

Female Silences, Turkey's Crises

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*Gender, Nation and Past
in the New Cinema of Turkey*

By

Özlem Güçlü

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To Serhan ŐeŐen (1982-2008) and Onur Bayraktar (1979-2010)

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NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout the book, all translations from the original Turkish are my own unless otherwise stated. Regarding the quotations cited from the films, the subtitles provided in their DVDs are used except *Shadow Play* [*Gölge Oyunu*] (Yavuz Turgul 1993) and *The Ivy Mansion: Life* [*Asmalı Konak: Hayat*] (Abdullah Oğuz 2003).

INTRODUCTION

AND SILENCE ENTERS THE SCENE

The cinema works to suppress discourse, to permit only certain “speakers”, only certain “speech”.

—Ann Kaplan, *Both Sides of the Camera*

In the mid-1990s, Turkish cinema experienced a remarkable revival both through the box-office success of commercial films and through art house productions as they gained visibility and received critical acclaim at both national and international festivals (Suner 2004, 306). While the “new” formula of polishing the thematic binary oppositions of Turkish melodramas with Hollywood’s visual style (Dorsay 2004a, 11) was used by commercial films as the way to box office success, art house productions introduced new and diverse ways of filmmaking and storytelling to Turkish cinema audiences. However, what is really unusual about this revival is the emergence of a new representational form: silent, inaudible characters. In the new cinema of Turkey, we constantly encounter characters that, for some reason, do not or cannot speak. Equally unusual is the fact that this newness, this on-screen silence, has a gender(ed/ing) aspect, since, for the most part, the mute(d) characters are female.

If we examine how women are absent from Turkish cinema screens after the mid-1990s, it is noticeable that female stories or female points of view are silenced; this invisibility is not specific to the new cinema. The Turkish cinema industry has always been a male-dominated cinema, and this has been discussed by several scholars (Abisel 2005; Suner 2006a; 2010; Ulusay 2004). However, the gender imbalance had never before been so intense in terms of the representations and stories. Gönül Dönmez-Colin describes this period in Turkish cinema as “macho cinema” (Dönmez-Colin 2004). Nejat Ulusay calls some of the examples in the new cinema “male films” (Ulusay 2004), while Z. Tül Akbal Süalp uses the term “male weepy films” to define and describe a group of films in the new cinema of Turkey (Akbal Süalp 2009). Thus the new cinema is differentiated from other decades in Turkish cinema by its mostly male-

centred stories and male points of view that are narrated by and/or through the male characters, their lives, problems, conflicts, feelings, anxieties and fantasies (Akbal Süalp 2009; Akbal Süalp and Şenova 2008; Ulusay 2004). In this atmosphere, women are cast either as “morbid provocateurs and seducers who lead men to commit crimes, violence and irrational acts and who, of course, then become the victims of these brutalities” or are completely excluded from the narrative (Akbal Süalp and Şenova 2008, 92). Furthermore, as Akbal Süalp argues, “women have taken their part as the unknown, threatening other and stand for all ‘Others’” and represent both the fantasies and fears of the wounded male egos’ (Akbal Süalp and Şenova 2008, 92). In these narratives, women are muted: “Women have gradually faded from the scene as characters and have become backdrops in most dramas. No meaningful dialogue has [been] written for them” (Akbal Süalp and Şenova 2008, 92). In her book *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*, film scholar Asuman Suner also suggests that “the absence of women is one of the characteristics of the new wave cinema. Again and again, we encounter mute women in these films” (Suner 2010, 163). Moreover, how they are “inaudible”, how they are made mute on the screen has also some “specificity” to Turkish cinema after the mid-1990s.

As a part of this current gender(ed) picture of the new cinema of Turkey, a new female representational form emerges: the silent, inaudible female. Even though there are a few examples of silent female representations in Turkish cinema before the 1990s, from 1993 onwards (particularly between 1996 and 2004), we encounter silent female characters in films that are not specific to a single genre. In fact, the films that can be considered as the most powerful examples of the new cinema of Turkey, one from the commercial side, *The Bandit [Eşkaya]* (Yavuz Turgul 1996), and the other from the art house side, *Somersault in a Coffin [Tabutta Rövaşata]* (Derviş Zaim 1996), involve two silent female characters: respectively, Keje (Sermin Hürmeriç), who chooses not to speak in response to her forced marriage with a man she does not love, and the Junkie Woman (Ayşen Özdemir), who is mostly depicted looking out of the window in silence. As film scholar Ulusay argues, these male films exclude female characters, and if they cannot cast women completely out of the narration they make them mute instead (Ulusay 2004, 154). In the background of the increased “voice” of the male stories, the audience is faced with these female silences that function in various ways and arise from various reasons: mute characters who are unable to speak such as Yusuf’s sister (Nihal G. Koldaş) in *Innocence [Masumiyet]* (Zeki Demirkubuz 1997) and Francesca (Beatriz Rico) in *Istanbul Under My*

