partly concentrates on aspects of the socio-cultural structure of Turkey via the analysis of the main characters' suffering.

Keywords: Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *Winter Sleep*, boredom, philosophy of boredom, Turkish cinema, modernization in Turkey, sociology of film, slow cinema

KIŞ UYKUSU'NDA SIKINTI ÜZERİNE

ÖZ: Bu çalışmada, Nuri Bilge Ceylan'ın *Kış Uykusu* (2014) adlı filmini, sanatçının eserlerine genel olarak yansıyan sıkıntı temasına odaklanarak ele alıyoruz. Türkiye'de yavaş sinema türünün önemli örneklerinin yaratıcısı olan Ceylan'ın, *Kış Uykusu* adlı etkileyici çalışmasında sıkıntı temasını üç ana karakter üzerinden irdelediğini öne sürüyoruz: Aydın (Haluk Bilginer), Nihal (Melisa Sözen) and Necla (Demet Akbağ). Filmin bu çerçevede gerçekleştirilen detaylı bir analizi yoluyla, sıkıntı temasının sembolik ve davranışsal düzeyde nasıl ele alındığını inceliyor; aynı zamanda söz konusu ana karakterlerin sıkıntıyı nasıl deneyimlediklerini ve farklı sıkıntı türlerinden hangilerini sembolize ettiklerini tartışıyoruz. Bu çerçevede filme yansıyan sıkıntıyı - ve zaman zaman sıkıntıya eşlik eden çaresizlik duygusunu- toplumsal değişme kavramıyla olan ilişkisi çerçevesinde analiz ediyoruz. Bu minvalde, çalışmamızda filmin ana karakterlerince deneyimlenen sıkıntı türlerini, Türkiye'nin sosyo-kültürel arka planı çerçevesinde değerlendiriyoruz.

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Introduction

In a world where boredom is mostly seen as a sensation one should definitely and rapidly get rid of, examining boredom may not seem so wise. However, although many would like to believe the opposite, we think neither art nor life can be thought separately from boredom. In Turkey, a director called Nuri Bilge Ceylan has shown that a movie can be shot in a way that deliberately underlines the boredom itself rather than hiding it —just opposite to the ones who aims to relieve the audience of boredom. In this work, we would like to shed light on one of Ceylan’s works which —we believe— reflects the boredom most, namely, the film *Winter Sleep*.

Due to the fact that a work of art cannot be understood without understanding its creator, it should be beneficial to begin with a brief introduction to the director of *Winter Sleep*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Ceylan, who was born in 1959 in İstanbul, spent his early childhood in a small province along the small coast of Çanakkale in Turkey. The effect of his bond with the countryside can clearly be seen in his films such as *The Small Town* (1998), *Clouds of May* (2000), *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) and *Winter Sleep* (2014). In one of his interviews, he states that “boredom [as the main theme in his work] is a feeling intrinsic to the Turkish provincial lifestyle”, and his bond with this lifestyle has never disappeared from his work.¹

According to Giovanni Scognamillo, Nuri Bilge Ceylan has brought a sense of realism to Turkish cinema with his improvisational and occasionally documentarian style.² His films “display a great lack of narrative action and an abundance of dead time.... Ordinary lives of ordinary people, who are played by non-professional actors, are the focus of his films and are often depicted in stillness through a contemplation of their everyday situations and empty moments.”³ Ceylan has been considered as one of the main figures in Turkish film-making, who is identified with slow cinema, which can be accepted as a recent phenomenon and which “shares its discursive genesis with a much larger socio-cultural movement whose aim is to rescue extended temporal structures from accelerated tempo of late capitalism” like the other

¹ Orhan Emre Çağlayan, *Screening Boredom: The History and Aesthetics of Slow Cinema*, University of Kent, Ph.D. thesis, Kent, 2014, p.205.

² Giovanni Scognamillo cited in Fırat Sayıcı, 2011. *1990 Sonrası Türk Sinemasında Gerçekçilik*. [Realism in Turkish Cinema after 1990]. Konya Selçuk University, MA thesis, Konya, 2011, p.82.

