

# SILENT REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the representational form of the silent female that emerged in Turkish cinema after the mid-1990s. It not only explores the thematic and formal tendencies that the silent female characters share, but also reveals the different forms of verbal and visual control that is maintained over them by the filmic elements. Drawing upon representative examples, different types of silence –*silencing silence*, *resisting silence*, *complete silence* and *speaking silence*– in the new cinema are discussed on the verbal and visual levels. A close reading of the film *Gemide (On Board)* is drawn upon in order to reveal in detail the thematic and formal conventions of the most prevalent type, *silencing silence*.

**Keywords:** Female silence, representations of women, new cinema of Turkey.

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## Yeni Türkiye Sinemasında Sessiz Kadın Temsilleri

### Öz

Bu makale, Türk sinemasında 1990'lı yılların ortalarında boy gösteren yeni bir kadın temsil formuna odaklanmaktadır: sessiz kadınlar. Makale, sessiz kadın karakterlerin tematik ve biçimsel açıdan paylaştıkları eğilimleri araştırmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda bu karakterler üzerinde çeşitli filmsel unsurlarla sağlanan söylemsel ve görsel kontrolün farklı formlarını da ortaya koymaktadır. Yeni sinemadaki farklı tip sessizlikler –*susturan sessizlikler*, *direnen sessizlikler*, *mutlak sessizlikler* ve *konuşan sessizlikler*– örnekler üzerinden, söylemsel ve görsel açılardan tartışılmaktadır. Yaygın olarak görülen tipin –*susturan sessizliklerin*– tematik ve biçimsel özelliklerini detaylıca ortaya koymak için *Gemide* filminin ayrıntılı okumasından yararlanılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kadın sessizlikleri, kadın temsili, yeni Türkiye sineması.

In this article, I will focus on representational form of the silent female that emerged in Turkish cinema after the mid-1990s, when a striking number of “silent” and/or “silenced” female characters, both literally and symbolically, appear on the screen. This article will investigate the following questions: What roles and positions are given to the silent female characters? What functions do these newly emergent female characters share? By asking these questions my aim is to explore this silence by encouraging a rereading of the films from a feminist perspective in order to make them “speak”, and both to reveal the different forms of female silences and to uncover the tendencies that they share. In order to do so, representative examples and a close-reading of *Gemide (On Board)*, Serdar Akar, 1998) will be drawn upon.

Representations are not independent but participate in certain power relations through which discourses around sexual difference and subjects of those discourses are produced (Kuhn, 1997, p. 204). In this sense, representations can be regarded as strategies of normalization and as forms of regulation (Kuhn, 1997, p. 204). Therefore, representations of women that are produced in films cannot be considered only as ‘harmless’ images, rather they set in motion certain power relations through which discourses around sexual differences and gender roles are (re)produced. It is thus very crucial to analyze representations of femininity in relation to silence in the new Turkish cinema, since these (re)produce prevailing gender distinctions and hierarchy.

### **Female Silences in the New Cinema of Turkey:**

In the mid-1990s, a new epoch in Turkish cinema began, as the cinema industry overcame the industrial crisis, particularly thanks to popular productions, which have been described as “stylish, technically polished,” and which “promote themselves with American-style marketing glitz” (Dorsay, 2004, p. 11), whilst the art house cinema produced a new type of film, which had a simpler style, focusing on the narration of marginalized lives, of “other” lives, of the invisibles/inaudibles and of “silenced” topics. One of the most important “newnesses” of the new cinema<sup>1</sup> is the noteworthy testosterone in the narration. Even though Turkish cinema is a male dominated cinema as far as the industry is concerned, it had never before been so intense in terms of its representations and stories; Gönül Dönmez-Colin (2004) even describes this

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<sup>1</sup> “New cinema of Turkey” is a concept which covers the time frame from the mid-1990s till present where the Turkish film industry have undergone an important change in terms of the themes, styles, narrative patterns and filmmaking modes. For a detailed discussion of the concept see Savaş Arslan’s article named as New Cinema of Turkey in *New Cinema: Journal of Contemporary Film* 7 (1). For a detailed analysis of the multifaceted tendencies in the new cinema see Z.Tül Akbal’s article The Glorified Lumpen ‘Nothingness’ versus Nigh Navigations in *Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and New Europe*.

