

YEŞİLÇAM MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE NEW  
TURKISH CINEMA

by  
BEHİCE PEHLİVAN

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*YEŐİLÇAM* MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE NEW  
TURKISH CINEMA

APPROVED BY:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan Bülent Kahraman .....

(Dissertation Supervisor)

Murat Germen .....

Selim Birscl .....

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## ABSTRACT

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Behice Pehlivan

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Thesis Advisor: Hasan Bülent Kahraman

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In Turkey, especially between 1960 and 1975, the popularity and influence of melodramatic cinema grew during dramatic socio-economic changes and hegemonic ideology of modernization project; melodrama tried to create a new morality for this emerging social order. The melodramatic imagination of Yeşilçam during this time period achieved formation of a characteristic Turkish melodramatic tradition. This thesis attempts to explore the influence of the melodramatic imagination of Yeşilçam on the post 1990s Turkish cinema. Focusing on some prominent examples (Zeki Demirkubuz, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Yavuz Turgul) of the new Turkish cinema, this analysis identifies Yeşilçam's melodramatic tradition at the basis of this new cinema. The work of this thesis includes analysis of the structure of the melodramatic text, search for the historical and cultural background of melodramatic imagination, and investigation of the fundamental characteristics of Yeşilçam melodrama that forms the melodramatic tradition in Turkey.

Keywords: melodrama, Turkey, modernization, Yeşilçam, cinema

## ÖZ

# YEŞİLÇAM MELODRAMATİK HAYALGÜCÜ VE YENİ TÜRK SİNEMASI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ

Behice Pehlivan

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Türkiye’de, özellikle 1960 ve 1975 yılları arasında, dramatik sosyo-ekonomik değişimler ve modernizasyon projesinin hegemonik ideolojisi altında melodramatik sinemanın popülerliği ve etkisi arttı. Melodram, bu yeni gelişen sosyal düzen için yeni bir ahlak anlayışı yaratmaya çalışıyordu. Bu zaman zarfında Yeşilçam’ın melodramatik hayalgücü, karakteristik bir Türk melodram geleneği yaratmayı başardı. Bu tez, Yeşilçam’ın bu melodramatik hayalgücünün 1990 sonrası Türk sineması üzerine etkilerini araştırmaktadır. Bu yeni Türk sinemasının öne çıkan bazı örneklerine (Zeki Demirkubuz, Nuri Bilge Ceylan ve Yavuz Turgul) odaklanan bu analiz, yeni Türk sinemasının temelindeki Yeşilçam melodram geleneğini tanımlıyor. Bu tez, melodramatik anlatım yapısını, melodramatik hayalgücünün tarihsel ve kültürel temellerini, ve Türkiye’de melodram geleneğini oluşturan Yeşilçam melodramının temel karakteristiklerini incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: melodram, Türkiye, modernizasyon, Yeşilçam, sinema

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## INTRODUCTION

What are the fundamental characteristics of melodramatic imagination of Yeşilçam and can we talk about a continuation of this particular melodramatic tradition in post 1990s Turkish cinema? An answer to these questions appears in understanding the essence of the melodramatic structure, the historical, cultural and sociological background of melodramatic structure, the historical, cultural and sociological background of the melodramatic tradition as well as the changes it experienced after 90s.

To understand the Yeşilçam melodramatic and its possible emergence in new Turkish cinema, general information about the history of the melodramatic drama and nature of the melodramatic text is required. The emergence of melodrama can roughly be located in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The socio economic conditions of this era, the birth of the new bourgeoisie class, and the clash between old and new lifestyles are the formative elements in the formation of melodramatic drama. Peter Brooks' influential analysis of early examples of melodrama in Europe shows the vital connection between the modernity and melodrama. In the light of his examination, we see the loss of tragic vision and traditional sacred is the basis of the emergence of the melodramatic drama which tries to create a new morality in the post sacred world.

While the melodramatic text tries to fulfill its function of resolving the clash between old and new values, repressed feelings and crisis can return and become visible. This makes the melodrama a "hysterical text". Geoffrey Nowell-Smith sees the hysterical outburst of melodramatic drama as a function to "flushing the undischarged emotions off". This perspective of melodrama shows that melodramatic drama can be a very valuable source for theoreticians. The pathetic nature of melodrama shows symptoms like hysteria, exaggeration, repetitiveness, irrationality, claustrophobia, and so on. It builds different layers of reality. The hyperbolic surface conceals the hidden layer of the repressed ones. This hysterical nature has made the melodramatic drama a great opportunity for thinkers to reach the culturally repressed.



In the case of Yeşilçam melodrama, we should also consider its non-Western identity. In addition to its pathetic nature as stated above, non-Western melodrama faces several paradoxes. With the internalized Western gaze and European dynamics of melodramatic form, Yeşilçam as a non-Western melodrama tries to recreate Western ideology and forms its own way of defense mechanism to this ideology at the same time. Like most non-Western examples of melodramatic tradition, Yeşilçam's main problematic is the modernization project under control of the state. The artificial nature of modernization in Turkey as compared with the more natural process of European modernity, causes the Turkish melodramatic imagination establish a different relation with modernization problematic. This relationship is more paradoxical and more hysterical.

The Yeşilçam melodramatic tradition established itself mainly in the 60s and first part of the 70s. As the most popular entertainment at its time, Yeşilçam melodrama had an ambiguous relation with the state authority. While Yeşilçam reproduces the hegemonic ideology of modernization and Westernization, it also formed a space in which the repressed one can return to the surface. There are different points of views on this subject. On one hand, some thinkers claims Yeşilçam melodrama has a completely disturbing effect on the authority because of its signification to the unacceptable, primitive, peripheral elements of the culture. On the other hand, other thinkers claim the Yeşilçam melodramatic reproduces the Western gaze over and over again; with this characteristic, Yeşilçam is perfectly in accordance with the hegemonic ideology. Both of these arguments have sound reasoning, and the tension between these two opposite points gives the original character of Yeşilçam melodramatic imagination.

There are some essential elements which define the melodramatic universe of Yeşilçam and also connect this tradition to the post 1990s Turkish cinema. These elements also have the tension that we talked above. The urge to return to the original unity, entrapment in the moment of trauma, urge to become a fully modernized, Westernized, urbanized and acceptable individual, the melancholy and reconstructing self image with nostalgia, negatively constructed subject are some of these elements. The contradictory nature of these elements and their connection with the modernization project- either a tool for recreation this ideology or a defense mechanism against it- shows that Yeşilçam melodramatic's primary problematic has always been the modernization project.

Search for possible melodramatic influence on post 1990s Turkish cinema, in other words new Turkish cinema, can seem a bit absurd at first sight. However, in a detailed analysis of this new cinema, we can see the melodramatic tradition underlying the dramatic surface of the films. Accentuating some of the important auteur directors and tendencies in popular cinema, we can witness perceive how new Turkish cinema is centered on the same problematic with the Yeşilçam melodramas. Two authors, Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan problematize the negatively constructed subject of the melodramatic tradition. On the other hand, Yavuz Turgul and some other popular examples of nostalgic films after 1990s take the same negatively constructed subject and try to recreate it with an excessive feeling of nostalgia.

The problematic of this thesis, which is Yeşilçam melodramatic imagination and its influence on new Turkish cinema, will be analyzed by investigating the historical and cultural background of melodramatic structure. To grasp the essence of Yeşilçam melodrama, first the historical context of melodrama and its dramatic structure will be analyzed. Then historical and cultural dimensions of Yeşilçam melodrama and essential characteristics of this melodramatic tradition will be discussed by presenting different arguments about it. As the last part, the new Turkish cinema will be searched in order to find any trace of the melodramatic tradition of Yeşilçam.

## CHAPTER I

### Historical Background and Theoretical Accounts on Melodrama

#### i) Historical Context

Melodrama is a term emerged in 18th century to describe a certain kind of stage plays. The origin of the term comes from the Greek word “melos” for song, which explains the vital role of music as the provocative element that enhances the emotions in certain scenes. In time, the closed boundaries of melodrama blurred and the term, in Wimal Dissanayake’s words, came to signify a form of drama characterized by sensationalism, emotional intensity, hyperbole, strong action, violence, rhetorical excesses, moral polarities, brutal villainy and its ultimate elimination, and the triumph of good.<sup>1</sup> Also Peter Brooks in “*The Melodramatic Imagination*” lists several connotations of the word as the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.<sup>2</sup>

To understand the melodrama and melodramatic imagination clearly, we should look at its origins. We can roughly locate the emergence of melodrama with the ascendancy of bourgeoisie in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In an era in which all the cultural and moral values

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<sup>1</sup> Dissanayake, Wimal ‘Introduction’ *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* Ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, Peter *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 12.

turned upside down, melodrama emerged as a “cultural machine” that functions to establish a moral universe. Peter Brooks relates the existence of melodrama to the “loss of tragic vision” in European society in the aftermath of French Revolution.

The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath. This is the epistemological moment which it illustrates and to which it contributes: the moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of the Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms- tragedy, comedy of manners- that depended on such society. Melodrama does not simply represent a “fall” from tragedy, but a response to the loss of the tragic vision. It comes into a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern. (Brooks 1976, 15)

Brooks grounds his arguments about melodrama basically on the dissolution of the myth of the Sacred in the new bourgeois society. As all the institutions of traditional sacred were thrown into question; the tragedy and the tragic vision lost its validity. If transcendent morality and awareness are being liquidated, we can no longer talk about the tragedy which is about the conflicts of the nature of man in the universe of the transcendent knowledge. According to R. B. Heilman the difference of melodrama from tragedy is that in tragedy, the conflict is within man; in melodrama, it is between men, or between men and things. Tragedy is concerned with the nature of man, melodrama with the habits of men (and things).<sup>3</sup> Tragic hero leaves his/her place to melodramatic hero who tries to prove the triumph of the virtue in the new social order. The main role of the melodrama is to reassure the spectator about the existence of the universal morality in the post-sacred world. As Brooks states, melodrama is the response to the fall of the tragedy and tragic hero. It is the embodiment of the urge towards giving meaning to the new daily life and the new relationship with the authority. In the dissolution of the hierarchical relation of authority and the subject, melodrama became the arena that the anxiety from this chaos comes out and the illusion that a universal, transcendent moral order exists.

It is important to note the impossibility of limiting melodrama by the 19<sup>th</sup> century era. Although it emerged from very specific conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, France in particular, it became ‘a fragmented generic category and as a pervasive aesthetic mode broke

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<sup>3</sup> Mulvey, Laura ‘Notes on Sirk and Melodrama’ *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 77.

genre boundaries<sup>4</sup>. It is very difficult to give a clear definition for the contemporary meaning of melodrama since it is a generic mode that cannot be restricted into the boundaries of a certain genre. However, we can say that melodrama has always been about the crisis of bourgeoisie. Christine Glendhill explains this characteristic of melodrama as following.

Melodrama is frequently associated with the bourgeoisie- in the eighteenth century a European bourgeoisie, struggling for ascendancy over a decadent aristocracy, or, two hundred years later, a bourgeoisie 'decaying from within' in Eisenhower's America. However, between these two periods of bourgeois 'crisis' lies the intervening generalization of 'crisis' and 'mode' across social classes and cultural forms which made melodrama both a central nineteenth-century paradigm and a formative influence in twentieth-century mass culture. A crucial factor in these shifts is the role played by emergent working-class audiences and 'popular' tradition in the early formation of melodrama. (Gledhill 1987, 14)

No matter what time interval it was in, melodrama has always been the art of the working middle class. Emergent working-class audiences who struggle to gain power over the established ruling class are the main reason for the success of the popularization of melodrama throughout the time. As being the new myth of the modern period in response to the fall of tragedy, melodrama gained its main dynamism from the struggle with the authority. The authority as state, father, husband, God, Monarch, and so on has been the central part of the melodrama which tries to find a new moral ground that the relationship between the subject and this authority can be established on.

The nuclear family, as the most important product of the industrial revolution and modernization, is the main material and problematic for the melodrama. As the smallest unit of the struggle for authority, family is the perfect subject-matter that helps melodrama for fulfilling its functions. Ann Kaplan describes this as:

In the modern period (dating in Europe and North America from the Industrial Revolution and the inception of the modern nuclear family) it seems that cross-culturally certain aesthetic modes, ones we call "melodramatic", appeal to the largest number of people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gledhill, Christine 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation' *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Kaplan, Ann 'Melodrama/subjectivity/ideology: Western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema' *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* Ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11.

The reason why melodrama became such a pervasive aesthetic mode that has successfully gone beyond cultural boundaries is that it is the myth of the modern nuclear family. The power of melodrama that enables it to appeal to the largest number of people is that it touches the sensitive points at which the socio-economic and the personal psyche.

While trying to prove the existence of a transcendent moral order in a chaotic new world with new socio-political dynamics, melodrama problematizes the public in the private sphere. While in tragedy the struggle was against the universal forces of nature and transcendent authority, in melodrama the conflicts are between several generic characters in the small sphere of daily life. Linda Williams explains this as “The melodramatic mode thus took on an intense quality of wish-fulfillment, acting out the narrative resolution of conflicts derived from the economic, social, and political spheres in the private, emotionally primal sphere of home and family”<sup>6</sup>.

As I said before, the birth of melodrama was a response to the fall of tragedy. The loss of the belief in the transcendental moral order and the shattering of social order that once believed as divinely ordained and organized paved the way to melodrama. However, the important point is that melodrama took its power from the archaic psychic roles that were inherited from tragedy. That is why melodrama is not simply the opposite of tragedy but the transformation of it. It emerged as a response to demand for a new myth for the newly emerged family and working middle class, and it continued to be this way. What is more is that it turned into an aesthetic mode that could infuse every possible genre. The archaic power of melodramatic imagination makes it ageless and stateless. Because of that we can find melodrama as the popular answer for the society’s demand to cope with the frightening new world in which the traditional “organic and cohesive society” begins to shatter.

## **ii) Melodrama as a Hysterical Text**

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<sup>6</sup> Williams, Linda ‘Something Else Besides a Mother’ *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 301.

Heavy sentimentalisation is the key element that melodrama uses to move resolution of the conflicts in the social, political and economical spheres to the private, personal sphere. In Glendhill's words:

Sentimentalisation, stress on the individual, appeals to the personal, all supported the shift in the social terrain of bourgeois fiction and drama from feudal and aristocratic hierarchies to the 'democratic' bourgeois family- arena of personal, moral and social conflict, and support of the triad, heroine/villain/hero, which became a dominant dramatic structure from thereon.<sup>7</sup>

While the dramatic change from feudal and aristocratic hierarchies to democratic bourgeois family is taking place, melodrama took this dangerous tension to the safe zone of private family sphere. Emotional intensity is used to create a diversion from the underlying tension. By heightened emotions through intensive dramatization, exaggerated gestures, and rhetorical excesses, melodrama can successfully cover the social anxiety from the change.

Through this rhetorical excess, melodrama tends to "express all". Every possible way of representation is used to underline the psychic role of the melodramatic character and the miserable situation the protagonist is in. Various elements of intensifiers like heightened dialogues/monologues, gestures, music, costume, dramatization, décor, etc. creates an excess level of articulation that left nothing unspoken. Brooks defines this characteristic as follows:

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psychic roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions life tends, in this fiction, toward ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statements. (Brooks 1976, 4)

Exaggeration, repetitiveness, sentimentalisation, polarization, all these elements serve to the aim of making the psychic roles of the characters as explicit as possible. The spectator is forced to identify with the characters and believe the resolution of the conflicts in the story. The mesmerizing effect of the overtly sentimental and hyperbolic drama creates an illusionistic hyper reality in which the universal moral order exists. Brooks claims that this tradition of "say all" is a way to establish a contact with the Sacred that had been lost.

Starting perhaps from Rousseau's decision that he must "say all" in his "enterprise without example," there is a desperate effort to renew contact with the scattered ethical

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<sup>7</sup> Gledhill, Christine 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation' *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987),17.

and psychic fragments of the Sacred through the representation of fallen reality, insisting that behind reality, hidden by it yet indicated within it, there is a realm where large moral forces are operative, where large choices of ways of being must be made. (Brooks 1976, 21)

Basically it can be said that the heightened and polarized dramatization builds different layers of reality. Expressing all as a way of hyperbole along with the heavy sentimentalisation help the audience to recognize, identify with and believe the result that is produced by the story. However, the excess quality in the structure of melodrama also signifies a hidden reality beyond this ridiculously hyperbolic surface. Because of that melodramatic text is defined as “hysterical” by most scholars. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith explains the relation between melodramatic excess and hysteria in his article *Minnelli and Melodram*<sup>8</sup>. Glendhill defines the characteristic that makes a work melodramatic as “[t]he siphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive *mise en scène*.”<sup>8</sup> According to Nowell-Smith, there is characteristic “undischarged emotion” in melodramatic text that cannot be siphoned off and expressed in the form of music or *mise en scène*; and in that case music or *mise en scène* are not just the functional tools that heightens emotionality of an element, but also substitute for it. He relates this substitution to hysteria as follows:

In hysteria (...) the energy attached to an idea that has been repressed returns converted into a bodily symptom. The ‘return of the repressed’ takes place, not in conscious discourse, but displaced onto the body of the patient. In the melodrama, where there is always material which cannot be expressed in discourse or in the actions of the characters furthering the designs of the plot, a conversion can take place into the body of the text. (...) It is not just that the characters are often prone to hysteria, but that the film itself somatises its own unaccommodated excess, which thus appears displaced or in the wrong place.<sup>9</sup>

Although the birth of melodrama is due to the social, political and economical changes of its time, it basically transfers all the conflicts to the inner, private space. As Asuman Suner noted in his book *Hayalet Ev* the exaggeration and repetition is related with the fact that melodrama is about in the inner part. It tells the stories that occur in a physical interior (like home) and also is interested with the matters where the events touch the psyche<sup>10</sup>. Melodramatic text is

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<sup>8</sup> Glendhill, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey ‘Minnelli and Melodrama’ *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 73.

<sup>10</sup> Suner, Asuman *Hayalet Ev: Yeni Türk Sinemasında Aidiyet, Kimlik ve Bellek* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2006), 185.



not about hysteria, but it is a hysterical text itself. It is for this reason that scholars compare the melodramatic works with Gothic literature which characterized by ‘displacing its irrational on to ‘Gothic’ topographies that can literally materialize the unconscious into lower depths, spaces below the surface, ancient ruins or the city’s underworld’.<sup>11</sup> Like Gothic novel, melodramatic text also uses its structural devices to express the unspeakable, in other word the irrational. Laura Mulvey says this ‘irrational of the Hollywood melodrama is poised between the interiority of the individual unconscious and the community that contains it’.<sup>12</sup> Although she limits her claim with Hollywood, it is true for melodrama in general that all the body of the melodramatic text is formed to deal with the hysterical outburst while trying to balance the tension between personal psyche and social life.

The multilayered relationship of melodrama with reality and the excess it produces that makes the text hysterical interests the scholars. Many theorists, especially feminist scholars find this aspect of melodrama as a radical potential. They believe that hysterical text can be an opportunity for the underlying social realities to break into the conventional, patriarchal surface of the text. Glendhill explains this as follows:

As a bourgeois form, melodrama is constrained by the same conditions of verisimilitude as realism. If the family melodrama’s speciality is generational and gender conflict, verisimilitude demands that the central issues of sexual difference and identity be ‘realistically’ presented. But these are precisely the issues realism is designed to repress. Hence the siphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive *mise en scene* which makes a work melodramatic. From this perspective the radical potential of melodrama lies less in a Sirkian critique of bourgeois life style and values than in the possibility that the ‘real’ conditions of psychic and sexual identity might- as symptoms of a ‘hysterical text’- press too close to the surface and break the reassuring unity of classic realist narrative. ‘Ideological failure’, built into the melodramatic programme, results in the breakdown of realism. (Glendhill 1897, 9)

As aforementioned, there are different layers of reality in melodramatic text. The one on the surface is a kind of hyper reality which is in accordance with the conventional forms and classic realist narrative style, but overtly sentimental, exaggerated, much more polarized and repetitive. If we consider the social terrain of the time and the tension between new and old lifestyles that is behind melodrama’s emergence, it is no surprise that melodrama keeps norms of verisimilitude as realism, but at the same time transforming it into a form that is

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<sup>11</sup> Mulvey, Laura ‘The Melodrama’s Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory’ *Melodrama Stage Picture Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

ridiculously unbelievable. Melodrama differs from the conventional realist literature by its interest in the relation of the dramatically changing social reality and the psyche. It is perfectly normal that the psyche in a chaotic time and under frightening social circumstances produces unrepresentable material for melodramatic text, since it is constrained by the limits of classic realist narrative.

