Eurimages and Turkish cinema: history, identity, culture

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Chapter 6

GENDER IDENTITIES

George L. Mosse argues that the nation was constructed according to the peculiarly heterosexual ideal of *manliness*, which acted as a basic signifying principle in the self-definition of bourgeois society and its nationalist ideology. Accordingly, manliness reinforced the class division of labour – the prerequisite productive mode of bourgeois society – not only in the economy but also in social and sexual life, as well as symbolising the nation’s spiritual and material vitality (Mosse 1985, 23-24). The renowned statement of Simone de Beauvoir - “one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one” (1979, 295) - can be seen as signifying the construction of gender identities by modernity’s ideology of manliness. Besides womanhood, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender (LGBT) identities are also subjected to and sublimated by masculine heterosexual morality in capitalist society: “Nationalism and respectability assigned everyone his place in life, man and woman, normal and abnormal, native and foreigner; any confusion between these categories threatened chaos and loss of control” (Mosse 1985, 16). Those who have trespassed beyond the limits of male and female activity have been considered as ‘abnormal’ and as constituting a threat to society (24-25).

Though nations and nationalism are by-products of capitalism, Turkey as a nation-state did not deploy this economic mode of production and its concomitant class structure in its early stage of establishment. The state was established and led by the military and bureaucratic elites, not the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the conservative Islamic morality provided a clear focal reference point in the seclusion of women and the utter exclusion of non-heterosexuality in Turkish society. The bourgeoisie that later developed parallel to the strengthening of capitalism in the 1950s - that which dominated the state apparatuses and imposed a cultural hegemony - confirmed Mosse’s determination: the heterosexual norm of *manliness* sublimated and replaced the earlier social structural normalcy and was reinforced by Turkish bourgeois morality.
The republican revolution granted a relative degree of ‘emancipation’ to women, but the acquisition of further rights necessitated a second wave of feminism, just like the relative recognition of, and initial social space given to, LGBT identities was made possible thanks to their own struggles – both against the popular ideology of manliness and its correlate morality. Therefore this chapter will focus on the two secluded and excluded identities in Turkish gender discourse, womanhood and LGBT identities. This chapter is not exclusory regarding men, for we are talking about women and/or LGBT identities and indeed of manliness and its ideology.

Firstly the historical backdrop of women’s status and ‘emancipation’ in Turkey will be provided, with the Ottoman and republican periods separated so as to create a clearer picture of the status of womanhood in today’s Turkey. This section will be proceeded by an outlining of the representation of women in Turkish cinema generally and in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films specifically. Thereafter the severe discrimination, oppression and exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities (and the struggles of their adherents against this discrimination) will be outlined, and this will likewise be followed by an analysis of their representation in Turkish cinema.

Women in the Ottoman Period

The Ottoman state turned into a theocratic one in the 16th century, after the transfer of the post of Caliphate to the Ottoman sultan, Selim I. Thereafter, religious doctrine became the key reference point in the exclusion of women from economic and social life right up until the last few decades of the empire. The Empire’s women were held under tight control by the decrees of the sultanate, stipulating injunctions on a myriad range of aspects of life, from their clothing styles to the days of the week on which they could leave the house. They were not provided with education and were obliged to live a secluded life that permitted contact with only close family members. A few examples of the sultanate’s decrees that targeted women in these times are given here:

The one dated 1580 forbidding women to ride in the same boat with men; banning women’s entry into creamery shops [1573]; changing the model of “ferace” (formerly an outdoor mantle for ladies) of 1726; banning women from
going to picnic places [1752]; banning the wearing of ferace made of fine cloth, and the threat to seamstresses that if they repeated making “ferace” from such material that they would be hanged outside their workshops [1792]; allowing women to go out only on four days of the week (during the reign of Osman III [1754-1757]); banning women completely from going out (the reign of Mustafa IV [1807-1808]); banning women from going out even with their fathers or sons, or ride in a car or stay outdoors at the time of call to prayers [1862]; the ban on women going out in çarşaf (formerly an outdoor garment) and veil made of very thin material and the decision concerning the introduction of “ferace”. 84 (Özkaya 1981, 231)

Women were secluded in a harem. From the 15th century on, the concept was introduced in the imperial palace, wherein the space was divided into two - the harem (women’s section) and the selamlık (men’s section). Besides referring to the women’s section in the palace and residences, the word ‘harem’ also referred to the community of women who lived in that section. Şirin Tekeli informs us that the Ottomans adopted the harem system after the conquest of Byzantium, along with many other structures of the Byzantine state: “The Byzantine Empire was a class society basically made up of slaves who worked on the land and the ruling classes who mainly indulged in governing. The women who belonged to the ruling classes and who lived in cities were secluded in the “harem’” (1981, 294). In contact only with the male members of their families, women were principally left to deal with housework, the upbringing of children and embroidery in the harem. Though not officially, it was essentially a kind of social slavery, as Tekeli suggests in referring to what Friedrich Engels (2010) called the “domestic slavery” of women (295). When it came to the palace, a group of women was chosen because of the women’s ‘beauty’ and they were kept in the harem to serve as sex objects for the sultan; Leila Ahmed (1982) states that Turks, as the last Middle Eastern peoples to convert to Islam, were responsible for developing the institution of the harem. In addition, women members of the imperial harem learned about and were involved in dynastic politics (Peirce 1993). It is well known that (especially) the mothers of the sultans or şehzades (the sons of the sultans that are the candidates for sultanate) influenced the leading male

84 The original dates in the source book are in the Hegira calendar, which is the lunar year of Islam. I have converted them into the Gregorian calendar; there might be a year of disparity in conversion, depending upon the month of the decrees, which are not denoted in the source book.
political figures from time to time. The imperial harem was dissolved in the Second Constitutional Monarchy Period (1908-1919) by a parliamentary decision.

While the sexes were segregated in the cities, as we have seen in the decrees of the sultans and in the practice of the harem, the women of the rural agricultural land led a less oppressed life due to the conditions of production therein. Working in agricultural fields in conjunction with men, women in the countryside were not forced to cover their faces and hide themselves. In a similar vein, while the turban (a type of Islamic headscarf) has been popular amongst conservative circles in the towns and cities of Turkey over recent years, it has largely not been used in the villages and the headscarf used by peasants today is almost the same as the one used by women in the Anatolian countryside centuries ago.

The status of womanhood and the emancipation of women was not questioned or proposed until the Reorganization Period (1839-1876), when the issue of women was located at the centre of Westernization debates in newspapers and novels. The proponents of Westernization maintained that the ‘superiority’ of the West was not only due to technological advancement but also to the rationalist and positivist worldview that underlay this technology. Thus there was no place for superstition in the Western world, and concurrently Islamic conservatism was the reason for the backwardness of Turkish society and the oppressed status of women. According to Islamists, on the other hand, the corruption and degeneration of society was due to Islamic creed not being fully exercised; a pan-societal Islamic ideology was to be the way forward, and while the military and economic systems of the West might be applicable in a Muslim society, issues over the status and rights of women should be muted by the dictates of Islamic law. When the debate touched on morality, even the most libertarian intellectuals could not go beyond their puritanism and, keeping in mind the predominant Islamic conservatism in the society, they tended to use the Koran as the chief reference point in terms of the rights of women. As the debate progressed over the years, the Islamist side had to admit some, minimal rights to women. All of these debates were, it must be said, partaken in by men, and women only had a direct political voice by the end of the 19th century, when they were given limited educational rights. While the status of women was intensely debated during the Reorganization Period, the actions taken in favour of their emancipation remained
limited and piecemeal. The equal inheritance rights granted to daughters with sons and the abolishment of slavery and concubine practices were, nevertheless, important moments of progress in this period.

Educational rights and opportunities have always been central issues in the discourse over women’s status in society. Throughout the six centuries of the Ottoman Empire, women were excluded from education except for during the last few decades. Only daughters of the elite (e.g. the pashas, judges and professors) could receive private tuition. Among these women, the first female poet in Ottoman history, known as Zeynep Hatun, was born in 1474 (Afetinan 1962; Özkaya 1981). No serious legislative provisions in terms of women’s education were made until the 1870s, when teacher-schools for women were opened (and a few high schools for girls were established in the big cities later on). Since male teachers were thought to be ‘inconvenient’ in schools composed of female students, only elder teachers who were defined as being ‘decent’ were appointed to work in the institutions at the beginning. The women who could access what little education was afforded were the daughters of the elite and of wealthy families, and many of these were later involved in literary productions and in the debate over women’s social status at the end of the 19th century, as alluded to above. More extensive educational provisions for women emerged during the Second Constitutional Monarchy Period, and were enacted under the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress. Both the demand for female education and the number of educated women significantly increased. A university for women (İnas Darılfünunu) was founded in Istanbul in 1915 and from 1919 onwards the female students therein could take courses alongside men (IUFL). The female students were permitted to lift their veil only during the lectures (Abadan-Unat 1981).

Despite the advancements made during the Second Constitutional Monarchy Period, the expectations of women were not satisfactorily met. Following the oppressive rule of Abdülhamid II85, women who were in hope of full liberty were frustrated in their ambitions, denotes Zülal Kılıç: “in the celebrations of the fifth anniversary of the second constitution, Women’s World [a journal] called this the national holiday for men” (quoted in Altan-Olcay 2009, 177). Nevertheless, an ideological basis had been prepared in the

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85 Following the Young Turk revolution, Sultan Abdülhamid II had to restore the constitutional monarchy and the parliament once again in 1908, which had been abolished by him in 1878. So the Second Constitutional Era was begotten. However, being involved in a counter-revolution eventually caused his deposition from the throne in 1909.
debates that took place during and after the Reorganization Period, and women obtained and secured many tangible rights after the 1908 revolution. Besides educational reforms, the social space afforded to women increased in size and political weight. The continuous warfare from 1912 to 1922 caused a swathe of men to withdraw from the workforce and necessitated women’s work. They principally served as nurses, in social welfare activities and in other roles acting as support to the army behind the front-lines. In 1915, women were permitted to unveil their faces during working hours. As women became part of the broader socio-economic arena, the number of women’s journals – which had been being published since 1895 - increased in manifold proportions. While some of these journals focused on raising awareness amongst women of feminist causes and defended women’s rights, some of them simply informed women as to how to be a good mother, a good wife and a good Muslim. The presence of more radical journals, however, was testament to a shift in public attitudes to women and the feminine.