period in Turkish cinema as “macho cinema”. Nejat Ulusay (2004) names some of the examples in the new cinema as “male films” while Z. Tül Akbal Süalp (2009) uses the term “male weepy films” to define and describe a group of films in the new cinema. The new cinema is differentiated from the other decades in Turkish cinema by its mostly male centred stories and male points of view that tells stories of and/or through the male characters, their lives, problems, conflicts, feelings, anxieties and fantasies (Akbal Süalp, 2008, 2009; Ulusay, 2004). In this atmosphere, women are cast either as “morbid provocateurs and seducers who lead men to commit crimes, violence and irrational acts and who, of course, then become the victims of these brutalities” or are completely excluded from the stories (Akbal Süalp, 2008, p. 92). Furthermore, as Akbal Süalp (2008) argues, “women have taken their part as the unknown, threatening other and stand for all ‘Others’” and represent both the fantasies and fears of the wounded male egos (p. 92).

As a part of this “new” gender(ed) picture of the new cinema, a new female representational form emerges: the silent, inaudible female. From 1993 on (intensively in between 1996-2004), we encounter silent female characters in films that are not specific to a single genre. In fact, the two films that are considered as the beginning of this new epoch, *Eşkiya* (*The Bandit*, Yavuz Turgul, 1996) and *Tabutta Rövaşata* (*Somersault in a Coffin*, Derviş Zaim, 1996), involve two silent female characters: respectively Keje, who chooses not to speak in response to her forced marriage with a man she does not love, and the Junkie Woman, who is mostly depicted looking out of the window in silence. As Ulusay (2004) argues, these male films exclude female characters, and if they cannot cast women completely out of the narration they make them mute instead (p. 154). In the background of the increased “voice” of the male stories, the audience is faced with these female silences that function in various ways and arise from various reasons: mute characters who are unable to speak such as Yusuf’s sister in *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, Zeki Demirkubuz, 1997) and Francesca in *İstanbul Kanatlarının Altında* (*Istanbul Under My Wings*, Mustafa Altıoklar, 1996); the characters who become mute as a consequence of a trauma such as Nazmiye in *Propaganda* (Sinan Çetin, 1999); voluntary mutes who chose not to speak such as Keje in *Eşkiya* and Yasemin in *Romantik* (*Romantic*, Sinan Çetin, 2007); the characters who are reluctant to speak such as Bahar in *İklimler* (*Climates*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2006); and forced mutes who are made inaudible by the writer and director, and cannot be heard by the audience even though they are actually able to speak such as the woman in *Gemide*, Kirpi in *9* (*Nine*, Ümit Ünal, 2002) and Mahmut’s lover and the women Yusuf stalks in *Uzak* (*Distant*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002).

On the thematic level, there is a tendency for the silent female characters to be more likely to be associated with sexuality, (self) destruction, otherness, and (gender based) violence and/or traumatic past. Moreover, these thematic associations are mostly exposed on and through her silent body. In *Masumiyet* when Yusuf and his brother-in-law are sitting at the dinner table, the brother-in-law speaks of a traumatic past, that is, his wife’s cheating on him and Yusuf’s murder of the man, and of his on-going suffering because of the wife’s attitude of refusal to communicate with him. She is portrayed as the cause of the trauma

in all of these characters' lives and victim of it as well, as she pays for her extramarital affair –her sexuality- by being subjected to violence. However, she is at the same time presented as the one that also still poses a threat, as she continues destroying the husband's life through her refusal to communicate. The thematic associations that the brother-in-law uses for his mute wife in *Masumiyet* appear in all the films involving a silent female character, however, it is crucial to mention that even though these films share these thematic associations, they differ in how the characters are associated with these themes. For example, in *Romantik*, the voluntary mute Yasemin is portrayed as the victim of the trauma rather than the cause of it, or in *Eşkya*, Keje's association with sexuality emphasizes an asexualization, not over-sexualization just as the Woman who is presented in an “always-beautiful” image in *Gemide*.