Excessive *mise en scène* and other devices of expression that takes the responsibility to siphoning off the unrepresentable material can be an opportunity for film and cultural studies for reaching the “anti-realist excess” as the representation of social psyche. Laura Mulvey considers these hysterical moments of melodramatic text as a potential to observe the psychic symptoms and collective fantasies that cannot be expressed in any other form of text. On the other hand, it is also true that the bourgeoisie used realism for legitimizing their current positions in society. However melodrama as a hysterical text also contains structural opportunities for breaking down the realist convention by its hysterical moments. Realist representation cannot accommodate the fantasy, however in melodrama it cannot prevent the excess to be discharged by melodramatic devices and its signification to psyche and collective fantasy.

### **iii) The Good and the Evil**

The essence of the melodrama is not about reaching an end which is in accordance with the moral order-although it is the case in nearly every example. It is about the existence of morality. Brooks emphasizes that melodrama is not by definition a moralistic drama, but the drama of morality.

Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. It plays out the force of that anxiety with the apparent triumph of villainy, and it dissipates it with the eventual victory of virtue. It demonstrates over and over that the signs of ethical forces can be discovered and can be made legible... Melodrama is indeed, typically, not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to “prove” the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist

and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men. (Brooks 1976, 20)

If we remember the social conditions leading to the emergence of melodrama, we can realize that the real tension is between accepting a transcendental existence of morality and fear of its possible absence. This social tension finds its reflection in the extreme polarization of good and evil in melodrama. In all its hyperbolic style, the good and the evil are the most exaggerated character categories in melodrama. They carry all the signs of their evilness or goodness on them and the melodramatic text use all of its narrative and structural device to make them as explicit as possible. The repetition and exaggeration throughout the melodrama as a genre and inside the text in particular enable the spectator to recognize and name the good and evil at first sight. Besides, the evil identify himself/herself as evil and constantly make statements, soliloquies about his/her evil nature.

The extreme polarization and portrayal of good and evil almost like a caricature shows us that identification of good and evil in the melodramatic text is as important as the struggle between them. The main interest of melodrama is never a middle ground on which reconciliation between the antagonists can occur. As Brooks states “It can offer no terminal reconciliation, for there is no longer a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, melodrama offers its spectators ‘transcendence in the struggle of the children of light with the children of darkness, in the play of ethical mind’.<sup>14</sup> Although discharging the anxiety and fear of the audience because of the frightening new world is a very important and natural characteristic of melodrama, creation of the good and evil, personification of the tragic forces in this two generic category, and transforming the conflict of the tragedy which is between hero and natural forces or in the hero’s conscious into the eternal conflict between good and evil characters are the elements that gives melodrama its mythical force.

Melodrama gives an easy explanation of a chaotic and changing world by extreme polarization and presents a drama of morality with the battle of the archetypal good and evil. As the new myth of modern industrial society, melodrama tries to deal with the dissolution of the traditional society, institutions, values, sacred, etc. in the form of the evil character in the melodramatic text. Evil as the corrupt one does not respect the traditional Sacred and moral

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<sup>13</sup> Brooks, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 22.

values and breaks the cohesive body of the organic society apart. This is the personification of the socio economic changes during the bourgeois crisis and it helps the audiences to relieve their anxiety and fear that grow out of this crisis.

Brooks notes “Melodrama represents both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms.”<sup>15</sup> With the loss of the tragic vision, melodrama created the myth of the new industrial society and its modern family creating a transcendent good and evil antagonism in the form of pure psychic roles. In fact, evil as the ultimate enemy of both the hero and the spectator gives the melodramatic text its power. Maeve Cooke states in his analysis of evil and moral “evil highlights the role played by feelings in the moral domain. Our reactions to evil tend to be passionate”.<sup>16</sup> Evil governs the universe of melodrama, it is the “motor of the pilot”, has “spectacular power” which makes the good hero seem helpless, and it basically violates the sacred space of the innocence; it signifies the original trauma, past horror.<sup>17</sup> It can be said that the first motivation of the spectator of the melodrama to watch the drama is not to see the Good defeating the Evil. It is the Evil itself that appeals the audience. To understand this better we should examine the concept of evil and the melodramatic evil more closely.

#### **iv) Selective Perspectives on the Evil**

Evil is closely related to the authority, fear and modernity. Although fear is a human emotion since the beginning and it is positive in nature in order to protect from danger; the cultural conceptualization of fear is a modern concept. Modernity as a continuous, unending process is the transformation and transition of authority into political power. Authority use fear in a negative sense transiting the source of the fear into invisibility. This is the artificial

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<sup>15</sup> Brooks, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Cooke, Maeve ‘An Evil Heart: Moral Evil an Moral Identity’ *Rethinking Evil* (California, University of California Press, 2001), 113.

<sup>17</sup> Brooks, 34.

fear related to “control” in cultural context and it enables the production of evil as a cultural product. As the systematized, constructed structures and early law systems, monotheistic religions, creates evil as the nonexistent source of fear. One of the dramatic changes that monotheistic religion brought is the complete invisibility of God and evil. As a result, Evil as the antithesis of God and the fear that comes from it become everpresent.

God, Evil and human free will is the basics of the moral systems and ethics as well as the religious systems of thoughts. In the “civil religion” created in the enlightenment this basic trio and the struggle among them did not change much. Immanuel Kant is the first modern philosopher reflecting on morality of evil. Kant’s account of morality presupposes that we are agents with the capacity to choose freely to obey or disobey what is dictated by the moral law. Moral responsibility requires this capacity.<sup>18</sup> He holds human accountable for their actions and relates human freedom to the responsibility of these actions. Humans become free as they become responsible for their behaviors.

Kant does not define the natural inclinations of human as the source of evil, in other words he claims that human is not good or evil in nature. Both the good and the evil belong to “the will”.

[t]here is no original sin or evil, just as there is no original goodness. To put the point positively, all sins, vices, and virtues originate in a (free) Willkür. The primary issue for Kant is always how we choose to respond to different, and sometimes conflicting, incentives. (Bernstein 2002, 15)

According to him, the will should be kept under the control of reason. Sin and goodness are the outcomes of the free reasoning, the choice that the reason makes about the endless clash between natural desires and mind. The important point here is that morality emerges as a consequence of this contradiction; good behavior can only be proven when there is a moral duty which is against the desires. The paradigmatic examples of acting morally occur only when there is an overt clash between what we naturally desire and what we recognize as our duty, what we ought to do.<sup>19</sup> It is also important to point out that the natural desire or bodily needs that is mentioned here is not the source of evil. Also the wrong reasoning or “corruption

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<sup>18</sup> Bernstein, Richard J. *Radical Evil* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Bernstein, 15.

of human reason” is not the place the evil comes from. For Kant, ‘radical evil is related solely to the corruption of the will.’<sup>20</sup>

Kant transforms the relation between good, evil and will into a drama. In Gustavo Levy’s words it is ‘the drama of human freedom.’<sup>21</sup> As free rational agents, human beings can adopt good or evil maxims. His passionate rejection of everpresent, ominous power of evil seems like an opposition to melodramatic evil. Melodrama always has the assumption that people are intrinsically good or evil. However, it departs from tragedy and gives its characters the ability to choose. In melodrama there is an almost tangible tension between the sentimental thought of a universal evil and the Kantian perspective of the human freedom. If we consider the time and social atmosphere of the emergence of the melodrama, we can say that melodramatic drama is the reflection of the ongoing struggle between traditional notions and the new ideas that the enlightenment brought. Melodrama functions as the illusion of the resolution of this clash caused by the rupture of these changes at the basis of the Western mind.

As Peter Brooks states “melodrama becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era”.<sup>22</sup> In this post-sacred era at which Kant holds the humanity responsible for all its actions and defines freedom as the ability to choose, melodrama finds its main strength at the archaic beliefs. The spectator of melodrama finds comfort and a guilty pleasure in the unending fear and fascination by the melodramatic evil which is a transcendental entity that is completely beyond the human responsibility. While Kant defines the maturity as being a free agent who has the ability to adopt the good or evil maxims, melodrama creates a space in which there is no need to will. In this space evil is not the corruption of the will, it just exists.

It is no surprise in this context that melodrama has been treated as an inferior genre for being “childish” since its beginning. In fact, being childish is a very important characteristic of the success of the melodrama. At the time of social crisis and change, melodrama offers a

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>21</sup> Levy, Gustavo ‘The Polyhedron of Evil’ *Rethinking Evil* (California, University of California Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>22</sup> Brooks, 15.

universe in which the evil is the mastering power that is free from the human responsibility. It is certain that one of the functions of melodrama has always been providing the spectator a kind of escapism. However, defining the childishness of melodrama only as escapism from the frightening social changes would be too simple. The aforementioned concept of the excess in melodrama comes to our attention once again. In melodrama, the emphasis on the childish, sentimental notion of the Good and Evil is so strong and excessive that it gives away the underlying tension beneath the surface. While the spectator and the melodramatic hero is fascinated and amused by the power of the evil, there is the underlying layer of the awareness of the absurdity of the excess evil and the immaturity in Kantian sense. Denying the will and the human ability to adopt good or evil maxims, rejecting the human responsibility in moral maxim, being terrified by the responsibility of the self-legislative rational man are the characteristics of melodrama that shows how melodrama is at war against Kant. Kantian good and evil and human freedom is the guilty conscious of melodrama and is the antithesis of the melodramatic evil.

At this point, it is useful to recall Schelling's perception of good and evil. Richard Bernstein says "Schelling's 'self-will' is much darker and much more unruly than Kant's 'self-love'. This perverted self-will is the source of the evil in human beings- a self-will that stands 'opposed to reason as universal will'."<sup>23</sup> Schelling finds a universal and natural evil in human. He sees it as a constitutive power of the universe and human existence. In this sense, it can be said that Schelling's sense of evil is very much like the melodramatic evil. In Leyva's words, Schelling's evil 'appears as the creative force of the universe itself, which is impossible to escape.'<sup>24</sup> He accepts the reality and existence of evil vividly.

In human beings, and in human beings alone, there is a clash, a conflict of two wills- the will to good and the will to evil. "And just as there is an ardor for good, there is an enthusiasm for evil". This is what is distinctive about human beings, and this is the essence of human freedom. (Bernstein 2002, 88)

As it can be seen, Schelling relates the essence of human freedom to good and evil like Kant. However, he goes to another direction and finds the origin of evil in human nature. He claims that human being can change the ground and existence relationship which is dissoluble in God, and this breaking of the unity brings the Good and the Evil. As it can be seen, Schelling

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<sup>23</sup> Bernstein, 88.

<sup>24</sup> Leyva, 112.

almost finds an original sin in human existence. He gives the human reason the governing power for free choice. According to him, human being can choose to break the unity and bring the darkness from the ground into the existence. However, although he emphasizes the human freedom to choose, his extended explanation about the everpresent evil as a part of human existence is where he departs from Kantian perspective and closes to melodramatic evil.

“Schelling portrays a much more ominous sense of the power of evil- a power that is never completely mastered and can always break out with ever-renewed vigor”.<sup>25</sup> As it can be seen Schelling creates a constant anxiety for the constant possibility of an evil-power. This ominous sense of the evil is one of the main elements of the melodramatic atmosphere. The fear of the possible intervention from an evil power or the sense of a hiding evil is a recurrent theme in melodrama. Good heroes are always afraid of being transformed into evil that will destruct their complete happiness. The essence of Schelling’s sense of evil is the concept of “dissoluble unity” which is also the main problem of melodramatic drama. The dark side from the ground underneath the melodrama universe overwhelms the surface of the complete unity of happiness and innocence. The structure of melodrama always includes the element of awareness of the existence of this evil power and its eminent disturbance. The hysteric heroes of melodrama who waits almost frantically the evil interference with a death wish always feel the ominous evil and try to prove it by showing excessive fear and melancholy for no reason.

Schelling emphasizes the indissoluble unity in God and the possibility of dissolution of it in human nature. In other words, a perfect state of balance in the first state and the disturbance of it in the next step. In melodrama, the main function of the evil always has been destroying the original unity and creating an unbalanced state. In fact, the main point here is the “change”. While the good and the innocent one struggles to keep the current state as it is, the evil causes the change and disrupts the balance. All the energy in the melodramatic world is spent for going back to the initial state of balance/original unity and therefore to escape from the governing force of the evil. Melodrama is a genre which is completely closed to changes. There is always a desperate urge to “return”. Not only the characters return their origin, family, hometown, ex lover, etc.; also the text wants to return its initial state. It builds a structure in which repetition gives comfort and the change is damned as the wish of the evil.

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<sup>25</sup> Bernstein, 90.



It is important to notice that the common blame on melodrama for being too repetitive and not being original becomes irrelevant once we realize that repetition is one of the main constructive elements and main problematics of melodramatic imagination. The spectator never searches for a new story, a new type of character or different sequences of different events. The main appeal of the melodrama is the sameness throughout the genre. The story, the characters, the décors, the mise en scenes, the dialogues, the dramatization, etc. are all the functional tools for creating the atmosphere of melodramatic universe in which repetition is the signification for the desperate urge to return the initial state of unity. We can define the melodramatic drama as the drama of balance and the melodramatic evil as the only creative force that disturbs this balance.

Schelling's perception of evil involves a degree of delusion assuming that the evil will deceive itself as if it is the universal will is good for everyone. Bernstein states about Schelling's evil as following:

Evil is the assertion of one's particular, idiosyncratic, narcissistic will over universal will- or, more accurately, it involves deceiving oneself into believing that one's particular will is identical with the universal will. Evil involves the delusion that one is omnipotent- a rival to God. (Bernstein 2002, 94)

The darkness that is part of the universe offers temptation to which human being can freely choose to resist or not. He/she can choose to pervert the harmonious unity that founded initially in God and create a new unity of dark and light that is not harmonious and good. Human nature has the tendency to see this new unity as equal to God's and claims that this unity is for the universal good and it is the initial state of unity and harmony. If we examine the melodramatic evil in light of Schelling's wise analysis of evil, we can see that it does not have any delusions about the universal will or having any higher good purpose. Melodramatic evil is excessively and self-reflexively evil. As aforementioned, it is vital for drama of the melodrama that the evil characters are explicitly defined. Free from any delusions, the evil in melodrama is always aware of its evilness. They are not the product of the endless struggle of the Good and the Evil in human nature. Melodramatic evil is a character which is like cut from a cardboard, it does not have any material for good in itself just like the melodramatic hero/heroine does not have any material for evil either. Schelling says:

Whoever has no material or force of evil in himself is also impotent for good. (...) The passion against which our negative morality is at war are forces each of which has a common root with its corresponding virtue. The soul of all hatred is love and in the most

violent anger there is seen nothing but the quietude which was attacked and aroused in the innermost center. (Bernstein 2002, 95)

He recites a passionate war between forces of good and evil inside the human nature. We all have the roots of either force both in our love and anger. However, melodramatic character never has the opposite force, he/she unrealistically one sided. Once again, we return back to Brook's claim about how melodrama is not a moralistic drama but a drama of morality. The characters in melodrama are not supposed to be close to human nature which is in the middle of a battle between good and evil all the time. Instead, in the melodramatic imagination, good and evil are the pure natural forces that are the pieces of a broken unity. Melodramatic evil is the dark force that comes from the ground and overwhelms the existence. Melodrama searches for the essence of the evil, in other words the radical evil. In this respect, melodrama is like the universe of human psyche. In this universe the good and the evil forces which are represented by the exaggerated melodramatic characters battle with each other, not with human characters.

Evil can also be analyzed from one other dimension. As the opposite of the moral one which associates with the reason and maturity, evil comes along with the irrational. If we read the good vs. evil opposition as the existence of moral vs. absence of moral, we can see that the latter one, in Georges Bataille's words, is in fact "kingdom of childhood". In his analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, he relates the childhood with evil for its rejection to enter the area of maturity which is governed by the reason.

Good is based on common interest which entails consideration of the future. Divine intoxication, to which the instincts of childhood are so closely related, is entirely in the present. In the education of children preference for the present moment is the common definition of Evil. Adults forbid those who have still to reach 'maturity' to enter the divine kingdom of childhood. But condemnation of the present moment for the sake of the future is an aberration. Just as it is necessary to forbid easy access to it, so it is necessary to regain the domain of the moment (the kingdom of childhood), and that requires temporary transgression of the interdict.<sup>26</sup>

It is true that melodramatic evil bases his/her mischief on the reason and there is always his/her interest from the turn of the events. However, as aforementioned melodrama does not have one layer of reality. While behaving perfectly reasonable on the surface of the text, the excess of the evil which is the reason for the most of the hysterical moments of melodrama directly signifies to the irrational in the psyche. There is never a reasonable justification for

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<sup>26</sup> Bataille, Georges *Literature and Evil* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973), 9.

the evil, it is always there, aware of its own evilness and its unavoidable damnation at the end and always rejects to comply with the common interest. It brings the irrational chaos to the melodramatic universe, it gets into rational, moral, mature world of the Good, and it is the only one allowed to be exempt from the rules of the reason.

There are two ways to revolt against the real world, dominated as it is by reason and based on the will to survive. The most common and relevant is the rejection of its rationality. It is easy to see that the underlying principle of the real world is not really reason, but reason which has come to terms with that arbitrary element born of the violence and puerile instincts of the past. (Bataille 1973, 7)

As Bataille emphasizes, the rejection of the rationality is a way to revolt against the world. Of course it does not mean to announce the melodramatic evil as a revolutionist. However, it is for the strong signification to the childhood and the irrational in the psyche that “Evil, therefore, if we examine it closely, is not only the dream of the wicked: it is to some extent the dream of the Good”.<sup>27</sup>

Evil does not only revolt against the world, in fact the real revolt of Evil is against the Good. The important point is that in many hysterical outbursts of melodramatic texts, the Good also detach itself from the rational and enters to the domain of the irrational and the childhood. On the underlying level of reality in the melodrama, the Good fantasies about the evil. While the Evil never finds the state of being good attractive, Good is fascinated by the Evil. It is the collective fantasy of the spectator. It signifies the hidden psychic symptoms and for this reason gets the most passionate reactions from them. It can be recognized at the moments where the emotional excess of the Good cannot get thorough the surface of the traditional narrative and expresses itself as a hysteria crisis which is totally irrational including rebellious tones against the moral and rational universe of the Good.

For Bataille, the female protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*, Catharine Earnshaw is aware of her dream about the Evil and she experiences an inner conflict that leads her to her death. Bataille claims that the heroine is so moral that she cannot stand the fact that she is dreaming about the evil and eventually dies from this pain. Her death is a compensation for not entering the rational world of the maturity wholeheartedly. Catharine is a character who carries the whole problem of the melodramatic Good in herself. However, besides being formed by the melodramatic problem, she also signifies to it. Her awareness of her own

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<sup>27</sup> Bataille, 8.

paradox moves her away from being a melodramatic character. She is like a postmodern text which has a self reflexive mode for signifying to its own problem by get out from the text. The melodramatic Good never dies for being too moral like Catharine. He/she can never afford being aware of his/her fantasies about the evil, because he/she had already been entered the closed circle of rational world of the maturity.

It is important to note that the children of melodramas are never like real children, they never carry any sign of childishness in reason or imagination. Even the children in melodrama are not allowed to be in the “the kingdom of the childhood”. The surface of the melodramatic drama is strictly closed to the irrationality of any kind. Only when the evil emerges from the hidden ground of melodrama and disturbs the balance, the irrational enters into the text. This is one of the reasons why melodramatic evil is so unforgivable; it reminds the melodramatic Good its fantasies about the irrationality and the childhood. Neither the Good nor the spectator becomes aware of its collective fantasies about irrationality and the pain for leaving the childhood behind. However, they sense it. Although they have not the level of awareness of Catharine Earnshaw, we know that melodrama has its own subconscious where it stores the repressed fantasies and it allows many hysterical holes in the structure of drama for expressing the excessive emotion. These hysterical points are the only allowed irrational moments where the entire excessive significations to the childhood and its freedom from the rational new world become free from the boundaries of the surface of drama.

We examined Kant’s, Schelling’s and Bataille’s perceptions of evil and their relations with melodramatic drama. There is no doubt that we cannot limit the analysis of the melodramatic evil by these three perspectives. However, they are enough to give a general idea about how evil governs the melodramatic universe. It erases the human free will, it spoils the original, harmonious unity and it brings irrationality into the text. It is no surprise that most of the undischarged emotions in melodrama are the result of the acts of the evil. Also it is the most exaggerated and repetitive one in the structure in the text. Therefore, it would be a sound argument to say the melodramatic evil is mostly responsible for the hysterical nature of the melodramatic drama. Not only the suffering as a result of evil actions causes this hysteria; also the evil itself as the excessive and irrational one breaks the rational surface of the melodramatic drama.