³ Çağlayan, 2014, p.171.

movements such as ‘slow cities’, ‘slow media’ or ‘slow food’.⁴ Among Ceylan’s main themes are life in rural areas (the daily routine of ‘taşra’), non-communication, loneliness, hypocrisy and alienation, which boredom especially playing an important role in his work.

As Bourdieu says, “the role of social studies is to highlight the social conditions of a piece of art”.⁵ Thus, considering the period and location Ceylan composed his works, we can acknowledge the influence of modernity in his thematic choices. As Lowenstein says, “perhaps, no single term in film studies has inspired as much research and debate as in recent years as the word ‘modernity’”.⁶ It is impossible to scrutinize boredom apart from modernity and Ceylan’s special focus on the topic of boredom seems to have a subtle relationship with the modernization process Turkey is still passing through. Actually, boredom can be seen as ‘a resistance to modernity’: “because it is in essence a refusal of attention; its stillness and affective lethargy contradicts the progressiveness and efficiency of modernity”.⁷ However like Benjamin, we also see boredom “not simply as crucially related to modernity but as perhaps the quintessential experience of modern life”.⁸

It should also be underlined that the concept of boredom is strongly related to the issue of meaning. When we say we are bored, this not only means that we cannot find anything to do, but also signals that we cannot find anything meaningful to do.⁹ Thus, we can say that “boredom emotionally registers an absence of meaning and leads the actor in question towards meaning”.¹⁰ At this point, we think it’s important to regard boredom as a concept not only related to an individualistic issue but also an issue intertwined with social conditions. As Gardiner says, “although often dismissed as trivial, boredom can be understood as a touchstone through which we can grasp much wider anxieties, socio-cultural changes and

⁴ Tiago De Luca, Nuno Barradas Jorge George, “Introduction: From Slow Cinema to Slow Cinemas,” in eds. Tiago De Luca, Nuno Barradas Jorge George, *Slow Cinema*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2016, p.3.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, cited in Bülent Diken, Carsten Bagge Laustsen, *Filmlerle Sosyoloji. [Sociology Through the Projector]*. trans. Ertekin. S., Metis, İstanbul, 2014, p. 26.

⁶ Adam Lowenstein, “Cinema, Benjamin, and the Allegorical Representation of September 11,” *Critical Quarterly*, 45: 1-2, 2003, p. 73.

⁷ Çağlayan, 2017, p. 210.

⁸ Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom,” *Critical Quarterly*, 45: 1-2, 2003, p. 168.

⁹ Lesley Kenny, *Boredom Escapes Us: A Cultural Collage in Eleven Storeys*, University of Toronto, PhD. Thesis, Toronto, 2009, p. 1.

¹⁰ Jack M. Barbalet, “Boredom and Social Meaning,” *British Journal of Sociology*, 50: 4, 1999, p. 631.

subjective crises that are intrinsic to our experience of modernity".¹¹ We will examine this issue while addressing the positions of certain characters in the film.

It can be said that "[a]mong Ceylan's films, *Winter Sleep* can be regarded as the movie, in which conflicts are most visible, contradictions and darkness of human nature are most emerge".¹² The film progresses through three main characters and through their relationships with one another. In this work, we will focus on three facets of boredom that these three characters of the film suffer from. It is worth stating here that we cannot sterilize each character and examine the issue accordingly; thus, character analysis, although attempted on the basis of characters being distinct from one another, may sometimes intersect.

In the first section of this work, we simply try to highlight some points of the story, while, in the second section, we focus on three main characters and their state of mind in approaching boredom.

1. The story

It seems beneficial to take a brief look at the story of the film before engaging with the boredom issue through the characters. To start with, Aydın, whose name means 'intellectual' in English, is the central character around whom the story revolves. He is a man who mostly prefers to engage in intellectual pursuits, such as writing for a local newspaper or continuously talking about his plans to write a book, which he never begins to do. His employee, Hidayet, takes care of the business and plays a mediation role in his relationships with locals, including collecting rents from tenants, and shopping. His wife, Nihal, who is somewhat younger than Aydın, has a very distant relationship with him and spends most of her time doing charity work. As for the third main character, Necla, her distinguishing point is that she moves in to Aydın and Nihal's shared property, having left İstanbul after a sad divorce. Although it seems that she does not work, it can be discerned from the story that she was a translator beforehand, but she now prefers to do nothing. She mostly appears on screen in Aydın's study and seems to enjoy criticizing Aydın's columns and more specifically his attitude towards life. After a very long and tense dialogue with Aydın in the second half of the film, she disappears.