In order to reveal the functions of the silent female form, it is useful to draw upon Michel Chion's comprehensive work on mute characters' function in film. In *The Voice in Cinema* Chion (1947/1999) claims that the mute character, a character without a sound, serves the narrative and plays a subservient role. He or she is an *instrument* “to disturb, catalyze, or reveal” (p. 96). In the same vein, almost all the silent female characters in the new cinema function as instruments for the male characters' speeches, for revealing their stories, fears and fantasies. Furthermore, Chion (1947/1999) argues that the mute character has a very close relation to knowledge and power as “we rarely know for sure whether he cannot speak or will not speak” (p. 96) and what is more, s/he is not only “unknowable”, but also we do not know how much s/he knows: “We might think of him as the place where the story's crucial knowledge is lodged and which can never be wholly transmitted” (p. 97). In the example of *Asmalı Konak: Hayat (Ivy Mansion: Life, Abdullah Oğuz, 2003)*, the film starts with the disappearance of a married couple (Seymen and Bahar) followed shortly after with a close friend finding Bahar comatose in a hospital. The doctors tell her that Bahar was found alone and shot in the head on the street. Throughout the film, the main questions that drive the narrative are where Seymen is, what happened to them and whether she will come out of coma and can answer these questions. Therefore, Bahar is presented as the one who harbours the *final word*, which Chion (1947/1999) defines as the key to the quest (p. 97), and therefore becomes the one who is attributed, to some extent, a position of power. Likewise, in the above-mentioned scene in *Masumiyet*, the silent female character asserts power by the unknowable limits of her knowledge, by harbouring the final word that she cannot or wishes not to utter. However, how the film treats the power that arises from her silence and her relation to knowledge, whether it attempts to establish control over her or whether it is put in a “safe” place differs from one film to another.

In the end, the silent female characters usually serve as the vehicles for the expression, revelation and also annihilation of the masculine fears, anxieties and frustrations. Nevertheless, it is crucial to indicate how the film depicts the silent character, how the visual and verbal control over her that is exerted and expressed differs. In order to investigate these differences I provide the following typology.

## Typologies of Silences:

The four main types of female silence that are used in the new cinema are *silencing silence*, *resisting silence*, *complete silence* and *speaking silence*. This is a working typology to define and describe clearly the differences among the depictions and functions of the silent female characters in the examples of the new cinema. The typology I suggest reveals that there is neither one function of female silence nor one way of control over the silent character. Moreover, power relations around speech and silence can change depending on how silent character is seen and how she functions in the narrative. Nevertheless, it is crucial to mention that the silencing silence is the prevalent type in the new cinema.

In silencing silence, the control over the silent female character is exerted and expressed on the verbal level and on the treatment of her silent body. On the verbal level, silent female characters are kept on the edges of the story and thereby the female stories and the female points of view are overlooked. In this type, the story is told from the male point of view and the silent female character serves as a vehicle for the expression of the male stories, fear and fantasies. As mentioned above, Bahar's silence in *Asmalı Konak: Hayat* is the most appropriate example as it not only serves to reveal and express her husband Seymen's fears and pains, but also becomes the instrument through which her power of knowledge is limited, by casting her out of narration, by talking on behalf of her and therefore by putting her in a safe, silent place. Her husband Seymen is found before she recovers from a coma, and his friends and family make him go into therapy. In each therapy scene, their past life including narrations of Bahar's suffering due to cancer are told, revealed and depicted from Seymen's point of view, through flashbacks. Bahar's silence and her inability to express herself, serves to reveal Seymen's feelings and to express his point of view. Moreover, in the scene where she wakes up, a close-up of her face creates an expectation/importance of her word. However, she barely utters her husband's name: Sey-men. Moreover, the final word, the key to the quest, is revealed and showed from Seymen's point of view in the scene where he sees Bahar for the first time after a year and remembers in shock what happened that night.

Another example is *İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında*, the story of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman scientist Hazerfan Ahmet Çelebi who wants to fly by using Leonardo da Vinci's blueprints. At the beginning of the film, Hazerfen rescues and heals the wounded (mute) Italian Francesca from a ship that was brought to Istanbul after being seized in the sea warfare in order to make her decipher Da Vinci's ancient scripts. From the beginning of the film, she is presented as the key to the quest, as she is the only one who can decipher Leonardo da Vinci's blueprints, and she therefore harbours the final word. She can therefore be considered as holding a position of power, as both the characters in the film and the audience do not know how much she knows and whether she will or can speak. However, even though she regains her voice at some point and manages to decipher the secret of the papers, her voice is not allowed to have verbal power: in the scene where she deciphers the papers and reads in Italian, her

voice is lowered, made inaudible, and the male voice-over of the Translator is heard over the images of Hazerfan working on the flying mechanism. Therefore, through the use of the male voice-over at the moment of the revelation of the secret, the final word, both the verbal authority and authoritative knowledge is transferred to the male character.