Wings [İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında] (Mustafa Altıoklar 1996); the characters who become mute as a consequence of a trauma, such as Nazmiye (Müge Oruçkaptan) in *Propaganda* (Sinan Çetin 1999); voluntary mutes who chose not to speak, such as Keje in *The Bandit* and Yasemin (Yasemin Kozanoğlu) in *Romantic [Romantik]* (Sinan Çetin 2007); the characters who are reluctant to speak, such as Bahar (Ebru Ceylan) in *Climates [İklimler]* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 2006); and forced mutes who are made inaudible by the writer and director and cannot be heard by the audience even though they are actually able to speak, such as the Woman (Ella Menae) in *On Board [Gemide]* (Serdar Akar 1998), Spiky (Esin Pervane) in *9* (Ümit Ünal 2002) and Mahmut's lover (Nazan Kesal) and the women Yusuf stalks (Ebru Ceylan) in *Distant [Uzak]* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 2002). In the end, as Suner states, "new Turkish cinema speaks over female silences" (Suner 2010, 174).

Being motivated by the "scream" of this ongoing silence, this book will attempt to go beyond just naming the silence to explore the operations and functions of these mute representations of the feminine, and their relation to the historical and industrial contexts in which they were produced and consumed. Therefore my central questions are: Why did this silent female representational form emerge specifically in this time frame? What are the functions of the silent female characters in these films? What is the relationship between this "new" – silent – form of female representation, the "new" cinema of Turkey, and the "new" socio-political climate in Turkey in the post-1980s and in the 1990s in particular? In my opinion, exploring the formations, operations and functions of gendered divisions of silence and speech on screen will reveal not only gender constructions in and through cinematic discourse, but also the possible relation of these constructions to both the historical, political, economic, social and cultural context of Turkey and to the Turkish cinema industry, since cinema constitutes and is constituted by the other discursive and non-discursive practices specific to the context of time and space.

Obviously, the silent form of female representation is not uniquely specific to the new cinema of Turkey. There are also some examples in Turkish cinema from other decades that involve silent female characters. Berivan (Melike Demirağ), who refuses to speak in *The Herd [Sürü]* (Zeki Ökten 1979), would probably be the first one that comes to mind. Berivan, who is a Kurdish girl, given in marriage to the enemy tribe's son as blood money [*kan bedeli*] or as a token of peace, becomes "mute" after her third miscarriage. Berivan, who is continuously accused by her father-in-law of being the source of every trouble they have been through, even though she

has done nothing, does not say a single word throughout the film. *Reddish Coloured Grape* [*Kıvalı Yapıncak*] (Orhan Aksoy 1968) and *Love Convict* [*Aşk Mahkumu*] (Nuri Ergün 1973) are both typical examples of Turkish melodrama and share almost the same scenario. These films involve female characters who become mute after the sudden death of their parents in an accident. Each of the women has to move to her distant relatives' house after the accident; she falls in love with the handsome and spoiled son of the family, and is raped by him. In *Reddish Coloured Grape*, we do not hear a word from the silent female character, Leyla (Hülya Koçyiğit), until she regains her voice after a "new" shock – a traffic accident. However, in *Love Convict*, we hear the mute female character's (Hale Soygazi) voice-over throughout the film in the scenes where she writes a journal. Another example involving a mute female character is *Alişan* (Şerif Gören 1982), where the central theme is the impossible love of two people from different classes. The silent female character, Aslı (Yaprak Özdemiroğlu), is the daughter of a rich family, while the leading actor is a poor construction worker. Even though Aslı does not talk throughout the film, she uses writing as a way of communicating with the male character. As can be seen from the limited number of these examples, the silent representational form was rarely used in Turkish cinema before the mid-1990s. There are only a few isolated examples simply because the silence of a character, if it is not momentary, was contradictory to the classic narrative patterns of earlier Turkish cinema, which for the most part depended on dialogue and talking.

In other cinemas, there are various examples of silent female characters from various countries, from various times: deaf and mute Belinda (Jane Wyman) in *Johnny Belinda* (Jean Negulesco 1948) from the U.S.; the silence of Elisabet (Liv Ullman), who becomes mute during a performance, in *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman 1966) from Sweden; Marlene (Irm Hermann) in *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* [*Die Bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*] (Rainer Werner Fassbinder 1972) from Germany; the mute girl (Kiti Manver) in *Speak Little Mute Girl* [*Habla, Mudita*] (Manuel Gutierrez Aragon 1973) from Spain; voluntary mute Christine M. (Edda Barends) in *A Question of Silence* [*De Stilte Rond Christine M.*] (Marleen Gorris 1982) from the Netherlands; deaf and mute Sarah Norman (Marlee Matlin) in *Children of a Lesser God* (Randa Haines 1986) from the U.S.. After the 1990s, we are again faced with examples of silent female representations in other cinemas: the silence of Ada (Holly Hunter) in *The Piano* (Jane Campion 1993); the mute woman (Samantha Morton) in *Sweet and Lowdown* (Woody Allen, 1999); Rivka (Yael Abecassis) who slides into silence because of the strict rules of religion in *Sacred*

[*Kadosh*] (Amos Gitai 1999); the silent body of Alicia (Leonor Watling), who is in a coma in *Talk to Her [Hable Con Ella]* (Pedro Almadovar 2002). Nevertheless the distinctive feature of the female silences in the new cinema of Turkey is that these are not isolated examples; rather, the usage of this representational form gained frequency at this historical juncture. Therefore, what this study is primarily concerned with is that silence emerged as a new female representational form in a specific historical time frame, in a specific country, and was frequently used in both art house and commercial productions.