## CHAPTER II

### Some Fundamental Characteristics of Yeşilçam Melodrama between 1960 and 1975

In this chapter, I will analyze Turkish melodramatic cinema between 1960 and 1975. This period is particularly important the melodramatic tradition is established, developed and find its own identity in this time interval. First, I will give a brief historical background of Turkish melodramas. Then, I will try to scrutinize some key aspects in Yeşilçam melodrama that can give important insights about melodramatic tradition in Turkey.

#### i) Historical Context

Turkish melodramatic cinema is not very easy to confine between strict dates in the Turkish cinema history. However, the 1960s and 1970s can be singled out as the golden age of melodrama in Turkish films. After the promising years of the 1950s which is an establishment period for Turkish film producers, directors, audience. 60s and the first half of the 70s saw a tremendous increase in Turkish film production. Nilgün Abisel explains the boom in sector as follows.

60s and the beginning of the 70s were the most successful time of Turkish cinema. During this time period the number of audience showed a rapid increase. In parallel with this increase, many cinema halls were opened in cities and towns. In another words, the seat capacity increased too. For example, while in 1961 there were 213 cinema hall (68 closed, 145 open) in Istanbul, these numbers reached to 373 (137 closed, 236 open) in 1975. The result of the increase of the numbers of cinema halls was the increasing demand for the film production. Thereby the film production companies, managers and the number of films increased gradually. Now, film making proved itself as a profitable business.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Abisel, Nilgün Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar (Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2005), 104.

As it can be seen through these numbers, Turkish film production showed almost an exponential growth between 1960 and 1975. The number of films produced put Turkish cinema among the most active cinema sectors in the world in those years. However, these figures were not enough for us to talk about a Turkish film industry. The reason for the failure in establishing a strong and ever developing film industry is beyond this analysis. However, the activity and popularity in Turkish film production make us believe that Turkish film was the main and definitive medium of popular culture of the day. As Abisel noted:

In these years Turkish cinema had become an important area of economic activity with its annual film production, increasing numbers of cinema halls, increasing diversity in the creative staff and audience; also it had become a definitive factor as the only medium of popular culture of Turkey. (Abisel 2005, 199)

Agah Özgüç claims that the consciousness about the expectations of the audience could not come into being till the beginnings of the 60s. He says “The films made on demand started to emerge slowly especially between 1960 and 65”.<sup>29</sup> The financial supply-demand relation between producers and audience explains the boom in 60s in film production. Audience loved and demanded the Turkish melodramas as their new myth and producers did not fail to supply it. It can be said melodrama, as the main genre of Turkish cinema till the second half of the 70s, is the main reason for this relative success. In fact, melodrama and this period of Turkish cinema is so interconnected that “Yeşilçam” has become a term connoting both this period of Turkish cinema and Turkish melodramatic cinema coextensively. It means the core of the Turkish cinema, the main essence of it that is inseparable from the melodramatic tradition. In fact, it can be claimed easily that melodrama is beyond being just a genre in Turkish cinema; it is the definitive form and the main medium that governed at least the period that Turkish cinematic tradition established.

If we want to understand the Turkish melodramatic cinema, it is essential to see the tradition of melodramatic literature behind it. As Hasan Bülent Kahraman states ‘One of the two facts that creates the current social level of the arabesque is the Turkish cinema that emerged in 50s and the melodramatic love novels which we can say that they formed this cinema.’<sup>30</sup> The contemporary arabesque culture and the influence of Turkish cinema on it is the topic of

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<sup>29</sup> Özgüç, Agah *Türlerle Türk Sineması: Dönemler / Modalar / Tipler* (İstanbul: Dünya Kitapları, 2005), 243.

<sup>30</sup> Kahraman, Hasan Bülent *Kitle Kültürü, Kitlelerin Afyonu* (İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2003), 270.

another chapter. However, it is important to recognize the light melodramatic novels as the basis of this tradition. Kerime Nadir, Esat Mahmut Karakurt, Muazzez Tahsin Berkant are considered as the most influential figures who partly shaped the melodramatic universe of the Turkish cinema. As Özgüç states, they are ‘the bestseller trio of the cinema- literature relations.’<sup>31</sup> According to Özgüç, the tradition of adaptation from the melodramatic novels dates back 1947, and it officially started with the Esat Mahmut Karakurt in 1951 and although it fades away slowly after the second half of 70s, continues till 1984.<sup>32</sup>

This melodramatic literature includes all the general, basic rules of the melodrama and they form a perfect basic structure which the melodramatic cinema can built upon. Kahraman explains this basic structure as follows:

Kerime Nadir’s, Muazzez Tahsin’s, and although different from others, Esat Mahmut Karakurt’s novels always use a few same patterns. These novels are the native branches of the popular, bestseller novel tradition which first of all can be seen at West, and then were named as the “soap opera” or “Barbara Cartland novel”. These novels are the important products of the elitist melodramatic and for this reason they always include class conflict, differentiation of good and bad, clear cut distinctions between man-woman. (Kahraman 2003, 272)

As Kahraman states, these melodramatic novels are the native representatives of the Western melodramatic, they are the first phase of adopting the western style of melodrama in Turkey. The combination of the cinema and this melodramatic literature formed “Yeşilçam” which is the domestic melodrama peculiar to Turkey. At this point it can be said that, Yeşilçam is the second phase of adopting the Western style of melodrama. It was built upon the structure which is provided by this literature and it created its own visual language with domestic archetypes and icons.

## **ii) The Home in Yeşilçam Melodramas and the Ideological Failure**

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<sup>31</sup> Özgüç, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

We can define the period between 1960 and 75 as the time the melodramatic imagination found its main shape in Turkey. There is no doubt that Yeşilçam is not a homogenous monoblock from which general conclusions can be drawn easily. However, Turkish melodramatic cinema with its natural repetitiveness and sameness enable us to observe some common thematic and structural points that occur almost identically. The melodramatic cinema of that period is a valuable source to understand the characteristics of the Turkish melodramatic imagination.

Before beginning to look closely to the melodrama itself, we should think about the peculiarities of the audience; because as aforementioned the film production in Turkey was strictly based on the demand-supply rule in that period. Abisel claims ‘These films mostly targeted the female audience from the middle class and the community from the shanty towns which was gradually getting crowded.’<sup>33</sup> This brings a strong feminine influence on Turkish melodrama which requires a thorough analysis from feminist discourse that is beyond this article. However, there is a point that cannot be disregarded. Female audience affected the stories of Turkish melodramas and moved the storylines which was already about the interiors to more into the home. As it has been mentioned in the first chapter, melodrama’s main interest has always been the inside, the inside of the home, inside the psyche, and so on. When we consider the social and cultural environment of 1960s’ Turkey, we can realize that the conservative lifestyle and the patriarchal pressure on women unavoidably make the melodramatic structure to emphasize this characteristic. It can be said that Turkish melodramatic structure is always a little bit unbalanced in respect to its foreign counterparts and the stress is heavily on the inside of the home.

The notion of family in Turkish melodramas can be analyzed from different aspects. Abisel discusses the function of the family as an agent that legitimizes and normalizes the authoritative ideologies.

The story in popular films takes place mostly in the atmosphere of indoors, around family and small groups like it. Family, as the foundation block of the present social structure, is a very suitable environment for legitimizing and reproducing the given hegemonic ideologies in its small atmosphere. In consequence, this universal “natural” association is the indispensable element of popular narrations. The association of family is so naturalized that it is perceived as almost free from its social context. The emphasis that popular narrations give to family and the romantic love that paves way to it is inevitable. (Abisel 2005, 206)

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<sup>33</sup> Abisel, 74.



As aforementioned, melodrama becomes the medium through which the irresolvable tension in society is relieved at the times of social crisis. The melodrama takes the fear, excitement, anger and channelizes them into the domestic environment. As Lynn Spigel says “the absence of politics from the melodrama should be understood as an inscribed absence, an erasure of the public enabled by the retreat into the domesticity of the newly suburbs with their differently constructed priorities”<sup>34</sup>. In this case, considering the atmosphere of 1960s and the economic, social and political crisis, the popularity of melodramatic drama in Turkey at this period becomes perfectly understandable.

Melodramatic imagination creates a universe in which the ongoing social crises are disguised and the social problems become family matters which are resolved at the end. As Abisel states, the family in melodrama is the ultimate, universal, natural entity that is completely ostracized from its social context. It is true that melodrama does not only take the problem which belongs to outside and turns it into a matter of inside, but it also solves it according to the dominant, patriarchal moral norms and recreates the authoritative ideology. However, the aforementioned notion of undischarged emotions which leads to the excess in the dramatic structure and the resulting hysteria of the melodramatic text should be remembered here. This excess in combination with other structural devices like repetitiveness and overt exaggerations makes the conservative surface of melodrama and its resolution problematic. The melodrama always signifies more than it shows. Geoffrey-Nowell Smith names this state as the “ideological failure”. In Smith’s words:

Melodrama can thus be seen as a contradictory nexus, in which certain determinations (social, physical, artistic) are brought together but in which the problem of the articulation of these determinations is not successfully resolved. The importance of melodrama lies precisely in its ideological failure. Because it cannot accommodate its problems, either in a real present or in an ideal future, but lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness, it opens a space which most Hollywood forms have studiously closed off. (Nowell-Smith 1987, 74)

If we depend on Smith’s analysis of melodrama, we can say Turkish melodramatic films cannot accommodate the problems that it had promised to resolve. It tries to deal with many social, cultural, economic, political problems as well as the pathological side of Turkish conscious, and it fails to articulate the resolution. After the affected and implausible end, the problems that have been come up from where they had been hidden and stay open. From

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<sup>34</sup> Mulvey, 128.

Smith's perspective, Abisel's claim about melodrama's recreation of hegemonic ideologies is not a sound argument. Because, the melodramatic structure is unable to successfully convey an ideological resolution. It is the opportunity and value of the melodrama; we can see and analyze the problems that were left open. The problem of articulation in melodrama which best shows itself in the hysteria of the text, fails the creation of ideology in melodrama.

The conservative, modernist, urban, Western, patriarchal, elitist state ideology tries to establish itself in the Turkish melodramatic structure through the narration, storyline, moral standpoints of good and evil characters. However, the melodramatic surface of the drama cannot accommodate the hegemonic ideology and the oppositions at the same time. The problems with the modernist project, the clash of Western and Eastern or urban and rural, patriarchal violence against women, Islamist impulses, and so on with all the archaic fears and obsessions about primary psychic roles occupy the surface of the melodramatic structure which cannot carry this burden and cannot resolve these grave contradictions. As Smith states, the melodrama shamelessly leaves open all these contradictions with an unsuccessful and phony resolution.

At this point, it is important to examine the ambiguous relation of melodrama with the authority. Considering Smith's claim about the ideological failure of melodrama, it is no surprise that the melodrama has always been disregarded by the hegemonic and elitist ideology. Umut Tümay Arslan analysis the inferior position of melodramatic Turkish cinema in the eyes of authoritative ideology.

Cinema has formed a "trouble" zone where the elements that disturb the image of a homogenous nation and culture come to light every time. In other words, on one hand because of its technological and visual nature, on the other hand, perhaps more importantly, because it has to include the gaze that the desires flow and are being recorded, cinema in Turkey has always been an area where the distance between the created image of the homogenous society and the reality can be seen, the elements that are being repressed because they are perceived as "strange", "underdeveloped", "primitive", "embarrassing", "unkind", "shapeless" can surface, cannot be detained. The desire to keep the distance inside the expression "typical Yeşilçam film", according to me, is also related with these. With these lapses, the disturbance resulted from the domestic reality, the usual return of the repressed on the mirror of Yeşilçam, the desire to keep the unruly under control.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Arslan, Umut Tümay *Bu Kabuslar Neden Cemil? Yeşilçam'da Erkeklik ve Mazlumluk* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005), 41.

Arslan defines Yeşilçam as a trouble zone where the repressed elements of the culture returns to the surface and becomes visible. She is in complete agreement with Smith by saying that Turkish melodrama forms a mirror on which the problematic elements that is not harmonious with the supposedly homogenous and modern image of the culture and society unavoidably returns to the audience. Yeşilçam cannot control the problems that it deals with. While it tries to recreate the hegemonic modernist and patriarchal ideology, it cannot prevent the visibility of the distance between this ideology and the real cultural identity itself. As Arslan noted, the melodrama always has the self reflexive element inside it. While it constitutes a surface that is in accordance with the authority in an exaggerated way and while it tries to reproduce it, Yeşilçam melodrama also signifies to the existence of the contradictions and social crisis. For example, while Turkish melodrama locks her female protagonists up in the heterosexual, patriarchal matrix and forms the boundaries of femininity very carefully, it also signifies this matrix and boundaries.

There is no doubt melodramatic is never deviates from the dominant ideology and traditional morality. Because as it mentioned in first chapter, the main reason for the existence of melodrama is the urge to find the traditional sacred in the new order of things. However, the melodramatic drama cannot fulfill its function to build a structure to respond this urge without leaving flaws. The surface of the drama includes marks that signify to its irresolvable crisis that lies beneath. Arslan describes this self reflexive, disturbing nature of melodrama as “uncanny”. In her words:

“For including banality, primitiveness, *alaturca*, Yeşilçam carries the symptoms of an illness that must be cured!” The distance between the criticism and the *uncanny* Yeşilçam always gives comfort by making the criticism own a pure Western gaze; criticism is free from “typical and disgusting” soul, out of this state. At least for little while. Until finding oneself in this *uncanny* state as against the West! The only way to establish the distance again with throwing this state out is to look the *uncanny* Yeşilçam. (Arslan 2005, 35)

Melodramatic drama in general has never been approved by the high culture and the attention that it receives from cultural analysts and film theorists is considerably new development. However, in the case of Turkish melodrama, this split becomes deeper. Yeşilçam is almost a dangerous zone where even the critics avoid going in. The Western view positions melodrama as the “other”, or makes it the agent on which we can feel ourselves detached and alienated from our real selves. Both on personal and social level, melodrama in general and Yeşilçam in particular is the pathological one. The schizophrenic fragmentation of reality, the hysterical

crisis that breaks up the rational surface and the signification to its own subconscious under this surface makes Yeşilçam the uncanny blank on the supposedly modernized Turkish conscious. That is why Yeşilçam has never been approved although its apparent moral standpoint is always in perfect accordance with the dominant ideologies. Yeşilçam contains the intrinsic gaze that looks upon itself and reveals the primitive sides of ourselves that we do not want to see.

Arslan's explanation of the general perception of Yeşilçam cinema connotes the concept of abjection. Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject gives us some interesting insights about the perception of Yeşilçam by the modern, Westernized, "enlightened" mind.

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.<sup>36</sup>

For Kristeva, the abject is not an object; rather it is the thing which escapes from the meaning, the borders, and the cultural codes. It is the other one, the inhuman, the anomaly, the abomination. It is useful to discuss the "the abject" with "the distance"; because distance is the first form of abjection. We tend to stay in a secure distance from things we fear or cannot identify. Then we try to give it a meaning and put it in a form that we can "accept" it. We stigmatize and turn it into the abject one. Yeşilçam as in Kristeva's words "what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite"<sup>37</sup> is nothing but the great abject one in Turkish culture. It is essential to hold Yeşilçam in a secure distance and protect its aloofness. Because it is beyond the borders, it disturbs the system of thought about homogenized, urban, modern Turkish family and society myth by signifying its archaic identities behind it.

At this point, it is useful to examine the frequently used term "typically Yeşilçam". Arslan says the critic always want to get rid of the "typically and disgusting" soul of the Yeşilçam melodrama and try to remain in the secure zone of the pure Western gaze. What does this typical mean? What do we try to tell when we say "typical Yeşilçam"? Which

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<sup>36</sup> Kristeva, Julia. "Approaching Abjection" in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, European Perspectives*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 390.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 391.

notions do we include under the term typical? It is obvious that this term signifies to the melodramatic genre and its several characteristics like exaggeration, hyperbole, intensity, clear cut differences between melodramatic good and evil, etc. However, it also includes a certain degree of abjection that tries to contain Yeşilçam in a secure distance. Yeşilçam is both the tale of the typical one and it is the typical itself. It signifies to the typical in our identity and culture and it forces us to enter the dangerous zone of the repressed identities.

On the other hand, a counter argument to Smith's theory about the ideological failure of melodrama can be made. Laura Mulvey indicates:

If the melodrama offers a fantasy escape for the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognizable, real and familiar traps that the escape is closer to a daydream than a fairy story. The few Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind evoke contradictions rather than reconciliation, with the alternative to mute surrender to society's overt pressures lying in defeat by its unconscious laws. (Mulvey 1987, 79)

As a feminist film theorist, Mulvey claims that the signification to the problems is not enough because the melodramatic text always includes its own mechanisms to prevent any deviation from the main ideology. There is no doubt that Yeşilçam's melodramatic drama, like Mulvey's Hollywood, tries very hard to not leave any room for the characters to escape from the morality of the dominant ideology. Patriarchal, capitalist, modernist conscious carefully arrange the dead ends and the severe punishments for those who misbehave according to their rules. For example, the tragic suffering and deaths of the female protagonists who have been unfaithful or have tendencies to break the patriarchal matrix around them are the recognizable, real and familiar traps that covers all exits of this patriarchal matrix. The audience of the Yeşilçam never gets messages that are inappropriate for the ruling ideology and they are never allowed to a fantasy escape. We can interpret from Mulvey that, melodramatic universe only recreates the dominant, middle class cultural norms.

According to Abisel, Yeşilçam melodrama goes one step further from the recreation; it simply normalizes by setting it as a natural law of the melodramatic universe.

In this time period when the new demands started to be heard, the female audience were tried to be convinced about the normality of their situation that they have been in for a long time, they were tried to be positioned the same way. This political behavior reaches the audience by the storyline, the setting, the melodramatic elements which creates the emotional intensity of the dramatic moments, flowery speeches and mainly the characters of the native cinema. (Abisel 2005, 209)

Both Mulvey and Abisel do not agree with several feminist thinkers who claim the female dominant structure of melodrama that signifies to and implies the presence of some crisis about female life in society opens a space that the contradictions can be seen. In fact, these two notions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Mulvey and Abisel's arguments can be integrated into Smith's argument. It is no doubt whatsoever that the melodramatic drama functions as recreating, normalizing and legitimizing tool of the middle working class morality and dominant cultural/political ideologies. However, this does not mean the melodrama can achieve this ideological and political function successfully. Although we cannot argue that melodrama gives some level of conscious or enlightenment or courage to stand against the hegemonic ideology; the uncanniness and abjection of melodramatic universe, Yeşilçam in particular, shows an ideological failure. For this reason, it opens a space that contradictions, paradoxes and crises come to the surface and gives us an opportunity to analyze that other genres does not allow.

### **iii) Family and Romantic Love in Yeşilçam Melodramas**

Family as the main subject matter of Yeşilçam, functions in two levels that is mentioned above. As Abisel noted, family is the main agent of Yeşilçam melodrama over which Yeşilçam recreates and normalizes the ideology of the authority. At the same time, family is the main mechanism that produces the most undischarged emotions and hysterical crisis. The unity of the family is one of the most important themes of Yeşilçam melodrama that functions on both level mentioned here. Abisel says about this unity:

The indication of the order in our films is the solidarity and unity in the family. The order in the family should not be disturbed. For this reason every kind of self-sacrifice is made. If the family is separated temporarily or permanently for any reason, the remainder part should continue this solidarity. The family members struggle for this. This struggle is always approved, supported and at the unity is secured even if there are some losses. Even in the films which have unhappy endings, the good always wins and "clean" relationships are praised. Death comes when it is inevitable, but since all the problems which depress the family are resolved, the decedents die happily. (Abisel 2005, 77)

As Abisel indicates, most of the energy is spent to protect and return to the unity of the family. Most of the Yeşilçam melodramas have the structure that progresses according to the state of this unity. In introduction, we meet the protagonists who are happy in the unity of the family. The tension begins when the threat to this unity appears, the climax is when this unity is torn apart and in the end we see the unity of the family again.

Turkish melodramatic soul always struggles with the emotional state of being exiled or separated from home. Arslan explains this soul as:

It seems vital to think about the essence of the Yeşilçam which is the stage where the “souls become modernized”. We can say that this essence first appears in the “sentimental city melodramas” which are directed by directors like Muharrem Gürses, Memduh Ün and Atıf Yılmaz in 50s. A feeling like being thrown into the cruel world, feeling like an orphan who does not know where to go, what to do in this world governs these films. This essence which cannot find meaning to its own existence, finds the only way to express itself by presenting its suffering and misfortune to the gaze of the other. It speaks to the other in the language of suffering and being orphan, but also in the language of malediction; it invites the other to see itself by this way: *Mezarımı Taştan Oyun, Kahpe Dünya, Yetimlerin Ahı, Talihsiz Yetim, Talihsiz Yavru*. I am talking about the being aggrieved as the dominant soul of Yeşilçam. (Arslan 2005, 42)

The social and cultural context of this phenomenon will be explained in following chapters. The protagonist always searches for his/her family, the harmonious state of balance that he/she once had. The family unity in Yeşilçam melodrama is almost like Schelling’s conception of the harmonious original unity that was mentioned in the first chapter. This unity is the only time and space that melodramatic Yeşilçam protagonist can have a meaningful existence in the melodramatic universe. The pain of being separated from this unity is so great that dramatic narration and the surface of the storyline cannot carry this suffering. The Yeşilçam melodrama does always include the undischarged emotions of this great suffering. From the beginning to the end of the film, the text carries the shadow of this pain and forces the spectator to see it. It is the primal force of the Yeşilçam melodrama. Despite all its absurdity, exaggeration and irrationality, this melancholic soul that suffers from the trauma of being separated from its original unity establishes a direct relation to spectators’ conscious unlike any other genre can do.