¹¹ Michael E. Gardiner, "Henri Lefebvre and the 'Sociology of Boredom,'" *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29: 2, 2012, p. 37.

¹² Pelin Erdal Aytekin, "Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sinemasının Anlatısal Dönüşümü: Fotografik Anlatımdan, Öyküsel Anlatıma," [Narrative Transformation of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema: From Photographic Narrative to Storytelling Narrative.] *Selçuk İletişim*. 9: 1, 2015, p. 262.



*Image.1. Cappadocia, Turkey*¹³

The environment that Nuri Bilge Ceylan chooses for the film is quite interesting, too. The film was shot in Cappadocia, Nevşehir, Turkey, where world-famous fairy chimneys and cave houses exist.

These natural formations increase the touristic interest in the area, and the hotel Aydın runs profit from such potentiality of the region. However, the area is rural and mid-Anatolian culture is practiced by the locals. Aydın, as an intellectual thrown into some kind of exile, engages with the tourists in order to feed his craving for mental stimuli which he only acquires in small amounts; not that he cannot acquire more, he just seems not to. In such an environment where almost nothing interesting happens, the only agenda that creates tension is a conflict with a tenant who cannot pay the rent and is referred to the bailiffs by Hidayet. Although Aydın always prefers not to have anything to do with the locals, this situation escalades when a small rock is thrown to a car in which both Aydın and Hidayet are travelling. It is later discovered that the rock was thrown by the young son of the tenant who is referred to bailiffs and beaten up by police officers on the grounds that he objected to his furniture being taken. During the film, Aydın, as well as Nihal indirectly, has to deal with the consequences of this event, while the miscommunication between the intellectual landlord and local figures comes to light. At the end of the film, Aydın's wife, Nihal, as a benefactor, wants to settle the matter (probably to ease her conscience) by giving a significant

¹³ All images in this article are taken from the official website of Nuri Bilge Ceylan: www.nuribilgeceylan.com

amount of money to the tenant's family in a display of empathy. However, this is met with an unexpected reaction: the tenant sets the money on fire.

It is typical to see "characters that are bored with their environment" in Ceylan's work but probably *Winter Sleep* is the one in which boredom is explored the most. It consumes the whole film and the characters are totally identified with it. "In many ways their desire for change as well as their inability to make change is rooted in their boredom. [Moreover], Ceylan insistently portrays these characters in their very moment of boredom. Many scenes involve the inactivity of characters or their idleness".¹⁴ Thus, the common features of the three main characters we analyze below are their boredom and idleness. All three seem to be experiencing a very deep sense of boredom, although the way they perceive and cope with it differs from one to another as we suggest.

In the following sections, we will be dealing with the main characters' attitudes and the types of boredom they are subject to.

2. Boredom in Winter

2.1. Aydın and 'denied boredom'

*"When the gods are expelled from the cosmos,
the world they have left becomes boring."*¹⁵

Aydın, who is a retired actor, seems to be at the center of the film, as we said earlier. He runs a hotel in Cappadocia, which was probably chosen by the director to invoke sensations such as boredom and/or gloom. He is fairly wealthy partly thanks to his father. He lives with his wife, Nihal, and his sister, Necla, at the hotel. Though they live together, each has her/his own study/rooms. So, they are together, yet lonely in their own way. Aydın seems to represent the modern man: well educated, well dressed and intellectual.

To examine Aydın's situation in the film, one should keep in mind the modernization process that Turkey has been going through. As a global process, modernization has not only changed Western societies. Rather, as a result, the whole world is "either modern or in the process of becoming modern".¹⁶ Turkey can be said to be among the countries that has been going through this process for a very long time in its own way. This process has

¹⁴ Çağlayan, 2014, p. 205.

¹⁵ Eric Voegelin cited in J. T. Fraser, F. C. Haber, G. H. Müller, *The Study of Time: Proceedings of the First Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time*, Springer, New York, 1972, p. 418.

