

RECONSIDERING THE FILM NOIR PHENOMENON THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF *SERIAL COOK'S* (2017) NOIRISH QUALITIES

Tuna TETİK
Bahçeşehir University, Turkey
tuna.tetik@bau.edu.tr
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5135-957X>

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses significant arguments in seminal studies on film noir's history, essence, and conventions. It approaches film noir as a phenomenon to provide a more direct way of reconsidering noir in cinema. Therefore, the study proposes to cover a comprehensive collection of debates on noir in cinema to ground the theoretical background. *Serial Cook* (2017) is approached as a particular case to analyze the narrative structure and characters in the scope of film noir conventions. Therefore, the article analyzes the noirish qualities of *Serial Cook* based on the story plot, themes, conflicts, and prototypical characters. One of the purposes of the study is to question Can a Turkish movie's structure be examined based on the film noir formula. Thus, the study searches for a film noir structure in a Turkish movie more than scoping a noirish tone and mood. For this reason, the article aims to broaden a new understanding of film noir's condition in Turkish cinema and present a reconsideration of the contemporary usage of the global film noir phenomenon.

Keywords: *Film Noir, Phenomenon, Femme Fatale, Serial Cook, Turkish Cinema.*

SOFRA SIRLARI (2017) FİLMİNİN KARA FİLM ÖZGÜ NİTELİKLERİNİN ANALİZİ EKSENİNDE KARA FİLM FENOMENİ ÜZERİNE YENİDEN BİR İNCELEME

ÖZ

Bu makale kara filmin tarihi, özü ve özellikleri üzerine değerli araştırmalardaki önemli argümanları ele almakta, kara filmi yeniden değerlendirmenin daha doğrudan bir yolunu sağlamak için kara filme bir fenomen olarak yaklaşmaktadır. Bu sebeple bu çalışma, teorik arka planını temellendirmek için sinemada kara film üzerine kapsamlı bir tartışma derlemesini içermeyi önermektedir. *Sofra Sırları* (2017) filmi, filmin anlatı yapısının ve karakterlerinin kara film ekseninde analiz edilmesi için özel bir vaka olarak ele alınmaktadır. Böylelikle, bu çalışmada *Sofra Sırları* filmi hikaye akışı, temaları, çatışmaları ve belirli standartlara göre yaratılmış karakterleri ele alınarak kara film ekseninde analiz edilmektedir. Çalışmanın ana amaçlarından birisi; bir Türk filminin anlatı yapısı kara film formülü temel alınarak incelenebilir mi fikrini sorgulamaktır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, kara filme özgü bir ton ve hali belirlemekten öte, bir Türk filminde kara filme ait bir yapıyı araştırmaktadır. Buna binaen, bu makale Türk Sineması'nda kara filmin durumuna dair yeni bir anlayış geliştirmeyi ve küresel kara film olgusunun çağdaş kullanımına yeniden bir değerlendirme sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kara Film, Fenomen, Ölümçül Kadın, Sofra Sırları, Türk Sineması.*

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the critical approaches to film noir from the early age to the contemporary period through seminal debates on the nature of noir. Therefore, the study essentially traces the roots of film noir as a filmmaking practice; then, it questions the retrospective criticism of film noir. Even though film noir has been the domain of many researches with contemporary arguments, the definition of noir in cinema has still been controversial. However, this article attempts to investigate film noir through conventional elements rather than struggle to define it as a genre, a period, or a cycle. Thus, this study approaches film noir as a phenomenon. In this way, it seeks to broaden an understanding of a cinematic phenomenon.

In the first place, the article proposes a comprehensive collection of seminal arguments from the field to ground the study's theoretical background. Hence, the study approaches the case with insight and methodological way of analysis from the film theory. In this regard, it addresses many academic works on noir in cinema, from Raymond Durnat's (1970) contribution to the field to recent studies that provide a rereading of the phenomenon.