A counter argument can be made about how most of Yeşilçam melodramas tell the story of process of unification of male and female protagonists who were single and sometimes in a miserable condition at the beginning. It can be argued there is no original unity in this kind of storyline and we cannot talk about the melancholic soul and suffering because of the

separation. However, if we look closer to the notion of “love” in Yeşilçam melodramas we can see that the romantic love in Yeşilçam includes different layers of signification to the original unity. In fact, love in universe of Yeşilçam melodrama is a different state of being that is not like what we understand from the romantic love in real life. We cannot talk about a real relationship with a sexual dimension between two people in melodrama. It is possible to connect this unreal nature of love in melodramatic universe to the superficiality and irrationality of the Yeşilçam like the general opinion do. However, if we analyze it closely, we can see that there must be an underlying process of signification. At this point Arus Yumul’s thoughts about love in Yeşilçam are quite explanatory:

In these films loves have characteristics like absolute love that is beyond the love for God, it surrounds the world of the lover and everything can be given up for this love. In this sense, there are some similarities with the love in Islamic mysticism. Although it got closer to the sophistication level of abstract, mystic love in *Sevmek Zamanı* (Metin Erksan) which has a theme about falling in love with an image, in other films there are loves which is defined by Mevlana like ‘Ey canan sensiz hangi hayat vardır? ... Senin aşkın beni bütün yakınlarımdan ayırdı.... Senin aşkın huzur ve selamet evini yıktı. Çünkü aşk insanı harap eder. Çünkü aşk hiçbir müsibetten nasihat almaz. İnsanda ne mal, ne iyi şöhret, ne mevki, ne ev bark, ne aile ne de evlat bırakır’. Love appears as a situation which disturbs the routine of daily life and violates the established order.<sup>38</sup>

Yeşilçam sees love as the prerequisite for the marriage. For the melodramatic universe of Yeşilçam, love is the force that leads to the unity of the family. However, the fact that conservative Turkish society of 50’s or 60’s was still in favor of the traditional ways of marriage like “görücü usulü” makes the popularity of the melodramatic love of Yeşilçam a bit paradoxical. This paradox enables us to recognize that love in Yeşilçam is not perceived as the romantic love by the culture.

As Yumul states, the Yeşilçam love is like the divine love rather than the romantic, carnal love. It does not leave any room for the free choice. The male and female protagonists do not show any indication of free reasoning for choosing each other; in fact, this is never subjected to questioning. The unification of them is like the choice of the melodramatic universe rather than the individuals themselves. Moreover, this unification becomes the main problem of that universe. We as the audience never know why this unification is so important, or are these male and female characters are suitable for each other, and so on. Yeşilçam melodrama is never interested in this kind of reasoning. The melodramatic universe is

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<sup>38</sup> Yumul, Arus ‘Türk Sinemasında Aşk ve Ahlak’ *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 1* Ed. Deniz Derman (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2001), 48.



divinely arranged only for securing or preventing the unity of the lovers. By many narration tools, Yeşilçam constantly emphasize that the two protagonists were destined to unite at some time, and the most uncanny thing of all these protagonists seem to have this knowledge from the beginning.

The melodramatic lovers of Yeşilçam try to recreate the original unity that is the time and space of complete balance and happiness. For this reason they never need a process of knowing each other, they seem like they have a beforehand knowledge about each other. Melodramatic text carefully leaves signs to imply that these man and woman are “supposed to be together”, they “belong to each other”, and most importantly they “know each other”. Sometimes it literally says in the cliché remarks like “I feel I know you for centuries” or “I have always felt your love even before we met”.

Melodramatic love in Yeşilçam is not something that comes up suddenly. It is in the texture of the melodramatic drama from beginning to end. In this sense, the protagonists do not “fall in love”; they “remain in love”. Therefore, we can argue that the romantic love in Yeşilçam melodrama signifies to original unity and the trauma of separation more than the family motif itself. While the family in Yeşilçam literally tells us the importance of unity and the tragedy of being apart from it, the romantic love causes the audience to feel it. The lovers in melodramatic universe of Yeşilçam are the broken pieces of the original unity. That is why there is always an uncanny acquaintanceship between these characters- in several examples, that strange feeling becomes so visible that a suspicion of them being siblings is surfaced-, and that is why failure in unification of the lovers becomes a tragedy.

#### **iv) Time in Melodramatic Universe of Yeşilçam**

The protagonists suffer “unimaginable” pain from the separation, losing this unity causes existential problems for them. There is no meaning in living or dying without this unity. The characters cannot go on their lives. The loss of the unity freezes the time for these

characters. The disintegration of the unity means the disintegration of time and space in Yeşilçam. One of the main reasons of the general opinion about the irrationality and absurdity of Yeşilçam is the way it handles the “time”. The time in Yeşilçam universe is a different physical concept than our understanding of time in real world. Like the melodramatic good, melodramatic evil, melodramatic love; we can speak of a melodramatic time that is peculiar to melodrama universe.

On one hand, Yeşilçam tends to spend the time generously, the years pass by incredibly fast, children grow up, characters graduate from schools, old people die, small ateliers become big factories, and so on. Also many signs like white hair about the time passed are put in the drama structure. On the other hand, almost nothing changes in the big time interval that the drama tells. Abisel says about the strange usage of time in Yeşilçam:

In most popular Turkish films the order of time of the narration is built upon uncertainties, because other than some words- “tomorrow evening”, “many years later”- no visual clue- costume, hair and automobile model, calendar, clock- is given, the chronologic relations between some events may not be established. In other words, dramatic time can be completely uncertain. Many times, the story which starts at the present time passes over ten- fifteen years for some reason and the character appears with his/her gray hair; but the time that passed has no influence on the outside, this set up which should cause a big problem of plausibility is easily disregarded for the reason that the emphasis is on the personal relations which is excluded from the social and special contexts. The main necessary thing happens, the children grow up at this time, the tension to meet them makes this no longer a problem for the audience. (Abisel 2005, 217)

Yeşilçam uses only the name of time without its meaning. Melodramatic time is not a force that changes things; it is stripped from its dimension of reality. While it passes by in a normal way as we know it, the characters remain trapped in one moment. That moment is the trauma of the separation. Yeşilçam melodrama never tells the life, space and time. The life begins at the end of the film. Because, apart from the original unity, the characters and the melodramatic universe cannot sense and be sure about their existence. The protagonists can never be separate individuals; they stay in the tragic moment of fear and terror right after the separation. The characters live in an endless, continuous, constant time, and only after the successful unification this moment ends and the time gains its reality. The real life with the real time beings after the broken pieces of the original unity come together.

The important point here is to recognize that the Yeşilçam melodrama always ends this endless continuous tense; therefore every drama in Yeşilçam has happy ending. Even if

the protagonists die, the unification on an existential level is successfully achieved. The obstacles are removed, the broken pieces come together. At this moment, death cannot be a problem, because the melodramatic love was never about the body. The cliché remarks of Yeşilçam melodrama such as “we will meet in the other world” or “we will be together even death make us apart” becomes more meaningful in this sense. If the spiritual unification is achieved, the existence of the protagonists can be meaningful again and the melodramatic universe can return to a normal mechanism which time becomes a changing force. After this moment, death becomes bearable because both the protagonist and the audience are saved from being trapped in the moment of trauma. For this reason, every Yeşilçam melodrama gives what the audience wants no matter the protagonists live happily ever after or die. In this sense, the aforementioned thoughts about how the melodramatic romantic love is the tool of Yeşilçam to signify to the original unity make more sense. The audience approves it and empathizes with the protagonists by feeling the unimaginable pain of separation because the melodramatic love in Yeşilçam is the aesthetization of the struggle to return the harmonious balance of the unity. That is why as long as the film establishes this unity in spiritual level it is enough satisfaction for the audience and it is the happy ending.

#### **v) Rhetorical and Visual Expression**

To describe the undischarged emotions in the trauma of separation in Yeşilçam melodrama, “unimaginable pain” has been used above. In fact, Yeşilçam melodrama has its own characteristic ways to express these emotions and tell the “unimaginable, indescribable” one. At this point, it is helpful to turn to Peter Brooks to remember the general tendencies of the melodrama as a genre.

Melodrama appears as a medium in which repression has been pierced to allow thorough articulation, to make available the expression of pure moral and psychological integers. Yet here we encounter the apparent paradox that melodrama so often, particularly in climactic moments and in extreme situations, has recourse to non-verbal means of expressing its meanings. Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign. (Brooks 1976, 56)

As the most expressive form of drama, the melodrama always wants to tell. However, the traditional ways of narration of melodrama cannot accommodate the repressed crisis of melodramatic universe; therefore expression becomes the main problem for this genre. As Brooks states, melodrama tends to express the repressed one through articulation although language sometimes cannot be enough for siphoning off the undischarged emotions, especially at the climactic moments. For this reason, melodrama becomes “too obvious”. It uses every visual and rhetorical way to express its messages. In Brooks’ words, the melodrama ‘is centrally about the need for repeated obfuscations and refusals of the message and about the need for repeated clarifications and acknowledgements of the message.’<sup>39</sup>

The panic and tension in melodramatic drama to express every detail of the story clearly and not leaving anything in dark or ambiguous can be perceived easily. Why is melodrama in such a hurry to make it obvious? Why the ambiguity is so dangerous that the melodramatic narration carefully spend so much effort to avoid it? Where is the paranoia about the audience’s misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the melodramatic text comes from? We can answer these questions in light of the concept of the “hysterical text”. The reason for the tendency to the overt obviousness can be explained in two ways. First, we can speculate that by leaving no room for ambiguity and expressing all, the surface of the melodramatic drama wants to conceal all the undischarged emotions and repressed crisis beneath. Because, as it was said earlier the repressed one tends to return and disturb the surface of the melodramatic drama and lead to a hysterical breakdown of this surface. Secondly, one can point out the possible signification of this obviousness to the repressed one in the subconscious of the melodramatic text. The uncanny nature of the strange narration which makes great effort to make us “learn everything clearly” and the tendency of the characters to the exaggerated articulation of their situations make us believe that they can be more than what they seem to be; they can be signifiers to the repressed one. Considering the multilayered structure of reality in melodramatic text, both of the answers seem to be right. Again, we come to the main paradox of melodrama, while it tries to hide the repressed, it signifies to it.

Besides articulation in its sentimental language, melodrama tries to use everything in its universe to express the melodramatic soul. Yeşilçam melodramatic text had always been full

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<sup>39</sup> Brooks, 28.

of excessive signifiers. If we consider the economic and political conditions with the traumatic changes in social and cultural structure of Turkey at the time of Yeşilçam's golden age, the need of exaggerated signifiers to signify the chaos beneath makes perfect sense. These signifiers disturb the balance of the melodramatic text and causes irrational and hysterical one to come to the surface. If we speculate further, we can connect the bad reputation of Yeşilçam melodrama for being absurd and irrational to the usage of the excessive signification. In fact, the signs of Yeşilçam melodrama are so excessive and exaggerated that visual elements start to talk like rhetorical elements. Dilek Kaya Mutlu explains this as following:

Needles to say that there are scenes in which visual elements are used.... Sometimes these gazes and facial expressions becomes so exaggerated that it can be claimed that more than signification, they try to talk, speak. In other words, these gazes and facial expressions do not only show themselves, at the same time, make themselves heard like they want to give a message. The framed marriage photos of lovers or the newspaper photos that show the death of a character, which at first sight seems like their visualities are more important, leave the impression that they are used for conveying a specific message to the audience explicitly and easily. (...) Usually appeared as the most economic way to express the time pass and the developments in this process, these kind of elements tell more than they show.<sup>40</sup>

As Brooks states the melodramatic text is the most expressive form of dramatization. Yeşilçam, in this sense, seems to go one step further. The melodramatic drama of Yeşilçam is never silent. It continuously talks. It can be through narrative voiceover, the dialogs, soliloquies, the lyrics of a song or it can talk through the visual elements such as object, places, decors, icons that is fetishized by Yeşilçam melodramatic tradition. As an example, we can look at Abisel's small list of "things" that Yeşilçam gave different meanings and almost made fetish objects of its own universe.

Haydarpaşa train station, discotheque scenes, the district police station which give the impression of consisting of one room, the door of prison and prison ward, the fences that blocks the front of the camera, book, typewriter, eye glasses, wedding gown and dower, bird in the cage, yacht, very big sized portrait photos, uniform,... (Abisel 2005, 284-92)

These are few examples of the long list of Yeşilçam signifiers. To exemplify what is said before, we can take Haydarpaşa train station. We can easily grasp the excessive nature of it as a signifier. It is more than a place or a décor where one of the characters comes in certain moment of the story. It is an object that had gone under the process of fetishization, it gained different meanings and become a signifier of Yeşilçam. When the character stands at the stairs

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<sup>40</sup> Mutlu, Dilek Kaya 'Yerli Melodramlar ve Ruhsal Boşalım' *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler I* Ed. Deniz Derman (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2001), 115.

of Haydarpaşa station with a suitcase in his/her hand, we no longer see the character that stands at stairs with a suitcase. It is no longer a photograph from a scene in a melodramatic drama, it is a poster. It comes one step further from the other frames of the film, takes our attention and brings the whole issues about the migration, the West and East clash, modernization project, our repressed rural identities, fear and anxiety towards the Western lifestyle, nostalgia about the village life, and so on. Suddenly, Haydarpaşa train station breaks the smooth surface of melodramatic drama and calls the repressed back to the surface. It is obvious that Yeşilçam tries to be economic by using Haydarpaşa over and over again to tell “the villager comes to İstanbul and he/she is a bit surprised to see the city”. However, by doing that, Yeşilçam fetishizes the Haydarpaşa station and makes it an excessive signifier which talks too much that it disturbs the normal narration of the film.

Yeşilçam melodrama sees life like a dictionary, nearly every object in this universe has an explicit meaning. It makes it impossible to misunderstand or misinterpret for the audience, and it guarantees this by repetition. By constantly repeating itself, it establishes a tradition in which we understand the eyeglasses are the sign of intellectuals or disco means the degenerated youth. Repetition is the strongest force of melodramatic Yeşilçam. While it is the forbidden zone for other genres, the repetition is completely welcomed by the Yeşilçam melodrama.

On the other hand, this repetition opens a different perspective. After the countless times of repetition of the same signifiers, this signifier becomes a fetish and begins to signify itself. In other words, after a while the Haydarpaşa train station does not only signify to certain social and cultural issues, but also it signifies to the previous Haydarpaşa scenes in Yeşilçam. By the repetition of the same visual, musical, rhetorical signifiers, Yeşilçam manages to create a specific melodramatic universe that is peculiar to Yeşilçam only. Therefore, the usage of these elements adds self reflexivity into the melodramatic drama. However, it is not in the sense of post modern reflexivity where the text is aware of itself. The Yeşilçam melodrama never becomes aware of itself, it lives in its own universe with different physical rules of time and space, and this universe ends when the broken pieces united at the end of the film. The life that begins after this end never coincides with this universe, so awareness in postmodern sense is impossible for the melodramatic text.

The self reflexivity here is more like an intrinsic gaze that looks upon its own signification process. This becomes more obvious especially during the hysterical breakdowns of the text. For example, the long scenes in which the heroine sings a song in casino, which is one the major break from the reality of the melodramatic text, includes several gazes and layers of reality at the same time. Analyzing Abisel's example about such a scene can be helpful here:

In the portrayal of Leyla/Ayla Gül/ Şoray as the “adorable fabulous woman” the emphasis is on the image rather than the words. Consequently, in the performing scenes where she becomes a spectacle and she shows herself, Şoray is displayed alone in front of different decors in colorful dresses. In these scenes, her look into the camera assures her awareness of this position. In crowded scenes, Leyla is set as the focal point which the gaze of the camera, other characters and the audience watch; she is the character whose face is zoomed in most. (Abisel 2005, 144)

As Abisel states, in this scene the audience see both the heroine of this specific drama and the actress Türkan Şoray. The song on the other hand functions as a tool for siphoning the undischarged emotions and libidinal energy of the text. Both the heroine and Türkan Şoray are aware of their being object of the gaze of both the spectators in the casino and the audience in the cinema hall. This is the most critical moment where the rational surface of the melodramatic text breaks down. The identity of Türkan Şoray is revealed by her obvious awareness and as the main signifier she makes the whole scene including the song and the heroine a fetish object with all the repressed emotions they signify to. Like this, Yeşilçam melodrama becomes its own fetish object and begins to signify to itself.

As it can be seen, the visual signification is a very important element of Yeşilçam melodramatic text. However, for Peter Brooks one of the melodrama's characteristics is the importance that it gives to rhetorical tools rather than visuality. For proving this point, he explains the extreme physical conditions in different genres including the melodrama:

Another dimension of signs appears in the choice of extreme physical conditions to represent moral states: the halt, the blind, and the mute people the world of melodrama, striking examples of past misfortunes and mysteries...The moral drama has physical repercussions which stand before us as its living symbols. (Brooks 1976, 46)

One is tempted to speculate that the different kinds of drama have their corresponding sense deprivations: for tragedy, blindness, since tragedy is about insight and illumination; for comedy, deafness, since comedy is concerned with problems in communication, misunderstandings and their consequences; and for melodrama, muteness, since melodrama is about expression. There are enough famous examples to suggest the pertinence of blindness to the tragic universe... (Brooks 1976, 57)

For Brooks, dramatic texts have their characteristic physical disabilities. He claims blindness is peculiar to tragedy whereas the muteness for the melodrama. In his words “The mute role is remarkably prevalent in melodrama”<sup>41</sup> because the melodramatic drama is the most expressive dramatic form, and the real problem of the melodrama is the problem of expression of the repressed one. However, when we look at Yeşilçam melodramas we see blindness is the prevalent physical repercussion.

Among our tearjerker, touching films, when it is looked to the history of Turkish cinema collectively, numerically the blind characters are the majority. Sometimes in this kind of “Yeşilçam melodramas” the deaf, disabled, paralyzed characters who live on rolling chairs can appear too. (Özgüç 2005, 121)

As Özgüç states, the blindness can be seen very frequently in Yeşilçam melodrama. Although the muteness is seen in several examples, it is not a characteristic element like blindness. In fact, the storyline that involves the protagonist becomes blind is perceived as one of the main clichés of Yeşilçam melodrama. While muteness is the characteristic physical disability in foreign melodramatic tradition, the choice of Yeşilçam as blindness is a very interesting point.

Mutlu says that “In all narrations in native melodramas repressed, restrained, suffering bodies are displayed.”<sup>42</sup> The unimaginable pain that protagonists suffer from has physical repercussions most of the time. As the hero and heroine’s existence loss its meaning, the physical existence begins to deteriorate. Addiction, physical and mental illnesses starts because of the spiritual pain. Sometimes, the melodramatic text needs to emphasize this pain more, therefore the body of one of the protagonists loss its unity or become disabled just like the melodramatic universe that they are in. It is important to recognize that in most of the cases, the physical disturbances happen after the tragic separation from the lover; the spiritual pain causes the physical one. The answer to the question “why is Yeşilçam melodrama tends to use blindness as the physical disturbance of the text unlike the foreign ones” is a complex one that should include the knowledge about Turkish collective conscious, social psyche, characteristic archetypes, cultural traditions, and so on. However, here we can speculate that the answer to this question can be the closeness of Yeşilçam melodrama to the tragic drama, and also the importance that Yeşilçam gives to visual signification rather than the rhetorical one.

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<sup>41</sup> Brooks, 56.

<sup>42</sup> Mutlu, 119.