¹⁶ Samuel Huntington, "Political Participation: Modernization and Political Decay," in J. T. Roberts, A. B. Hite, N. Chorev, *The Globalization and Development Reader*, Blackwell, USA, 2007, p. 88.

become intertwined with a kind of sharp identity crisis. As Yavuz says, “few countries in the modern period have had their identity contested as bitterly and interpreted as variously as the Republic of Turkey”.¹⁷ Turkey is a country that has always remained in-between secularism and Islamic values, or been keeping pace with Europe while remaining a Middle Eastern country. One of the main changes that Turkey has been witnessing since the late Ottoman period and the foundation of the Republic at the beginning of 20th century is secularism, a process that continues to be discussed despite the passage of time. For Diken, “in its permanent suspension between the two horizons [secularism and fundamentalist Islam], being both attracted to and repelled by the West, life in today’s Turkey is perhaps a good metaphor for the global *unsicherheit* attached to liquid modernity in which there is nothing, no secure guide that automatically leads the majority of people from one extreme to another”.¹⁸ This conflict never disappears from Turkish people’s daily life and sharply affects the way they socialize and understand life.

As Waxman points out, “there exists an overwhelming consensus amongst scholars of modern Turkey that Turkish modernization and nation-building has largely been top-down, state-led, and elitist”.¹⁹ As a part of the modernization (and, by implication, secularization) process in Turkey, there has been an attempt to adopt a certain Western way of life in defiance of the distinctive and sometimes uncompromising socio-economic conditions in Turkey.²⁰ As a corollary, this process could only be embraced by the country’s well-educated and rich population. Given the unequal distribution of socio-economic opportunities, Turkey has found itself in a dichotomous distinction between ‘civilized’ and ‘backwards’; ‘intellectuals’ and ‘illiterates’.²¹ Although Aydın can be seen as a member of this ‘lucky few’ (he is both intellectual and rich), it seems that his way of life is also not

¹⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism”, *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, Spring, 1998, p. 19.

¹⁸ Diken, 2014, p. 719.

¹⁹ Dov Waxman, “Islam and Turkish National Identity: A Reappraisal,” *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 30, 2000, p. 5.

²⁰ We need to state that this is a complex issue which necessitates further discussion. To “modernize” or to “regulate” the masses may not be a unilateral process which the elites imposed their way of life and their perception of civilization to the silent and passive individuals. For an elaborated discussion on the issue, see: Nilüfer Göle, *Melez Desenler: İslam ve Modernlik Üzerine*, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000.

²¹ For further information, see: Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, USA, 1993; Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity*, Oneworld, UK, 2014; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, Tauris, London, 1993.

especially easy for him being in the middle of Anatolia. In the village where he lives, almost everyone, apart from his sister and wife, is illiterate/uneducated, a situation that he has a strong desire to change and 'fix'. Although he mostly seems indifferent and distant towards the reality surrounding him and does not communicate with locals as much as he could, there are times when he cannot escape; and, during these moments, he cannot hide his disdain. For example, at the beginning of the film, while discussing the mud surrounding the hotel with his friend, Aydın says that "only the ones who can appreciate the mud should come and stay: the tourists like it. If I do somehow eliminate the mud here, no one comes. It is exotic." However, in another instance, Aydın, while hosting the village imam, sees his 'muddy' shoes and pushes them aside with disgust.²² He despises local people and accuses them of being unvirtuous, dirty (specifically referring to the imam's foot odor) and immoral. He writes a column for the local newspaper *Bozkırın Sesi (Voice of the Steppe)*, in which he clearly represents himself as a modern Turkish intellectual. Among his column titles is 'Blossoms in the Desert', where he seemingly talks about how hardworking steppe people are, not the townsfolk but the educators. In one of his other columns, he writes about religious officials and how they misrepresent religion, while, in another, entitled 'Absence of Aesthetics in Towns of Anatolia', he appears inspired by his observations of his tenant's house, which he finds filthy on a brief visit. Although his dislike seems to center on religious, uneducated and poor people, his wife Nihal says that his hate is much wider than this: he literally hates everything. This hatred can be analyzed as a barrier, which limits and shapes his conduct.