Studies in Turkish academia or mentions in the media of this newly emergent representational form do not adequately address the questions of how and why these silences have emerged on screen during this time period. While female silences dominate the Turkish screen, local cinema authorities continue to be silent about this ongoing silence. Most of the research or critiques on the new cinema of Turkey leave the silenced representations of women outside their scope of reflection (Ayça 2003-2004; Dorsay 2002; 2004a; 2004b; Evren 2003a; 2003b; 2005; Güven 2004; Maktav 2001-2002; Kırac 2000a; 2000b; 2008) while trying to define the Turkish cinema in terms of the emerging changes in the industry, narration, style and box-office or festival success after the mid-1990s.

The researchers or critics who are not gender blind to the changes in Turkish cinema (Dönmez-Colin 2004; 2008; Evirgen 2006; Eyüboğlu 2001; Koç 2004; Oktan 2009; Özgüç 2006) are for some reason “deaf” to the silences of female characters: they overlook this emergence of the silent female representational form, although they focus on the representations of gender and sexuality in the new cinema from different angles. The few studies that acknowledge the presence of women’s silences as far as the characters, stories, and narratives are concerned (Öztürk and Tural 2001; Suner 2010; Ulusay 2004), need to be critiqued and should be elaborated on. Even though these studies name the problem, pointing out the female silences, the scope of their research does not include the question of the functions of these silences and/or why this representational change appears in this specific time period.

Ulusay argues that in these films, silent female characters are one of the symptoms of masculinity in crisis (Ulusay 2004). According to Ulusay, after the 1980s, masculinity in Turkish cinema started losing its power, which paved the way for male bonding films that aimed to reassign the myth of masculinity through male chauvinism and gun-fetishism

(Ulusay 2004). The overemphasised virility in these narratives, Ulusay argues, very much points to a crisis in masculinity; that is, the anxiety of not being or being seen as manly enough (Ulusay 2004, 160). Most female characters in these films are thrown to the edges of the narratives, and the ones that cannot be completely excluded from the narratives are made mute instead (Ulusay 2004, 154). Ulusay suggests that the ongoing silencing of female characters in these films might be read as a manifestation of this masculinity crisis and as a response to the second-wave feminist movement in Turkey (Ulusay 2004, 157). However, since the main focus of his article is about the representations of masculinities, Ulusay does not make a detailed analysis of female silences. Suner provides a detailed analysis of identity and belonging in the new cinema of Turkey from a film studies perspective, mindful of contextual “specificities” (Suner 2006a, 2010). However, she does not put forth a comprehensive textual analysis of female silences in the chapter called “Women’s Silences”, and does not go beyond pointing out the problem that was previously set forth by Akbal Süalp. Film scholars S. Ruken Öztürk and Nilgün Tatal’s article, “Female Characters’ Silences in Cinema” [*Sinemada Kadın Karakterlerin Sessizliği*] (2001), where the different “meanings of female silence in films” (Öztürk and Tatal 2001, 101) are explored through various films that were produced in different countries at different times, is one of the most important works on female silence in cinema written in Turkish. However, it does not focus on the female silences in Turkish cinema after the mid-1990s, and considers only one film, *The Bandit*, from the new cinema of Turkey.

Thus, in the mid-1990s and 2000s, this striking change in female representation did not receive scholarly attention, while the revival of Turkish cinema and the return of audiences have been reported. Even if these silences spoke, they were definitely not heard. On the other hand, Akbal Süalp not only points out the issue of the increasing number of silent female characters on screen (Akbal Süalp 1999) and poses very important questions seeking to understand the function(s) of these silences (Akbal Süalp 1998), but also sets forth a sound argument that associates the mute(d) female characters with the increasing “glorification of male lumpen attitudes” along with the emergence of the male weepy or arabesque-noir films (Akbal Süalp 1998; 1999; 2004; 2009; 2010a; 2011; Akbal Süalp and Şenova 2008). This book aims to bring further discussions and analysis, following in the footsteps of Akbal Süalp who posed a crucial question for the purpose of this study: “Which unspeakable words and unarticulated dilemmas are represented by silent women, or what is the director unable to say?” (Akbal Süalp 1998, 13). This study

argues that silent female characters, which have a close relation to the historical and political contexts from which they emerged, provide a representational form that reveals or hints at “unspeakable words and unarticulated dilemmas”, namely the crises in the hegemonic power positions in the realms of gender, nation and the past. The following chapters provide a detailed discussion of this silent female representational form. Its repeated association with the tropes of scapegoating, shame, victimisation, trauma, secrets and wounds provides a unique articulation of the silent trauma, shame, and crises of Turkey’s post-junta era.