## **vi) The Melodramatic Evil in Yeşilçam**

The Yeşilçam melodrama tends to fetishize everything including itself. However, the melodramatic text is mostly interested in the evil as its main fetish object. Kahraman notes about the evil in the melodramatic literature upon which the structure of the Yeşilçam melodrama built:

In Turkish novels, the ‘evil’ which is complained for its absence is handled in its pure form in these books. The good is given as buried in this texture. Indeed, these books heighten human ‘dark’, evil side in a way that is not seen in any other literature section. Though the good always wins at the end and all the construct of the novel is determined at the beginning, however the novelist do not refrain from digging up this naked truth. (Kahraman 2003, 273)

As it was analyzed in previous chapter, the evil is central for the melodramatic universe. This does not change in Yeşilçam melodrama. Evil as the one who is responsible for the loss of the unity is the only reason for the existence of melodramatic universe. It is the one who keeps the protagonists and the spectators trapped in the infinite moment of trauma. However, although the function of evil always the same- breaking the unity and separating the broken pieces-, it appears in many different faces. In fact, Yeşilçam melodrama is quite creative about the evil one. It can be a feudal ruler, the parents of the lover, the boss, the obsessed and rich stalker, the step mother, the vamp femme fatale and her mafia friends, etc. We can make a very long list of melodramatic evil in Yeşilçam whereas the good has a very limited shape that only changes according to his/her economic conditions.

It is important to pay attention the variety of the evil in Yeşilçam melodrama. It is possible to connect this to the social and economic conditions of the time when the economically diminished society is afraid from future and lost its self respect between Eastern and Western identities. The melodramatic text of Yeşilçam has the hidden message that “the Evil is everywhere”. However, in the city it is more varied than the village where the evil is the feudal ruler most of the time. City, on the other hand, is always full of evil in different costumes that the protagonists always meet one of them at a place. This paranoid soul leads to

the anticipation of the evil in melodramatic text. The melancholy resulting from this anticipation is the characteristic soul of the Yeşilçam melodrama. A causeless sadness is always present at the beginning of the film.

The paranoid society that is afraid of the big city finds its reflection in Yeşilçam melodrama. As the new myth of a society in the process of modernization, the Yeşilçam melodrama creates its new tragedy with new tragic villains in the city. If we look closer to the evil characters of Yeşilçam melodrama, we can recognize the striking common element in most of these characters. The melodramatic evil tends to be the one who has the authority in most examples. Either they have money or well established position; they are fully integrated to the city life and they usually have more power than the protagonists. This can be read from the socio-political aspect as the urge of the new middle class or working class who were migrated to the city from rural area to gain power and position in the new order. As a matter of fact, the protagonists who struggle to defeat the evil usually end up in the same powerful and rich position with the evil at the end. Revenge in most cases means superseding the evil one. As Abisel states ‘We can say that in nearly all our native films the key point in the storylines is the ‘revenge’.’<sup>43</sup> If the evil takes the hero’s girlfriend, then the hero should get her sister, if the evil is rich then hero or heroine should be richer and have his/her company, if the evil is a powerful mafia patron, then the hero must be more powerful mafia and kill him, and so on.

As it can be seen, the melodramatic evil is directly connected to the conditions of the day more than any other element in Yeşilçam melodrama. In combination with fear, anxiety and rage against the changing economic and social conditions, the audience of Yeşilçam reacted passionately against the melodramatic evil. It is the cause of most of the undischarged emotions that leads to hysterical breakdowns of the text. It is the strongest signifier of the melodrama that signifies to the fear and anger that the audience feels vividly. Therefore, it can be said that the evil is the central element and the main mechanism of the melodramatic universe of Yeşilçam that causes the hysterical excess.

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<sup>43</sup> Abisel, 96.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Socio-Political and Cultural Dimensions of Yeşilçam Melodramatic**

In this chapter, I will analyze Yeşilçam melodramatic's socio-political and cultural dimensions. As a continuation of the previous chapter, Yeşilçam melodramatic imagination which was formed 1960-1975 will be the main interest of this search. Mostly, I will try to examine the relation between Yeşilçam melodramas and modernization process of Turkey. Since this process is not a natural way of development but a well defined and controlled task which is imposed by hegemonic, authoritative ideology of the state, I will call it as "modernization project". Although it is difficult to confine the modernization process of Turkey between strict dates, I will mostly imply the modernization project of the new Turkish Republic. Also, in this analysis, I will investigate the non-Western identity of Yeşilçam melodramatic and its ways to recreate the internalized Western gaze. Lastly, I will analyze the tendency of Turkish audience to identify with the victimized child figure in melodramatic Yeşilçam.

#### **i) non-Western Melodramatic and Modernization Project**

As it was explained in previous chapters, melodrama signifies more than it shows. It is the main characteristic of the melodramatic text; it is never only the summation of its visible elements on its dramatic surface. Rather, it is a text which has different layers of consciousness and reality. It is a complex structure with a repressed subconscious, and this repressed one always tends to return to the surface of the melodramatic drama. The energy spent on keeping the repressed one underneath and the urge of this repressed one to return to

the surface creates a tension which is a determining element of melodrama. Also this same element makes melodrama a very valuable source for cultural analysis.

Taking melodramatic cinema seriously and making academic analysis on this genre is a relatively new development. Especially feminist discourse paved the way to the close examination of the melodramas by recognizing its relation to female inner life and gender issues. It did not take long for the academicians to realize that melodrama's analytical importance is not bounded with the gender and feminism issues. First of all, it is a pathological text which expresses its undischarged emotions with hysterical crisis. By following these hysterical moments and the tension underlying the text, we can reach the most delicate points in the collective conscious of the society.

Also, as many scholar states, melodrama reveals valuable information about society's relation with modernity. In fact, melodrama is essentially about the struggle of the society to create a new morality in the modernity crisis. It is about defining new individual and new society by trying to resolve the crisis between the traditional and the modern. In Peter Brooks words "At its most ambitious, the melodramatic mode of conception and representation may appear to be the very process of reaching a fundamental drama of the moral life and finding the terms to express it"<sup>44</sup>. Once we realize that this essential crisis is at the basis of melodramatic text, we see its importance to understand cultural transformations under the influence of modernity.

On the other hand, analyzing melodramatic drama becomes more important outside the Western world. Melodramatic structure becomes more complex as the modernization process turns into a hegemonic project. Modernization project automatically divides the world as West and non-West. Modernization in Europe was related with the emergence of a new class and new modes of production. Melodramatic drama functioned as a resacralization device in this new society. However, outside the Western world, the modernization and modernity is a different process with different dimensions like Westernization, colonization, and so on. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto says about this difference:

Melodrama articulates the conflict between the old and new social structures and modes of production. In Europe, the emergence of melodrama was inseparable from the rise of the bourgeoisie and the beginning of a new class conflict. In Japan, melodrama

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<sup>44</sup> Brooks, 12.

articulated a disparity between modernity and modernization, whose “synchronic uneven development” has been the sociocultural strain on the Japanese for more than a century.<sup>45</sup> (...) for the non-West, the coming of modernity and that of colonial subjugation have always been inseparable. In most cases, the non-West’s incorporation into the geopolitical space of modernity has taken the form of colonization by the technologically advanced West.<sup>46</sup>

As Yoshimoto states, in non-West the colonial subjugation is the inseparable part of modernity. It is impossible to think of the modernization process outside the Western world without the geopolitical space.

The analysis of different characteristics of modernization periods of West and non-West is beyond the scope of this study. The point I have been trying to reach is that the melodramatic imagination of the non-West carries different kind of tension and unresolved crisis. The non-Western melodramatic has two major paradoxes that can never be seen in Western melodramatic. First one is the result of the fact that the melodrama is essentially a European form of drama. Although there is no doubt it is a generic genre which can be easily adopted by different cultures. However, this does not change the European identity and European way of thinking which is a determinant and formative element at the basis of melodrama. Second, the non-Western melodrama does not only about the crisis of the society torn between the traditional sacred and new, modern life and its new morality like the Western melodrama. While, it is in perfect accordance with the ideology of the hegemonic and Western modernization project, it also signifies to the inferiority complex, anxiety and anger against this same ideology. These two fundamental problems lead us to claim that non-Western melodramatic hides more repressed emotions and more hysterical breakdowns, because it does not only carry the weight of the crisis of the modernization period, but also the depression of being trapped inside the Western matrix of modernity- both in the sense of melodramatic form of expression and modernization period itself.

Turkish melodramatic shows all the characteristics of non-Western melodrama that we talked above. Modernization becomes a project which contains hegemonic state ideology in Turkey. The Turkish history of modernity is beyond the range of this study. However, for understating the cultural and social context of Turkish melodramatic, a few points should be

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<sup>45</sup> Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro ‘Melodrama, postmodernism, and Japanese cinema’ *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* Ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 106.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

underlined. First, we should be aware of the traumatic history of Turkish modernization. The basic motivation of Turkish nation to become modernized is the knowledge of the inferiority next to the West and the anticipation of an inevitable collapse because of this. From *Tanzimat Fermanı* to Atatürk's revolutions, the main motive of modernization has been catching up with the West. The modernization has always been perceived as a project with a goal defined as "Muasır medeniyetler seviyesine ulaşmak". As it can be seen, it a very vague definition, it is unclear whether it means the level of economic development, tradition of democracy, European positivism, or something else. However, this vague statement achieves to give a crystal-clear meaning, "to be like a Westerner, to be modernized". Considering this with the trauma of the tragic defeat at World War I and the Turkish Independence War, we can see the love-hate relation that Turkish culture has with the West. Modernization project is the continuation of the Independence War against the imperialist Western ideology and at the same time it puts the same West as the sacred goal for Turkish nation.

The Turkish melodramatic imagination is mostly shaped by this complex relationship with West and the modernity. On one hand, the Turkish melodramatic adopts the goal of the modernization project and always points to the West as the ultimate objective of all the struggle and pain; it leaves no room to deviate from this goal. On the other hand, it carries the melancholy and sorrow resulting from the long and painful death of an empire and its ideology. We can recognize the traces of the trauma of war and deep rage against the imperialistic West. The sudden fear and terror from the modern and Western one as a recurrent motif in Yeşilçam melodrama signifies to the repressed traumatic experiences and anger.

This complexity with excessive repression and hysteria makes Turkish melodramatic a very valuable source to understand Turkish consciousness and its relation with modernity and West. The opposite is also true. Without keeping the traumatic history of Turkish modernization in mind, we cannot fully comprehend the Turkish melodramatic imagination. Also, the relation of melodrama with the state ideology is an important point to understand Turkish melodrama. Umut Tümay Arslan says:

The fact that cinema has been outside the national culture politics has enabled it to be a part of the post-1950s Turkish popular culture. Like arabesque, Yeşilçam's popularity comes from the massification of the encounter with modernism and modern life practices and also the weakness and the incapability of the Republican cultural modernism project. If that is true, the reasons such as state bans and the indifference

given to explain the degeneration of popular music and cinema become meaningless. The emotional state found as degenerate and disturbing regardless of being claimed or disclaimed by the national cultural ideal and tried to be repressed has burst out on the surface outside the formal society; certainly not in the shape it was repressed. Anyhow the tradition that can define itself in relation to modernism is there having a new shape due to the modern practices. (Arslan 2005, 37)

As Arslan states, Yeşilçam melodrama functions in two opposite ways and it is the reason of its popularization. It builds its structure upon the modernization project and at the same time it signifies to this project's weaknesses. That is why Yeşilçam melodramatic has an ambiguous position in eyes of the authority. Although it recreates and normalizes the modernization project, and for this reason it can be defined as in agreement with the state ideology; it also forms a dangerous zone where things that are repressed by this ideology can emerge to the surface.

However, thinkers like Neziĥ Erdoğan states Yeşilçam melodramatic's function as a tool for normalizing the state ideology is more fundamental. According to him, Yeşilçam recreates the colonial ideology.

Disregarding the radio, in my opinion, Turkish cinema has been one of the pioneers in the development of the colonial discourse till the arrival of the television. Cinema might have been the most popular communication medium in a country where there is the low consumption of books, magazines, and newspapers. For this reason, the encounter of the colonial discourse with the masses took place in the cinema palaces.<sup>47</sup>

Both Arslan and Erdoğan state Yeşilçam was the most popular and influential form in cultural life of its time. However, while Arslan claims it has a disturbing effect on the state authority because of its availability for the emergence of the repressed ones, Erdoğan maintains it was the medium through which the hegemonic ideology transmitted to the masses. In fact, these arguments are not necessarily exclusive and both of them can be true at the same time. To understand the function of Yeşilçam melodrama in Turkish cultural life, we should scrutinize how Yeşilçam positions modernity and the West.

Yeşilçam melodramas' perspective of West and their way of representation it is in accordance with the ideology of modernization project. As we mentioned in previous chapter, melodrama's main clash is in between modern new and traditional old. This does not change in Turkish melodramatic. Main struggle of the melodramatic protagonist of Yeşilçam is

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<sup>47</sup> Neziĥ Erdoğan, "Ulusal Kimlik, Kolonyal Söylem ve Yeşilçam Melodramı", *Toplum ve Bilim* (Vol: 67, Fall, 1995, İstanbul), 183.

becoming modernized individuals in the new system. Nilüfer Göle's explanation of ideology of modernism and its place in Turkish conscious can be helpful here:

Modernism has an ideological understanding of time and defines "the others" as not sharing the same progress level and time with itself, namely "not moderns". The west attributes an ideological time concept to its relation to "the other" and by fictionalizing the differentiation between them as a distance in time and space, it does not allow the non-westerns to be contemporary and isochronic with itself. Not keeping abreast of the modern times have injured the consciousness of the non-western societies. "To reach the contemporary civilizations level" or in new Turkish "modernization" stands for the distance that cannot be reached with modernism and the longing for it. The dictionary definition of "contemporary" is of the time or period being referred to and belonging to the same time but at the same time it refers to the future and identity with the western modernism in Turkish modernization concept. It does not refer to the isochronism with the western societies but on the contrary, it determines the direction and the values of the progress about the future.<sup>48</sup>

Turkish melodramatic adopts this perception of time that Göle talks about. Just like modernization project points out an ambiguous time in future as the moment of triumph, melodramatic structure too marks an indefinite time in future for the absolute unity and happiness. Considering the fundamental problematic in melodramatic text, we can indicate that this moment of happiness also implies successful completion of the modernization project. Melodramatic drama simply tells the struggle of the protagonist to reach this moment when he/she has become a fully modernized individual. Until this moment, the melodramatic time cannot process correctly; it is like the melodramatic universe is trapped in a frozen time which is always at past tense. The present tense, in other words, the real life begins after the end. This time perception is a fundamental characteristic of non-Western modernization projects which hides the moment of achievement in an ambiguous and indefinite future. In fact, this goal which can be summarized in "Muasır medeniyetler seviyesine erişmek" involves a paradoxical impossibility in itself. By definition, trying to catch something up means you are always behind it. The internalized Western gaze always signifies to this lateness, impossibility to seize the present time.

This internalized gaze is a symptom of is the non-Western tendency to take the West as a reference point. Göle says "The common feature of the non-western countries is that they perceive the western modernism as a reference point to understand their experiences. They analyze and position their history, and social practices vertically against the standard western

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<sup>48</sup> Göle, Nilüfer "Batı-dışı modernlik" kavramı üzerine', *Toplum ve Bilim* (Vol.: Spring, 1999, İstanbul), 134.



modernism model.”<sup>49</sup> The modernization project is the embodiment of this characteristic. It defines Turkey in Western terms, and determines its lateness by the assumption Western lives in present tense. Considering its existential connection to the modernization project, it is no surprise that Yeşilçam melodramatic also includes this internalized Western gaze. Melodramatic drama defines itself according to an outsider’s point of view. As we stated above, it always tries to reach the present time and spends all its energy to achieve this goal. However, this goal carries its impossibility with it. Although it implies the achievement and completion of this project by the ending, by leaving this happiness after the film it signifies to its impossibility and underlines the indefiniteness of the time of completion.

The mechanism of the melodramatic text always works on binary oppositions. Referring to Göle again can be useful here:

Modernism has supposed a common experience belonging to the worldly societies but has regarded a hierarchy according to time and placement. Modern and traditional, civilized and barbarian, developed and underdeveloped, people at the center and the periphery have all been subjected to a chronological time differentiation and hierarchical placement. The middle categories like the newly modernising ones, improving ones, semi-peripheral ones have been added to the list but the chronological and the hierarchical differentiation has been the milestone of the analyses. (Göle 1999, 134)

The ideology of Western modernity categorizes time and space. It brings the chronologic division such as the ones who are in past and the ones who live in present tense. The space is divided too, the center and the periphery. The center can be defined as the urbanized middle class who are fully modernized and the periphery as the ones who cannot be included in this center. If we look carefully to Yeşilçam melodramatic dramas, we can see that all the oppositions like rich-poor, beautiful-ugly, city-country, feudal-bourgeois, old-new, good-bad, and so on, bases on the primary opposition of center and periphery. The struggle of the melodramatic protagonist is always to leave the periphery and to enter the center. In this sense, Yeşilçam melodrama basically tells the same story. The protagonist who comes from rural area, who is uneducated, traditional, poor, etc. transforms into a modern individual who is accepted to the new liberal, capitalist, Western mechanism of the urbanized society. This story is also the drama of otherness. Modernization project defines the ones who are not at the center, who are not integrated with the modernization project as the “other”. As one of the

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<sup>49</sup> Göle, 133.

others, the melodramatic protagonist spends all his/her energy to leave his/her otherness and to become “acceptable”.

At this point, we should admit that the concept of otherness has other dimensions. As well as it defines the ones who cannot integrate with the modernization project, from time to time it also signifies to this project and the center. Since the melodramatic drama is told from the perspective of the protagonist, who in most cases is the one transforms into a modernized individual, melodrama cannot avoid defining the modernized middle class as “the other”. In fact, it is also possible to position the Yeşilçam melodramas as a popular agent through which discontent from this project becomes visible. Here, we return to Brook’s and Arslan’s argument about how melodrama forms a dangerous zone in which the repressed identities, complexes, emotions, anger, dissatisfaction, and so on emerge to the dramatic surface and how it is not welcomed so much. Erdoğan claims that even in the situations where the Western and modern values are assaulted and humiliated by the traditional point of view in Yeşilçam melodramas, the West still remains as the object of desire. He explains this as follows:

Colonial discourse covers not only the western politics but also an area that cannot be excluded by the western practices. This bipolarity plays a part in the representation of the west as an object of desire even at the times the west faces an attack to itself. Besides, resistance to its production of the subject effects becomes hard as it works on a psychic tool which cannot be interfered directly. Although Yeşilçam represents a certain kind of western social class in a negative way, it also neutralizes all the negative aspects it represents by creating it in a fantasy space where anything goes. (Erdoğan 1995, 194)

There is no doubt that in most examples, the Western modernized and urbanized lifestyle is disapproved by the moral judgments of the Yeşilçam melodrama. In fact, it goes further from a simple disapproval, in most cases this new life is associated with evil. The city life, the modernity, capitalist liberal economy, modern nuclear family are commonly condemned and negated by the Yeşilçam. Moreover, against this new life style, the melodrama tends to glorify the old, traditional, rural life and sanctify the initial state of the character for its “purity” before transforming into a modern individual. However, according to Erdoğan the fantasy dimension of Westernized modern life enervates the opposition. It forms a realm of fantasy in which everything is acceptable and possible.

The modern Westernized life is the main fetish object in Yeşilçam melodrama. It is the center of attraction. Although the melodramatic narration sometimes despises the modernized

individual and this new social class, the protagonist is attracted to it and desperately wants to get in there. It is the paradox of Yeşilçam melodrama. While the inferiority complex and the repressed anger forces melodramatic drama to take an opposite side, it also constructs the melodramatic universe in which the West and its modernity is the only true norm and ultimate destination. Erdoğan says:

Anyway, we should not forget that Yeşilçam's colonial discourse establishes a specific but genuine bipolarity. As it pivots the western values on a norm, it imposes itself and the "national" values materialized in itself as the temporary and obligatory deviations from the norm. In order to be Chopin again in the future, one should tolerate being a waiter or an anonymous composer because Azize should not be lost; in order to return to the conservatory, one should accept to work in a cheap night club because mother is so ill and needs money for her operation. In order to make the desire and accordingly, for instance, to watch the melodramas, outlast, the distance with the Other should be kept and in this way, as the Other is set in the fantasy space, the continuity to keep the national cultural identity out reveals the very logic of Yeşilçam. Actually, this logic which can be established on nearly every form of popular culture gives it a legitimization and power to stand. (Erdoğan 1995, 194)

The West and its modernization project is the "inevitable" in Yeşilçam melodramatic universe. The structure is constructed in a way that there cannot be any room left for the protagonist to escape from Westernization. The internalized Western gaze constantly reminds the necessity of it by defining Western modernity as the center and the rest as the "other", the "peripheral" and the "old". The success of the Yeşilçam melodramatic drama is supporting the hegemonic ideology of modernization project while allowing small deviations by which the repressed anger and discontent can be surfaced. Therefore, we draw an agreement between Arslan's and Erdoğan's arguments. Yeşilçam melodrama forms a dangerous, disturbing space for the authority where the repressed can return like Arslan indicates, however at the end the Western gaze and its perception of modernity is recreated as Erdoğan explains.