Subsequently, the article concentrates on a Turkish art-house film titled *Sofra Sırları* (*Serial Cook*, Ünal, 2017) as a particular case. Some Turkish directors' several films have been subjects of academic researches through their features—derived from film noir tradition. However, the scope of the researches has focused on the art-house scene of Turkish cinema in the first decade of the 2000s, such as Zeki Demirkubuz, Derviş Zaim, Serdar Akar, and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's early films. Akbal Sualp (2001) defines a group of Turkish art-house films—released in the late 1990s, as arabesque noir, even the phenomenon's others, through their *noirish* elements. Significantly, this article examines a contemporary example from the mid-2010s, Turkey, to develop new understandings and arguments in the field. The research question constructed the study: Can *Serial Cook* be examined as a Turkish noir? Because early examples have only been associated with *noirish* tones. For this purpose, the narrative structure is analyzed by a Todorovian method (1969), while the journey of the female protagonist Neslihan and the secondary characters are examined through the generic characterization and portrayal from the film noir criticism (Berra, 2013). In this way, this study aims to reveal that a Turkish art-house film can be constructed on film noir elements more than including *noirish* tones. It proposes to broaden structural academic knowledge rather than defining or labeling noir. Therefore, *Serial Cook's* *noirish* qualities are scanned based on the methodological knowledge from theory.

AN OVERVIEW AND THE TOPOLOGY OF FILM NOIR

Film noir has always been a popular subject among film critics and academicians. Despite the changing condition and status of film noir in cinema throughout film history, noir films—or simply film noir—have been in the field of academic research from many different perspectives within several categories, such as classical film noir, neo-noir, postmodern noir, and global film noir. In the field, many comprehensive works have eagerly investigated *noirish* qualities and generic features of particular films and a cycle of films to describe and categorize them by a specific label. However, there still needs to be a consensus on the definition of film noir, even though the roots and fundamentals have been documented and researched in detail. Desser (2003, p. 516) describes film noir as an infamously difficult genre to categorize and identify. Therefore, at first, this study attempts to provide a collection of significant arguments on film noir to trace the *noirish* qualities of the Turkish art-house movie titled *Serial Cook*.

As a term, film noir was used in the mid-1940s for the first time, even though remarkable, labeled, and classic film noir examples have been derived from the 1940s, and the roots have been based on much earlier. In his seminal work on film noir called *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, Spicer (2010, p. xxxviii) indicates that French film critic Nino Frank used the term in his essay on four crime films in 1949. Spicer lists Franks' scope of film analysis from the perspective of film noir, covering "*The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941), *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944), *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944), and

Laura (Preminger, 1944)” (ibid.). Spicer underlines that the name film noir has been given to “black cinema” [literally], which has involved a cycle of American B/W films—crime films—produced in the years between 1940 and 1959 (ibid.) Subsequently, film critics, who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif*, and directors such as Chabrol and Truffaut, have developed the term in the 1950s to describe the perception of the American popular cinema’s essentials (Spicer, 2010, p. xxxviii). Desser (2003, p. 516) explains that critics defined noir *retrospectively* in France; therefore, it became significantly critical. Nevertheless, Spicer (2010, p. xxxvii) underlines that the definition of film noir has been problematic due to its retrospective nature, which was not applied to the films during their release periods; thus, it looks to connote to films whose conventions were not identical as Westerns or comedies.