If one takes a look at female representational forms in Turkish cinema before the new cinema, the angel-devil dichotomy characterised the 1950s’ and 1960s’ melodramas.¹ The home and the family were the main interest of Turkish melodramas. The “outside” was always considered as the source of trouble and of “threat” in these films. In terms of female characters, the woman “inside”, namely the mother and/or wife or the woman looking for eternal love, was always depicted as “good” and reached a happy ending that she deserved, while the woman from “outside”, namely a prostitute or the woman engaged in extramarital sexuality, was depicted as “bad” and found the trouble she deserved at the end. Beneath these dichotomies, the female characters, as well as Turkish melodrama as a genre itself, speak of and accord with the needs and characteristics of Turkish society after the 1950s, namely the conservative lifestyle and the changing social life due to the country’s opening to the “outside”² world, and the need to ease the growing social anxieties as a consequence of that opening out. In the 1970s, female nudity entered the scene with the emergence of erotic films, which were designed to re-attract

¹ In Turkish cinema, melodrama was the main genre until the mid-1970s. Moreover, it is seen as the main form that defines the Turkish cinematic tradition, especially in terms of narrative patterns. The angel-devil and also the rich-poor and the urban-rural oppositions are not specific to the female representations; rather, they are the characteristics of the Turkish melodrama as a genre. These oppositions can be considered as an articulation and a response to the widening gap between the social classes and the increasing internal migration in Turkish society after the 1950s as a result of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and of the consumer culture project of the Democratic Party government.

² With the Democratic Party government, Turkey experienced a great change from the Republican Party’s policy of national isolation, and underwent a huge economic “opening out”. For the first time in the history of Turkey, foreign aid and foreign loans were received. The government reduced the state’s role in the economy and encouraged foreign investments. The United States Army was permitted to situate a military base on Turkey’s territory.

the attention of audiences lost to television at the end of the 1960s. The 1980s witnessed a diversity and depth in the representations of femininities with the emergence of women's films that were affected by the second wave feminist movement in Turkey. Just after the decade of women's films, where the female characters, narratives and points of view gained "voice" and increased visibility, the silent female representational form emerges with the new cinema of Turkey.³ As film theorists Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue with regard to popular Hollywood films in their book, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, the changing dynamics of the different periods, the emergent developments and crises in society, not only affect the collective psychological state but also change the narrative and representational strategies of the films (Ryan and Kellner 1990). Therefore, newly emerged representational forms, or changes in representational forms, might be considered as a response to the changing dynamics of the society, since the existing forms were no longer sufficient to construct the changing world on screen. It might be read as a cinematic way of accommodating the changing order of society. This study accepts and starts from the proposition that every period produces its own specific representational form(s) and/or narrative strategies, or modifies existing forms, as a projection and as a response according to its needs and dynamics. However, Western studies on female voice and/or female silence in cinema (Dittmar 1998; Lawrence 1998; Rhodes and Sparrow 1990; Santaololia 1998; Silverman 1988) attempt to theorise female voice and/or female silence via various types from different regional cinemas, from different time frames without taking into consideration the possible differences of the formations and functions in relation to these time-space variations. Therefore, this book proposes to fill these gaps and to overcome the possible shortcomings of the theories on female voice and female silence on screen by focusing on contextual specificities and effects of the given time period in Turkey. It will be argued that the silent female characters on the new cinema's screen have a very strong relation to the socio-political context of Turkey in the post-September 12, 1980 military coup, within which the changing divisions of "voice" and "silence" in various domains, namely the changing order of discursive authority, was the key issue (Gürbilek 2011).

³ The changing female representational forms, the changing gender orders of Turkish cinema in different decades, and their relation to the historical context will be discussed in detail and in comparison in the second chapter.

Since the silent female representational form appears consistently in a specific time-space, the question has to be posed as to what specifically in this historical juncture opened the way for the emergence of this form. The 1980 military coup⁴ produced the biggest silencing of the dissident voices in every domain in Turkish society and irreversibly violated freedom of expression. Moreover, Turkey then underwent a massive economic liberalisation, and the period after 1980 was marked by privatisation and the rise of the consumer society. In the name of full integration into the global economy, a number of reforms in the information and communication sectors were also made, which turned the media into a real power in Turkish society, one that created the “Speaking Turkey” [*Konuşan Türkiye*] and defined what should be spoken while silencing politicised “voices” (Gürbilek 2011).