Women in the Republican Period

In addition to entering into the workforce, women were actively involved in the War of Independence and contributed much to the eventual victory. They protested the occupation of Istanbul and Izmir by the allied powers and joined the resistance movement in Anatolia. Thus they were politicised as well as being a greater part of the country’s socio-economic life. The new republic introduced many unprecedented women’s rights and pushed for the ‘emancipation’ of women not only insofar as they were involved in the struggle for liberation but as a deeper process of radical modernisation. The reforms that were most relevant to women were made in three domains: education, law and politics.

As a first step, a law establishing a universal education system that rejected religious education was passed on the same day as the abolition of the caliphate (3 March 1924). The principles of a secular education system were adopted, and the new system granted equal educational rights to every citizen. Educational institutions on the one hand and girls’ schools in particular were set up across the country. Primary school education became obligatory and free for every citizen. All of the universities opened their doors to women. The higher education of women increased in time to a level that, as Feride Acar denotes, “compared to ‘developed’ countries in the West, women’s participation in higher
education was significantly higher in the Turkish Republic” (quoted in Toktaş and Cindoğlu 2006, 739). Female graduates of these universities worked as teachers at the beginning, and then occupied all kinds of profession, as doctors, professors, opera singers and even as pilots.

Secondly, in terms of legislation, the civil code of Switzerland was adopted in 1926 with only some minor changes made, as it was thought to have thoroughly desirable secular characteristics. It replaced the old code, which was based on the theology of Shari’a law and was weighted hugely against the favour of women. The new civil code arranged marital relations and familial legal relations. Some of the improvements provided included the following:

- Civil marriage became obligatory and official before witnesses and required registration on identification cards, instead of there being a religious ceremony; couples who wished to have a religious ceremony could also do that.

- The principle of equality between woman and man was adopted in terms of inheritance, child custody decisions and divorce proceedings.

- Polygamy was abolished.

- The legal minimum age of marriage was raised to 18 (although this was later altered a few times).

Although the new civil code constituted a milestone in the emancipation of women, it did not bring an absolute equality of the sexes, for, according to the Swiss civil code, man remained the head and chief representative of the family and a woman had to get the permission of her husband to obtain employment. Besides, the practical implementation of the new legal code could not be effectively enforced beyond the cities and thus could not change the life of women in the countryside and in the conservative cliques. Over time the civil code has been much improved in favour of women’s rights and has become effective in the more remote parts of the country.

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86 According to the statistical data of 2009, approximately 35% of people who have a doctoral degree in Turkey are women, which is probably one of the highest ratios in the world, if not the highest (TÜK 2009).
87 Sabiha Gökçen, for instance, the adopted daughter of Atatürk, served as the first female pilot in the air force in the 1930s.
88 The Former Family Code, legislated in 1917, was the first one in the Muslim world (Kandiyoti 1989). Though it brought some improvements for women (such as making marital contracts obligatory, and requiring the consent of both sides for marriage and divorce), it also legalised polygamy despite demanding the consent of the first wife.
The third set of legal motions which favoured women’s emancipation involved suffrage being granted to women and women being allowed to stand as electoral candidates. This right was given in the local elections in 1930, in the election of village heads in 1933, and in the parliament in 1934. Eighteen women were elected as deputies in the first election (1935) after suffrage was widened. According to Tekeli (1981), the granting of electoral rights to Turkish women at the beginning of the 1930s was not coincidental. After the closure of The Progressive Republican Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fıkası*) in 1925 and dissolution of the Free (Liberal) Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fıkası*) in 1930, Turkey was still a single-party regime and Atatürk wanted to dissociate the republic from the fascist regimes of Europe that were excluding women from political life.\(^9\) Thus, suffrage to women was a good sign of enlightenment and democracy in Turkey. Tekeli argues that: “… Atatürk was not satisfied with the formal recognition of women’s political rights but went as far as to encourage women to participate as candidates in the 1935 elections, the result of which was the election of a high number of women deputies with no counterpart in the Western democracies” (299).

After the demise of Atatürk, the proportion of women in parliament, however, was not to be so high for several years (until recently, although the ratio is still in favour of men).\(^90\) The Women People’s Party (*Kadınlar Halk Fıkası*) was established at the beginning of the 1920s. Without approval from the government, it was turned into a federation and dissolved in 1935; the formal justification given was that the emancipation of women had been achieved after suffrage had been granted.

The reforms made in the initial years of the republican period – also called the ‘first wave of feminism in Turkey’ – gave women many unprecedented rights in a relatively short period of time, without a violent or difficult struggle, especially as compared to the experience of Western European women. Ahmed expresses this situation: “thus by 1930 Turkish women had achieved legal and civil status equal to that of women in the more advanced European countries – and against how different a background, how

\(^{9}\) The Progressive Republican Party was established in 1924 and closed in 1925, following Şeyh Said’s rebellion that was mentioned in Chapter 5, as being against the principles of the republic on the basis of Islamism and having a role in the assassination attempt on Atatürk in Izmir. Free (Liberal) Republican Party on the other hand was established by Fethi Okyar, one of the fellow officers of Atatürk during the War of Independence, upon the request of Atatürk in 1930 to create a multi-party democracy. This new party found support in a short period of time especially among conservatives who were against the reforms of the new regime. Fethi Okyar was a supporter of the republic and he personally dissolved the party upon this new situation.

\(^{90}\) 18 out of 395 deputies in the parliament were women in 1935 (4.5%). 78 out of 550 deputies in parliament were women after the 2011 elections, which makes up a total of 14.2%.
different a reality” (1982, 157). Toprak states that: “as early as the 1930s, Turkey stood as an anomaly among Muslim countries” (2005, 170). The public visibility of women was profoundly increased and women were well educated and could occupy all kinds of professions thanks to the reforms. The women whose lives were radically changed in this way became staunch advocates of the republican revolution. Mina Urgan, for instance, who was a prominent English Literature professor, speaks about the sentiments that the Kemalist reforms invoked in women and why women have been strong advocates of the republican revolutionary reforms:

Now, as the time has come, I would like to say that I am a Kemalist, a Kemalist to the bone. Mustafa Kemal danced with me, I am a Kemalist not because he treated an eleven-year-old child like an adult, but because if it weren’t for Mustafa Kemal, I wouldn’t have been ‘I’. It would be completely abnormal for an educated woman, past the age of eighty, not to believe in Kemalism in this country. I was very young then but I remember very well the curtain that separated the women’s seats from men’s in tramways. Mustafa Kemal, with his beautiful hands, tore that curtain and all other curtains that excluded women from public life and confined them to dark corners. And that’s why there is no way for a woman who was about seven-eight years old when the republic was established, and, who [saw] with her own eyes all the revolutions, not to be on the side of Mustafa Kemal. (quoted in Altan-Olcay 2009, 168)

The reforms had a complementary function in the projects of Westernisation and modernisation (which I outlined in Chapter 5) in that women’s emancipation ensured the modernist image of the republic. The profundity of the changes brought about by the new regime was so great that “Kemalism is perhaps the first movement in the world that set the alteration of the existing civilization as its primary objective” (Göle 1996, 73). Kemalist reforms aimed to reverse the top-down theocratic rule of the Ottoman-state in the 16th century, again in a top-down manner. In the establishment period of the republic the emphasis on women - who were the group most oppressed by the Islamic order of the Ottoman state - and on the pre-Islamic period of the Turks can be seen as crucial moves towards modernity.
“Most revolutions use gender to legitimate the new social order to make it appear “natural” or even inevitable, though the meanings of gender in nationalist, revolutionary, and anti-imperialist projects constantly shift”, states Temma Kaplan (2004, 172). The women’s role, in this sense, is defined by Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) as acting as a biological, cultural and symbolic reproducer of the nation. The women who experienced and actively participated in the War of Independence, as the core of the nuclear family, were to transmit republican ideals to their children; these were the oppressed women excluded by the former Ottoman state apparatus. Liberating women from that exclusion was thus vital for the total demise of the old, outdated regime. Moreover, the emancipation of women has always been at the heart of modernisation processes and projects in all places and historical stages. Women should not be kept at home but should be visible in the public sphere and encouraged by men (fathers and husbands) to be so. As Göle appropriately determines, “the question of women did not emerge as a secondary issue on the agenda of Kemalism, but, rather, it enables us to comprehend the essence of this ideology” (1996, 64) and “it was the women who were the standard-bearers of Kemalist reforms” (63). The arguments of Göle find their verification in the words of Atatürk: “We have to believe that everything in the world is the result, directly or indirectly, of the work of women…A country which seeks development and modernization must accept the need for change. The weakness in our society lies in our indifference toward the status of women… We must have Turkish women as partners in everything, to share our lives with them, and to value them as friends, helpers, and colleagues in our scientific, spiritual, social and economic life…” (quoted in Abadan-Unat 1981, v)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the republican regime emphasised the pre-Islamic period of the Turks both in order to distance itself from Islamic culture and traditions (paving the way for Westernising policies) and to provide a source of national identity which the individuals of the very young and ideologically embryonic republic could be proud of (the Turkish Historical Thesis). The issue of women’s rights was approached in a similar vein, recalling the equality between the sexes in pre-Islamic Turkish societies and stressing the oppressive character of the form of Islam that was embraced in the later period. Gökalp, for instance, was a representative sociologist of the new republican system. He emphasised the equal status of women and men in ancient Turkic civilisation and remarked on the adverse effects of Islamic ascetism in his reference book The
Principles of Turkism, first published in 1923. Afet İnan, similarly, suggested that Turkish Muslim women - under the influence of non-Islamic national custom - led a distinctly different life to Muslim women in other communities at the beginning of the Ottoman Empire, and argued that this explains the later shift to a more oppressive type of Islam: “this was due not only to Islam but also to the influence of the customs of other nations who embraced Islam” (1962, 21-22). As we have seen, the modernising ‘nation-state project’ of the republic worked towards the liberation of women on the one hand, and referred to the virtues of the pre-Islamic period of the Turks in its legitimating ideology – this had been a period in which women were not subjected to the oppression of Islamic rule.