In this regard, two works on film noir are seminal, including *Paint It Black: The Family Tree of the Film Noir* (Durgnat, 1970) and *Notes on Film Noir* (Schrader, 1972). Schrader (1972, p. 8) emphasizes the term’s inception with the mid-1940s French critics’ view on American cinema through the notice of a newly presented pessimist, dark, and cynical tone. The dark tone of the noir films has been the essence, which Durgnat (1970, p. 37) also mentions that black is as omnipresent as shadow, and film noir—as a term—has a marginally evident exotic tone. It is revealed against Puritanism and the optimistic, Hollywoodian, and Anglo-Saxon middle class. Durgnat (1970) prefers to describe a cycle of movies with *noirish* qualities by the particular tone of classification rather than defining them as a specific genre. Likewise, Schrader (1972, p. 8) states that “it [film noir] is not defined, as are the western and gangster genres, by conventions of setting and conflict, but rather by more subtle qualities of tone and mood.” Besides, Schrader points out that film noir could be defined as a particular period through the entire film history, such as French New Wave or German Expressionism (ibid.). Schrader explains that “film noir refers to those Hollywood films of the Forties and early Fifties which portrayed the world of dark, slick city streets, crime and corruptions” (ibid.). However, he mentions that crime and corruption as narrative themes are not prerequisites for film noir. That is why Schrader also puts emphasis on the cinematography, tone, and cultural and stylistic elements, which he (1972, p. 9) lists as “war and post-war disillusionment, post-war realism, the German influence, and the hard-boiled tradition.” Like Schrader, Durgnat (1970) excavates film noir into cultural and narrative tropes and prototypical characters through the themes and influences that Schrader (1972) touches upon them. Durgnat (1970, pp. 39-50) examples the commonalties with the usage of “crime as social criticism,” covering “prohibition-type gangsterism, a corrupt penology, the fight game, juvenile delinquency,” *gangsters* as prototypical characters, “criminals on the run, private eyes and adventures, middle-class murder, portraits and doubles, sexual pathology,” *psychopaths* as common characteristic qualities, “hostages to fortune, blacks and reds, and guignol, horror and fantasy.”

Schrader’s (1972, p. 11) periodization of film noir is crucial to gain an understating of the perception by several movies. He (1972) periodizes film noir into three ages: “the Wartime period between 1941 and 1946, the Postwar period between 1945 and 1949, and the Final phase.” According to Schrader (1972, p. 11), the Wartime period covers “*The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941), *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Garnett, 1946),” whereas the Postwar period includes “*The House on 92nd Street* (Hathaway, 1945) and *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946).” Schrader (1972, p. 11) defines the Final phase as “the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulses” with “*They Live by Night* (Ray, 1948) and *Gun Crazy* (Lewis, 1950).”

Conard (2006, p. 9) states that film noir is centered on criminal activities from many perspectives, which can be defined as “a distinct style of filmmaking,” while it has genre requirements because of including narrative and visual conventions. In this sense, Conard (2006, p. 10) echoes James Damico’s (1975) approach to film noir that film noir is a genre due to certain narratives and conventions. The narrative tropes are consistent with the protagonists who find themselves in violence, and the femme fatale figures often cause their destruction (ibid.). According to Holt (2006, p. 13), film noir—the term—is retrospectively referred to future films in their classic periods by generical connotations.

In this respect, Holt (2006, p. 24) argues that German expressionist elements, such as lighting, canted angles, and deep focus, existential and pessimistic tone, have affected noir films' iconography and narrative. Additionally, Holt describes the plot and narrative patterns, which were adapted from American hard-boiled fiction, as identical qualities of classical film noir. Holt (2006, p. 25) examines the early stage of classical film noir, which centers on private detectives and morally ambiguous characters. According to Holt (2006, p. 29), the hero and the villain are portrayed as polarized sides—identifying noir films' moral distinctions. In his research, Holt (2006, p. 33) prefers to call noir “a stylized crime realism.”