Melancholy as the general mood of Yeşilçam melodrama is an important element that should be discussed in this context. In most cases, the modernization process is followed by a certain degree of melancholy. At these moments, the melodramatic narration emphasizes the purity, wholeness and happiness of the initial times before this process. The protagonist feels himself/herself alienated from his group, unhappy and starts to find himself maybe a bit degenerated. From this moment, the melodrama and the melodramatic character start to make its own nostalgia. This moment suddenly brings an unexpected weight to the drama, because both the audience and the protagonist realize that ones he/she gains the modern conscious, it is impossible to return the previous state. This realization is the tragic turn of the

melodramatic drama. While the modernization process of the protagonist was a joyful course of time in most examples, this moment of realization reminds the audience the gravity of this transformation and signifies to the painful experience of Turkey in this modernization process.

This moment of realization, the following melancholy and the sudden urge to nostalgia can be read as Yeşilçam's own way of representing the common dissatisfaction with the modernization project. On the other hand, if we look closely we can recognize that it also supports the ideology of Westernization. The Western and modern thought divide the time and space by chronological separation and centralization; and wrap this "other", "peripheral" and "old" one up with exoticism and nostalgia. In other words, by identifying something nostalgic, the Western ideology implies the expiration of this thing. Just like this, melodramatic drama defines the initial state before the protagonist became westernized as nostalgic. As a very recurrent theme in Yeşilçam melodrama, I think this sudden emergence of nostalgic gaze deserves scrutiny. Although there is not a big time interval between the initial and last state, the melodramatic narration acts like there is a big gap between that turns the initial state something that can be "remembered". Asuman Suner says in the context of nostalgia cinema 'Remembering, at the end, is simply one of the forms of forgetting.'<sup>50</sup> By turning the outside of the Western, modernized center into the nostalgic one and the act of "remembering" it is Yeşilçam's own way of representing and accepting the disappearance of the local one under the hegemony of the modernization project.

It is possible to think this as a way of recreation of Western ideology of modernity. Erdoğan says:

I find the signification practices conducted by the West significant but in my opinion, the fact that the colonial discourse is not a product of the West should be highlighted. As I indicated before, the colonial discourse is shared by both the exploiter and the exploited of which success comes from but on the contrary, it invites the sophistication to have specific representations. The reason for the colonial discourse's representation of uniform combination is not its unity's breaking up one by one but its re-setting of the discourse by the help of the subject that are already set as the exploiter and the exploited. This means reproducing a different representation of the discourse rather than producing a whole different discourse. (Erdoğan 1995, 181)

As he states, the success of the Western ideology depends on the mutual recreations from both sides. This abrupt melancholy and nostalgia is the reproduction of the Western gaze by

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<sup>50</sup> Suner, 99.

domestic agents. The protagonist internalizes this Western gaze after being modernized. From now on, this gaze prevents returning back to the joyful but primitive life of the first state. Here, the similarity between this first state and childhood draws our attention. The Western modernization ideology associates the rest, the other, the peripheral with childishness. This conception which is the basis of Orientalist exoticism is also a determining element of Western gaze. Certainly, Western thought, its perception of modernization and East, Orientalism, and so on, is beyond the scope of our analysis. The point which interests us is this internalized gaze shapes the Yeşilçam melodrama's way of positioning things. The modernization and Westernization process that the protagonist goes through is also the process of growing up. Sooner or later, willingly or unwillingly, the protagonist goes under this process and becomes an acceptable individual in the structure of the new social and economic system just like a child's obligation to grow up. The melancholic mood after becoming a conscious individual and the nostalgia is identical to a grown up's longing for his/her own childhood. Same kind of impossibility to return is felt by the protagonist, the audience and the melodramatic drama itself. Even in the examples in which the protagonist practically returns his/her old way of life, the melodramatic drama always implies that he/she is definitely a different person. Although this can be read as a defense mechanism of melodramatic Yeşilçam towards the modernization project like in Arslan's argument, it is more proper to understand it as a normalization mechanism. At the end, both the melodramatic character and the audience learn with this nostalgic feeling, like a grown up lives with the feeling of longing for childhood. Although it sanctifies the purity of the primitive and traditional life of the initial state, the end makes the audience and the protagonist happy with the satisfaction of fulfilling the aim of the modernization project. Yeşilçam melodrama implies that entering the modernized, Western, capitalist, individual, urbanized life and becoming acceptable in this system is the healthy way like growing up and leaving childhood behind is.

## **ii) Appearances of Childhood in Yeşilçam Melodramas**

Childhood references in Yeşilçam melodramatic tradition is not restricted what we stated above. As a hysterical and pathetic text, melodrama's obsession of childhood and irrationality was mentioned in previous chapter. In the case of Turkish melodramatic, this obsession becomes so excessive and visible that it deserves a careful examination. There is no doubt that child film stars and films which are centered on these stars are frequent in foreign melodramatic dramas as well as Turkish ones. However, in Yeşilçam puerility and childhood references are not limited only by a subgenre in melodramatic tradition. If we take the risk of overstating a bit, we can say that childhood is the essence of Turkish melodramatic imagination.

From early periods of Yeşilçam to today's new Turkish cinema this essence has not disappeared. Turkish melodramatic imagination constantly creates atmospheres, characters, places which signify to childlessness. In fact, the main function of the melodramatic tradition has always been to give its audience a space in which they can feel like innocent children. The character type with who Turkish audience can emphasize and love easily is the ones who are incapacitated, debilitated, victimized characters who becomes an object of other's decisions and practically behaves like a child in grown up's world. To understand this phenomenon, referring to Fethi Açıkel's article *Kutsal Mazlumluğun Psikopatolojisi* can be helpful here:

The sacred aggrieved, by its focus on misery and sorrow discourse, is the "spiritual image" of capitalism in the Turkish Islamic geography in Hegelian understanding. It is the unification of the passive and miserable subjects that have lost their material sources due to their class and culture; rootless masses; the wild energy of the periphery; and the subject of the arabesque that says "I am also the subject of God" with a repressive political vehicle. It is the submission of the masses to a political discourse that fuels the tension of the economic competition and power fetishism. It is the combination of the bidirectional mechanism that has transferred the suffering, pain, and grudge discourses from the everyday life to political vehicle; on one hand limitless longing for love and sympathy and on the other, the tendencies to pathological power demand and revenge. It is the Faustian adventure of the late capitalism in the Turkish Islamic geography that renounces the self and rehapas its environment by destruction; destructs the past on its own and mourns over it. It is the ideology of the masses of which ego ideal is threatened by "brutality of the world", "ingratitude of Europe", "injustice of the system", "cruelty of the world", and "double-crossing of the fate". It is the longing for "return of dignity", "power", "respectibility", and grudge by using political fantasy. It is "the requirement of love and sympathy" masked under the clumsiness of the periphery. Concisely, it is the conscious of false reality in which the masses have been channelled in a repressive way.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Açıkel, Fethi 'Kutsal Mazlumluğun Psikopatolojisi', *Toplum ve Bilim* (Vol:70, Fall, 1996, İstanbul), 163.

A detailed analysis of Açıkel's notion of submissive perspective and its relation with negatively constructed subject in non-Western melodramas will be done in following chapters. Here the point that interests us is the connection between this sanctifies submissiveness and Yeşilçam's obsession on the childhood. According to Açıkel, this passivity is also includes the force of demanding political and economic power. Although it still contains this dimension, the submissiveness in the appearance of the childhood is more about the demand to love, pity and understanding. However, the ratio of the violent demand for power determined different looks of the childhood in different times of Yeşilçam melodramatic. Arslan indicates:

The opposed, the most characteristic feature of Yeşilçam, can be recorded as captured by various desires and having various shapes: Coarsely speaking, the opposed spirit stands as the absolute aggrieved in the 50s, as a voluntarily follower of the Kemalist modernism project in the 60s, and the sacred aggrieved; both the will to transform the aggrieved itself and a neurotic desire of power in the 70s. (Arslan 2005, 46)

The appearance of childhood in 50s and 60s, and first part of 70s was absolutely naïve. The starlets like Zeynep Değirmencioglu, Ömer Dönmez, Parla Şenol, Sezer İnanoğlu, their parents in the films, the stars were all the signifiers of a naïve universe in which there was still hope in modernization project. In late 70s and 80s, we see more violence, pathological masochism and great pessimism in the look of the childhood which no longer signifies to hope or trust in the modernization. Certainly, these differences are signs of dramatic changes in the Yeşilçam's perspective of the childhood. However, the essence of the different appearances of childhood in Yeşilçam is always the same which is in Açıkel's definition "the sacred aggrieved".

The innocence is the key element of this notion. As it was explained in previous chapter, the melodrama is fundamentally about the modernization process. Therefore, this primary character of popular Yeşilçam melodrama with which the audience immediately emphasizes indicates how Turkish society positions itself against the modernization project. Nurdan Gürbilek's explanations can be helpful to understand this:

This is the unchangeable model of all the Yeşilçam films representing the parents in need to be rescued and the children as savers. As a spectator, we identify with the hero child who fights against the injustice, distributes justice, and is the head of the family despite his age, which makes us cry over being still a child but also gives us strength which cannot be gained by the adults. We are a child but we are assigned to keep evil away from the adults, fight for justice against injustice, and oppose the rough world. Despite our being a child, actually, for being a complete child. All these films

representing the wisdom, sacrifice, and resistance of children actually is an expression of the ill fate, and the incapability both pertaining to the family and the society; in short their effort to love the fact that they are left as a child. The reason that the savior child image encountered in most of the fairy tales and has been reshaped by literature is constantly repeated in the Turkish popular culture and the persistence of the society to find a local dignity, features of a child angel and a petite virtue is certainly affected by this society's coping with its being left as a child against the modern west, the transformation of this fate which has left itself ridiculous and deficient into a loveable one, and the struggle to turn out the children image seen on the mirror held by the west.

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The exaggeratedly innocent and naïve child image of Yeşilçam melodramas is the embodiment of the feelings of the Turkish society. The child faces with grave troubles and changes that he/she does not deserve. None of these misfortunes can be in the child's responsibility. As the most innocent and sympathetic one, this child is the main victim of the outside world. At this point, we should state that, melodramatic drama never represents the childhood by its socio-economic aspects. On the surface of the drama, it is never about the problem of poverty, social security, rights of children, unemployment, lack of equal opportunity in education, and so on. Although it implies and signifies to these social problems, we can say the child in melodramatic imagination is isolated from all its social and organic relations. The children of melodramas have none of the characteristics of childishness; they talk, behave, suffer and struggle like grown up. In fact, it can be said this children are the projection of the grown up character onto a child's body. This supports Gürbilek's claims, because the victimized, innocent and sympathetic child who is alienated from all the childlike characteristics opens a space in the melodramatic drama that the "sacred aggrieved" can emerge and be visualized.

By this victimized, innocent child, both Yeşilçam melodrama and the audience recreate the Western gaze which defines outside the West as "childish" against the "maturity" of the modern West. On the other, the excessiveness and exaggeration of the emphasis on childhood tell us there is more than that. Like Gürbilek explains, Yeşilçam internalizes this positioning but at the same time turns this into a defense mechanism against this positioning. It is the embodiment of the need to find something likable and respectful in this inferior position. Against all the evil that comes from the grown up world, the child remains pure, innocent and clean. The dignity and pride that the child never loses throughout the struggle makes his/her

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<sup>52</sup> Gürbilek, Nurdan *Kötü Çocuk Türk* (İstanbul: Metis, 2001), 41.



passive and victimized existence valuable. At the end, the child always reaches victory and punishes the evil grown ups against all his/her weaknesses.

It is important to note that the audience never positions themselves as a grown up beside this child. They immediately identify with him/her. The best example of this situation is the famous poster of the crying child and its incredible popularity in Turkey. Gürbilek says about this poster:

People have placed themselves not against the child as a cruel, and therefore guilty, adult but rather in the shoes of the child, himself. They spectated their own sorrow in his image pitying their very own sorrow in his identity. (...) Actually, this face does not explain the sorrow, itself, but rather being subjected to sorrow because of injustice. The child is the symbol of being wronged and punished despite being innocent and the victim of the unjust act. A second meaning exists in this representation as the sorrowful child also represents a resistance for the spectator. It represents a hard-kept honour despite everything rather than a violent feeling that cannot be rehabilitated, a dark desperation or dreadful grudge which will certainly reveal its face in a time. He is deeply injured, knocked about in an early age, however (as if for this reason) has not come down and stands despite the effects of the cruel world. Everything is like reversed in a flash. The sorrow at an early age in a cruel world reveals its face as the source of the honour, virtue, and kindness now. (Gürbilek 2001, 39)

There is no doubt that this poster is a very typical example of melodramatic imagination. Also it is a perfect analogy to the Yeşilçam's innocent and victimized children. The spectator never feels guilty because of the pain of this sympathetic child while looking at this poster. We do not position ourselves as the responsible, mature grown ups in front of this image, we immediately identify ourselves with him. Like every kitsch object, this poster carries its own a paradox in itself. While it is discharged from all the meanings and opens an empty space where the spectator can fill in, at the same time it has an excessive nature and overflows with signification. We do not want to know the cause of this suffering, because we do not want it to fill in this empty space which we can fill with our own experiences. Also we do not want to know, because the image is already too heavy with meaning. Just like that, we do not want and need to know the cause of the sufferings of the child in Yeşilçam melodramas. It can be a really absurd reason, or there can be no reason at all. The important parts are the suffering and pain. That is why the beginning of these dramas where the cause of the suffering is told is always very short and unimportant. Just like the poster of the crying child is frozen in the moment of the pain, Yeşilçam melodramas try to freeze the moment of suffering and expand this moment as long as possible. Because this pain is the core of Yeşilçam melodramatic that

reminds the audience its own inferiority, otherness, lateness, childishness, absurdity, and at the same time innocence, dignity and pride of suffering.

One other dimension of childhood in Yeşilçam needs our attention. These children who visualize the pain of inferiority always has Western, modern, elite characteristics. It can also be seen in the poster that we talked about. Gürbilek explains this as follows:

It did not resemble the likely representations of greed which were the miserable, wizened, and squalid village children that had been the symbol of neglect for a certain time. He had well-combed blond hair, big blue eyes, clean clothes and a shiny face. He looked like he belonged to a prosperous family and faced with sorrow long after his birth. He made people think about not the poverty faced right from birth, a long-lasting misery, but the afterwards shock, mostly like being an orphan. He seemed as if he was offended of the world because of that shock of which he could not understand the reason. (Gürbilek 2001, 37)

Gürbilek's explanations can also be applied to early Yeşilçam. In 50s, 60s and first part of the 70s, the children in these melodramas were always carrying the signs of modern and Western identity. Their white skin, fair hair, civil manners and excellent mode of speaking give the impression that they come from Western, modernized and wealthy social class. The important question is that why the audience of Yeşilçam melodrama chose this particular type of character who is not so much familiar with them; why Yeşilçam prefers a character that carries signs of modern West while it functions as a signifier to the inferiority complex of Turkish audience against the West. Certainly, there is no easy and definite answer to these questions.

Nonetheless, Gürbilek's argument seems a sound one. Both the crying child in the poster and the melodramatic children in Yeşilçam imply being an orphan. In most examples, the children in Yeşilçam melodramas suffer from lack of an authority figure. Sometimes, the father or mother actually die, sometimes one of them goes to jail, becomes ill or mysteriously vanishes, or the child have to grow up in another place and search for his/her real parents. In most of these examples, the child actually comes from a wealthy and modern family, the disaster that happens at the beginning of the film causes a sudden change in child's life and the child has to live in poverty and inferiority. The lack of father is the reason for this temporary suffering. In this suffering, there is also an element of shock and disbelief like the crying child. Some part of the pain comes from not an innocent child's suffering, but the suffering of a child who is not familiar with low standards of life.

The lack of the father and resulting decadence is a very common theme in Yeşilçam melodrama. It can be speculated the reason why the audience identifies with this orphan child is that the audience feels itself like an orphan child who is in an undeserved and inferior condition because of the lack of a righteous and respectful authoritative figure. By this identification, the audience cherishes an illusion of being free from the responsibility of the current inferiority. Gürbilek says:

This deprivation has become believable through the father image that acts pitilessly towards his own children and the child image punished despite its innocence; the state image that acts pitilessly towards its people and the public image punished despite its innocence. (Gürbilek 2001, 44)

The interesting point is that although it reproduces the position that the authority forms for the society- the modernization project of the state authority positions the society as the children who must be disciplined and controlled-, it also surfaces the discontent by this same reproduction. The cry of the child in the poster and in Yeşilçam includes a silent disappointment and resentment towards this state authority. This is what we find in the images of suffering children in Yeşilçam, a shared feeling of discontent, the melancholy of being left alone, umbrage towards the father/ the state who made us live in inferiority.

Starting with the second half of the 70s and 80s, we see a different generation of childhood in Yeşilçam. There is no longer the naivety of 60s Yeşilçam and its children. With increasing disappointment of migration to big cities, the crisis of modernization project and the growing disbelief in the complete Westernization, the looks of the childhood became more violent. The fair haired, gentle children with Western and modern backgrounds transformed into darker children who comes from the lowest social classes and tell their stories and demands more recklessly. As the hope and belief in Westernization and modernization project died slowly, the identification with these modern and Western children lost its appeal.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Recreation of Melodramatic Imagination by the New Turkish Cinema

Analyzing the influence of Turkish melodramatic tradition on Turkish cinema in the post 1990s is somewhat difficult because of problem of classifying cinema according to time periods; however, we should admit that there is a new Turkish cinema which has its peculiar problematics, a different visual language and different dramatic structures than its predecessors. Any Turkish critics agree that the starting point of this new cinema is marked by *Eşkiya* (Yavuz Turgul: 1996). In this new period Turkish films and Turkish audience reunite after a long time, after the public's long flirtation with foreign films. Possible connections between this new cinema and the reoccurrence of Yeşilçam melodramatic has been proposed by Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto in another setting, Japan, but applies to Turkish cinema as well: 'The question is whether the melodramatic did really disappear or whether it has merely become unconscious'<sup>53</sup>. Yoshimoto's question explains the aim of this analysis intention to understand how or if Turkish melodramatic imagination has surfaced in new Turkish cinema. In this search, I will single out two auteur directors, Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and the tendency to nostalgia in popular cinema, Yavuz Turgul in particular.

#### i) Historical Context

As it was said earlier, melodrama is beyond being just a genre in Turkish cinema; it is a definitive form that establishes the Yeşilçam as a tradition. Especially the time between 1960

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<sup>53</sup> Yoshimoto, 116.

and 1975 was the period in which melodrama became the only form Turkish cinema uses. This melodramatic tradition which is now referred as the classic Yeşilçam practically came to its end towards the end of 70s. Mostly economical reasons caused the depression in Yeşilçam cinema sector and the producers chose to earn money from more easy ways like cheap, erotic films. Nilgün Abisel explains this crisis of Yeşilçam as follows:

The crisis cinema faced in the 70s has caused the female spectator to return home. The various reasons such as the rising cost of the film production, the decrease in the number of the films and copies, the increase in the cheap sex films, political incidents and the standardization of television have caused the cinema palaces, especially the local ones, close one by one. The low-budget sex films have driven away the female spectator and the people in cinema business have focused on these films in order to cling to the male spectator. Concisely, this vicious circle have decreased the number of the family films, putting an end to the hegemony of the female stars. (Abisel 2005, 75)

As a result of this crisis and change in the sector, Yeşilçam melodrama in its classical meaning disappeared. After the glorious days of 50s, 60s and the first half of the 70s, the classic melodrama of Yeşilçam were no longer satisfactory for the audience. Suddenly, it became out of date.

However, the disappearance of the classic Yeşilçam melodrama with the decline of the Turkish cinema sector does not mean the disappearance of the melodramatic imagination. As an indispensable element of Turkish culture, melodramatic imagination always finds its different mediums to express itself. In the case of cinematic expression, this melodramatic imagination with its significant structure forms the basis of the Turkish cinema. As it was said earlier, melodramatic drama is the foundation that the Turkish cinema is built upon. As many thinkers claim, after the depression of the cinema sector, the classic Yeşilçam melodrama has been transformed itself into the *türkücü filmleri* which is a different kind of melodrama that is in combination with the arabesque culture; and many claims that after the emergence of TV, melodrama continued in the form of the TV serials and soap operas. Although the influence and definitive role of Yeşilçam melodrama on the products of televised popular culture is widely accepted; the general tendency towards Turkish cinema after 1990 is to consider it as if it is completely effaced from the Yeşilçam melodrama.

Turkish cinema after 1990, often regarded as the “new Turkish cinema”. Atilla Dorsay thinks this new momentum is the reunion of the Turkish audience and the Turkish cinema.