Despite the emancipation of women being enacted at previously unimaginable levels, these reforms did not escape criticism. The first point of objection was that the reforms in education, law and politics were unable to go beyond the elite circles of the big cities and pervade in the countryside, especially within conservative social segments in the rural areas. The second criticism was that the main objective was the formation of a modern nation-state and the emancipation of women was only of instrumental use in reaching this sublime objective; the pressure on the Women’s Republican Party that had to cease its functioning can be seen as evidence of this according to certain critical scholars. Other criticisms point to the system being a form of ‘state feminism’ (in terms of Tekeli) in which all that was required by women was granted by the state such that there was no need for further demands or radical reorganisation. Thirdly, it is sometimes argued that the role appropriated by women was motherhood: they were seen as the transmitters of republican nation-state ideals to the next generations in a domestic setting and this was the sole motivation for educational reforms being made. This recalls the argument of Yuval-Davis that women were biological, cultural and symbolic reproducers of the nation. The fourth criticism was that the role of religion in establishing the unequal status of women was not fundamentally questioned and the reforms only made limited changes to the quintessentially patriarchal order of Turkish gender relations. Traditional familial and social gender oppression was not easy to

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91 Afet İnan (1908-1985) was an adopted daughter of Atatürk and one of the first professors of history in the republican period. She was also one of the founders of Turkish Historical Society and proponents of Turkish Historical Thesis (was explained in Chapter 4) which emphasised pre-Islam Turkism in order to serve the modern-secular-nationalist republican ideology of new Turkey.
overcome in this more subtle sense, even for the better educated women of that era. Two films covered in this section, *Graduate of Insanity*, and *Bliss*, provide evidence that verifies this criticism.

The Second Wave of Feminism

The second wave of feminism in Turkey started in the depoliticised atmosphere of the post-coup period in the 1980s, more than a decade later than its Western counterpart. The people who organised this autonomous movement came mainly from the leftist organizations of the 1970s wherein the issue of women was secondary to the struggle for socialism. Tekeli, one of the organisers, narrates the outset of the second wave:

In those days, political parties were outlawed, but we were talking political issues. It is a miracle that we had the courage, and were tolerated by the military. Many women came from leftist political parties or groups and were Marxist oriented. This was the first time they were able to think from a women’s perspective and shake off Marxist concepts, not only on the issue of who is being oppressed by what, but also on forms of (democratic) organization. We discovered just how thoroughly Turkish society was permeated by patriarchal and sexist concepts and the ‘fact’ that daily private life is the real arena of patriarchy. (quoted in Grünell and Voeten 1997, 225)

The concepts these feminists deployed in their analysis included “patriarchal domination, sexism, gender inequality, and sexual discrimination” (Tekeli 1992, 140). ‘The personal is political’ was their motto. Upon the approval of a judge regarding domestic violence against women in 1987, a demonstration was organised to protest against the hidden suffering of abused women, in which three thousand women participated. This was the first demonstration in Turkey organised by women struggling for their own rights (Grünell and Voeten 1997; Diner and Toktaş 2010). Many other events followed this one, and the women’s movement strived towards raising awareness about the unpalatable practices extensively faced by women in Turkey. These included: both domestic and social oppression and violence against women; exploitation of women’s sexuality; rape; issues around sexual freedom; the practice of virginity tests (in
cases of sexual assault before marriage, or by the administrators of some dormitories for university students); discrimination against women in the workplace; the civil code, which requires the permission of the husband for the wife to be able to work, and that orders the wife to bear the husband’s surname, and establishes the husband as the institutional head of the family.

The struggle was fought by a range of women’s organizations, the number of which exceeded 350 in the 2000s (by 2004 specifically) while it was less than 10 in the 1970s (Diner and Toktaş 2010). As their numbers increased, these organisations became involved in more and more activities aimed at educating women and improving their social status. Some of them accessed funds from the European Union and the United Nations. There were cleavages in the feminist movement in the 1990s, wherein different approaches to feminism were posited from the standpoints of Kurdish, Islamist and gay-lesbian movements. Kurdish women stressed the double victimisation they are exposed to: by the state because of ‘Kurdish question’ and by the tribal system of the Kurdish populated regions, which is based on a firm notion of patriarchy. Islamist women, referring to Islamic law, attached central importance to the domestic roles of women as wife and mother. They supported the protests against the constitutional clause that is the source of the ban for their entrance to universities while veiled or covered with a turban. Socialists, as the initiators of the second wave of feminism in Turkey, criticised the reproductive role assigned to women in developed global capitalism and emphasised the necessity of a revolution for the emancipation of not only women but of men. Kemalist women laid claim to the reforms brought in by the republic, and struggled to protect and revise them. Gay-lesbian movements brought in new approaches to the issues of gender identity, such as the gender-sex distinction. Many other organizations undertook protesting activities without a finite political-ideological stance.

The issue of women’s rights and social status has often held a pivotal position in the country’s socio-political agenda thanks to the activities of feminist groups and women’s organisations. The status of women has improved in the past two decades. The Directorate General on the Status of Women, affiliated to the office of the prime minister, was established in 1990. The aforementioned clauses of the civil code which

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92 The authors refer to: Altunay and Arat 2008, 21.
legitimise the supremacy of the husband in the family – that require the husband’s permission for a woman to work and the changing of the woman’s surname, and that have placed the husband at the symbolic and legal head of the family - were changed in favour of more equal codes. The articles were those which received the most criticism in the civil code originally adopted from Switzerland’s code in 1926. In addition, the sentence for sexual harassment of women has been increased, and intra-marital sexual harassment and honour killing have been included in criminal law. Shelters have been opened providing support services for women exposed to domestic violence. The volume of academic research on the question of women has increased, and institutes dedicated to women studies have been founded in many universities; a women’s library was also opened in Istanbul. In brief, the gender hierarchy has been challenged to a great extent.

Nevertheless, a plethora of research testifies to the extensive oppression of women. Among this body of works the research by Toprak et al. (2008, 77-101) - which I also referred to in the previous chapter - succinctly shows that severe oppression takes place in Anatolian cities: many Anatolian cities are more conservative now compared to 20-25 years ago and it is not easy for women to dress as they wish to or to go out especially at night time, as they become vulnerable to molestation by men; oppression of women has increased, including pressure on women to cover and veil themselves (which comes largely from other covered women), even for Alevis whose religious beliefs do not necessitate this injunction; there is pressure on women not to work; various interferences in single women’s lives come from neighbours; some women resort to committing suicide because of incest or sexual harassment in the family [the film Bliss, which I will address in the following pages, focuses on this issue]; the conservatism oppresses men and leads a series of problems, and women and men share less and less public space; all this oppressive discourse is founded on the concepts of sin, shame and decency.

Another recent piece of research, the most comprehensive one hitherto, made through face-to-face interviews with more than twelve thousand women all over Turkey, shows some strikingly worrying figures about the violence that women are exposed to (DHA 2010). 41.9% of women have encountered physical or sexual violence and 48.5% of those have kept officially silent about it. 33.7% of Turkish women who have been
exposed to violence have thought of committing suicide, and 12.4% of them have indeed tried to do so.

To sum up thus far, women of the Ottoman period were secluded from social life in the name of Islamic doctrine for centuries, and gained only limited educational and working rights in the last few decades of the Empire. The republican regime brought them educational, legal and political equality with men (to a great extent) without necessitating a women’s struggle as Western counterparts had had to engage in. Those reforms, however, were not sufficiently effective throughout the country. The ‘second wave’ of feminism, initiated and organised by women’s organisations, contributed to the acquisition of many more rights over the past two decades. Nevertheless, oppression of and violence against women is still an unresolved issue. I will now proceed to covering women and films in Turkey and address the representation of women in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films.

**Women and Films**

The status of women has advanced from the initial years of the cinematograph in Turkey and various aspects of cinema, namely audience demography, acting, filmmaking and representation, have seen radical changes in terms of women's status in cinema over time; their numbers insofar as their being actresses, directors, characters, audience members etc. have markedly increased. While representations of the diverse ethnic and religious identities and/or the problematisation of their status on screen is what films can do for those groups, the participation of women in cinema - either on the side of film production or as audience members – is an indicator of women’s emancipation too. Therefore their significant participation in film needs to be emphasised.

Cinema was a fundamentally male form of entertainment at the beginning, and Muslim women were prohibited from going to movie theatres due to religious injunctions. To overcome this obstacle, some dressed as men or as Christian women (Lüleci 2009). In the last few years of Ottoman Empire, in parallel with its gradual secularisation, theatres were arranged to segregate the sexes so as to enable women to be spectators, and matinees for women were scheduled. Though it became possible for
women and men to watch films together thanks to the republic’s measures, it was not until the 1950s that the number of female audience members increased dramatically, along with the mass popularisation of cinema in the country.

I mentioned in Chapter 1 that Muslim women were not permitted to act in films until the early 1920s, and all of the female roles were performed by non-Muslim actresses. Bedia Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyyir became the first Muslim actresses in Turkish film history, in their roles in Shirt of Fire (Ateşten Gömlek) by Muhsin Ertaş, which was screened in 1923, approximately six months before the declaration of the republic. It is well documented that the local rural people reacted belligerently to the crew of this film during the shootings on location, due to Muslim women acting in it. People soon got used to Muslim Turkish women acting in films and Cahide Sonku became the first female star of Turkish cinema in the 1930s. She is also famous for being the first female producer and director in her film Homeland and Namık Kemal (Vatan ve Namık Kemal) in 1951. Nonetheless, the share of women filmmakers has been a very small one in Turkish film history, wherein Bilge Olgaç is the most prominent name. She made thirty-eight films in total, the biggest number among women directors (Özgüç 2003, 157). Lynching (Linç-1970) by Olgaç, for instance, is one of the most outstanding films in Turkish cinematic history, somewhat paradoxically involving a narrative of solely male characters in prison. Regarding Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films, the proportion of women directors is even higher: 11 films out of the total of 60 have been directed by 7 different women. This does not mean, however, that women directors have necessarily focused on women’s issues or have problematised gender dynamics in their society. Among the eleven films only two, Rosa I Love You (1992) by İṣıl Özgentürk and Bergen or Love is Colder than Death (1995) by Canan Gerede, focus on the lives of women who experience problems because of their gender and their society. The other nine films narrate a variety of different stories and themes.

The representation of women in early Turkish cinema was surprisingly contradictory for a society in which Islamic morality and rules were hegemonic. For instance, it is known that The Claw (Pençe) by Sedat Simavi, the first Turkish feature film, conceived of marriage as a claw which grabs the individual, and questioned its oppressive character and took a stand in favour of free love, as early as 1917. This film
is known for including the first erotic representations of women. Similarly The Governess (Mürebbiye-1919) by Ahmet Fehim is known for its obscenities for its time. As Gönül Dönmez-Colin states: “about half of the first fiction films made in Ottoman Turkey were about women, although women’s representation in these films is far from favourable, the most common image being the seductress with loose morals and an unappeasable sexual appetite” (2010, 91). While women were constrained in terms of going to movie theatres due to Islamic imperatives on the one hand, they were represented as sex objects for male audiences of the same community on the other. Of course those ‘unfavourable’ women on the screen were non-Muslims, for Muslim women were not permitted to act in films until 1923, a solution which can be said to ‘relieve (…) the scruple’ of Muslim men.