One can also say that Aydın's so-called 'virtues' also restrict him and do not allow him to behave in any other way. He always talks about the moral value he was taught, although both his wife and sister find them irritating and unrealistic. As a former actor, he is mostly accused of 'play-acting'. As he draws lines around himself through his values, he cannot leave, as he tells Nihal at the very end of the film. He wants to explore, yet he only explores the life of his wife by discreetly observing her. He both denies his potential and also envies those who turn their potential into something actual. Unlike his sister, Aydın seems to rely on certain meanings in life. Dramatically enough, one can say that applying such meaning to life, which comes with the denial of boredom, turns into a vicious circle that always results in boredom. Still, Aydın's motivations keep him alive and in step with his relationships. That said, if Aydın were to be devoid of moral values and

²² A name used for a religious official in Turkey who is in charge of leading mosques.

habits, it is not clear whether he would get rid of the boredom he is suffering from; however, the core of his boredom seems to be reflected in the limited way he posits himself. Although he rejects the notion that he is bored, he depicts his boredom throughout the film in various statements, gestures and conduct. He has a plan: to write a book on the history of Turkish theatre, “a serious, thick book”, in his own words. However, we see that he only begins the book at the end of the film, which, again, we take, as a symbol, not of trying to cope with boredom, but of mere duty to which he has assigned himself. As Svendsen says, in order to get rid of the discomfort that boredom causes, “we attack the symptoms rather than the disease itself, and search for all sorts of meaning-surrogates”.²³



Image.2. Nihal and Aydın

Aydın’s situation also draws attention to the changing nature of the modernization process (although this is a huge and complex topic to discuss in this paper) since the beginning of the 20th century at this point. From that time on, modernity has evolved and redefined itself. This is a change that creates “a world of a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’”, as well as “a world that cannot be grasped through comfortable (modern) dichotomies of inside/outside, national/international, political/non-political, etc”.²⁴ It can briefly be stated that, although older forms of modernity promote determinism and a belief necessary to explain the world in a linear fashion, today’s economic system is much more complex than this and obliges individuals to keep pace with an uncertain, ambiguous way of life, which

²³ Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, Reaktion Book, UK, 2005, p. 30.

²⁴ James Der Derian, Michael J. Shapiro cited in S. Selchov, “The Paths Not (Yet) Taken: Ulrich Beck, the ‘Cosmopolitized World’ and Security Studies,” *Security Dialogue*, 47: 5, 2016, p. 375.

Aydın cannot keep up with because of his older habits²⁵. So, by rejecting his own boredom, he lives a denied life filled with the interests of a ‘mediocre’ ‘modern’ man of Turkey. Indeed, he probably knows that this way of life is no longer valid in today’s world. Although it clearly seems that he would like to be something more, or at least different, he cannot escape the vicious circle he is in. As he says, “maybe my kingdom is not big but, at least, I’m the king here”, which reflects the motivation of his being stuck in a small village, mirrored in his deep feeling of inadequacy and the boredom he suffers from. It can thus be said that a Chekhovian style is specifically visible in Aydın’s character: not being able to do, not being able to go, not being able to express himself about his feelings. Accordingly, towards the end of the film, in a scene in which Aydın is very drunk during a meeting with a friend, he articulates the famous quote from Voltaire: “Our infallible faith is to be deceived in everything we attempt. I make brilliant plans each morning and fool about all day.” After his words finish, he bursts into laughter and then starts to vomit badly. For us, this highly metaphorical scene reveals the nausea emanating out of the denied boredom that Aydın suffers from.