With the difference in Durgnat's approach to film noir's generic status (1970), Skoble (2006, p. 41) defines film noir as a genre with a set of identical conventions, covering odd camera angles, dramatic shadows in lighting, and dialogues—derived from hard-boiled tradition. All emphasize the mood of “loneliness and isolation.” Like Holt's (2006) emphasis on film noir themes, Skoble (2006, p. 41) lists common themes, especially in classical film noirs, covering “moral ambiguity, conflicts between law and morality, and unsettling inversion of values.” In this manner, Sobchack (1998, p. 129) relates criticism of film noir to historical associations, covering “World War II, an increase in crime, and mounting paranoia regarding the working woman's place in society.” She defines classical film noir as “a pessimistic cinematic response to volatile social and economic conditions of the decade immediately following World War 2” (Sobchack, 1998, p. 130). With this respect, Dixon (2013, p. 79) claims that “doubt, fear, and postwar era's uncertainty” are associated with common anxieties of film noir. According to Dixon, “noir served as the most authentic version of the inherent corruption and complacency of postwar life, when forced consensus and idealized conformity was prized above all other considerations” (ibid.). Likewise, Mayer (2013, p. 211) calls firstly the great depression, then World War II critical components for the birth of film noir. In Sobchack's contribution to the field called the *chronotope* of film noir (Sobchack, 1998, p. 139), the setting of the home is represented as “something lost or fragile and threatened.” In this sense, Gustafsson (2013, p. 52) explains that *chronotope*—the term—is defined as a space of identical insecurities of time in all possible negative connotations. According to Gustafsson, the space in film noir is a construction on polarized settings through several dichotomies, including “country vs. city; family farm vs. rented rooms, agrarian self-sufficiency vs. capitalist urban economy; prewar isolationist past vs. cosmopolitan present” (ibid.). Therefore, the characters are portrayed as divergent from each other based on these dichotomies.

Other notable characteristics of the phenomenon are neo and global film noir. At first, in the 1980s, there was a tendency to remake classical noir films in Hollywood. Desser (2003, p. 517) exemplifies “*The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Rafelson, 1981), *Against All Odds* (Hackford, 1984), and *D.O.A.* (Morton and Jankel, 1988).” According to Desser (2003), this tendency had been more apparent in the 1990s; thus, critics have begun to categorize them as neo-noirs such as “*After Dark, My Sweet* (Foley, 1990) and *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992).” Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) have a special place to portray the neo-noirs in a new extension with a group of characters in a postmodernist narrative. Several movies, such as *The Usual Suspects* (Singer, 1995) and *Suicide Kings* (O'Fallon, 1997), can be given as examples in this sense. From a broader perspective, the new tradition of neo-noir has spread globally. Several cases in global neo-noir tradition are more identical, such as “*Adrenaline Drive* (Yaguchi, 1999) from Japan, *Sleepless Town* (Chi-ngai, 1998) from Hong Kong, *Amores Perros* (Iñárritu, 2001) from Mexico, *Total Western* (Rochant, 2000) from France, and *Snatch* (Ritchie, 2000) from Britain” (Desser, 2003, p. 519). Significantly, Spicer (2010, p. xlvii) indicates that American, South Korean, and Hong Kongese neo-noir films are in a reciprocatory relationship. In this sense, John Woo's *Face/Off* (1997), and Siu Fai Mak's *Wu jian dao* (*Internal Affairs*, 2002) as the original source of Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006) could be mentioned (Spicer, 2010, p. xlvii). Spicer (2010) states that even *Insomnia* (Nolan, 2002) is an American remake of a Norwegian movie (Skjoldbjærg, 1997) with the same title. The darker tone and narrative tropes have also been used in American films with several genres—associated with neo-*noirish* styles, such as *Fargo* (Coen, 1996) and *Dark City* (Proyas, 1998).

Obviously, these movies from different origins and genres can be associated with or labeled as neo-noirs, even though the label neo-noir is not used to describe them under a particular genre. Therefore, the neo-noirish quality of the work is not for categorizing movies but instead emphasizing their contemporary features—derived from noir tradition. The noir quality is used as an adjective for a genre to describe the classification in detail, such as a neo-noir crime film and neo-noir science fiction. In this regard, cinematographical choices, story plot, setting, and characters are still common conventions among American and global neo-noirs. The collection of the arguments on the film noir from birth to the overall qualities is presented to ground the theoretical base for investigating *Sofra Sırları (Serial Cook, 2017)*, in which a female protagonist finds herself in a bunch of serialized murders. Thus, the prototypical characters in film noir corpus and their relation to the narrative should be discussed. In this manner, the femme fatale phenomenon is essential to be mentioned in detail.