On the other hand, these erotic representations of women verified the ‘male gaze-female object’ gender relation that feminist scholars point to in the narrative of classic cinema. Laura Mulvey (1985) set about using psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate how the unconscious of the patriarchal order formed the phallic-centric film structure of Hollywood and also of the cinematic traditions that fell within its sphere of influence. In that representational project woman is the image and the man is the bearer of the gaze, i.e. the to-be-looked-at-ness of the female object stands in primordial opposition to the empowered spectator-ness of the male subject. She becomes an object of scopophilic pleasure and instrumental value. Accordingly, the spectator identifies with the powerful male protagonist who controls the film’s fantasy and makes things happen, but at the same time bears an anxiety regarding imminent castration. For the sake of escaping it, the female object is either devalued – punished/found guilty - or fetishised. In words of B. Ruby Rich (1985), that type of narrative is ‘the Cinema of the Fathers’.

I mentioned in Chapter 1 that the classic narration of Turkish cinema which began in the 1950s was especially influenced by Hollywood and its films, a great majority of which were either melodramas or comedies, mainly representing women as passive objects, secondary to the active male characters. As Asuman Suner (2010, 165) argues, the female characters in Turkish cinema were divided into two categories, ‘virtuous’ and ‘vicious’. A virtuous woman was loyal, devoted, honourable –meaning a virgin – and worthy of love. A vicious woman on the other hand was the one who
invoked sexual desire and engaged in extramarital sexual practices. Virtuous or vicious, the women were by and large subjected to and sublimated by the leading male characters.

Amid the thousands of narratives that do not address female subjectivity, a few counter-films have been made. Metin Erksan’s *The Well (Kuyu-1968)* is probably the first feminist film in Turkish cinema with its treatment of a rural woman’s struggle for the freedom to live with a man of her own choosing. For her own will, she opposes the traditional values of village life and even her mother. Throughout the film, as spectators, we identify with the female protagonist and follow her in resistance and making things happen. The narrative style does not serve the visual pleasure of the male gaze. The final scene is impressive in that, after killing her tormentor (the undesired man) by throwing stones at him, she mounts the top of the stones, hangs herself on the crane of the overhead well, and leaves her body in the space left.

The more emancipated female characters in Turkish cinema emerged in the 1980s, when a series of feminist-orientated films were made that overlapped with the aforementioned second wave of feminism in those years. Particularly the films of Atif Yılmaz are worthy of note. Among these films, *The Woman Has No Name (Kadının Adı Yok-1988)*, for instance, is based on the renowned novel of feminist writer Duygu Asena. It problematises the struggle of a woman to be a free and independent individual in her society. Flashing back to her childhood, puberty, university years and then to the marriage and working life of her story as an author-to-be, the film questions the uncontested gender roles assigned to women and men. The film demonstrates that she had to struggle all her life against her father, boyfriend, husband, boss, friends and neighbours because of her society’s unequal gender relations and her sexuality.

Eurimages-backed films, as well as other Turkish cinema output, have sustained a focus on women in the post-1990 period. While problematic features of the gender roles assigned to women have been exhibited as an element of the background in some Eurimages-backed films, several have narrated stories that have centred wholesale on women and their social status. Among these, I will concentrate on two, *Graduate of* [93]

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[93] Various representations of women can be seen in Appendix-I.
The former, while focusing on an urban educated woman, draws attention to the fact that the patriarchal order women face throughout their lives never ceases, no matter how educated or ‘emancipated’ they are. The latter, narrating the tragic story of a rural woman who survives an honour killing attempt at the last moment, justifies the criticism that the republican reforms in favour of women could not spread throughout the country sufficiently, and failed to reach the rural social periphery. I chose these two films, for they show the ongoing dominance of patriarchy in Turkish society in showing two women from two different educational and class backgrounds.

**Graduate of Insanity**

This film is based on the true story of a woman who is treated by the psychiatric service of a hospital for her manic-depressive (bipolar) disorder. Nur, the protagonist, is the daughter of a mother who is from a rich landowning family and of a father who is a parliamentarian member of the ruling Democratic Party in the 1950s. Though in appearance she has everything in childhood she could need, Nur thinks that compared to her two brothers she is not loved enough by her parents. Her father in particular treats the sons of the family more lovingly, and her mother seems careless and neglectful. Thus she is not affected much when one of her brothers dies because of a heart condition, as she expects the parents will hence be attached to her more. Nevertheless, the father’s cruel and insulting attitude does not change. He continuously denies her emotional sustenance.

She grows up and gets married to Murat, whom she met during her university years. Murat, contrary to Nur’s right-wing conservative father, is a socialist. Suna, a close friend of Nur, says to her about him: “he is just the type for you. He will keep you busy all your life. You’ll never get bored”. She was right, thinks Nur years later, in the hospital. However, Murat is an irresponsible husband. Once, when talking to Nur’s mother, he is advised to treat his wife well:

**Murat:** The only way for that country is socialism. There is no way out for all the world. In socialism everything is shared. There is no abuse.
Nur’s Mother: No abuse? What is this that you do to your wife? Start socialism first in your own house, my boy.

After that conversation Nur’s voice tells us: “for the first time Murat helped me to wash the dishes. He started socialism in his house. It was the first time and the last time”. In addition to the problems in their marriage, they lose their only child in a traffic accident, which contributes to things becoming worse. “Something was happening to me but I couldn’t understand what it was” - Nur describes her state of mind at the beginning of her mental trouble.

In her book *The Seed and the Soil* based on research of the rural centre of Anatolia, Carol Delaney, speaking of married woman, says this: “she is socially invisible; her identity is fluid and passes between two men, her father and her husband” (1991, 152). Whereas Delaney addresses the rural woman, her observation is verified by *Graduate of Insanity*, except with regard to social invisibility, for Nur is an urban woman and leads a visible life. We hear from Suna speaking to Murat: “People are driven crazy by the ones closest to them. Women, especially, by their husbands”. In a similar vein, Nur, as the narrative voice, says: “What carries a person to insanity? Another person? Her genes or the surrounding system? Or all of them? Then there is no reason for me not to go crazy. Because I have had all the causes. First my husband Murat”. Although her father and husband hold contrasting political views; both men contribute to the formation of Nur’s disorder as two of the closest men to her in different stages of her life. Her husband even rapes her on one occasion. A third man comes later into her life. Her narrative voice tells us after her recovery: “When I look back now, I see that three men have an important place in my life. One is my father. The other is my husband. If you ask about the third, I haven’t chosen him. I haven’t touched him”.

The third man is Atatürk, the founder of Turkey. Because of his father-figure position in the national history, Nur sees him an affectionate father and a loving man in Atatürk; he fills the gap in her world that is ignored by her father and husband. “We owe everything to him” said her father. She believes that Atatürk was a magnificent man, and we watch her reading his *Speech*: “‘Gentlemen… The one and only decision we should take under these circumstances is to establish an independent and free Turkish state’. Wonderful. Only Atatürk could have uttered these things. ‘The primary principle for our
nation is living an honoured and respectable life’. Is there anybody left honoured and respectable? He told us years ago but who listens now?” In this sense, the latter of these three men is expected to have a rehabilitative impact. After the deteriorating experiences begot by first two on her personality, the final one, the liberator of the land and emancipator of women, should surely liberate and emancipate her? She talks to him, to his portrait and to his statue, and often reports back to him about events in her life. She sings the national anthem before his monument. Neither of these strategies works in her favour in the end. She joins a competition over research on Atatürk but does not win. Moreover, she believes that she is the leader of an organisation of Kemalists. Her hallucinatory communication with Atatürk emerges as one of the symptoms of her manic-depressive disorder. When Murat says that she is a ‘maniac’, Nur declares her husband to be one of many enemies of Atatürk.

The film also seems to be critical of a type of Kemalist mentality that, symbolised in Nur, does not honour the revolutionary spirit of the ideology, and instead strives to put Atatürk in every aspect of life, such that the main boulevard of every town is called ‘Atatürk’ or by a title that is associated with him. Not only boulevards but also schools, buildings, bridges, airports, parks and many public places have been named like this. Various statues and monuments of Atatürk have been erected in many public spaces. That type of Kemalism is a product of the 1980 coup and while paying lip service to Atatürk and his ideology on the one hand, it also worked for the revival of Islam through the imposed *Turkish-Islamic synthesis*, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The susceptibility of this type of alleged Kemalism perceives hostility against the state in many acts of its citizens, to the extent that the state becomes systematically paranoid. This relates to the thought of Deleuze (2007, 15) regarding the great imperial formations. In such structures there is the great signifier at the top, and beneath it exists a network of bureaucrats, priests and messengers, whose mission is to circulate, explain, interpret and ultimately reify it – this paranoid regime is independent of the great signifier him/herself. The meaning and interpretation of the signifier is coupled in this dissociated way. Such social formations also need followers who receive and obey the messages, and carry out tedious assignments. Nur seems to resemble that type of bureaucratic mentality when she complains to Atatürk her perceived and imaginary hostilities against Kemalism. The film provides a clue as to its critical dimension.
regarding Kemalism in the scene where Nur purchases a statue of Atatürk to position in the garden of her family’s house, but the order is cancelled by her brother. As the pick-up truck of the sculptor moves rapidly, the statue falls down on the ground and the head breaks. This is probably the first time in Turkish cinema we have seen any form of deformation of a statue of Atatürk.

Throughout the film, we see manic, depressive and then yet more manic states in Nur’s suffering personhood. During the manic periods she is “inclined to struggle against society to cause trouble for herself and other people”, as her doctor says, and “feels energetic, carefree, irresponsible”. She even “feels like touching the stars in the sky”. For Nur, this does not sound like a disorder. When she is in a depressive mode, she feels exhausted, wants to cry all day, doesn’t want to do anything and cannot move from her seat, indeed she longs to die. Nur thinks she is not mentally ill and that what she needs is someone to talk to her, to understand and to “treat her like a human being”. So she creates a man who is a psyche-projection of herself. He always tells her what to think about. He talks to her extensively about love. After Nur’s recovery, her doctor says that she has learned to love herself.