2.2. Necla does exist, thus is bored

Necla seems to suffer from a type of boredom that we might call ‘existential boredom,’ which can be characterized as the boredom “where the soul is without content and the world is in neutral”.²⁶ Put another way, in Kafka’s words, “[a]s if everything I owned had left me, and as if it would scarcely be sufficient if all of it returned”.²⁷

Necla, unlike Aydın, seems to accept her boredom as it is. At least, she does not believe that denying boredom, by pouring oneself into trivial matters, such as writing for a local newspaper, as her brother does, is a meaningful attitude. Rather, she engages with boredom at a contemplative level. She does not do anything other than think; sometimes, “thinking”, itself, for her, “contains more activity than acting”. She questions life and, one might say, takes a philosophical attitude. Her effect on Aydın, however, is irritating. She continuously criticizes him, regarding his so-called intellectual activity as nonsense. She acts like the eponymous character in *Caligula*, the poster of which she constantly sits under, as well as criticizes

²⁵ For a broad and significant discussion on “the personal consequences of work in late capitalism” see Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in Late Capitalism*, W. W. Norton & Company, London/New York, 1998.

²⁶ Svendsen, 2005, p. 42.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 43,44.

Aydın, whose back (he says it itches when she talks) is against her while he is working. Firing an ‘emperor’s rage’ at Aydın, she accuses him of doing work that is beneath his potential.



Image.3. Aydın and Necla, in Aydın’s study

She also criticizes Nihal, Aydın’s wife, sharply, too. According to her, Nihal portrays herself as a benefactor who “walks around like she is a guardian angel”, but in reality “she doesn’t do shit” other than “glaring at people with a contemptuous look”. For her, this type of charity work is just a way of showing off and, for Nihal, as a woman who has never earned her living; it is just a “salvation ritual”. Necla thinks that “philanthropy isn’t tossing a bone to a hungry dog. It is sharing it with when you are just as hungry.” We see at the end of the film that her idea is in parallel with that of İbrahim, the alcoholic brother of Aydın’s tenant, who throws all the money Nihal gives onto a fire.

Necla seems to have lost all meaning in life, so her words and conduct show both a nihilistic and somewhat cynical attitude. As mentioned before, ‘losing meaning’ is closely related to talk of boredom. According to Pease, “in modern use, boredom is understood as a loss of personal meaning, occasioned either by the withdrawal or absence of the meaningful or by the imposition of the meaningless”.²⁸ Meanwhile, for Svendsen, “boredom can be understood as a discomfort which communicates that the need for meaning is not being satisfied”.²⁹ Although all three characters seem to have a meaning problem in their lives, the difference in Necla’s experience is that she does not believe that one can fill the gap of meaning by doing day-to-day

²⁸ Allison Pease, *Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 2.

²⁹ Svendsen, 2005, p. 30.

business. Parallel with the famous saying of Theodor Adorno, “wrong life cannot be lived rightly”, she may be pointing to a structural problem about the boredom she suffers from and accusing the ones whom she thinks are ignoring the ‘grand scheme of things’ and being overwhelmed with trivial details. As is understood, while Aydın seems to find meaning in doing ‘things’ as an individual, Necla finds meaning in not doing (or wasting time doing) things. Necla may be giving importance to collective action and preferring to question her boredom instead of trying to transform it into day-to-day business. Indeed, she harshly criticizes the way Aydın writes about the locals.

Necla’s approach, based on judging people, might be a way for her to reduce her boredom. While Aydın criticizes the locals and Nihal criticizes Aydın, Necla may also be using criticizing or blaming the other as an escape or as an excuse for not doing anything to face and solve her problems.

Here, two central discussions seem quite important when interpreting the difference between Necla and Aydın and the differences between Necla, Aydın and Nihal. The first one (i) starts between Aydın and Necla and continues with Nihal’s appearance. Necla asks whether or not to respond to an evil act, which can be accounted for, and whether or not we can find ourselves in a better situation if we do not respond to such an act and even volunteer to be the subject of this kind of conduct.³⁰ Aydın responds to this question, albeit insincerely. Necla, however, seems to defend the view that any kind of evil act, when suffered, should not be avoided, but welcomed; e.g., if someone is attempting to kill you, you should, Necla states, just let her do it; or similarly, you should allow a thief to steal what is yours. It is such a withdrawal from life that Aydın just cannot stand and dismisses the question. The day after, the characters meet at the breakfast table, where the discussion lingers. What Necla is doing during this discussion, we think, is simply to raise questions about meaninglessness. This attitude shows itself in the second discussion too, which (ii) makes it possible to comment both on Aydın’s worldview and Necla’s pessimistic and passive standing in life. It begins with everyday conversation, before reaching a point where Necla criticizes Aydın’s articles in the local media. She mainly defends the view that Aydın is not an expert on politics or sociology and that he should not write on social issues. She says that she had not paid much attention to his writings earlier when she had read them; now that has she re-examined them, she implies that they are not good at all. Next, she moves onto criticizing

³⁰ This piece of conversation in the film is adapted from Chekhov’s short story, *Excellent People*.