Prototypical characters, such as femme fatale, femme modern, femme attrapée, and homme fatale, have been prominent figures in the noir corpus. Grossman (2014, p. 40) states that a “close examination of film noirs reveals a systematic representation of female characters who cannot express their desire or attain satisfaction within conventional social roles.” According to Grossman, “examples of such characters who are given subjectivity in film noir while still often being tagged as simply femme fatales abound” (ibid.). These female characters are presented to criticize “male privilege and obsessiveness, lack of trust in women, and will to power” (Grossmann, 2014, p. 40). In her seminal study titled *Dames in the Driver’s Seat*, Wager (2005, p. 19) argues that the femme fatale character connotes a female figure in “the downfall of the male protagonist, representing her inevitable demise.” The femme fatale character causes her deadly ending or gets herself stuck in prison or an unhappy marriage with an undesirable husband (Wager, 2005, p. 19). Place (1980) mentions that a noirish female character has mainly been represented as a dreadful figure for male characters or herself. In this sense, the femme fatale figure’s primary function is described as a dangerous obstacle that challenges the male with desirable female sexuality (Kaplan, 1980, p. 16). However, Place (1980) indicates that female characters have often been portrayed as innocent figures, even “the redeemer.” Contrary, predecessor sources of the femme fatale archetype, such as “the spider woman, the evil seductress, and the dark lady,” are Western religions, art, and literature in the dim and distant past (Place, 1980, p. 47).

Notably, the archetype fits the femme fatale in the noir tradition. However, Place puts emphasis on the fact that “she [the dark lady] and her sister (or alter ego), the virgin, the mother, the innocent, the redeemer, form the two poles of female archetypes” (ibid.). Wager (2005, p. 19) calls Place’s (1980) redeemer female figure “femme attrapée,” which could be described as the male figure’s savior. Wager (2005) discusses the lack of subjectivity of a female character in film noir, whether she is fatale or not, by rereading Laura Mulvey’s approach (1975) to the male gaze for male pleasure. The condition of the female figure—attrapée or fatale—depends on the selection between the containment in the patriarchal requirements and destruction due to resistance (Wager, 2005, p. 20). Wager argues that this situation removes the male character from the narrative’s center. Through the argument, Wager (2005, pp. 20-21) proposes a new understanding of female characters in the film noir corpus by categorizing both male and female characters in flexible dichotomies, such as femme fatale vs. homme fatale and femme attrapée vs. homme attrapée.

Likewise, Grossman (2009) proposes rethinking deadly female figures in the noir tradition and criticizes the immediate recognition of the femme fatale as “a projection of male fear and desire;” and then a “politically forceful symbol of unencumbered power.” Grossman (2009, p. 22) illustrates her case with an example of Cora Smith in *TPART* (Garnett, 1946), in which the character is represented as “one of the central film noirs ‘femme fatales.’” Film noirs give subjectivity to the femme fatale figure as an independent female, portraying her psychological motivation to become fatal or act deadly (Grossman, 2009, p. 23). Grossman associates nonfatal female figures in noir with “social conditions of women in postwar America,” whose identities are stuck in their inner lives (ibid.). Whereas they have been

portrayed as sympathetic characters, femme fatales have been depicted as women—raised by repressive social conditions (Grossman, 2009, pp. 24-25). Noir films can be considered as a warning to men to stay away from desirable females due to the representation of the femme fatale figure as evil by her sexuality (Kaplan, 1980, p. 10). Because Kaplan (1980, p. 9) argues that the femme fatale in the male imaginary could be related to the male figure's play of desire and fear. Therefore, the female, whether fatale or not, in the noir tradition has been represented as a dreadful, unstable, and desirable character who can destroy male territories or often herself. This extension to the female in noir was a requirement in this study because of the research case, *Serial Cook* (2017). It puts a female character called Neslihan as a protagonist into the central position of the narrative, which has valuable *noirish* qualities to be examined.