Turning now to the argument that ‘a woman’s identity passes between two men’ (Delaney) and ‘people are driven crazy by the ones closest to them’ (Suna, close friend of Nur in the film), these statements are validated by the story of Nur. She only recovers
after gaining the courage to get divorced from her husband, or in the words of Suna: “she’s thrown away the disease from her soul”. Thus Graduate of Insanity, while questioning gender roles and oppressive male dominance in Turkish society, promotes the power of the female protagonist by producing an autonomously arrived-at solution, i.e. divorcing her husband.

**Bliss**

Bliss addresses ‘honour killing’, the aforementioned vital issue affecting mainly rural women in Eastern Anatolia. Honour killing involves the execution of a girl (in general it tends to be women) who is believed to have had premarital sex, and the decision to enact such a killing is underpinned by the patriarchal ordering of the family. Despite the general advances made in terms of the social status of women thanks to the republican revolution, this custom is still practised in some rural districts of Eastern Anatolia; a gap has remained, as mentioned earlier, between the more emancipated urban women and their rural counterparts. In Bliss, the duty of killing the girl is assigned to one of the younger males in the family and she is posed as having committed suicide. Abdullah Oğuz (2007), the director of the film, informs us that 64 dead bodies of girls, the majority of whom were aged between 13 and 16 years old, had been found in the past year and a half (before the film was made) and all of them were posed as suicides. However, the reality, usually, is that it stemmed from a case of incest or rape committed by an elder in the family – a father, grandfather, elder brother or uncle. Before proceeding to the film, I have to introduce the concept of honour killing with particular reference to the honour of male dominance and the shame of female subjectivity in patriarchal groups.

The work of Victoria Goddard in her essay exploring various aspects of gender relations and sexuality in Naples, Italy, offers helpful information also applicable to rural Turkey. Goddard argues that: “Women’s honour is an element, a resource, which is controlled and manipulated by men” (1987, 168). In a similar vein, Aylin Akpinar (1998, 156), in her doctoral dissertation on the construction of gender and ethnic identity amongst Turkish immigrant divorcees in Sweden, in reference to Delaney – whom I spoke of in the previous section on Graduate of Insanity - argues thus: “[a] male/female
hierarchical dichotomy lies implicitly in gender constructions according to the honour/shame complex whereby honour is apprehended as an attribute of males and shame of females”. To turn to Goddard: “Women may also be seen as the guardians of the ‘secrets’ of the group. By the very process of their control by men and their relegation to and identification with the domestic sphere, women are in a unique position to provoke a crisis within the group” (1987, 180). However these crises are either repressed by threat or managed against women by the elder men of the group. Meenakshi Thapan states that: “Feminists have tried to show the link between shame and sexual violence, i.e., a woman’s experience of shame is a form of patriarchal control as a man can violate a woman’s body and then throw the blame back on her. A woman who has been raped is seen as having lost her honour, that of the family, and even the community. In that lies the power of shame” (1997, 25).

That is exactly what the story of Meryem in Bliss tells us. From the beginning of the story, the discourse of the family is the pollution of Meryem’s body due to her violation and hence shame. Though she consistently repeats that she has not committed a ‘sin’, she cannot recall who did it. She is therefore found guilty for the loss of the family’s honour and is to be killed according to custom; the blame is thrown entirely on her. The patriarch of the family, Meryem’s uncle, insists on her impurity and on the execution. As we learn in the final scene of the film showing Meryem’s sudden recall, her uncle is the actual violator of her body and he is thus killed by his younger brother, Meryem’s father.

We see the young Meryem violated by the coast of a lake at the start of the film. The ‘shame’ and the pressure placed on her by the neighbourhood and felt by the family intensifies daily, and the ‘soiled’ Meryem (the name corresponds to the virginal Maria of Christianity) is told she will receive the death penalty. It is inflicted upon her by the patriarchy of the family in order to ‘clean up this business’. She is told to kill herself because ‘it is her sin’ and only in this way may she ‘go to heaven’. Since Meryem’s birth was not registered, as is the case for many girls in the region, the death of a ‘non-existing citizen’ does not present a problem with the official authorities. The verdict is given and the custom is to be applied. Thus she is convinced to hang herself by a rope in the barn she is locked in. Realizing she is being watched by her step-mother, she resists her fate at
the very last moment and quits her suicide attempt. The task of execution is then assigned to her cousin, Cemal, who is close to completing his military service and expected to arrive home shortly. According to the narrated plan, they are to go for a train journey to Istanbul – it will be announced to the neighbourhood that she is going to be married there – during which Cemal will kill his cousin. However, he cannot do it either. Their runaway thus starts, and they flee from the men and from Cemal’s father, who is the patriarchal head of the family. They therein meet a retired professor at the Aegean coast who has left everything behind and chosen to live a new life in his boat. The two work for this man for sustenance. Cemal herein realises his love for Meryem – kin marriage is not uncommon in rural areas.

Fig. 22 Bliss (Mutluluk): Meryem (Dir. Abdullah Oğuz, 2007).

The axial issue in the story is honour killing. At a different level, however, we also witness many examples of the clash between the two sets of values of East and West, rural and urban, uneducated and intellectual, in Turkey, especially after Meryem and Cemal meet Professor İrfan Kurudal, who represents of the latter set of values. Before their acquaintance with Kurudal, they stay in a lodge by the sea; Cemal sits at the table for dinner and Meryem waits standing until an order to be seated is given by her cousin. However, while they are working in the boat, Kurudal asks Cemal to prepare the
table for dinner. Surprised at this request, Cemal replies: “but it’s a woman’s job. It’s not right”. Similarly, in a conversation between the two men about love affairs, we see how different the values of the two participants are:

_Cemal:_ İrfan Abi, I don’t know what the deal is with girlfriends. They’re an invention of where you came from. Where I come from, everyone knows their place. Women know what it is to be a woman, men what it is to be a man.

_Prof. Kurudal:_ Fine, but then you kill women when they have done nothing wrong.

_Cemal:_ Who?

_Prof. Kurudal:_ Isn’t that right? It’s in the papers every day.

*Bliss*, while narrating the escape of two cousins from the traditional honour killing system of the countryside, exhibits the difference that exists between the approaches to gender relations and gender hierarchy that two segments of the same imagined community adhere to. The film exposes the fact that the educational reforms made in the civil code in favour of women have not been sufficiently effective throughout the country and throughout all the classes. They have not produced and protected the absolute emancipation of women; the case of Meryem clearly shows that the republican project failed to achieve universal improvement.

When it comes to narration, although the men are depicted as the most powerful characters in both the aforementioned films, *Graduate of Insanity* stresses a strong female subjectivity after a certain pivotal point, and thus the female character makes things happen on her own initiative. Hence it can be seen as a quintessentially _feminist_ film. *Bliss*, on the other hand, problematises the honour/shame dichotomy in patriarchal families in rural Turkish districts. Therefore both films contribute to feminist consciousness as they uncover and are critical of the oppressive nature of the patriarchal order and its effect on women. As I have stated, these two films are not the only Eurimages-backed ones to narrate stories that centre on women. I will briefly mention a few others before proceeding to the next section.
In *Nude* (Ali Özgentürk-1994), two women from a low socio-economic background pose nude for students in an art class at a university. They are worried about their husbands’ possibly brutal reaction if their truth comes out, as they are supposed to be cleaning houses, not modelling in the nude. The women expect violence, battering, even to be killed by their powerful husbands; they nevertheless think that their husbands love them. After learning the truth, the two men feel shame over their wives’ actions and cannot tell of them to anyone. They visit prostitutes, and in the process they speak of their wives’ actions. Then they try to steal the paintings on which their wives appear nude. Finally, instead of sustaining their feeling of shame, the two men start modelling nude too, in an act that demonstrates that they do not perceive it as shameful behaviour but rather as a laudible profession both women and men can engage in. They realise their equality with their wives.

*Bergen or Love is Colder than Death* (Canan Gerede-1995), based on the true story of a famous singer killed by her husband in 1989, conveys the vulgar treatment of a wife by her beloved husband. Bergen is saved by Ali from a police station where she is under arrest after a police raid of the nightclub in which she works. Ali owns another nightclub. They fall in love, and promptly get married, and Bergen starts singing again and becomes famous in a short time. Ali becomes jealous of his wife and treats her brutally, to the extent that one day he burns her face with nitric acid. After this action he shouts: “no longer will any man look at your face”. She loses one of her eyes but does not give up fighting and continues to sing. She proceeds to divorce Ali. Nevertheless, she is still in love with her ex-husband. Ali eventually stabs her, after his release from jail.

*Harem Suaré* (Ferzan Özpetek-1999) depicts the life of women, and their devotion to the sultan and the imperial harem in Istanbul, and traces those women’s tragic downfall thereafter. The harem is dissolved by the parliamentary decree after the declaration of the Second Constitution (1908) and the women become free, which means being obliged to live a life of ‘cold and hunger’, in the words of Safiye, who is one of the women left desperate and homeless. Years after (in 1924), life imposes upon Safiye no choice but to dance in a nightclub in Italy named ‘The Harem Soire’, which presents her

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94 Canan Gerede, the director of the film, stated that the story of Bergen is a typical woman problem especially for Mediterranean countries and only in Tunisia nine hundred men took revenge by burning faces of their beloveds with nitric acid in 1994, the year before this film was released (quoted in Basutçu 1995, 67).
as “the loveliest flower of the Sultan’s Palace” and “The pearl of the Orient! The last Favourite!”