The circle has become to be broken now, the ill fate of Turkish films have reversed and from now on, some Turkish films will break records, reach the peak surpassing even

the most brilliant America films and thus, realize the ‘big encounter’ in the end of the 90s and the 2000s: the incident that Turkish cinema re-encounters with its spectator...<sup>54</sup>

The number of the spectator of Turkish films has really become amazing. Actually, this is not a new aspect for Turkish cinema as our films have been the sphere of interest, surpassing the most costly and brilliant foreign films in the period between 1960-1970 till the phase of the known sex films. After the break point caused by the sex films, the encounter with television, the video incident, and the alienation to our own culture in a self-centered world, the incident happening now is the re-encounter, a really big one.<sup>55</sup>

Like Dorsay says, in 1990s Turkish cinema made the Turkish audience return to cinema halls like in the 60s. Not only the number of films produced has increased, but also many of them reached box office records which were impossible before. The analysis of the possible reasons of this success is beyond this article’s content. The important point for our interest is the perception of the Turkish cinema after 1990 as “new”. It might be emphasized strongly that there is a different Turkish cinema with different production mechanisms with the help of new popular media agents. Also, these different mechanisms work with completely new names (However, alienating this time period and breaking its ties to the classic Yeşilçam off would be a grave mistake). It is true that the Turkish cinema of this period is “new” and “different”; but there are also undeniable ties between this new Turkish cinema and Yeşilçam melodramatic tradition. The reunion of Turkish audience and Turkish films alone enough to show that new Turkish cinema contains or problematizes many elements and issues of the melodramatic universe of Yeşilçam. To understand this fully, it is better to look at many influential and important directors and waves of new Turkish cinema closely.

## ii) Zeki Demirkubuz

Zeki Demirkubuz is an important figure in the new Turkish cinema as an author who is able to create his own universe in every film he makes. In the seven films he directed since 1994 -*C Blok* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 1994), *Masumiyet* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 1997), *Üçüncü Sayfa*

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<sup>54</sup> Dorsay, Atilla *Sinemamızda Çöküş ve Rönesans Yılları* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2004), 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

(Zeki Demirkubuz: 1999), *Yazgı* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 2001), *İtiraf* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 2001), *Bekleme Odası* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 2003), *Kader* (Zeki Demirkubuz: 2006)- he has tried to show dark sides of human nature like Dostoyevsky who influenced Demirkubuz most. The point that brings him to our attention here is his interest in and usage of melodramatic codes in especially *Masumiyet*, *Üçüncü Sayfa*, *Yazgı* and *Kader*.

Demirkubuz's cinema is always about the inside. It is interested in the inside of the house, inside of the family, relationships, and inside of the human psyche. Suner indicates:

Every film is set around the characters that feel themselves trapped and at a dead end regardless of their social classes. These characters are all in fluster desperately due to the conditions compass them and whatever they do, they cannot find a departure and always find themselves where they have started. However, surprisingly, the sense of desperation, obscurity, and being trapped in Demirkubuz's films emerge not from external conditions but rather from the "inner" feelings of the characters. In this context, we can say that these films refer to the quiet and secluded parts, back rooms, and dark sides of the human soul, or in other words, "the provinces of the human"... Human is one of the most emphasized of these common expressions for the inexplicable irrationality and self-destruction present in its existence. Consequently, the sense of obscurity that defines Demirkubuz's films emanates from the focus on the inner worlds and the dilemmas there, and the dark desires of these characters. (Suner 2006, 168)

Demirkubuz's films always explore the repressed, hidden one. As we have analyzed in previous chapters, this exploration is one and the same with melodrama. Melodramatic text struggles with this repressed one, tries to resolve the tension that comes from this repression and leaves some open spaces with which the repressed can return to the surface. In this sense, it is no surprise that Demirkubuz plays with the melodramatic imagination.

In his films, melodramatic universe which disappeared towards the end of 70s comes into the light. Those elements recognizable from the melodramatic Yeşilçam returns to the surface like the return of the repressed. Arslan stated the disturbing characteristic of the Yeşilçam melodrama for the Western and modern gaze as 'By having features such as degeneration, primitiveness, and *alaturkalık*, Yeşilçam has the symptoms of a disease that should be cured.'<sup>56</sup> As the abject and pathetic one from the childhood of the Turkish cinema, melodramatic Yeşilçam becomes visible like the dark side of human nature in Demirkubuz's cinema.

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<sup>56</sup> Arslan, 35.

Demirkubuz does not only use the recognizable similarities between his storylines, characters, decors and the classic Yeşilçam. He also uses the Yeşilçam melodramas themselves as the uncanny, disturbing, recognizable elements from the collective consciousness of the audience. He uses Yeşilçam melodramas as the signifiers of the unexplainable irrationality of human psyche which is the main part that Demirkubuz searches for. Suner says:

Contrary to the general reference to the television receivers, the screen acts as a window not to the “outside” but to the “inside”. In other words, television screen is a frame that depicts not outside but inside. Through the medium of the television screen, film expands to the past Turkish cinema, a phase before its development. (...) The classical Yeşilçam melodrama represents in a way the relationship of the state of belonging to reminisced in a shamefaced way and in other words, the “childhood” of the cinema. In this context, television screen play the part of a window that expands to inside (backwards, past) displaying the heavy representations ad nauseam. (Suner 2006, 191)

As Suner states, the people watching Yeşilçam melodramas on TV screen in Demirkubuz’s films do not look to the “outside world”. Although, most of the time TV screen symbolizes the relation with the outside world, in this case it is a window that opens to the inside. It is a brief look to the past, to the repressed memories and childish fantasies, it is a glimpse of the Yeşilçam which is the childhood of the 90s’ mature Turkish cinema.

As it can be seen, the usage of the classic Yeşilçam in Demirkubuz’s films has two functions also interconnected. First, scenes showing people watching old Yeşilçam movies recall the repressed ones to the surface (They help to open a space which is the irrational and hidden one can become visible and invade the surface of the film). These melodramas signify to their irrational holes inside their dramatic structure and their hysterical outbursts. The classic Yeşilçam melodramas have never been the nostalgic elements recalling the happy and innocent memories of old days. On the contrary, they are used as the uncanny elements signifying their own uncanniness.

Second, they function as self reflexive elements exposing their usage and signification to melodramatic structure, and also illustrate its own fictiveness. Suner explains this self-reflexive characteristic of the usage of Yeşilçam melodrama in Demirkubuz films as follows:

We can say that the Yeşilçam melodramas constantly seen and heard in the background in *Masumiyet* and *Üçüncü Sayfa* constitutes a mirror-text that echoes the structure of the narration and a metafictional level. The references to Yeşilçam melodramas in the narration on one hand creates an illusion and on the other, explains



this self-created illusion and comments on its own fictionalization. Film, by creating this kind of metafictional level, not only draws attention to its self-fictionalization, but also, puts an ironic distance between the spectator and the story enabling us to read the story not in itself but on a different discourse. (Suner 2006, 191)

These Yeşilçam melodramas used in Demirkubuz's films become a mirror inside the film upon which the film is reflected. All the melodramatic storylines, melodramatic characters and the illusion that it creates, in other words, the signification to melodramatic universe are exposed by the usage of the same melodramas which influenced Demirkubuz in the first place. As a result, Demirkubuz's cinema turns into an endless circulation in which the signifier and the signified infinitely reflect each other. In Suner's words 'In the narration, the window (metafictional level) that opens through the medium of television screen is combined to the cyclic structure of the film, creating a nauseam feeling of return to the past just like in Yeşilçam melodramas.'<sup>57</sup> By putting the Yeşilçam melodramas as the self reflexive mirrors inside his films, Demirkubuz forms a claustrophobic structure.

The pieces of classic Yeşilçam and the film constantly reproduce each other. It is also related to the concept of fate. In *Kader*, Demirkubuz use his another film, *Masumiyet* in a scene. *Masumiyet* tells the next chapter of Bekir's life after *Kader* with explicit signs, but although he sees it, Bekir cannot understand anything. Certainly, it is a very special circumstance; however, it still gives some insights about the Demirkubuz's usage of melodramatic Yeşilçam in his films. The scene, in which people watching *Masumiyet* on TV, creates a vicious circle and encloses the structure of the film. This piece of *Masumiyet* creates a layer inside the structure of *Kader*, it creates *Kader*'s mirror image and at the same time signifies and reproduces itself. These endless reflections and reproductions in the enclosed, claustrophobic universe leave no room for the characters to go.

The terrifying point is that, the characters in this universe are not aware of this vicious circle. Although Bekir sees his future, his mirror image, he cannot comprehend its meaning; even though it is a window opening to his future, he cannot see it. There are mirrors and windows inside the structure of this universe, but characters do not have the ability to see it. The pieces of classic melodramas in Demirkubuz's films have similar functions. They are the windows opening to the inside, the past. They reproduce their and Demirkubuz's

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<sup>57</sup> Suner, 191.

melodramatic imagination; they heighten the claustrophobia by signifying the endless circle of Yeşilçam and Demirkubuz's cinema. However, the characters cannot see through those windows, either. These mirrors, reflections and significations can only be seen by the audience. Also the inevitability of the fate or in other words inescapability from this claustrophobic world can only be perceived by the audience. As for the Yeşilçam melodramas, the characters were aware of these kinds of structural devices, the significations, the claustrophobic universe they were in and the inescapability from it on a subconscious level. As aforementioned, this awareness causes excessive emotions that can only be flushed off by the hysterical holes in the structure. In the case of Demirkubuz, we do not see the same mechanism.

In this claustrophobic atmosphere, there is no exit from this vicious circle for the characters. Demirkubuz's film and the Yeşilçam melodrama inside it endlessly mirror and reproduce each other. In this bottomless abyss, the cinematic time freezes. Demirkubuz's cinema is always at the present tense like the melodramatic imagination. The characters seem to be trapped in the time and place between the two mirrors while they reflect each other. One of the reasons why Demirkubuz's cinema is so uncanny and terrifying is the obedient acceptance of this entrapment. Chris Berry explains this acceptance as follows:

This dullness is depicted in another Demirkubuz's motif: Characters watch Yeşilçam films and serials in living rooms or hotel lobbies. Maybe, we can sense how Demirkubuz feels by their watching styles of Yeşilçam dramas. While there is the commotion on the screen, they watch sometimes carefully and other times carelessly. Nevertheless, they never react. They seem dull both physically and emotionally, contrary to the characters and the stories displayed on the screen.<sup>58</sup>

The calmness of the characters against the melodramatic pieces inside the film amplifies the uncanniness of the existence of those pieces. This is one of the main points where Demirkubuz's films differ from the melodramatic drama. In melodrama the characters hysterically react to this entrapment in one traumatic moment, it causes both the text and the protagonists force the limits of exaggerated expressiveness. Whereas in Demirkubuz's universe, characters do not react, they silently accept.

The frozen, motionless characters are so important for Demirkubuz's cinema that he sometimes prefers to visualize the embodiment of it by mute characters. In *Masumiyet*, which

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<sup>58</sup> Berry, Chris 'Zeki Demirkubuz: Karanlığın Işığında' *kader: Zeki Demirkubuz* Ed. S. Ruken Öztürk (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları, 2006), 22.

is the closest film to the melodramatic tradition in Demirkubuz's filmography, the audience is introduced to two mute characters, Yusuf's sister and Uğur's daughter. It is helpful here to remember Peter Brooks' claim about how muteness is peculiar to melodramatic drama, because of the expressive nature of melodramatic imagination. According to him, muteness is remarkably prevalent in melodramas and he says "Mutes correspond first of all to a repeated use of extreme physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional conditions"<sup>59</sup>. Brooks perceives the muteness in melodrama as a structural tool that allows to physical expression and exaggeration where language is not enough to express the emotional excess.

In the case of Demirkubuz's cinema, muteness is a functional tool of exaggeration, too. However, the exaggerated one is not the expression of the emotions, but the state of non expressiveness. At this point, we can speculate that, Demirkubuz's cinema can be named as the reverse of the melodramatic universe. This reversion is like the reflection of the film on the mirrors that is formed by the old Yeşilçam melodramas within the film. The excessive exaggeration, tendency to explain every detail and expressing every emotional state turn into a complete silence, exaggerated stillness and expressing nothing in Demirkubuz's films.

Especially *Masumiyet*, *Üçüncü Sayfa* and *Kader* give the impression that Demirkubuz finds and uses few remaining elements from the collapse of the melodramatic universe of the classic Yeşilçam. The same melodramatic imagination that once had given the audience satisfaction and peace now becomes the terrorizing elements. The reason of why melodrama becomes the uncanny one and why recalling melodramatic imagination is a terrifying experience is worth to think. We can speculate that Demirkubuz's cinema does not have an a priori assumption of an original unity like classic Yeşilçam melodramas. Although it has a hysterical and pathetic nature, melodrama is the art of hope and expectation. As aforementioned, all the endings of Yeşilçam melodramas are essentially happy endings. The struggle to return to original unity always reaches its goal and on the spiritual level this unity is always secured at the end. Classic Yeşilçam always had the optimism and hope to return the first place of balance. They assured their audience about the hope to become completely modern, Western, happy, full, and so on.

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<sup>59</sup> Brooks, 56.

However, after 1990, especially in Demirkubuz's cinema the hope and optimism is completely lost. The belief in the original unity and any possibility of a happy ending does not exist any more. In a universe like that, the signs of melodramatic imagination become terrifying objects that recalls the childish fantasy of original unity that both the audience and the cinema itself believed in. As a result, the Demirkubuz's films and Yeşilçam melodramas used in these films reflect each other endlessly in a complete emptiness. Therefore, here we can name a third function of the usage of Yeşilçam melodrama in Demirkubuz's cinema: by their existence as the remnants of a dead universe, the melodramatic elements signify to their absence. We can speculate that the melancholic atmosphere of Demirkubuz's films seem to carry the disappointment from this collapse of the melodramatic universe. The heavy sorrow of the atmosphere seems to grow out of an emptiness which is impossible to be filled again. Melodramatic elements both strengthen and expose this depressive mood of Demirkubuz's cinema which mourns for the death of the melodramatic fantasy of the original unity.

The reason why Demirkubuz's cinema interests us cannot only be based on his usage of melodramatic references in his films. Their stories are so melodramatic that everything seems to filled with the melodrama<sup>60</sup>. Incredible coincidences or exaggeratedly unlucky failures to spot, the endless passion and love that leads to character's total devastation, and so on. Suner defines this as the intersection of melodrama and film noir.

In my opinion, the best way to categorize *Masumiyet* and *Üçüncü Sayfa* is as a "dark melodrama". We encounter different versions of the mysterious / dangerous woman specific to film noir in the male characters who destruct themselves in both films. The narration occurs through the submissive male characters both in *Masumiyet* and *Üçüncü Sayfa*. There is the guidance of the powerful, greedy, and dominant female characters in both films. Both films use the specific features of melodrama in an exaggerated way by adding up film noir features. (Suner 2006, 190)

*İtiraf*, *Masumiyet*, *Üçüncü Sayfa*, *Kader* and partly *Yazgı* can be included in this tradition. Especially the female protagonists of *İtiraf*, *Masumiyet*, *Kader* and *Üçüncü Sayfa* can be named as the continuation of the femme-fatales of classic film noirs in contemporary cinema. The examination of film noir as a genre is beyond the scope of this analysis. However, it is important to point out that, the melodramatic imagination of classic Yeşilçam which was mostly dominated by the feminine, now transformed into film noir kind of melodrama which

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<sup>60</sup> Berry, 21.

is mostly a male fantasy<sup>61</sup>. There is no doubt that melodrama and film noir are two different genres that have different mechanisms of dramatization. Also, it is certainly related with the change of the feminine and masculine in Turkish culture since 1960s and moreover with the change in the demography of the cinema audience in Turkey which is again beyond the aim of this analysis. However, the fact that their mutual source is the melodramatic imagination shows us the transformation of the formation of this imagination in Turkish cinema after 1990s. Sylvia Harvey's explanation about film noir can be helpful here:

What this world view reflects is a series of profound changes which, though they are not yet grasped or understood, are shaking the foundations of the established and therefore normal perceptions of the social order...[f]ilm noir offers us again and again examples of abnormal or monstrous behavior, which defy the patterns established for human social interaction, and which hint a series of radical and irresolvable contradictions buried deep within the total system of economic and social interactions that constitute the known world.<sup>62</sup>

The melodramatic in Turkey moves from the bright, colorful and optimist world of Yeşilçam melodrama to the darker universe of film noir, which shows the abnormality and monstrousness. Again we can relate this to the collapse of the melodramatic universe and the resulting disappointment. The Yeşilçam melodrama tries to believe in the modernization project and the possibility of a harmonious unity of the West and Turkish. There is the optimism that comes from the trust in the system and the society. As we come to the contemporary Turkish cinema, melodramatic imagination takes the form of film noir in which the hope and trust in the system, authority, society and future is completely gone.

The city is no longer a place of hopes and dreams; it becomes a dark place which full of dangers in new Turkish cinema. In classic Yeşilçam of 60s, when the migration to city is still a hopeful dream, the country and the city are two separate regions. While the city is the modern and the Western one with full of opportunities as well as some dangers, the country is the primitive place of original unity and childhood happiness. After 1990s, we see a completely different structure. Now, the city and the country are not separated from each other. The city is invaded by the country and the country by the city. In this sense, it is no coincidence that the names of the small cities which the characters go to in *Masumiyet* are

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<sup>61</sup> Place, Janey. "Women in Film Noir" *Women in Film Noir* Ed. Ann Kaplan (London : BFI Pub., 2005), 47.

<sup>62</sup> Harvey, Sylvia. "Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir" *Women in Film Noir* Ed. Ann Kaplan (London : BFI Pub., 2005), 35.

never given. The cities are not different from each other, and they are not very different from rural areas either. All of them form a claustrophobic space from which there is no escape to any place of original unity and happiness. Just like a classic film noir in which the city constitutes the whole universe and gives the impression that nothing exists beyond this dangerous city; new Turkish cinema in general, Demirkubuz in particular constructs an enclosed, dark, dangerous, chaotic, infinite city and locks the characters inside it.

### iii) Nuri Bilge Ceylan

At this point, another influential author of new Turkish cinema, Nuri Bilge Ceylan needs to be analyzed. It may not be convincing to contain Ceylan's cinema in the melodramatic tradition at the first sight as on the surface of his films is definitely not any melodramatic element. However, a closer look would reveal the tacit crisis of his film that is similar to melodramatic imagination and also Demirkubuz's films.

In *Kasaba* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan: 1996), *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan: 1999), and *Uzak* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan: 2002), he problematizes the endlessness of the countryside and the resulting claustrophobia. Suner says:

He does not encounter with a new and different thing in İstanbul but rather his own provincialism again. He probably experiences the "provinces problem" more densely than the villager as there is no dream, a destination, and an escape plan left in his hands in order to overcome with this problem. His dream has been realized, he has come to İstanbul but could not get away from his own provinces. (Suner 2006, 117)

As Suner indicates, when Yusuf, one of the main characters of *Uzak*, comes to city, he recognizes the inescapability from the countryside. Like Demirkubuz, Ceylan constructs a filmic universe of claustrophobia beyond which nothing exists. Taking the risk of over reading, we can speculate that Yusuf in *Uzak* and Saffet in *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* and *Kasaba* are characters who have a melodramatic dimension inside. They share the similar optimism and faith in the possibility of becoming completely modern with the melodramatic imagination. Plus the same melancholy that pervades the Turkish cinema after 1990s and the

disappointment from the fail of the modernization myth shapes Ceylan's cinema. Hasan Akbulut states:

Ceylan's films take place from the provinces to the city, nevertheless, there is the transition from society to individual in this phase. The social way of life Ceylan simplifies and distances from the crowd and noise is replaced by the individuals in *Uzak*. Actually, this transition is a transition from 'lonely' societies to lonely individuals.<sup>63</sup>

We talked about a rupture in the belief system which positions the individual in a structure of relationships with authority, society and hegemonic ideology. This rupture is responsible for the tendency of post 90 Turkish cinema to represent individuals alone in a terrifying universe. It is the same reason why Demirkubuz's melodramatic shifts toward the film noir. The underlying theme of Ceylan's cinema is this rupture, too. In *Mayıs Sıkıntısı*, *Kasaba* and *Uzak*, Ceylan tells one big story about ambition of leaving the countryside, moving to city and becoming modern city citizen and at the end the protagonist finds out that the country has no limits and nothing exists beyond it. In these three films, as Akbulut states, we see the process of leaving the communal life and trying to become separate individuals. Neither this communal life nor the individual life is aestheticized, abjected or exaggerated like melodramatic drama, and this positions Ceylan's cinema out of the melodramatic tradition. However, Ceylan shares the same crisis of modernization/urbanization with melodramatic Yeşilçam and post 90s melodramatic imagination.