AN EXAMINATION OF *SERIAL COOK* (2017) AND THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST THROUGH THE NOIRISH QUALITIES

Serial Cook (2017) is Turkish director Ümit Ünal's eighth film, which achieved to win Best Screenplay, Best Actress, and Best Cinematographer prizes at the 37th International İstanbul Film Festival in 2018. Ünal started his carrier as a scriptwriter with Halit Refig's *Teyzem* (*My Aunt*, 1986). However, he became a well-known director with his debut titled *9* (2001). He can be named as an art-house film director whose films, such as *Ara* (2008), *Ses* (*The Voice*, 2010), *Nar* (*The Pomegranate*, 2011), and *Aşk, Büyü Vs. (Love, Spells and All That*, 2019), won several awards at major Turkish Film Festivals in many categories. Dönmez-Colin (2014, p. 336) calls Ünal "a distinguished filmmaker." Because he is not hesitated to experiment unusual narratives and settings in a variety of genres with social commentaries and criticism. Although Ünal puts individuals at the center of stories, his films have social criticism that caused him to be called as an acclaimed director in Turkey. Özdemir (2012, p. 38) argues that political stand and social criticism are hidden with allegories in Ünal's filmography. Only if Ünal's stories are examined through the hidden social indicators in his films, the core of the arguments can be revealed (ibid.). Even though Ünal's films seem individualistic regarding the discourse in social connotations, a reconsideration through postmodernist theories can show that the collective ego is on his filmography's surface (Özdemir, 2012, p. 35).

This study focuses on one of the recent films of Ünal, *Serial Cook* (2017), through the *noirish* qualities. As mentioned above, film noir has been identified with cinematography, narrative structure, and characterization from early films to contemporary works. Firstly, the narrative will be analyzed in terms of noir themes and conflicts, including corruption, murders, unsuccessful detectives, love affairs, and consequences of guilt. Meanwhile, Tzvetan Todorov's narrative analysis way will be used to inspect the narrative structure in a proper methodology. Berra (2013, p. 229) examines film noir through post-studio production practices and proposes an epitome to conventional—often stereotypical—narrative tropes in the noir tradition, including "a small town, a drifter who has lost his moral compass, a sexually unsatisfied wife, a husband who is worth more dead than alive, and the temptation of the financial rewards of murder despite the legal consequences of such an act." Berra's notions of the epitome will be criteria to examine *Serial Cook* into *noirish* qualities of the narrative and characterization.

The Narrative: *Serial Cook* (2017)

Serial Cook begins with an opening image, in which several items are shown in a small country town's gloomy house where there is no trace of charm except for an old childhood photograph of a woman. Then, Neslihan hosts a cooking show, but the reality show sequence is revealed as her escapist—controversially delusional—dream. In this sense, his husband Ethem insults her for being delusional. The scene highlights Neslihan's unhappy marriage and her condition at home. Through the setup, Neslihan cooks different meals to satisfy her husband when she images herself as a cooking show host. The tomato peel gets into Ethem's throat at a dinner with friends. Neslihan calmly acts and saves him with the Heimlich maneuver. However, Ethem blames her for the tomato in front of their guests; then, he throws a glass at Neslihan. The sequence is crucial because, at first, it portrays Neslihan as a woman redeemer even though she is blamed and humiliated by a man. Besides, it hints to show Ethem's weakness in chewing.

The following scenes illustrate that women and men are separate groups, even in their blockings and conversations. After a dream-like cooking show sequence, Ethem brings Neslihan to a restaurant, but he intends to see a charming woman named Meral. Subsequently, Neslihan and Ethem have sex, but Neslihan does not have satisfaction or joy to any degree. After that, Ethem comes home with a bag. He looks nervous and panicked. Then, the doorbell rings; a young florist wrongly brings a bucket into Neslihan's home with a note from Ethem. Neslihan understands that flowers are for Meral. When Neslihan decides to kill Ethem, the tomato peel gets into Ethem's throat again, but she does not save him at this time. Neslihan immediately goes shopping to have eyewitnesses during Ethem's moment of death.