Repression in the political sphere in the 1980s was accompanied by increased freedom of expression on the cultural and personal front. Cultural critic Nurdan Gürbilek argues that the 1980s in Turkey was a period when two seemingly opposed cultural strategies – repression, assimilation and annihilation, on the one hand, and provocation and incorporation on the other – came together (Gürbilek 2011). It was a period when the voices of Islamists, Kurdish people, women, feminists, gays and lesbians, and the lower classes entered the public sphere, while political voices were suppressed, through torture and imprisonment (Gürbilek 2011). As Ayşe Gül Altınay argues:

The military intervention of 1980, the re-writing of the constitution by the military regime in 1982, and the internal war between PKK (Kurdish Workers’ Party) and the state security forces in the 1990s significantly militarized Turkish political discourse and practice. Characterized by polarization, antagonism, “win or lose” logic, the normalisation of violence, and ethnic nationalisms (both Turkish and Kurdish), this militarized political space left little room for voices of democratization and

⁴ September 12, 1980 was the third *coup d’état* in the Turkish Republic. As a result of the military coup, the Parliament and the political parties were immediately closed down; 650,000 people were arrested; 1,683,000 cases were prepared; 230,000 people were tried by court martial; 517 people were sentenced to death, and 50 of them (18 from the left wing, 8 from right wing, 23 judicial criminal, 1 Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia militant) were carried out; 98,404 people were on trial for “being an organization member”; 300,000 people died dubiously; it has been documented that 171,000 people died because of torture; 937 films were banned. (“Darbenin Bilançosu” [Balance Sheet of the Military Coup] from *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, 12 September, 2000).

pluralism to articulate themselves. Still, the same period witnessed a proliferation of political organizing against militarization, nationalism and discrimination of all sorts. Feminist movements, human rights activism, gay and lesbian organisations, conscientious objectors, nonviolence training groups, and peace initiatives challenged the existing political discourse and proposed a new language to approach difference in the context of democratic polity. (2007; quoted in Suner 2010, 11-12)

As such, the post-1980s witnessed the second wave feminist movement in Turkey based on the discourse of the “personal is political”. Issues related to the personal sphere such as domestic violence, abortion rights, or rape moved to the public sphere. The feminist movement revealed the operation of power relations between men and women, and “opened up a route for women to become social actors” (Göle 1996, 82). Simultaneously, the headscarf dispute, together with the Islamist feminist movement, came out from *mahrem*, the private realm or the domestic sphere, and entered the political sphere. The post-junta period became a period when women began to be the subject of politics, rather than the object of political struggle, as in the past (Göle 1996, 82). The rising voice of women affected discourses on gender and the gender order of society.

On the one hand, as part of the political silencing after the military coup, assimilation policies accelerated, with the aim of sustaining the national unity and cohesion of the country. Following this, beginning in 1984, Turkey witnessed the rise of the Kurdish movement and an undeclared civil war between Kurdish guerrillas and the Turkish Army, characterised by harsh state violence, evacuations, village burnings and the disappearances and deaths of thousands of people in extra-judicial killings (Keyder 2004). The rise and effectiveness of such an ethnic movement disrupted the foundational ideas of the Turkish nation-state – national unity, territorial integrity and perpetuity – that do not recognise any ethnic or national identity other than Turkish (Barkey 2000; Bozdoğan and Kasaba 2000; Bulut 2006). Furthermore, this movement called into question the official discourse of cultural homogeneity and coherence (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 2000). On the other hand, the effort to achieve European Union candidacy re-provoked a love-hate relationship with the West. After the official candidacy for EU membership was granted, the reform process started, and the demands of the European Union with regard to human and minority rights, the Kurdish question, the Cyprus question and the issues around the Armenian genocide conflicted with official history. Turkey was harshly criticised by the European Union because of human rights abuses in the form of unsolved killings and

disappearances in the mainly Kurdish populated regions. The demands of the European Union, especially with respect to the Kurdish question, were commonly perceived as an intervention in Turkey's domestic affairs and triggered suspicion of Western intentions toward Turkey (Gürbey 2006) for dividing the country, causing a sense of a loss of sovereignty (Bulut 2006) and a threat to territorial integrity. In addition to the Kurdish movement, the post-September 12, 1980 period witnessed the rise of Islam in the mainstream political space where it was used as a buffer in the struggle against leftist ideologies (Keyder 2004). Turkish national identity had been officially devoid of religious influence because of the foundational principle of secularism, but that position started to be shaken during the 1980s. However, in the aftermath of a right-wing Islamist party's coming to power in 1996, this rise of the voice of political Islam opened up the public space for the thus-far denied identities not only to articulate their demands (Yavuz 1997) and their very existence, but also to play a pivotal role in the political system. These developments in relation to the principle of secularism profoundly affected the stability of the foundational elements and the order of national discourse. While the increased voice of non-Turkish ethnicities and of religious groups in the social and political realm, and the EU pressure to make Turkey conform to European human rights standards and to meet the demands of the Kurdish population and minorities in Turkey posed a challenge to the hegemonic discourses of the constitutive foundation of the Turkish nation, the political scandals that were revealed in the mid-1990s disrupted the discourse on the peace, unity and coherence of the national community by unveiling the violent, arbitrary, corrupt and criminal activities of the deep state organisations of the nation-state. The revelation of deep state relations, together with the injunction of the counter-discourses and suppressed voices in the public sphere, induced debates around the national history and resulted in both a questioning of the dominant voice of the official history, and an increasing articulation of the suppressed memories in the history of Turkey. Thus Turkey began to experience a return of the past (Gürbilek 2011), and memory studies and oral history research gave voice to the heretofore silenced experiences and identities (Neyzi 2010). Turkey's points of silence began to be revealed in the public realm in this period.