On another level, the control over the silent female character is maintained, actually doubled, through the eroticisation, victimization or punishment of the female body. Feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey (1989) argues that women as an image always threaten to evoke the castration anxiety and that there are two ways to escape from this. The first way is through *voyeurism*, which is eroticization of women, investigating women, or showing a woman in a victim position, and then either punishing, demystifying or saving her, to affirm mastery of the male character (1989). The second way is through *fetishism* showing a woman's body with extreme aesthetic perfection (1989). Fetishistic strategy focuses on fragments of woman's body in close-ups. Therefore the female character is valued only for her erotic look, beauty and desirability. Mulvey's argument is very much applicable to the new cinema even though her objects of study are classic Hollywood films. Indeed, these two forms of escape have found expression in Turkish society since the 1980s, from box-office hits to art house productions, from prime-time news to television commercials: women are represented as threats, victims and erotic images. This can be considered as a kind of response to the effects of the change that Turkey underwent in economic, social and cultural fields since the 1980 on masculinity. As Akbal Süalp (2009) argues,

Traumas over a long period with no mourning nor healing after each leftist turn or opposition, and the brutal fall of the left after coups, followed by profound stillness, are one of the main effects we even hesitate to question. Moreover, the strapping and economic crises one after another followed by a high unemployment rate and rapidly mounting poverty, bringing about feelings of hopelessness and helplessness among mainly male silent majorities, are all crucial...The male ego has to deal with unemployment and confront this newly-shared space with others. Fear and fantasy restore the forms of representation of specific genres and aesthetics (p. 228).

Moreover, in the 1980s in Turkey, the second wave of the feminist movement blurred the cultural representation systems that supported traditional gender roles, and led to a masculinity crisis that can be considered as the reason behind the inclination towards male stories, male characters and the male points of view in the new cinema (Oktan, 2008; Ulusay, 2004). In most of the films, in order to comfort this wounded male ego, silent female characters are represented as objects of the male gaze, objects of crime, objects of punishment and objects of desire, and are subjected to gender based violence mostly because they pose a threat to the male order. In *Gemide*, the woman prostitute who is positioned as the object of male gaze is "punished" by rape and by being left for dead. In *Masumiyet*, the female character does not obey the rules of marriage and is punished by being left mute and being beaten. In *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* (*Mrs. Salkım's Diamonds*, Tomris Giritlioğlu, 1999), the heroine is punished by rape because she is wrongly accused of being sterile. In all of these films, we

face explicitly shown overemphasized gender-based violence. In this way, women's silent presences are put into a safe or "proper" place by rendering them into erotic, weak, suffering bodies, which minimizes the female silence's possibility of having a "voice" and representing a power. On the visual level, the silent character's body is often put in a safe place through various devices: sometimes they are rendered weak and impotent, such as in *Tabutta Röveşata*, *Asmalı Konak: Hayat, Ulak (The Messenger)*, Çağan Irmak, 2008); often dead or badly wounded, such as in *Gemide, Laleli'de Bir Azize (A Madonna in Laleli)*, Kudret Sabancı, 1999), *İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında*; sometimes under the threat of a gun/knife/chopper/beating belt, such as in *Gemide, Şellale (The Waterfall)*, Semir Aslanüyrek, 2001), *Masumiyet*.

In *Tabutta Röveşata*, through the story of the main character Mahsun we watch the lives of the subalterns who are imprisoned in the big city. The story of the film tells the hard life *outside* by showing Mahsun's struggle to stay alive. The only woman character in the film is a heroin addict whom Mahsun platonically loves. We do not see or hear any information about her life, feelings or thoughts except that she is a heroin addict. The images depicted of her in the film are either while she is injecting heroin in the toilet of the café, or while she is sitting in a café, looking at the sea without saying a word. In the first scene where she is introduced to the audience, she is injecting heroin, and is shown straight after, framed in a close-shot from above, lying back semi-conscious. In other scenes, she is shown hardly walking and barely opening her eyes after the injection, and while she is sitting in the café, she is again shown semi-conscious, hardly able to remain awake. Hence, she is portrayed as an impotent and weak body and is depicted only in relation to her heroin addiction. If we consider the fact that Mahsun is platonically in love with her and that most of the scenes in the café are shot from a point of view shot of Mahsun watching her, it would not be extreme to suggest that her function is to reveal and represent Mahsun's unsatisfied desire.