A newly appointed detective (a police officer) starts to investigate the case with suspicion about the meal made by Neslihan. Then, Neslihan finds Ethem's hidden bag. She realizes that it is full of money. The detective interrogates Neslihan as a suspect. Subsequently, Neslihan invites Meral for a meal—made with mushrooms. Then, Meral dies due to poisoning. When Ethem's friends wonder the Ethem's stolen money, Neslihan and the young florist Ramo have a secret relationship. However, Ethem's friends catch Neslihan and Ramo in Neslihan's home. Neslihan shoots one of them when Ramo stabs the other one. In addition to Neslihan's delusions, she starts to see ghosts of Ethem's friends. An eyewitness sees Ramo when he buries dead bodies.

Therefore, Ramo gets arrested, and Neslihan confesses her relationship with him. However, Neslihan blames Ramo for each murder that is connected to her. Even though Ramo attempts to explain Neslihan's criminal activities, he cannot convince legal authorities. Nevertheless, Neslihan considers Ramo as a threat; thus, she tries poisoning him in jail with a mushroom pie. Meanwhile, her delusions about cooking show hosting continue, and she leaves the small town to go to her childhood home in İstanbul.

Table 1. Todorovian (1969) analysis of *Serial Cook* (2017).

Todorov's narrative tropes	Todorovian structure of <i>Serial Cook</i>
Equilibrium	A marriage in a small country town
Disruption of the equilibrium	The death of the husband by the wife
Recognition of the equilibrium	The stolen money and the existence of the husband's love interest
Attempt to revolve the disruption	Killing all related characters
Return to a new equilibrium	A new life in a childhood home in a big city

Firstly, Neslihan finds out that her husband and his love interest threaten her marriage. As a Todorovian (1969) analysis, her "equilibrium" is in danger. When Neslihan allows the death of her husband, the "equilibrium is disrupted." She recognizes the condition; therefore, she kills all related characters with her meals in an attempt to "resolve the disruption." Table 1 portrays the Todorovian plotline of *Serial Cook's* narrative. When all is gone, she leaves town to have a new home in İstanbul, and her condition "returns to a new equilibrium."

The Protagonist: Neslihan

At first, Neslihan is portrayed as "a woman redeemer" (with the term of Place, 1980) archetype who obeys her husband's rules, tries to satisfy him with her cooking abilities and body, and is stuck in an unhappy marriage. Ethem is represented as a corrupted figure who can steal lots of money and is disloyal to his marriage. When Neslihan recognizes Ethem's criminal activities and love interest, she causes his death. However, she could not be described as a *noirish* femme fatale at that point. Even though she wants to kill Ethem, the murder is not planned in cold blood. However, Neslihan kills Ethem's love interest by using her menu as a weapon. Then, she gets attention on herself. Neslihan seduces a young man; then, she starts a secret relationship. Therefore, all cause to call her a *noirish* femme fatale.

Neslihan and her love interest become partners in crime. They kill Ethem's two close friends who search for stolen money. However, her love affair with Ramo has dreadful consequences. Ramo is accused of all the murders and killed by Neslihan. Therefore, Neslihan has a transformation from an innocent woman redeemer to a powerful femme fatale.

Moreover, she can be defined as a serial killer. In this sense, Ethem, Meral, two friends of Ethem, and Ramo are murdered. When Berra's (2013) standard noir elements—centered on Neslihan are analyzed, the notion should be underlined that the small town has an influence on Neslihan. The only way of socializing can be by meeting Ethem's friends' wives. It is also compatible with Durgnat's (1970) "middle-class murder" concept. According to Durgnat (1970, p. 46), "crime has its harassed amateurs, and the theme of the respectable middle-class figure beguiled into, or secretly plotting, murder facilitates the sensitive study in black." Ethem is a middle-class figure who "has lost his moral compass" and "a husband who is more dead than alive" (Berra, 2013). Based on Berra's elements (2013), Neslihan is an unsatisfied wife, she uses her sexuality on her young love interest, and the death of Neslihan's husband causes "the temptation of the financial rewards despite the legal consequences of such an act."