Aydın’s career. Aydın, who used to be of some promise to Necla and her friends, is now a “disappointment”. She says that Aydın is deceiving himself; if she were able to do so, as she says, she would probably get rid of the boredom (as a luxury for Aydın himself) that surrounds her. After such harsh criticism, even touching on the calmness of Aydın at their parents’ funeral, the arrow points at her, at which Aydın begins a tirade: “You are condemned to be lonely throughout your life because you are a coward, because you are lazy. You are used to live like a parasite. You want everyone to do something for you. You behave as if the whole world is in debt to you. Where, on earth, does this debt come from anyway? Whatever you do, whatever you say, you demand tolerance from everyone. Is such a thing possible at all?... You are not a realist although you think you are... I swear to God, whenever you get into the room through that door, I pray you will not say anything irritating, and annoy me. While you are sitting silently behind me, I feel your gaze on my back, looking for an escape from the boredom you suffer. My back gets numb!” In Aydın’s words, we can see how he is feeling, as well as how Necla experiences boredom. Although Aydın seems to reflect his own boredom upon Necla, Necla seems to find truth in Aydın’s words and withdraws into her existential boredom (she doesn’t appear on screen again). This fight between siblings reflects the fight between two different sorts of boredom: ‘denied’ boredom and ‘existential’ boredom.

2.3. Nihal; captive and bored



Image. 4. Nihal

The first point that draws our attention to Nihal is the tension between her and her husband, Aydın. Nihal, trying to have a distinct life, has her own interests and her own concerns. She is interested in charity work as we said earlier and she does not want Aydın to interrupt any of her business in

anyway. There is a discussion that both highlights the tension between Aydın and Nihal and signifies Nihal's boredom through her so-called captivity. The story goes like this: Nihal organizes a meeting concerning the charity work at home, but Aydın does not know anything about it. He comes home one afternoon and is surprised to see there are people gathered to discuss charity work. Although his intentions are not towards staying, he just hangs about for a few minutes until Nihal calls him from the kitchen to lecture about how badly she does not want him to take part in the meeting. Aydın is literally dismissed. The day after the gathering, he visits Nihal's study and, regardless of the paperwork issues, the discussion takes an existential route. In this scene, Nihal's words to Aydın are especially important in terms of signifying her boredom and the root of her boredom too. As an answer to Aydın's question, "What is my guilt?", she replies, "You are unbearable, selfish, vindictive and a mocker... This is your foundational guilt. You are virtuous and you suffocate me with your virtues ... You hate everyone. You stopped our separation. Aren't you stung inside to see a young woman wither away in boredom? I became rough, rude and a coward while clashing with you." It is clear that we cannot say that Nihal, as a young married woman, has her own life. As Tokuroğlu states, a woman in Turkey is "the symbol of, first, the honour of her father's family, then the honour of her husband's family, and above all, the honour of her country".³¹ Although her husband, Aydın seems to be a modern human being, it is clear that he is not someone who overcomes these kinds of common sexist ideas. As Bakacak and Özlem states, in Turkey, "although significant changes have taken places in the family structure in parallel with modernization, conservative values of the patriarchal system still persist in relations within the family"³² (2014). Aydın has difficulty accepting that his wife holds meetings with 'men' in their house and seeing other men around her, while always finding a way to meddle in her job and claiming that she is incapable

³¹ Belma Tokuroğlu, *Özgürleşmeyen Kadın*, [Unfree Woman] Odak, Ankara, 2004, p. 176. The word 'namus' refers to something additional when you translate it as honour. It is a "notion that is used to reflect the bodily and moral qualities women have to have and a notion that is closely related to sexuality" (Hülya Durudoğan, "Namusun İlmîği," [The Knot of Honour] in ed. Serpil Sancar, *Birkaç Arpa Boyu... 21. Yüzyıla Giderken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar*, [A Few Steps... Feminist Studies in Turkey in the 21st Century] Koc University Press, İstanbul, 2011, p. 871.) Meanwhile, as Kocacıoğlu also explains: "In Turkey, we live in a social order in which women's bodies are disciplined through namus (honour) and women discipline themselves by namus" (our translation) (Kocacıoğlu cited in Durudoğan, 2011, p. 871).