In *Masumiyet*, after the scene where the husband complains about his wife's refusal to communicate with him and her treatment of him as an enemy, he beats her with his belt. In this scene, we see her being punished because of her "crime" –her extramarital affair, her uncontrolled sexuality- which makes the husband fear not being good enough. In feminist psychoanalyst Karen Horney's (as cited in Ussher, 1997) view, a man's fear of a woman is very much connected with the feeling of not being "good" or "man enough" seeing as within the script of heterosexual sex, men are expected to be sexual, powerful and in control (p. 89). Horney argues that any kind of failure might suggest that a man is not man (p. 89). Here, the husband's punishment can be seen as a response to her uncontrolled sexuality, which evokes this manly fear, fear of rejection and inadequacy. However, at the same time, she is represented as the victim of the crime in the beating scenes, therefore, the husband's vulnerability and loss of control are annihilated through the female character's victimization.

In resisting silence, we encounter female characters that use silence as a resistance to the rules of the patriarchal system and as a response to the decisions that are made on their behalf. These women therefore manage to

overturn the passive message of silence. As Vietnamese filmmaker and feminist post-colonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) suggests, “silence as a refusal to partake in the story does sometimes provide us with means to gain a hearing. It is a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right” (p. 83). Indeed in this type of silence, even though the silent female characters still serve to reveal or catalyze the male stories to some extent, they provide a female point of view and their silences signify a gap through which they managed to get rid of the control over them in some instances. Unlike the examples of silencing silence, they are not reduced to a body as this type’s distinctive feature is not to accept the victim position and to resist the verbal and visual control attempts over them by their silence.

*Salkım Hanım’ın Taneleri* tells the story of the changing lives of the minorities in Turkey after the passing of the law that established a tax –*varlık vergisi*- on minorities living in Turkey<sup>2</sup>. The female character Nora, who is under psychiatric treatment, is represented sometimes silent and sometimes talking in monologues. In the scenes where her husband comes to visit her in the hospital, it is felt that there is a reason behind Nora’s silence and that it is “a response in its own right” as Nora’s refusal to talk to her husband engenders a guilty expression on her husband’s face. Thus Nora is presented as the one who harbours the secret and therefore is attributed a power position in these scenes. Moreover, after this scene showing her in silence, the camera cuts to her remembering, to her memory scene where her silenced secret –being raped by her father-in-law Sabit Paşa- is exposed to the audience from her point of view. Moreover, even though her body is in a victim position as she is subjected to a rape, the provided female point of view resists victimization.

In *Eşkîya*, Keje, the main female character, chose silence after her forced marriage with Berfo and has not spoken a word in thirty five years. Her silence as “a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right” represents a resistance to the forced marriage and the rules and destinies that are prewritten for her by the male character Berfo. However, when she meets her lover Baran, after thirty five years, she regains her voice. After this episode, she is kept mostly outside of the narration. Hence, even though her silence performs a resistance, and signifies a gap in the gender order, she still cannot escape the narrative control over her.

In the category of complete silence, the female character is the complete vehicle of the story. The story begins and continues because of her, though she does not appear as a character on the screen and exists rather as an image. The other characters speak about her, but she does not have any chance to respond. This type of silence can also be defined through Teresa de Lauretis’s (1990) concept of *non-being of woman*:

<sup>2</sup> In Turkey, the legal minority status is established for Jewish, Armenian and Greek communities. The wealth tax was legislated for the wealthy citizens in 1942 for the reason that there was need to raise funds for the country’s defence in an eventual entry into the World War II. However, higher tariffs were imposed on the minority citizens and over two million non-Muslim citizens who could not pay the tax were sent to a forced labour camp in Aşkale in Eastern Turkey.



The paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but of itself inaudible or inexpressible, displayed as spectacle and still unrepresented or unrepresentable, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled (p. 115).