Overall, Neslihan's characterization transforms from an unsatisfied wife and a woman redeemer in a small town to a serial killer-type femme fatale by manipulating her love interest and using her cooking abilities as a weapon. However, her delusional characterization should not be unmentioned. Despite her transformation to a powerful and dreadful figure, her mental condition is depicted as unstable by dream-like sequences in each plot point of the narrative in which she sees herself as a cooking show host. Nevertheless, being stuck in an unhappy marriage with a neglected and corrupted husband in a gloomy house of a small country town without socializing shapes all; these themes and characterizations could be described as *noirish* qualities of *Serial Cook*.

FINAL NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Film noir has been a controversial phenomenon throughout film history, film criticism, and film studies regarding its nature and classification. Comprehensive discussions on film noir should be beyond an attempt to define it as a genre, a mood, a cycle, or a period. Therefore, this study approached film noir as a phenomenon. As predecessor and seminal works, Durgnat's (1970) and Schrader's (1972) studies were crucial for the theoretical background of this study, together with some contemporary arguments which have proposed reconsidering the film noir phenomenon. At first, this study aimed to present a comprehensive collection of the complementary approaches to film noir from the classical era to the contemporary period. Therefore, it proposed a wide range of literature reviews to contribute to the field in which academicians, researchers, and scholars can reach it as a competent source.

Subsequently, *Serial Cook* (2017) was selected as a particular case to trace its *noirish* qualities through the common themes and conventions based on the knowledge from the literature. As mentioned in Introduction, the relation of cinema in Turkey to the film noir tradition has been studied. However, these studies primarily focused on Turkish male protagonist-centered art-house films with melodramatic tones, such as *Tabutta Rövaşata* (*Somersault in a Coffin*, Zaim, 1996), *Üçüncü Sayfa* (*Third Page*, Demirkubuz, 1999), and *Üç Maymun* (*Three Monkeys*, Ceylan, 2008). Thus, one of the selection criteria of the case in this study was including characterization of the woman figure as a protagonist with a transformative journey. That is why Neslihan, regarding *Serial Cook* (2017), was particularly chosen as a subject.

Based on the insight from the arguments and methods in the literature, the narrative and the character were analyzed in terms of their *noirish* features. It was observed that *Serial Cook* has more than a film with noir tones. The film follows a narrative structure—derived from classical noir tradition and presents main and secondary characters, which have stereotypical resemblances with noir figures.

While the narrative is based on a group of serialized murders in a small town, Neslihan, as a serial killer archetype femme fatale, and Ethem, as a neglected husband with disloyalty to his wife and a corrupted employee, are represented. The police officer, as a detective archetype from the noir tradition, is portrayed as a dysfunctional figure who cannot arrest Neslihan due to the lack of evidence. Therefore, a series of dreadful events can spread like a spider web. In this regard, one of the study's significant findings is the transformation of Neslihan. She changes from a passive redeemer woman with controversial delusions in a patriarchal home to a woman in charge who can be deadly, sexual, and active. Thus, Neslihan could be associated with femme fatale figures due to her *noirish* identity.

Even though *Serial Cook* has many identical film noir features, the movie is not presented, labeled, or classified as a neo-noir or Turkish noir. The movie is noted as a Turkish drama, crossing comedy and crime on MUBI (n.d.), IMDb (n.d.), and Netflix (n.d.). Like contemporary arguments on film noir or neo-noir, *Serial Cook*'s genre is not called as film noir. However, the movie can be retrospectively defined as a Turkish neo-noir because the literature provided a way to approach subjects in film noir retrospectively. Therefore, this study proposes to contribute to the field by examining a Turkish film directly through the *noirish* qualities that can provide insight to further research on global neo-noirs and cinema in Turkey.

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