As a result, in the 1990s, in the background of the emergence of the new cinema of Turkey, the Turkish nation-state experienced a growing nationalism and militaristic discourse on the one hand, and more visible religious and ethnic identities on the other, which led to a crisis in the collective and previously stable set of identities. These changes, I would

suggest, can be detected in various characteristics of the new cinema from the themes to the narrative patterns. Turkey has been through various military coups throughout its history; however, none of them left such a remarkable trace regarding the changing divisions of silence and voice in the public space, because of which, I argue, this specific historical juncture produced textual effects on cinema, the silent female representational form constituting one of the most apparent. The silent form must be considered as an epiphany in the struggle over authority in the changing orders of discourses on gender, nation and the past, rather than a rupture from the hegemonic discourses, since it becomes a representation of both the non-hegemonic voices and of the continuing points of silence in Turkey in different but interrelated domains. In this respect, the silent form reveals not only the silent trauma of the military coup itself, but also the trauma of the changing order of discourses and of the changing positions of discursive authority.

Apart from the socio-political developments at this historical juncture, the changes and transformations in the cinema industry after the military coup give an important answer to the question of why the silent female representational form emerged in this specific time frame. The September 12, 1980 military coup deeply affected the cinema industry in Turkey. Because of the severe censorship, the detention of certain filmmakers and the confinement of the Turkish cinema syndicate Sine-Sen after the military coup, film production substantially decreased and audiences almost stopped going to the theatres (Arslan 2011; Kara 2012). The crisis led to various changes and transformations in the cinema industry (which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter), one of the most important of which was the demise of the *Yeşilçam* system and the emergence of the new cinema. The cinematic revival with the new cinema, along with other transformations, came along with the advancements in film technology and the emergence of aesthetic styles that prioritise cinematography. The fundamental characteristic of *Yeşilçam* cinema, dubbing, was abandoned, causing sound design and sound technology to gain more importance. That change played a part in the emergence of the silent form, as silence can only be present and be heard in the diegesis on the condition of the existence of the sound. On the other hand, newly emergent art house productions, in contrast to the classical *Yeşilçam* narrative that was based on the verbal, introduced a new cinematic language and aesthetic prioritising the visual before the verbal. That opened the way for the use of silence in various forms and functions as a complementary tool of aesthetic style. In this respect, the emergence of the silent female representational form would not have been possible after any

of the other military interventions before September 12, 1980, since, above all, the traditional *Yeşilçam* filmmaking style and narrative patterns which were heavily based on dialogue and the verbal persisted and proceeded, even though the themes and genres were adjusted according to the needs and necessities of the eras following the interventions.

By being very much aware of the striking tendency in Western criticism to insist on a contextual analysis for examples of “non-Western” productions, I am not blindly proposing a contextual reading; rather, the above-mentioned features of the historical conjunction make it indispensable. From this point of view, this study not only focuses on the representations of femininity in silent forms, but also premises more layers of analysis related to these silent representations in these films. The crucial and interrelated layers for the purpose of this study are gender and sexuality, national or ethnic identity, and the (traumatised) past and memory for the following reasons: the silent characters are for the most part female and subjected to gender-based violence; they are either foreign or of non-Turkish ethnicity; and/or their silence has a close relation with a traumatic past. This study must be considered as an attempt to understand why the silent representational form insistently appears in relation to certain themes, figures and narrative patterns. It explores the possible anxiety/anxieties behind this insistent relatedness, and how it is coped with in and through the films themselves. In order to discuss the silent female form in its relation to gender, nation and the past, this study provides combined analyses of plot, character development, mise-en-scène and narrative structure, that set forth the various filmic devices, the cause-effect links of events and the organisation of the mise-en-scènes in the narratives developing the silent female character in association with these interrelated layers. On the other hand, it is important to indicate that even though silent female characters in the new cinema share similarities in terms of their relation to the abovementioned components, in terms of the projection of an anxiety, those similarities may manifest different functions or operations within the narratives. These silences have highly complex, sophisticated and multidimensional relations and structures: Ayşe/Eleni’s (Rüçhan Çalışkur) Greek heritage-based silence in *Waiting for the Clouds [Bulutları Beklerken]* (Yeşim Ustaoğlu 2003) and the silence of the foreign prostitute in *On Board* have different reasons and functions even though neither woman is Turkish. Keje’s silence in *The Bandit* and Yasemin’s silence in *Romantic* have different formations even though they both “chose” to be silent. Yusuf’s sister’s muteness in *Innocence*, which is caused by an honour crime, cannot be considered as

identical to Bahar's (Nurgül Yeşilçay's) comatose silence in *The Ivy Mansion: Life [Asmalı Konak: Hayat]* (Abdullah Oğuz 2003).