The film *9* is an example of complete silence. It tells the story of an investigation of the murder and rape of a homeless young woman, whose nickname is Kirpi (Spiky), in one of the districts of Istanbul. We see people from the district being interrogated by the police. They all say that they have no connection with the girl and the murder, but as the story develops, and their lives are scratched by the police's questions, we are faced with their contradictory testimonies about each other. Throughout the film, we listen to the story of Kirpi, told from different perspectives, but Kirpi is completely silenced: she is the one who is spoken of but has no chance to reply. One suspect claims that she is a Jew, the other says that she is a Romanian or a Russian prostitute. Some say that she is mad, others say that she is smart. Who is she? She is a non-being in Laretis's term: she is the one who is constantly spoken of, but who is completely silent and whose existence is asserted and denied, negated and controlled simultaneously on the verbal level by the visible characters' testimonies. Moreover, throughout the film, Kirpi is seen only in a few scenes which are supposedly taken by Firuz's handy-cam by Firuz, Tunç or Kaya. In this way, apart from the verbal control over her, a visual control is maintained by making her visible from male points of view.

Finally, in the speaking silence, the films not only speak of an issue that has been silenced by society, but also tell female stories from female points of view. *Bulutları Beklerken* (*Waiting for the Clouds*, Yeşim Ustaoğlu, 2003) is the story of a silenced woman who goes on a journey to find her suppressed voice. Ayşe/Eleni has kept silent about her Greek origin and her true identity for half a century because of the assimilation policies starting with the Turkish nation building process. When her sister dies, she unlocks memories of her family's forced deportation, starts speaking in her own language and she embarks on a journey to find her long-lost brother. The story of suppression and assimilation in Turkey is told through her silenced language, identity, and religion, therefore Ayşe/Eleni's silence serves to articulate her unspeakable language and suppressed ethnicity in Turkey. *Bulutları Beklerken* is an example of full agency of the female character as the female character is neither reduced to a passive eroticised/suffering body, nor serves to reveal or catalyze male stories. The female character as a leading role controls the narrative from the beginning. Ayşe/Eleni is not put into a passively waiting position after regaining her voice (unlike Keje), rather she goes to Greece to confront her traumatic past. In the last scene where her brother Niko is looking at family photographs, Niko says that if she was his sister, she should have been in one of those pictures. Ayşe/Eleni puts on the table the only family picture she has, and the camera slowly pans into the family portrait, the picture is seen in extreme close-up which dissolves into the documentary passages of the forced deportation. In this way, the film not only put an emphasis on "her" story and "her" loss, but also does

not offer a resolution or a recovery at the end of the film. Rather it leaves the audience with the burden of this confrontation with the so-far suppressed traumas of the Other. As Övgü Gökçe (2009) argues, “Ayşe/Eleni’s story becomes something bracketed, related to the stories of other anonymous people; she becomes one of the many whose stories are lost” (p. 275).

### ***Gemide*: The Male Gaze at Silent Woman**

In this section I will analyze *Gemide*, a film that exercises control over the female character on various levels, in order to discuss silencing silence in detail. *Gemide* is about four sailors aboard a harbour silt-cleaner living a routine life that revolve around talk, drink and marihuana. Their only image of the outside world, and primarily of male-female relationships, comes from the stories of Captain. Their isolation is shattered one night when Boxer returns beaten up and robbed of their dinner money. Drunk and stoned, they hunt down the thieves; Captain accidentally kills one. The sailors “save” a foreign prostitute, who is with those thieves, and take her to the ship. The female character in the film is represented in silent form. The Woman is a foreign prostitute and cannot speak Turkish. Throughout the whole film she does not speak, except two scenes where she speaks in a foreign language which is not subtitled.