In terms of other Eurimages-backed films, *Rosa, I Love You* (Işıl Özgentürk-1992) shows that while life is a game for Rosa during her childhood, wherein she is the princess of a richly enlightening tale, Rosa is frustrated as she grows up because life in general and men in particular do not meet her expectations. In *Miracle* (Atif Yılmaz-1997), Erol’s dead mother, Suzan, returns to life as a woman keen on promoting Erol’s freedom. *Balalaika* (Ali Özgentürk-2000) demonstrates the tragedy experienced by women from the ex-Soviet republics who come to Turkey to work but are forced to serve as prostitutes by a women-trafficking mafia. In *Angel’s Fall* (Semih Kaplanoğlu-2005), a young girl lives with her father and works as a housekeeper in a hotel; she occasionally gets molested by her father at night and he assumes that she is asleep, and the abuse is so tormenting that she kills him one day in such a violent way that one would not expect it from a young girl. *Borrowed Bride* (Atif Yılmaz-2005) demonstrates an interesting practice of the past in Denizli, a city in Western Anatolia, in which a woman called a ‘borrowed bride’ stays with a young to-be-groom for some time (several days or weeks) and teaches him about sex, how to treat a woman, and the particulars of marriage, before he gets married to his real wife; the borrowed bride is paid for her service. In *Destiny* (Zeki Demirkubuz-2006), we see a ‘fallen’ woman, Uğur, who is unlike classical cinema’s heroines who tend to be the objects of male eyes. She chooses to follow the man she truly loves - he is in prison and moves to a different jail from time to time – and she has to stand up to many difficulties that arise from this decision. Another man, on the other hand, is in desperate love with Uğur and this leads him to follow her from city to city. *Justice* (Ali Özgentürk-2009) narrates the struggle of a group of women to establish justice ninety years after the murder of a midwife by the bully of the district – this murder was represented as a kind of ‘honour killing’ at the time. *My Only Sunshine* (Reha Erdem-2009) depicts the experiences of a girl who is in early puberty, and addresses her mother’s reaction to her first menstruation and to the molestation she is exposed to by the local grocer in their area.

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95 Semih Kaplanoğlu (2009) stated that he tried through this film to bring a different point of view to the constructed roles of women in Turkish society, especially to the hidden domestic violence, incest problem and its approval in silence.
As I have shown, many Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films – at least 28 out of 59 films, to my observation - focus on, question or display the problematic aspects of womanhood in patriarchal society, which is woven together by an ideology of manliness according to Mosse. This high number of such films verifies the notion that the Eurimages criteria ensure that projects reflect and promote the Eurimages aspiration to have contributions made from a diverse range of the ethno-national components of Europe’s overall cultural identity. Women and womanhood make up a significant part of the Turkish national identity, especially in terms of their ‘emancipation’ and the gender dynamic in the republican nation-state.

**LGBT Identities**

This section of the chapter will address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite and transsexual identities in Turkey – another series of identities that have been subject to the manliness ideology in addition to women. It explores their representation in cinema, more specifically in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films. Before that, the difficulties that LGBT individuals have faced and the history of their struggle for rights and visibility in Turkey will be outlined.

It has been claimed that homosexuality was relatively tolerated and respected in pre-Islamic Turkish societies, for instance the shamans - priest-like leaders - were homosexual (Tezel 2009, 52). That respectful attitude was replaced by intolerance after the adoption of Islam, for the Koran forbids same-sex relations. Nevertheless it is known that male homosexuality was not uncommon during the Ottoman era (53-57). For instance, the sultans dispatched their soldiers to newly conquered lands in order to capture ‘beautiful boys’ (Lutes 2000). Similarly, sultans and wealthy pashas kept male dancers – sometimes in their harem - in women’s clothes (Janssen 1992). Those were mostly young boys and some were castrated. In this sense Mehmet Ümit Necef states “transvestism plays a much bigger role in Turkey (and Southern Europe) than in the North or the USA” (1992, 75). Notwithstanding the Ottoman Empire being one of the first states in Europe to decriminalise same-sex consensual acts between adults as early as in 1858 (Hammarberg 2011), Metin And denotes that public performances of those köçeks (male dancers in women clothes) were forbidden by the sultan in 1857,
preserve order in the army (quoted in Janssen 1992, 84). Homosexuality turned into a taboo in the country during the corresponding Reorganization period (Hoşcan 2006).

The influence of religion was decreased by the gradual secularisation that was brought about by the republic. Same-sex relations have not been a subject of law during the republican period; this means that on the one hand it has not been prohibited but on the other hand LGBT identities have not been legally protected by the state. An exception to the negligence suffered by these identities occurred during the post-coup period: transvestites and transsexuals were prohibited from taking to the stage in 1981 (Yıldız 2006), but this ban was lifted in 1988. A change in the law that same year permitted surgery aimed at sex change. The current constitution neither prohibits nor even mentions the protection of a diversity of gender identities. A new constitution is being debated in Turkey currently and it is expected to be prepared in the very near future. I will turn to this point later.

Though not prohibited, LGBT identities have been subjected to various forms of oppression and exclusion from the state, society and family institutions in Turkey, as in most of the world. It is something that (it is thought) should be hidden and LGBT individuals feel forced to act as heterosexual ‘normal others’. Those who are in towns and small cities where the social oppression is much greater feel obliged to migrate to big cities, especially to Istanbul, to lead a relatively relaxed life. They are subjected to discrimination in education and working life, and to ill treatment in official institutions such as police stations and courts. A few recent instances reflected in the media expose the ways in which LGBT identities are either excluded or degraded by state institutions: the Minister of State Responsible for Women and Family declared homosexuality as a ‘hazardous disease’ in 2010; the reply of Presidency of Religious Affairs upon questioning by the gay-lesbian periodical Kaos GL in 2008 was that homosexuality is a kind of ‘perversion’ and an ‘outrageous sin’ according to Islam (Homoseksüellik 2008); the Radio and Television Supreme Council (Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu) gave a warning to a broadcasting company in 2010 because of its displays of a gay couple in a TV series (Olay 2010). These are only a few from a number of cases against in which the identities that fall outside heterosexuality have been slandered.
An examination of national audio-visual and print media done by Ali Özbaş (2009) provides significant information on media representations of LGBT identities. Özbaş divides Turkish media history into three eras. The first era is the early 1980s when the military coup intervened into almost every aspect of social life. It was a time when LGBT identities were a kind of imaginative entity that could not be described and anyone who did not fit in with the ‘normal’ were named ‘homosexual’ in those days. The discrimination, oppression and torture of the individuals who were named ‘homosexual’ was at a peak. The identities were assigned a criminal status in the news and in papers. In the second era homosexuality was represented as transvestism and transsexuality, for transgender individuals were the more visible forms of identification compared to lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Kaos GL, the first gay-lesbian periodical in Turkey, started its publishing during this era, in September 1994. The third era begins, according to Özbaş, with the participation of the Kaos GL group in the May 1st celebrations of 2001 with posters and flags. The slogans such as “We are gay, we are real, we are here!” (“Eşcinseliz, gerçeğiz, buradayız!”), “Compulsory heterosexuality is a humanity crime!” (“Zorunlu heteroseksüellik insanlık suçudur!”) and “The emancipation of gays will free heterosexuals too!” (“Eşcinsellerin kurtuluşu heteroseksüelleri de özgürleştirecektr!”) that accompanied their march with the workers were a turning point for everyone. It was headline news in most of the printed and audio-visual media; the appearance was of LGBT individuals who were no different to the other marching workers and university students but were different from the ‘homosexuals’ represented in the media. In this third era the news related to LGBT people has been rather mundane and LGBT individuals have been striving to convey their struggle more accurately to the media.

Despite the advances made in terms of the approach of the media to LGBT identities, as pointed to by Özbaş, another piece of research on the media portrayal of homosexuality between 1998 and 2006 posits that for the media LGBT people are marginal and it is difficult to accept them: “Turkish Daily Press covers news items on homosexuals only when they are the actor or the topic of a sensational event. In addition, when homosexuality is mentioned in the press, it is portrayed as a marginal and unaccepted phenomenon” (Hoşcan 2006, 92).
A comprehensive content examination of newspapers and magazines by Kaos GL group in 2010 provides a general picture of the attitude of today’s Turkish media towards LGBT individuals (Alacaoğlu et al. 2010). 201 national and local papers were scanned in the first ten months of 2010. Accordingly, the media news was evaluated according to eighteen positive and negative categories (9).

The positive categories were as follows: the ideas of LGBTT associations and experts were represented; sensitive to and respectful of human rights; positive role models related to homosexuality took place in (…); the identity of the victim is hidden; portraying LGBTT individuals positively; the ideas of LGBTT individuals regarding non-LGBTT related subjects took place in (…).

The negative categories were as follows: LGBTT individuals were shown as sexual objects; LGBTT individuals and issues were criminalised; the stereotypes relating to LGBTT people were fuelled; homophobic use of language; legalising of violence against LGBTT people; LGBTT individuals were caricaturised; (…) includes images which humiliate the victim; the news includes the statement of the attacker only; the words used feed prejudice; the words used are incorrect; hate speeches are spread; homosexuality is used to discriminate against other groups.

The scanning covered the news that included words such as gey, gay, lezbiyen, transseksüel, travesti, eşcinsel, biseksüel, ibne, sevici, queer, cinsel yönelim, cinsel tercih, cinsel kimlik, i.e. Turkish and English words that might be used in relation to LGBT identities. 3,606 news items were conveyed in the printed media in 2010, approximately 20% more than the previous year (Alacaoğlu et al. 13). The number of negative news items (70%) was more than the number of positive ones (30%); the number of positive news items was less than the previous year’s (38%) and that was the case for every positive news category (24). There was a marked increase over the year in the negative news items that fuelled stereotypes relating to homosexuality, along with homophobic language, which spread hate speeches and promoted violence against LGBT individuals.

The perception of LGBT identities is not any more positive at the individual level, as a research of university students – senior year students of a faculty in Ankara in
2005 - exhibits: with a more negative attitude towards homosexuality amongst their same sex, approximately 53% of the participants were strictly against male homosexuality and 38% were against female homosexuality and they proposed penalties for such identities and actions (Ceyhan 2005, 166-171). Another piece of research conducted in the same year by the Lambdaistanbul LGBT organisation among 393 gay, lesbian and bisexual participants living in Istanbul found that 36% of them had had negative opinions of homosexuality or gay-lesbian individuals in a period during their life (quoted in Çolak 2009, 32). According to the same research 67% of the participants have been subjected to negative treatment or practices by psychologists or psychiatrists they have visited, and some had been ‘forced’ to become heterosexual, subjected to medical ‘cures’, or misinformed about the issue of sexual orientation; 87% experienced at least one type of social violence such as being subjected to verbal remarks, ignored, or cutoff because of their sexual orientation, and 23% had experienced physical violence; 83% hid their sexual orientation from all or some of their family members (Lambdaistanbul 2011).