In these respects, this study will argue that the silent female characters emerged as a symptom of crises in traditional power positions, or of the fear of losing these positions because of new developments in the transition period in Turkey. The silent female representational form is a kind of cinematic response to these developments in the country, and it reveals more about the "other" than about itself. In all of the films – except the contradictory example of *Waiting for the Clouds* – that involve a silent female character, there is more about the anxieties and fears of the masculine voice than there is about the female voice, more about the anxieties and fears about "Turkishness" than there is about foreigners or non-Turkish ethnicities, and more about the anxieties and fears of the collective memory than there is about the individual's memory. In most cases, the cinematically muted female characters, as a symptom of fears and anxieties of a country in transition, become the medium, and they function as a mirror for the other characters, who are male and Turkish, to confront (but not necessarily come to terms with) the other, themselves, their (traumatic) pasts, and the changing world. As Gürbilek argues, every piece of art was born with an anxiety; however, only some of them manage to translate the source of the anxiety into a "scene" for the piece, i.e. to problematise the anxiety, while the rest make do with being a "certificate" of the anxiety by projecting it to the other (Gürbilek 2007, 13). Even though these female silences share an anxiety or anxieties about the changing order of gender, nation and collective memory, the films differ in their ways of coping with these anxieties. Some of the films manage to translate the anxiety into a scene for the film, and therefore open a space to criticise it, while others project anxiety onto another character in order to avoid it. But in the end, in both cases, these films have the potential to expose a male character's own "hoarseness" and anxiety about losing a power position in (the order of) gender, nation and collective memory realms by insistently associating the silent female characters with certain themes and patterns. In most of the examples, via female silences, male characters reveal and speak of the silenced, the secret, the trauma and the wound; thus the films articulate the unspeakable and make the inexpressible visible in these three realms. By making the unspeakable visible, the silent female representational form is supposed to both reveal the power loss and expose the crises in the order, as well as to become the medium through which the order is reassigned in favour of the males.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In order to draw a theoretical framework for the study of silent female representations, I will firstly define the word “silent”. Even though in various examples female silences share similarities, they may have different functions and formations. What I mainly propose to focus on in this book is the female characters who do not or cannot speak, or who are made mute for various reasons (not speaking Turkish, muteness, choosing not to speak). Therefore, silence refers to the characters that we, the audience, do not hear either throughout the film or in some part of the film (in some examples characters regain their voices). There are also some female characters who can be considered as “silent” since they do not have many lines or are not talkative. However, the silence of these characters is not distinctive, since the same kind of silence might be encountered in relation to male characters in some art house productions. Silence, in this research, condenses these issues: the woman’s voice-loss, her relation to language or verbal discourse, her possession of an authorial point of view, and her instrumentality in the narrative.

In order to theorise silence, I will draw upon Michel Foucault’s conception of “discursive authority” and the “order of discourse” (Foucault [1971] 1981), since these concepts will highlight the power relations behind the division of silence and speech and how this division serves certain knowledge productions and the production of “truth”. As Stephen Whitehead explains, following on from Foucault:

Discourses are the means by which we come to “know ourselves”; perform our identity work; exercise power (in contrast to “holding” power); exercise resistance; pronounce or deny the validity of knowledges and “truths”; communicate with others and “our selves”. (Whitehead 2002, 103)

According to Foucault, discourse production and distribution are highly regulated and subjected to certain procedures in every society (Foucault [1971] 1981). There is control over what can and cannot be said and over who can and cannot speak. Foucault suggests three sets of procedures that limit discourse and regulate its production (Foucault [1971] 1981). The first set comprises the social procedures of exclusion: prohibition, the division between reason and madness, and the distinction between true and false. Prohibition refers to the constraints surrounding the way that we talk about certain subjects, such as sexuality. The division between true and false is seen in the speaking positions, those that have the authority to

speak about a certain subject. The authority of the speaker attributes truth to the subject. Therefore, I draw upon Foucault's arguments on the procedures that limit and produce discourse, in order to reveal that discourse in the new cinema of Turkey also has an order. Not everything can be said; not everyone has a right to speak. Indeed, certain statements are circulated while others are excluded. Certain characters have the exclusive right to speak, while others are not listened to even when they do speak.

As Foucault's theory on discourse analyses the processes, the regulatory mechanisms whereby discourses are brought into being, it provides a toolbox for this study that allows exploration and analysis of the formations, functions and associations of female silences, rather than their meanings. As opposed to previous eras in the history of Turkish cinema, female characters in the new cinema of Turkey have a limited access to speech; their words are excluded from cinematic language. Foucault's framework for discourse that focuses on the order of discourse, which is not fixed but which changes according to the needs and necessities of the context, enables an analysis that associates the silent form with the historical context of Turkey in the post-September 12, 1980 period, where the prohibitions, the points of speech and silence, and the roles of the speaker and the spoken-of, the regulatory mechanisms of discourses, have changed remarkably (Gürbilek 2011).