In *The Acoustic Mirror* Kaja Silverman (1988) highlights the importance of the female voice in her critique of Hollywood’s representations of women. Her claim about Hollywood cinema is also valid for the new cinema of Turkey as she argues that in cinema the male subject has the “discursive power” while the female subject is excluded from it (p. 164). Moreover, female subjectivity has a “receptivity” to the male voice as well as to his gaze, which keeps her under double surveillance (Silverman, 1990, p. 312). This means what we hear in the film is successful suppression of the feminine by reducing women to muteness and to an object position. Male subjects in the cinema control the discursive power by holding and using discursive practices. According to Silverman’s theory (1990), the male subject is ideally achieved when he is heard but not seen, when the phallus is left in unchallengeable possession of the scene (p. 312). *Gemide* starts with a male voice-over talking about the order, rules, laws, regulations and control on board. In this way, the disembodied male voice assigns authority and authoritative knowledge to the male characters from the beginning of the film. On the other hand, Silverman (1990) also claims that to permit the female subject to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes that define woman as a dark continent, inaccessible to definitive male interpretation and positions her away from male control (p. 313). However, in *Gemide*, although the prostitute is muted, and “inaccessible to definitive male interpretation,” she is imprisoned in the male characters’ stories. Throughout the film Captain tells the other male characters his sex stories (or fantasies as we do not know whether they are true) and always starts the story by asking “where were we?” In the last scene of the film, Captain asks this same question again. This kind of ending might be read as Captain is beginning to tell a new story or as everything they have been through is his

story/fantasy. Contrary to Silverman's argument, in the end, she becomes one of his stories and therefore, becomes completely open to male interpretation, and verbally silenced. Moreover, the Woman serves to reveal, in Chion's term, the power struggle among these male characters as it is depicted that the order, which is mentioned in the voice-over in the beginning of the film, is ruined: Captain's power started to be challenged by the other sailors when the Woman makes her entrance on board. This is also illustrated by Ali's dream scene, where he sees himself as the hero and the Woman as the heroine of Captain's sex story, expressing Ali's envy of Captain and his fantasy of power.

On the visual level, throughout the film, both voyeurism and fetishism, in Mulvey's terms, are used through the camera's gaze. There are numerous scenes where the camera focuses on fragments of the female character's body –legs, lips and breasts- in close-ups. These close-ups start with her first scene on the ship where we see her legs in close-up while Boxer is laying her in bed. In the scenes during which Boxer rapes her, the camera focuses on her breasts. In the scenes where she is sitting tied in the same room with them, even though she is held captive and continually harassed and raped by them, there is still an erotic look on her face, rather than fear or panic. In and through those scenes, the Woman is constructed as “to-be-looked-at”. In this way, the problem of the female character as a sexual threat is both posed and resolved through an overt valuation only of her beauty, erotic look and desirability. The threat is brought under control through positioning her beauty in a safe eroticized place, like a “blow up sex doll” (Akbal Süalp, 1999; Algan, 1999). As Akbal Süalp (1999) argues, the woman stays alive till the end of the film in order to function as a blow up sex doll and to maintain the balance of the supply and demand for sex (p. 19). In addition, the Woman is shown with aesthetic perfection that supports the control over her by fetishization. Her body and appearance are shown as “too good to be true”. Although she is raped, harassed and persecuted, her hair, clothing, and make-up are not spoiled. We can claim that her always stylized appearance is the tool that is used to emphasize her “sexual availability”, but also to make the guilt of rape and of groundless violence on her ambiguous and to convert rape and sexual harassment into a spectacle.

Another level of control that is connected with the voyeuristic technique is maintained through the victimization of the female character. As it is argued by Mulvey (1989), victimization affirms male mastery through presenting her body in a helpless and vulnerable position that can also be read as a method of resolving the threat by positioning her in a safe place for the enjoyment of the male gaze. In a striking number of scenes, she is shown her hands and her mouth tied in high-angle shots which make her seem even more vulnerable and powerless. In one of the scenes, her tied hands are shown in a close-up that underlines her helplessness and victimization. Close to the end of the film, she is shown being left wounded in the street, again stressing her victimization, and leading to a kind of catharsis, by posing a resolution by positioning her threatening silent body to a weak, suffering, and therefore safe place. She is punished for ruining the “order” on board and is thrown out. She becomes the

object of the crime -rape and harassment- but she also becomes the object of punishment for her sexual availability, for her accessible body as a prostitute.