Psychological and physical violence follows the ‘coming out’ of the individual, and may manifest in forms of exclusion as the sexual other, wholesale rejection or in some cases hate crimes. Hate crime is defined thus:

It is stated that if the impetus behind a crime against a person or property is the victim’s race, colour, ethnic origin or nationality, religion, sex or sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disabilities, then this particular crime constitutes a hate crime. Accordingly, the way hate crimes are perpetrated can be summarised as verbal abuse, threatening, name-calling, causing disturbance via post or e-mail, causing disturbance via telephone, causing disturbance via messages, graffiti, physical assault, robbery, theft, extortion, abuse, rape, molestation, intimidation, violence, violence in the family, damaging properties or belongings, arson, neighbour disputes, aggressive brochures and posters, disposing garbage in front of residences or in mailboxes, bullying in schools or workplaces, offensive jokes, gestures or other ways of damaging. (Doğanoğlu 2010, 10)
The victims subjected to such violence tend not to inform the authorities either because they do not believe that justice will be done or because it will lead to greater stigmatisation. Another piece of research conducted with 116 transgender women in Istanbul by the Lambdaistanbul (2010, 25) organisation, for instance, has found out that 90.5% of them have been subjected to physical violence by the security forces (police, military, security guards etc.) and 92.2% have been subjected to mocking, humiliation, insults and cursing by authority figures.

The LGBT movement in Turkey needed to be organised to struggle against this extensive discrimination, and for their rights and social visibility to be enhanced. The first attempt was announced in the newspapers at the end of the 1970s and Bülent Ersoy, the popular singer, was named as the possible leader of such an organisation (Sofer 1992). This suggestion was not a serious one (Yıldız 2006). The key moments in their struggle and the consequent advances that have been made are as follows (Yıldız 2006; 2007a; 2007b):

- The first gay-lesbian publication in Turkey was the centrefold of the Yeşil Barış (Green Peace) periodical in 1985-86, titled Gay Liberasyon (Gay Liberation). That was the publication of the officially ‘non-established’ political party, Radical Party (Radikal Parti) – later named Radical Democratic Green Party (Radikal Demokratik Yeşil Parti) or Green Radical Union Party -, an organization which besides gays contained anti-militarists, atheists, greens and feminists (Sofer 1992; Tapinc 1992). The first gay-lesbian periodical started to be published in 1994, named Kaos GL which was underground until 1999 and then became legal. The second gay-lesbian periodical, named %100 GL, followed that in 1996. The first bilingual (Turkish-Kurdish) LGBT periodical, named Hevjin, has been started to be published in 2010.

- Arslan Yüzgün published a book titled Türkiye’de Eşcinsellik (Dün, Bugün) (Homosexuality in Turkey, Yesterday and Today) in 1986, which was classified as ‘detrimental to youth’ and could only be sold in sealed plastic bags (Sofer 1992).
The first LGBT organisation, Lambdaistanbul, was established in 1993 and it became an association in 2006. Lambdaistanbul was followed by the first lesbian organization in 1995, named Venüs’ün Kızkardeşleri (Sisters of Venus). Many other LGBT communities and opening of cultural centres followed those. They organised activities such as Gay Pride Week in Istanbul and Meeting against Homophobia in Ankara. Around 40 people joined the first open air Gay Pride in 2003 and the number of participants increased in time, to reach 3,000 in 2009 (Lambdaistanbul, n.d.).

The first radio program focusing on LGBT themes was broadcasted by Açık Radyo (Open Radio) in 1996; the program was prepared and presented by Lambdaistanbul.

The first time LGBT identities and their rights were mentioned by a legal political party, in the manifest of socialist-oriented Freedom and Solidarity Party (Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi) established in 1996. For the first time, this party proposed a transgendered activist, Demet Demir, as a candidate for municipal council of Beyoğlu, Istanbul, in 1999.

These periodicals, organisations and radio programs have often been exposed to hindrance, obstruction and restraint from state authorities. Nevertheless, all their efforts have served in favour of the awareness and visibility of LGBT identities in the country.

Today, the LGBT organisations endeavour to contribute to the preparation of the projected new constitution – I mentioned this before - in a way that recognises and protects diverse gender identities as well as advancing other legal codes in the same direction. The LGBT Rights Platform, composed of six organisations, wrote a report in 2010 that recommended new articles relevant to human rights and the rights of LGBT individuals in the new constitution. Some of their legal demands, to be included in the constitution, are as follows (2010, 6): sexual orientation and gender identity must be acknowledged in the article on equality in the constitution and must be added to all articles in the legal system; protocol no. 12 in the European Convention on Human Rights must be ratified; an anti-discrimination law must be passed; hate crimes must be acknowledged within the penal code and such crimes against LGBT persons must be
punished; terms that tend to the criminalisation of LGBT persons, such as general morality, obscenity, exhibitionism and unnatural sex acts must be clearly defined and must not be used against LGBT individuals; all of the regulations about human rights and anti-discrimination measures must be made in consultancy with the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Thus far by referring to several surveys I have drawn a general picture of the extensive prejudice, exclusion and oppression of LGBT identities in the Turkish media and amongst individuals and state institutions. This was followed by a brief history of the pivotal moments in their struggle against this negative attitude and their demands for legal recognition and protection. I will now proceed to the representation of LGBT identities in Turkish cinema and in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films.

LGBT Identities and Films

In broadly Marxian terms, and recalling Mosse once more, cinema is located in the realm of the cultural superstructure of our class-based society, and concomitantly functions as an extension of or parallel to bourgeois morals and ideology. Accordingly cinema has by and large represented gender identities in terms of binary oppositions through mainstream films and has served to reinforce heteronormativity. Melodramas, which constitute the bulk of film history, are narratives that reproduce heterosexual norms by marking the female and male bodies as gender identities and drawing an essentialist line between them (Arslan 2007). Turkish cinema is no different. Aiming themes and content at a Muslim-majority audience has further reinforced this function of cinema. Nonetheless, LGBT people have occasionally appeared on screen in secondary roles since the early 1960s and their neutrality or positive visibility has increased in recent years, both in world cinema and Turkish cinema specifically.

Earlier in this chapter I focused not only on the representation of womanhood per se but also addressed women as actors, filmmakers and audience members, for advances in these aspects of cinema might be indicators of emancipation writ large. When it comes to LGBT identities, I will cover only their representation on screen and not explore other aspects of the cinema industry, because they tend not to be open and
for that reason it is not possible to discern their role as LGBT actors or filmmakers. Firstly I will convey the representation of LGBT identities in Turkish cinema overall, and this will be followed by an analysis of Eurimages-backed films.


The first gay-themed film in Turkish cinema was made by Eser Zorlu in 1989, and was titled *Deep Pain* (*Açılara Paylaşılmaz*). The film focuses on the problematic relationship between a lawyer and his gay son. In addition to this, *The Night, Angel and Our Gang* (*Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar*) by Atıf Yılmaz (1994) represent the relationships of gay characters (Özgüç 2006, 389). Many sources describe *Lola+Bilidikid* (1999) by Kutluğ Ataman as a gay-themed Turkish film. It is true that the film narrates a gay environment and focuses on their relations, but the milieu is the Turkish minority in Germany wherein mostly the German language is spoken. Therefore I would argue that it is more appropriate to regard *Lola+Bilidikid* as an example of German cinema. A recent film, *The Luxury Hotel* (*Lüks Otel*) by Kenan Korkmaz (2011) features a gay couple as main characters. The representation of gay individuals in films
is not limited to the films mentioned herein. Gay characters have occasionally featured in mainstream films as well, however these tend to be quite negative representations, for example ridiculing or caricaturing them as “funny types”. Non-mainstream films, produced in recent years, tend to depict gay individuals in a more neutral manner rather than as objects of ridicule.

From the beginning Turkish cinema has presented cross-dressing male actors to make the audience laugh. Some women actors have been dressed like men as well. However, it was not until the Whistle If You Come Back (Dönersen Islik Çal) by Orhan Öğuz (1993) that an actual transvestite character appeared on the screen. That film focuses on the friendship between a transvestite and a midget, and displays the various forms of oppression the transvestite character is subject to. The Night, Angel and Our Gang is another film that displays a similar oppression by the police (Özgüç 2006, 68). Other Angels (Teslimiyet) by Emre Yalçın (2010) focuses on the love affair between a transvestite and a man and her relations with three other transvestite flatmates. In terms of representation of transsexuals, the first film to cover the sex change of a man to a woman is likely to be Boy Dancer (Köçek) by Nejat Saydam in 1975. Damn (Beddua) by Osman Seden and Melih Gülgen is another film focusing on sex change. In this film Bülent Ersoy, the famous singer, plays the transsexual character who becomes a woman. Bülent Ersoy actually received surgery for sex reassignment approximately two years after the film was made.

The representation of LGBT identities has been much greater in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films than elsewhere in Turkish cinema. While some of those films depict them in a neutral manner as a reality in daily life and may even focus on their relations, others display a negative perception of them and show a ridiculing attitude of heteronormativity toward them – in the negative category, to refer to the classification of Kaos GL that I mentioned before. Robert’s Movie (Canan Gerede-1991), Istanbul beneath My Wings (Mustafa Altkoklar-1996), Steam: The Turkish Bath (Ferzan Özpetek-1997), Graduate of Insanity (Tunç Başaran-1998), Wound (Yılmaz Arslan-2000), Encounter (Ömer Kavur-2003) and Our Grand Despair (Seyfi Teoman-2011) display or mention LGBT identities in positive or neutral manner. Bergen or Love is Colder than Death (Canan Gerede-1995), The Bandit (Yavuz Turgul-1996), Cholera
Street (Mustafa Altkoklar-1997), Miracle (Atif Yilmaz-1997), Balalaika (Ali Özgentürk-2000), Toss Up (Uğur Yücel-2004), Destiny (Zeki Demirkubuz-2006) and The Road Home (Semir Aslanyürek-2006) depict homosexuality in a negative manner or as a subject of ridicule. Thus LGBT characters show up or are orally mentioned in 16 of 60 films, (if we include the as yet unreleased Saint Ayşe by Elfe Uluç). Displaying a negative perception and a ridiculing attitude towards LGBT identities makes this representation open to criticism and can give the impression that the film affirms heteronormativity, even if the filmmaker does not intend to do so. The representations that fall into this category can be found in Appendix-I.