Foucault indicates in *The History of Sexuality Vol.1*:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault [1976] 1998, 100-1)

In this respect, I intend to use political theorist Wendy Brown's conception of silence in "Freedom's Silences" (Brown 2003). In this work, Brown "[rethinks] the powers and potentials of silence" (Brown 2003, 84) through a problematisation of "the compulsory discursivity and presumed evil of silences" (Brown 2003, 85): by avoiding a dualistic approach, "[it] interrogates the presumed authenticity of 'voice' in the implicit equation between speech and freedom entailed in contemporary affirmations of breaking silence" (Brown 2003, 84), while suggesting that silence is

neither more nor less truthful, neither more nor less regulatory than speech is (Brown 2003, 83). As Brown suggests, “if discourses posit or organise silences, then silences themselves must be understood as discursively produced, as part of discourse” (Brown 2003, 87). Brown’s conception of silence, breaking the dualistic approach, allows analysis of silent female characters as constitutive of and constituted by the changing discourses on gender, nation and the past in Turkey in the given time-frame. In my view, following in Foucault’s footsteps, Brown’s argument that silence, which is not the same as not speaking and is also discursively produced (Brown 2003, 87), is extremely important for this study in order to provide a framework in which silence is not positively or negatively valued, but rather considered as a representational form that has formation(s) and function(s) in the changing orders of discourses. Yet, paradoxically, silence that is produced within the discourse may function as a source of protection from power. It indicates “a particular relation to regulatory discourses, as well as a possible niche for the practice of freedom *within* those discourses” (Brown 2003, 87). In this respect, female characters’ silences can also function “as a scene of practices that escape the regulatory functions of discourse” (Brown 2003, 88). Their silences may position them, to a certain extent, in an unknowable place so that they may escape the regulations that are imposed by discourse to “know the truth” about them. As Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests, “silence as a refusal to partake in the story does sometimes provide us with means to gain a hearing. It is a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right” (Minh-ha 1989, 83). However, Brown also points out that “it would be a mistake to value this resistance too highly”, since the silence provides a niche for protection from power, “one to which, however, she is also condemned” (Brown 2003, 97):

... emancipated into silence – no longer a subject of coerced speech, no longer invaded in every domain of her being, yet also not heard, seen, recognized, wanted as a speaking being in the public or social realm. (Brown 2003, 97)

Minh-ha also indicates the paradoxical/dualistic nature in the use of silence:

On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lapse and blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity (Kristeva) and to work in “undertones” (Irigaray) in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set

in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay, a language of its own, has barely been explored. (Minh-ha 1991, 150-151)

As the authority to speak is attributed to male characters, what they say about female characters becomes “truth”. We “know” female characters and their stories through male speech. This way of “knowing” or “making knowable” is quite different from the more customary knowledge that comes through the images of women being depicted in a male-dominant film. In this case, the main tool is not the gaze, but rather the speech. What makes this research interesting is the focus on films where a gender hierarchy is being built mainly on/through the authority to speak, not to look or “to-be-looked-at” (Mulvey [1975] 1989). In most of the films, there is at least one scene where the male character reveals the “unknown” story or “secret” of the silent female character. Thus, the female characters that are positioned to some extent as “unknowable”, and so “uncontrollable”, are made “knowable” again. As film critic Pascal Bonitzer argues, this “knowledge” is the essence of power since if the voice “knows”, it knows for someone who does not or cannot talk, both for someone and also instead of someone. Bonitzer claims that the voice speaking for the Other dominates, registers and fixes the Other with knowledge: “The power of the voice is a stolen power, stolen and extorted from the Other” (Bonitzer [1976] 2007, 30).

On the other hand, the “made known” story or secret of the silent female generally also reveals the male character’s relation to her and/or his inability to control her. Therefore these sequences expose not only the female character, but also the male character’s impotency. In this respect, silence becomes both the domain of power and the medium of the redistribution of power positions. This two-way relation between silence and power introduced by Foucault and Brown will allow me to fill the gap in many feminist film scholars’ studies on female silence, which are not sufficient *per se* to describe, critique and understand the functions of silences in the new cinema of Turkey, since they treat silence either from an oppressive or a resistive stance (Doane 1980; Kaplan 1993; Kozloff 1988; Lawrence 1991, 1998; Silverman 1988; 1990).

Linda Dittmar suggests in her article “The Articulating Self” that if we think about voice “as a vehicle of human utterance – of expressed opinion, judgement, and will – the notion of birthright holds little sway” (Dittmar 1998, 391) and the ability to use it, rather than innate ownership, becomes the issue. According to Dittmar, in society, the voice is an instrument used to position the self and be positioned by others (Dittmar 1998, 391).