In the example of *Gemide*, we clearly see that there is a double control over the female character, for “the ship is like a country” excluding a female narrative and moreover reducing her to an object of desire and of male fantasies: a silent, obedient, beautiful, erotic image. We do not know what this woman thinks and feels. The threat posed by her silent presence, because of being an “enigma” or harbouring the final word, is avoided by positioning female subject as only a body. Moreover, because “the ship is like a country” where there is talk about women, they are spoken about according to the “phallographic codes” (Dallery, 1989, p. 53) that are written on her body. Likewise, in *Gemide*, the control over the female character is not only maintained over her body, but also through the codes written on her body on a thematic level. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues that “the body is that materiality, almost a medium on which power operates and through which it functions” (p. 146). It is an effect, target and object of a certain mode of corporeal inscription. In *Gemide*, the female body is controlled through the codes that define rape and prostitute’s body in the sense of sexual availability. Feminist theorist Carole Pateman (1988) argues that the prostitute implies the meaning of being readily available for all men (p. 189). Prostitution is a part of the exercise of the law of male sex-right and one of the ways in which men are ensured access to women’s bodies (p. 194). In the film, the prostitute’s body is shown as “readily available for all men” through the rape scenes where she does not react, through her always beautiful manipulative appearance, and also through the repetitive articulation of unimportance of raping a prostitute. In the film, rape scenes represent the embodiment of male power, which functions on female body as a mode of corporeal inscription, in Grosz’s terms, for rewriting and reaffirming the patriarchal right and heteronormative order in which rape and violence effectively silence and subdue the woman (Modleski, 2005, p. 15).

Virginity is another inscription on the female body that represents the sexual “honour” of woman, especially in the Turkish context where it functions as a signifier of gender order codes and therefore as a control mechanism. However, the accessible prostitute’s body and its meanings conflict with inaccessibility of virgin’s body and its messages. Yet, these changing and conflicting messages do not let the control over female body disappear: instead, control changes its form. After the acknowledgement of the Woman’s virginity in the film, one of rapists starts to think about marrying her and the captain starts showing concern for her: “If she was a virgin then you should have thought twice. She could have been your sister”. They start thinking about other and “appropriate” ways to maintain the control over her body again: “She is cute. She can sleep in this room. No one will touch or harm her. She will help Kamil. Cook. Clean up. You’ll have a good time”. Therefore, the control over the silent body is also maintained on the thematic level by engaging the phallographic codes of prostitute’s body, rape and virginity with the silent character in the film as the possible oppositional meanings that the female silence might reveal is avoided in this way. The leading feminist poet of the twentieth century, Adrienne Rich

(1979), claims that all silence has a meaning (p. 308). As we see in the example of *Gemide*, the meanings of silence on the Turkish cinematic language are written on female bodies through the inscriptions of gender order and by “masculine” pens which are often inclined to see the female character as only an erotic or a suffering image.

### Afterthought:

In this article, I have explored the roles and positions given to the silent female characters and the functions of this newly emergent representational form. I have found that most of these films do not reflect or involve female point of view or female desire, and instead attempt to maintain control over the female body by eroticisation and/or victimisation. The silent female character is either used as a vehicle for the male characters’ speech and stories, or rendered an erotic or a suffering body in order to enjoy male gaze or affirm male mastery. Therefore, these films most often reproduce the definition of a “proper woman” as silent, erotic and vulnerable.

On the other hand, these films may open up the possibility for subversive readings by exposing, voluntarily or involuntarily, the patriarchal system’s violent control over women, through the shocking explicitness of the gender based violence and self-destructive agency of female characters in these films. The rape scenes in *Gemide*, the hymen reconstruction surgery scenes in *Laleli’de Bir Azize*, Nora’s being raped by her father-in-law in *Salkım Hanım’ın Taneleri*, or the scene in which the husband is beating the muted wife by his belt in *Masumiyet*, are the most disturbing scenes that the Turkish cinema has offered so far in terms of gender-based violence in everyday life contexts. Therefore, these may also serve to expose the female horrors of everyday life, by revealing the gender based-violence that is usually hidden behind the thick walls of the personal sphere. These films involve the possibility of being read as the reflections (but not allegories) of heterosexual male control over women’s bodies and lives, of exclusion of women from the ship/country and of disorder on the ship/in the country. These may in turn function as an unmasking of the male dominant system, as the female characters’ silences tell stories of silenced women in Turkey from different perspectives.

Finally, it is crucial to mention that whilst this study exposes how women’s silences function, it does not completely answer the important question of why women are represented in silent forms in the new cinema’s language. This article must be seen as the first step to provide an analysis of the silent female representational form in relation to the social and political context of Turkey and to the representations of masculinity, without which we cannot find the answers to the questions of why and how this form emerged and is used frequently in the new cinema.

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