Positive or neutral portrayals of LGBT identities need to be mentioned here. In Robert’s Movie (Canan Gerede-1991), we see Robert’s gay friend kissing his partner John Kelly, a New Yorker artist, when he goes to visit him. The scene is not represented as an extraordinary action to the spectator. Besides, we understand Robert, who is together with a woman today in Istanbul, is bisexual that they talk about a gay relationship of him with a man called Savage in the past in New York. Istanbul beneath My Wings (Mustafa Altkoklar-1996) displays the Ottoman sultan Murat IV as a bisexual individual that we witness both his relationship with a young boy, named Musa, and we also see him sleeping with two women on different occasions. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this film received negative reactions within conservative circles, for portraying an Ottoman sultan as a bisexual. In the same film we also see a köçek, a transvestite dancer of the time, in a tavern. In Graduate of Insanity (Tunç Başaran-1998), the new neighbour of Nur and Murat is mentioned as a lesbian. In Wound (Yılmaz Arslan-2000), the affair between Hülya and Neriman, though not explicitly mentioned in the film, give the impression that they are lesbians. In Encounter (Ömer Kavur-2003), two transvestites pass by Sinan and Mahmut as they walk along the street. Our Grand Despair (Seyfi Teoman-2011) focuses on the close relationship of two male flatmates and a young girl – the sister of their friend - who becomes a part of their life when she loses her parents. Some dialogue in the film suggests the two flatmates are bisexual, but this is not openly portrayed. For instance Ender, one of the flatmates says that the relationship between himself and Çetin was something else, because it was love, there were girls they had loved but they did not have girlfriends and he searched for Çetin in the women he met, and even in the men. Furthermore we learn from Ender that once – when Ender went to
Istanbul to visit Çetin - Çetin proposed to his girlfriend that they make a flatbed for Ender in their room, explaining that he would be very upset if they didn't; his girlfriend was surprised and later reveals this to Ender. It was announced that Saint Ayşe, which received backing by Eurimages in 2005, will portray the life of a transvestite character who lives on money made from collecting garbage in Istanbul. However, as mentioned, this film has not yet been released. Among those films which display LGBT identities in a positive or neutral manner, Steam: The Turkish Bath is the only one that has a gay theme, i.e. the film focuses on a gay relation. Therefore I will address this film separately.

Steam: The Turkish Bath

Since it focuses on the emergence and development of an unexpected relationship between two males, Steam: The Turkish Bath (Ferzan Özpetek-1997) can be considered a part of the gay film genre. The film starts with the death of Madame Anita, an Italian who had been living in Istanbul for many years; the bath she owned is inherited by Francesco, her nephew in Italy. Francesco is experiencing problems in his marriage with Marta. Almost one year after the death of his aunt, Francesco flies to Istanbul to sell the property he has inherited, at this stage he is not aware that it is a bath, believing it to be old real estate. However, his experience in Istanbul will be different from his expectations.

While walking along a street, Francesco encounters an old man who needs his help to go to a bath, the old man insists that he try the bath if he has not done so before. Francesco follows the man’s advice and is greatly affected by the ambiance of the bath. Francesco then discovers that the property he has inherited is also a bath and the intention of the potential buyer is to own all of the properties in the district in order to transform the region into a shopping mall complex. Furthermore the family which host him are tenants of his aunt and they are anxious about their future if the house is sold. Francesco abandons the sale of the property and decides to operate the bath following renovation. In the meantime, he discovers letters written by his aunt written to his mother that had not been sent after the first one did not reach the intended address. In her letters Madame Anita describes how she voyeuristically watches the males and their pleasures.
in the bath, who are ‘respectable’ patriarchs of their families. Since she knows their secrets, these ‘respectable’ patriarchs show great respect for her. At this point, one can claim that the film reverses the male’s gaze on the female object of classic cinema, as analysed by feminist approach in psychoanalytic terms. It is the female gaze on the male object mentioned here, at least verbally.

In a mood influenced by the ambiance of the bath, learning of the homosexuality experienced there from the letters of his aunt and what with a failing marriage in Italy, Francesco falls in love with the family’s son, Mehmet, and their relationship develops in the bath. His wife Marta, after coming to Istanbul to end her marriage with Francesco, one night witnesses her husband and Mehmet making love there: another instance of female gaze on the male object, visually this time. In addition to those, in one scene before they become lovers, Francesco and Mehmet voyeuristically watch the women bathing; the director’s intention here may be to balance the male and female gazes.

It is the first time that Francesco has fallen in love with a male. Marta also has a relationship with somebody else, Paolo, in Italy. During the quarrel Marta says that it is not the same thing because she has slept with a male and Francesco replies that it is the same thing. Interestingly, after learning about his relationship with Mehmet, Marta gives her wedding ring to a poor woman she encounters in a courtyard, signifying that she has totally abandoned her marriage. However, the ring of Francesco is removed from his finger and given to Marta after he is killed by a hired assassin of the real-estate mafia. Thus we understand that Francesco has not embraced the gay identity totally but rather remains bisexual.

Steam: The Turkish Bath is important in Turkish film history, for focusing on same-sex male relationship as the main theme. Nevertheless, the film is open to criticism for displaying Istanbul and Turks in an orientalist way as I discussed in Chapter 3, despite its theme. I will now discuss another film, Toss Up, as a counter example which portrays a gay individual as a side character, but this time the extensive prejudice and negative attitude against LGBT individuals is foregrounded as well.
Toss Up

*Toss Up* (Uğur Yücel-2004) depicts the parallel story of two young men who complete their military service in the South Eastern Anatolia, and have had to engage in armed clashes with PKK militants. The story begins after they return to their hometowns. Neither Rıdvan nor Cevher are able to overcome the trauma they experience during their military service. Furthermore, Rıdvan has lost one of his legs due to an exploding mine and Cevher is unable to hear in one ear. I discussed aspects of Rıdvan’s life in Chapter 4. This section will focus on the relationship between Cevher and his brother.

Cevher’s dream was to establish a kiosk in Istanbul but he has to engage in ambiguous business in order to actualise this dream. The big earthquake takes place in Marmara region in 1999 and he loses his uncle. Following this, his father’s ex-wife in Greece, Tasula, visits them with her son Teoman, who is the elder brother of Cevher, since Cevher and Teoman share the same father. Cevher cannot accept Teoman as a brother and refuses to talk to him because he is gay. His father reacts to Cevher’s attitude:

*Cevher:* Screw my fate. I lost my ear at war, then I get back and there’s an earthquake, my uncle dies and God knows what else. And now this brother comes from Greece, who is more woman than man.

*Father:* Watch your mouth. He is your brother.

*Cevher:* My brother? My sister, more like!

Then two brothers have an opportunity to talk in a bar. Teoman tells Cevdet that their neighbour, who was taking him on his lap and telling stories, later raped him: “One day he fucked me. I didn’t know anything. I was a kid. I thought that was the way life is. I’m a queer – and you are a man, yeah. Ok?”. Teoman asks for a lipstick from a woman in the bar, applies it to himself and kisses his brother. He turns Cevher’s face to the mirror and asks him: “Now we look alike, don’t we?” I will now discuss the significance of this speech and behaviour in reference to “queer theory”, which I will briefly introduce.

Coming into play in feminist and LGBT studies by the beginning of the 1990s,
‘queer theory’ advocated the approach that gender identities are socially and culturally constructed, which was immanent to the sex-gender distinction that was raised in the 1970s. Accordingly, it is sexual identity which is biological, based on from anatomy and essential. Gender identity by contrast is non-essential and non-fixed, as Judith Butler states: “Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (1990, 6). Queer theory in this sense also objected to the traditional binary sex and gender categories and puts forth that gender is floating and might be flexible, in the words of Butler: “When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (6).

![Fig. 23. Cevher in Toss Up (Yazı Tura), Dir. Uğur Yücel, 2004.](image1)

![Fig. 24: Teoman in Toss Up.](image2)

Teoman’s first question “I’m a queer – and you are a man, yeah. Ok?” and then applying lipstick, kissing his brother and asking the second question “Now we look alike, don’t we?” draws attention to what queer theory argues: gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice. Although the film text makes an unnecessary connection between rape in childhood and the ‘queerness’ of Teoman, I think it is important in criticising the generally negative attitude against LGBT individuals and in conveying queer theory through the conversation between the two brothers. In this way the film questions the heteronormativity prevalent in Turkish society.
Conclusion

Women and LGBT identities have been otherised in national ideology by the bourgeois morality of manliness. In this sense these identities are suitable for scholarly scrutiny.

Women in the Ottoman Empire were secluded from social life, and in particular they were excluded from educational and working opportunities after the state adopted an Islamic character in the 16th century. Starting with the Reorganization Period, their status became an issue of debate and women gained considerable rights during the turn of the 20th century. However, it is the republican revolution that introduced an almost equal status between women and men, taking place during the moves towards modernisation and secularisation. Unlike those reforms which were initiated and managed by the state and may be labelled the ‘first wave’ of feminism, the second wave came in the 1980s and was organised by the women themselves, and these led to a revision of women’s status and rights in many ways. Nevertheless, one cannot claim that the patriarchal order of gender relations has been radically changed thus far.

The status of identities that fall outside heterosexuality has been no better than that of women’s. Although not forbidden legally, LGBT identities in Turkey have been subject to extensive exclusion and oppression, as in many other countries. The struggle in recent years has contributed to their rights and visibility.

The attitude Turkish cinema adopted towards women and LGBT identities has been largely similar to the classic period of cinema in Hollywood. The narrative style has been defined by the patriarchal order, while women have been positioned opposed to male subjectivity, LGBT individuals have been ignored, ridiculed or assigned to derogatory sexual categories. A few counter films that present female subjectivity or represent lesbian individuals have been made since the 1960s. The films that focus on women and LGBT identities, however, have increased in the post-1980 period.

Regarding Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films, the oppression women experience due to patriarchy has been problematised in a considerable number of works, of which Graduate of Insanity (Tunç Başaran-1998) and Bliss (Abdullah Oğuz-2007) are two examples. Out of 59 films, the issues of gender roles and the experience of women
has been represented – either as the primary focus or simply featured in one or more scenes – in 28 works. On the other hand, although *Steam: The Turkish Bath* (Ferzan Özpetek-1997) is the only film that focuses entirely on a gay relationship and *Toss Up* (Uğur Yücel-2004) is the only film that problematises general negative attitudes toward LGBT individuals (through the relationship of two brothers), the representation of non-heterosexuality is much higher in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films than in the films that did not receive that support. 16 films have given place to LGBT individuals (including the unreleased *Saint Ayşe* by Elfe Uluğ), and half of them have done so in a positive or neutral manner and the other half have displayed the negative attitudes of other people that were shaped by heteronormativity and the manliness ideal of bourgeois society. The following graph presents information on the number of films that represent diverse gender identities; this includes films that question the gender roles of women, or address LGBT identities.

![Graph](image)

Fig. 25. The number of Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films in which diverse gender identities have been represented or problematized (minimum numbers out of 59 films).