³² Ayla Gelgeç Bakacak and Pınar Öktem "Homosexuality in Turkey: Strategies for Managing Heterosexism" *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61, 2014, p. 822.

and irrational. Like most women living in Turkey, Nihal is excluded from opportunities to become an individual and forced to live within limits, which her husband determines.

When we briefly look at the historical legal and institutional developments concerning women's rights in the Turkish Republic, we see that new regulations were (and are) not effective enough to change the nation's conservative and sexist structure. As Kandiyoti states, during the course of modernization in Turkey, certain roles were determined for both men and women.³³ In order to build a new modern nation, women were supposed to be both educated and 'decent' married citizens. In this context, "marriage meant becoming a responsible citizen; choosing not to marry was an egocentric act, amoral and irresponsible ... These contradictory expectations placed a double burden on women who took advantage of new opportunities to get an education and pursue a career".³⁴ Neither in the past nor today is it easy to talk about the equality of women and men in Turkey, and talking about Aydın and Nihal, as characters in the film, underlines this fact.

According to Svendsen, "boredom presupposes subjectivity, i.e., self-awareness" and "to be able to be bored, the subject must be able to perceive himself as an individual that can enter into various meaning contexts, and this subject demands meaning of the world and himself".³⁵ However, we see in such a discussion that when the situation, or boredom, of women is discussed, it is not easy to see boredom as a mere problem of meaning. We can say that Nihal's situation differs from Aydın's and Necla's in such a way because of her dependent life. As Pease says, "women's secondary status creates a complex, and classically modernist, version of the struggle for selfhood that is frequently expressed through boredom".³⁶ We see that in the case of Turkish women, the situation is a little more complex.

Besides, we understand from Nihal's conduct that she directly associates her boredom with the issue of freedom. It might be true that she is not free. However, the question that can be asked here is: "What is the relationship between freedom and boredom?" It might be said, in this context, that Nihal's boredom seems to be a 'situative' one. By situative, one can

³³ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Patterns of patriarchy: Notes for an analysis of male dominance in Turkish Society" In Şirin Tekeli (Ed.), *Women in modern Turkish Society*. London: Zed Books, 1995, pp. 306-319.

³⁴ Jenny B. White, "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal*, 15: 3, 2003, p. 154.

³⁵ Svendsen, 2005, p. 32.

³⁶ Pease, 2012, p. 8.

understand “a boredom that is due to something specific in a situation”.³⁷ In this instance, this might be related to Nihal’s lack of freedom and desire to do something, without being able to. The main difference between Nihal’s and Necla’s boredom is related to the difference between situative boredom and existential boredom.³⁸ Namely, “while situative boredom contains a longing for something that is desired” -anything to make her free for Nihal in this case- “existential boredom contains a longing for any desire at all”.³⁹ For the relationship between freedom and boredom, although a deeper analysis might be needed, one can say that, “if you are not free, the only boredom you can suffer is the situational one”.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, it should be underlined here that the characters we have tried to analyze in brief have more complicated features than the way they are presented, which is what makes the film among the valuable examples of realistic cinema. There are no superheroes or villains to self-assuredly categorize, nor is it possible to talk about certain characteristic features such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or certain types of boredom. True to life, all of the characters, who only converge on the fact that they are really bored, occasionally contradict themselves, and all suffer from their boredom in their own way.

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³⁷ Svendsen, 2005, p. 21.

³⁸ The boredom classification here mainly reflects Martin Doehleemann’s analysis, which is found in Svendsen, 2005, p. 45. For more details, see: Martin Doehleemann, *Langeweile? Deutung eines verbreiteten Phänomens*. Main, Frankfurt, 1991.

³⁹ Svendsen, 2005, p. 42.

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