In classic Yeşilçam melodramas this repressed crisis was returning to the surface of the drama with hysterical outbreaks. In Demirkubuz's cinema we talked about melodramatic elements within the film that mirrors the film and forms a hole in the structure of the film. In other words, the underlying crisis of the melodramatic imagination always returns to the text as an uncanny disturbance. In Ceylan's cinema, it is possible to name the notion of time as the uncanny return. Akbulut defines the time in *Uzak* and other Ceylan's films 'a frozen time or an expansion in time. For this particular reason, it makes us think of what we see or do not see.'<sup>64</sup> In Ceylan's cinema, one fixed moment of time expands and opens room for the repressed crisis, emotions and the unspoken ones. Also, it is a space for the audience to think about the crisis behind the surface, the thing that the film signifies to.

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<sup>63</sup> Akbulut, Hasan *Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sinemasını Okumak* (Ankara: Bağlam Yayınları, 2005), 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Suner names this kind of openings in Ceylan's cinema as "open images". She says: 'Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films problematize itself not through fiction but rather through image. A different kind of image I refer to as 'open image' that cannot be seen in popular films is found in Ceylan's films.'<sup>65</sup> These images mostly appear in the frozen, expanded moments that we talked above and are not put into a system of cause and effect. These images appear without a reason, without any definite meaning, symbolization or signification. Those moments are the text's own way of dealing with the underlying crisis like melodramatic hysteria or Demirkubuz's mirror elements. Certainly, this does not make Ceylan's cinema melodramatic, however, it shows how the same crisis of melodrama causes same kind of breaking on the surface of the drama.

#### **iv) Negatively Constructed Subject**

Negatively Constructed subject is a type of melodramatic character which was defined by Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto. The reason that makes this character important for us is the dominance of him/her in both Demirkubuz's and Ceylan's films, and also several examples of popular cinema after 1990. Yoshimoto explains this subject as follows:

Because the Japanese believe that in the West the self is asserted and the subject as agency is firmly established, the parallel is established between two binaries, melodramatic-nonmelodramatic and Japan-the West. The word "melodramatic" in turn signifies for the Japanese their inferiority complex toward the West. To the extent that it feeds on their awareness of the lack of a Western style subjectivity in Japan, the melodramatic constantly reminds the Japanese that Japan is trapped in the geopolitical space of Western hegemony. It is partly to facilitate the escape from this position of the "slave" that melodrama clears the space for the subject who does not act but only acted upon; that is, the Japanese have negatively constructed a subject position from which they can fall into a delusion of being innocent victims of evil doings by others. This victim consciousness of the Japanese is a specific type of the so-called *ressentiment* articulating the colonial mentality of the Japanese, which has never been overcome for almost a century and a half. (Yoshimoto 1993, 108)

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<sup>65</sup> Suner, 120.



While explaining negatively constructed subject, Yoshimoto's main interest is the Japanese cinema and Japanese melodramatic. Although a certain degree of similarity between Japanese and Turkish melodramatic imagination can be found as their positions against the colonial West and capitalism are comparable; this connection is beyond the scope of this analysis. However, we can accept that this conception defined by Yoshimoto for particularly Japanese cinema, can also be found in Turkish melodramatic. The melodramatic reminds the Turkish that Turkey is trapped in the space and gaze of the Western hegemony, too. This gaze does not necessarily belong to the outside Western. This gaze of Western hegemony is internalized by the Turkish people. This hidden but everpresent gaze like an ominous god constructs a space and positions its subject as "slave". As an escape from this position, melodramatic imagination creates negatively constructed subject who does not actively direct the melodramatic universe but is passively directed by. As Yoshimoto implies, this position frees the subject from the responsibility of its inferiority and sanctify it as the innocent victim of the evil other.

Classic Yeşilçam melodrama forms its protagonists as the negatively constructed subjects. They do not act but only acted upon. The Turkish melodramatic imagination satisfies itself by the delusion of being the innocent victim of evil. Also, this delusion is the main bridge connecting the Yeşilçam melodramatic to the new Turkish cinema. For example, Demirkubuz's male protagonists are always negatively constructed. Sometimes, it is so exaggerated, like in *Yazgi*, that this negatively constructed subject gains consciousness about this and makes it a manifestation of a kind of rebellion against the outside world. Suner says:

Interestingly, while 'the negatively constructed subject' is viable for the female heroines in Asian, specially Yeşilçam melodramas, we see the male heroes in the same situation in Demirkubuz's films. Yusuf (*Masumiyet*) and İsa (*Üçüncü Sayfa*) are these kind of heroes. (Suner 2006, 188)

Both Yusuf and İsa are the negatively constructed subjects who are always reluctant to make an action. Bekir in *Masumiyet* and *Kader* also cannot use his freewill; he almost gets a masochistic pleasure from being dragged by an outside power. This passivism can be defined as a way of self-destruction; as a matter of fact, it is not a coincidence that both İsa and Bekir kill their selves at the end.

Also, Ceylan's cinema is full of negatively constructed subjects too. Like the frozen moments in his film, the characters seem to be frozen in a moment between waiting and doing an action. Suner indicates:

We do not encounter with the characters who act in the narration space, react to conditions and finalize the events parallel to the fixation of the stories. On the contrary, the characters are mostly defined through a kind of expectancy, recession, and passivity. (Suner 2006, 125)

Ceylan's characters mostly waits and watches. It seems like they are trapped in the moment just before the movement. This anxiety and the stressful anticipation of movement pervades into the atmosphere of the film. Even the Saffet/Yusuf as the most ambitious character, who wants to escape from this passivity, cannot find the enough energy and motivation to take an action. The essence of Ceylan's cinema can be defined as the melancholy of being trapped inside the limited space of the negatively constructed subject. The character that we feel this melancholy mostly is Mahmut in *Uzak*. In Suner's words "Ceylan's words indicate Mahmut's nostalgia about not acting despite being aware of the facts which makes him live in a permanent guilt and self-hatred."<sup>66</sup>

Both Ceylan and Demirkubuz construct their cinema on "awareness". This is the point where their cinema departs from the melodramatic structure. Melodrama's main function is to make the audience identify with this negatively constructed subject. A certain level of awareness can lie in the subconscious of the text and can return to the surface, however, melodramatic drama never shows the disturbing nature of this passivity. As for Demirkubuz and Ceylan, although they use the same type of subject with melodrama, they add a layer with a certain degree of awareness that causes the melancholic atmosphere. They give the responsibility of the construction of the submissiveness of the subject to the subject himself. As a result, the subject starts to signify the delusional nature of the negatively constructed subject. Their films disturb the audience and create a depressive atmosphere, because this delusion which the audience hide behind and excuse themselves is now exposed. The disturbance and uncanniness of these films come from the revelation of the obscene guilt of this delusion for which both Yeşilçam and the audience are responsible.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 119.

## v) Popular Cinema

On the other hand, there is a popular cinema after 1990 which tries to recreate this negatively constructed subject. Unlike Demirkubuz and Ceylan, this cinema assures the security of this subject both in past and now. Popular contemporary Turkish cinema uses two structures for this aim. Either it defines a society as the negatively constructed subject and locks it up in a fabricated past; or it puts one negatively constructed subject into today's world and eulogize its innocence against the monstrous world of today. In both cases, this subject- a single person or a group of people- is sanctified by the film. All energy in this cinema is spent to enable the audience believe in this subject and make them to identify with it again.

To understand its place in new Turkish cinema, we have to recognize the vitality of negatively constructed subject for the Yeşilçam melodramatic. In Fethi Açıkel's words: 'Sacred aggrieved is the struggle to overcome the pathologies of capitalism of the "peace idea" of pre-capitalism.'<sup>67</sup> Like Yoshimoto, Açıkel defines this character type as a defense mechanism to the hegemonic West and capitalism. Açıkel points out that, this submissive character type does not necessarily show society's compliance and acceptance of the Western, capitalist ideologies. It can also be a kind of statement of society's demand for power. He says:

The sacred aggrieved is the momentum of the transformation of the masses faced to unpropertiedness due to social, cultural, and imaginary rootlessness caused by the violence of late capitalism and rapid modernization, to a repressive-neurotic political ideology that represents their demand for power. (Açıkel 1996, 155)

By this claim, Açıkel take Yoshimoto's claim one step further. According to him, negatively constructed subject does not only enable the audience to escape from the entrapment inside the Western hegemonic gaze, but also includes the momentum of a neurotic demand to gain power.

Approached this perspective, we understand that the passive melodramatic character in Turkish cinema signifies more than it seems. Açıkel's contribution also helps us to comprehend the transformation of this character due to the changes in socio-economic

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<sup>67</sup> Açıkel, 156.

conditions. Umut Tümay Arslan points out several changes in negatively constructed subject of Yeşilçam from 50s to 70s.

Certainly, the aggrieved perspective based on the revenge from the oppressive, and the spirit of the aggrieved is the spirit of Yeşilçam. Nevertheless, is not there a difference between the aggrieved of the 50s who feels he is thrown into the “harlot world” and the aggrieved of the 60s that has become orphan but is still responsible, virtuous, honest, and gains victory against the oppressive for these very features? Is not there any difference between the aggrieved of the 50s losing everything, including his family, self, and life, over an ultra modern woman and the aggrieved of the 60s who come from a village, ending up as a modern living in a city? Also, why have the aggrieved of the 60s who have made the right choices become full of grudge, desire of revenge, violence, and power in the 70s? In my opinion, the aggrieved, the most characteristic spirit of Yeşilçam, has different faces in different times. The repetition power of the aggrieved can only be defined through these variations. (Arslan 2005, 43)

50s, 60s, and 70s’ melodramatic victimized characters had gone through remarkable transformations. As Arslan indicates, this character always appears in different shapes and psychology in different socio-economic conditions. This explains its survivability against the excessive repetition.

The strongest evidence of the existence of melodramatic imagination as the basic element of new Turkish cinema is the negatively constructed subject. As we stated above, this character can be seen in the author cinema of directors like Demirkubuz and Ceylan. But this type of independent cinema problematizes this character and adds a certain level of awareness and intentionality into the text. Especially Demirkubuz looks back to Yeşilçam and questions this character. In the popular cinema, this character’s passiveness, insecurity, cowardice and lack of will to change its life is never questioned. Rather, it is fetishized and is made an object of a childhood fantasy. In this sense, it is no coincidence that many critics frequently choose the term “fairy tale” to describe several examples of popular Turkish cinema.

In the case of Turkish popular cinema after 1990s, the challenging point is the nostalgia element. The submissive subject always appears as a nostalgic being in these films. For understanding this phenomenon, this statement of Açıkel can be helpful:

The material of the aggrieved fantasy is historic, namely the contemporary conditions are included in its discourse. The combination of the symbols in an eclectic way is not a problem for the submissive subject. The collage-like style, symbolic selection, and the tendency to construct history according to his own taste befits the taste of the submissive subject. This construction of the eclectic discourse phase is more apparent in the ideology of the submissive subject. The “emotionality” of the aggrieved makes him take

sides with anyone he thinks has the same fate. A legal league against the cosmic evil. (Açikel 1996, 172)

In new Turkish cinema, the victimized subject is always told in relation to the past. This ‘past’ is either the society, or a character signifying the past. In this sense, Açikel’s claim about submissive subject’s interest in past becomes explanatory in the new Turkish cinema. The historical is the material of the fantasy world of the submissive subject. This fantasy reconstructs the history, and the unrealistic nature of this new history does not disturb the subject. Nostalgic films set in a historical time frame in the new Turkish cinema construct a similar fantasy world. Several examples like *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan & Ömer Faruk Sorak: 2000), *Vizontele Tuuba* (Yılmaz Erdoğan: 2004), *Şellale* (Semir Aslanyürek: 2001), *Beynelminel* (Muharrem Gülmez & Sırrı Süreyya Önder: 2006) can be named for this kind of historical fantasy of the submissive subject. Asuman Suner says:

The past is reified in the nostalgia films, is envisaged as a kind of social children phase and the society becomes kind of children. These films construct a collective identity materialized in the past provinces life, an obsession on “us”, and a kind of “inherent fact area”. What defines “us” is self-possessed goodness, naivety and childlikeness. On one hand, this obsession of “us” envisages the society as a sweet and impish child, on the other, takes away the responsibility to give an account. By this way, nostalgia films save the society from bearing the brunt of history. (Suner 2006, 98)

Suner’s comments about the characters and the constructed history in popular nostalgic films in the new Turkish cinema are very similar to Yoshimoto’s definition of the negatively constructed subject. In this case, a small society becomes one submissive subject. After numerous transformations throughout the time, the melodramatic submissive character turns into a naïve group of people in a historical time period. In its unrealistic world full of exaggerations, the film always overemphasizes the innocence, happiness and unity of this small group; and at the end this group becomes the victim of evil doing by others. Like Yoshimoto’s perception of melodrama, these films, too, open a space to escape from the guilt and shame for not being active and dominant agents in Western sense.

It is important to understand the reason why the negatively constructed subject appears in a nostalgic universe of a past time. The socio-economic changes behind it are beyond the range of this analysis. However, we should recognize the same melancholy and grief that we have seen in Demirkubuz’s cinema. These nostalgic films also seem to mourn for the disappearance of the melodramatic universe. The loss of faith in the delusion that is created by the negatively constructed subject makes this popular cinema to place this subject in a

world which died long ago. We see the same analogy here. Once again, the melodramatic imagination and its main victimized character are associated with the childhood of the Turkish society.

## vi) Yavuz Turgul

On the other hand, in another category of new Turkish cinema the victimized character placed in present-day. In this case the character is completely isolated from the contemporary world and constantly signifies a historical time which is constructed and unrealistic. Yavuz Turgul is the best example of this kind of cinema. One can argue that his cinema has always been built upon the negatively constructed subject that goes back from the new Turkish cinema. In films like *Züğürt Ağa* (Nesli Çölgeçen: 1985), *Muhsin Bey* (Yavuz Turgul: 1986), *Aşk Filmlerinin Unutulmaz Yönetmeni* (Yavuz Turgul: 1990), *Gölge Oyunu* (Yavuz Turgul: 1990) he repeatedly tells the victimized characters. However, the reason why *Eşkiya* is accepted as the beginning of the new Turkish cinema is important. In *Eşkiya*, we see the peak of the fetishization of the negatively constructed subject. Baran is a victimized, submissive character who carries all the signs of a past time. We can speculate that, *Eşkiya*'s success and revolutionary effect on Turkish cinema can be explained by its total acceptance of the loss of melodramatic fantasy of original happiness and its overemphasize over the death of the victimized character type. It should not be confused with Demirkubuz's approach to accepting this loss. While the delusion of negatively constructed subject is being questioned and exposed in Demirkubuz's cinema, Turgul tries to recreate it as a fetish object of a fantasy.

Turgul's cinema has many characteristics derived from the melodramatic tradition. He says about *Eşkiya*:

He says about *Eşkiya* "The old genuine Turkish films are like a bridge to nowadays... If you analyze them, these films are so much Turkish because of the fairy tales elements, the reaction to betrayal, love stories, the form and the density of violence present in these films."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Scognamillo, Giovanni. *Türk Sinema Tarihi*. İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 1998, 468.

Like he indicates, *Eşkiya* constructs a bridge between classic Yeşilçam and contemporary Turkish cinema. The atmosphere of a fairy tale, the naivety, ever-lasting love, the demand for revenge, long monologues expressing the inner struggles of characters, holes in the surface of the drama from which sudden outburst of violence come out, and so on, shows the melodramatic foundation of Turgul's cinema.

Still, we can say that the main melodramatic element in his films is the negatively constructed subject signifying both the melodramatic universe and the disappearance of it. In the new Turkish cinema, the urge to recreate this melodramatic victim and impossibility of creating this delusion in today's world paved the way to the nostalgia obsession. *Eşkiya* opens a new period in Turkish cinema by both defining this problem and answering it at the same time. It recreates the melodramatic character, but also encircles it with a nostalgic aura that makes it seem like out of this world. Nostalgia becomes the defense mechanism of the melodramatic imagination in the new Turkish cinema.

In his next film, *Gönül Yarası* (Yavuz Turgul: 2005), he once again uses the same type of victimized character. But now, he prefers to question him:

My last film has actually been a different one for me. Because *Gönül Yarası* is a film of settlements. The film enables you to see the most just, good, and amiable man's devastation of the others' lives by his own beliefs and deeds. Şener has not acted such a part before. For the first time, he has to take responsibility of such guilt. Think of what her daughter has to face because of Nazım, the misery of the son delivered to a step-father, and despite saying that "Everything is in our own hands", Nazım's setting Dünya's death by his very own hands. For the first time, Şener plays such a profound part that has all the positive and negative aspects in itself.<sup>69</sup>

As it can be seen, the acceptance of the loss of melodramatic victim and trying to recreate it with nostalgia turns into a criticism of this character. Negatively constructed subject has always been the one who the audience identifies with. Like in Yoshimoto's claim, it is the innocent one who is acted upon by evil others. Turgul, in fact, tries to imply this passive innocence by saying "the most just, good, and amiable man". He is not only talking about Nazım in *Gönül Yarası*, he refers to all the characters he created as the negatively constructed subjects including Baran in *Eşkiya*.

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<sup>69</sup> Turgul, Yavuz. 'Söyleşi', *Altyazı* Vol: 37, February, 2005, İstanbul: 50-56

This change in Turgul's perspective of this submissive character throughout 90s and 2000s implies one of the main problematics of the new Turkish cinema. The popular side of this cinema tries to recreate this subject in present day's conditions only by wrapping it up with a nostalgic cover. In this sense, it is no surprise that *Eşkiya*, as the one which achieved this first with a successful cinematography, is the starting film of this cinema. This subject is constructed either by a nostalgic character who constantly signifies the past in contemporary world, or by constructing a small and closed society as the victimized character in an absurdly naïve and unrealistic atmosphere of the past. As for the independent auteur cinema, it is not about recreating this subject but problematizing it. Against the joyfulness of the nostalgic atmosphere of the popular cinema, we see an uncanny and melancholic mood of guilt and shame of submissiveness in Demirkubuz and Ceylan's cinema.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to analyze the Turkish melodramatic imagination and explore its influence on the new Turkish cinema. In the search for the possible recreations of the melodramatic tradition of Yeşilçam in post 1990s Turkish cinema, the analysis of the melodramatic text of Yeşilçam in 60s and 70s revealed some essential melodramatic characteristics which are at the basis of the Turkish cinema.

Melodramatic text has always been about the modernization process. It tries to create a new morality in the new social order and an illusion of a resolution of the social crisis. However, the hysterical and pathetic nature of the text also allows the repressed crisis and undischarged emotions to surface. Therefore, melodramatic structure which has different layers of reality forms a disturbing space. This also turns the melodramatic text into a very valuable source for the social sciences to see the culturally repressed and uncanny ones.

Yeşilçam melodrama has an existential relation to the modernization process, too. It tries to fulfill its function to create a new morality in the new social, economic and political order. However, in the case of Yeşilçam the non-Western identity and the internalized Western gaze makes the Yeşilçam melodramas more paradoxical and hysterical. While it tries to recreate the hegemonic ideology of modernization project, Yeşilçam also turns this recreation into a self regulating mechanism. In this context, the negatively constructed subject is a very important element in Turkish melodramatic imagination that reproduces the inferior and submissive position; at the same time it turns this submissiveness into a neurotic demand for power. In new Turkish cinema, negatively constructed subject emerges in the face of nostalgia. Either a group of people or one character becomes this victimized subject in an excessive atmosphere of nostalgia.

One other essential element of melodramatic Yeşilçam is the concept of original unity. Melodrama always gives the feeling of entrapment in the moment of trauma just after the

separation. Various readings of this separation can be done. However, in new Turkish cinema this separation generally occurs as the separation from the hometown or group of people. Interesting point is that the new Turkish cinema does not only share a thematic similarity with melodramatic Yeşilçam, but the pathetic and hysterical nature of text is also like each other. The mirrors in Demirkubuz's cinema, the time expansion in Ceylan's cinema, and popular cinema's excessive nostalgia all indicate the melodramatic tradition at the basis of the new Turkish cinema.

Although both Yeşilçam melodrama and new Turkish cinema are interested in the modernization project, their perception of the same project differs. In this sense, the melancholy, disbelief and extreme passivity in post 90s Turkish cinema fit the melodramatic tradition. The naïve and hopeful melodramatic universe of 60s and first part of 70s began to be charged with more violence and recklessness with the decreasing hopes and belief in modernization project since the second part of the 70s. In new Turkish cinema, the complete disbelief and disappointment emerges as a heavy melancholy.

The new Turkish cinema either wants to recreate the naïve universe of melodrama through excess nostalgia, or, conversely, mourns for the death of this naïve melodramatic universe and chooses a complete alienation. Nevertheless, both alternatives mean that one of the main problematics of the new Turkish cinema is the melodramatic imagination of Yeşilçam.

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