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**Turkey from Akad’s Film “Bride” and
Tunisia from Ben Ammar’s Film “Aziza”:
A Comparison of the Two Countries’
Modernization Process.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ömer Lütfi Akad’s film *Bride* (Gelin/1973/Turkey) and Abdellatif Ben Ammar’s film *Aziza* (1980/Tunisia) take pictures of women immigrated to urban areas in years in which Turkey and Tunisia faced with important social changes. Thus, both films are important representations of social changes in modernization processes of the two countries and difficulties that women faced with.

When it is looked from aesthetics and art aspect, we can see that visual arts are very effective in modern societies. Actually, vision is thought as the key instrument of knowledge in modernity. “The age of modernity/Enlightenment was an age marked by a desire for total control and mastery of the body based on the notion of perfect visibility.”¹ Visibility in the Enlightenment ideology is regarded as the precondition of the possibility of true knowledge². Thus, we can find very important indicators about the countries and societies by using visual arts of them. Because of these, while looking at Turkey’s and Tunisia’s modernization processes, I attend to visual sources rather than classical methods. I choose two films (one from each) from Turkey and Tunisia produced in 1970-1980 period to examine situation of immigrated women from lower classes in modernization process. Even they are fiction stories, they devoted to social reality of their periods. Thus, we can make inferences about the modernization processes of the two countries by looking at these films.

In this respect, modernization processes of both countries will be examined generally at the first hand. Secondly a general framework of both countries’ cinemas will be

established. Finally, after giving brief summaries of selected films, they will be analyzed under the light of all these data.

2. A COMPARISON OF THE TWO COUNTRIES' MODERNIZATION PROCESSES

The word "modern" originates from the Latin word "modernus" which defined the separation from pagan Rome with the acceptance of Christianity. Today, the term "modern" is used to highlight the meaning of "new, being different from the past."³ Modernity is a process emerged from the idea of being modern. Today, it is argued that all societies will share same characteristics of the idea of universal character of modernity.

Theory of modernity is an ideology that refers to political differences. Theory of modernity also includes non-western countries. In that field terms such as "third world countries undeveloped countries, developing countries, or underdeveloped countries" are used. However, all these concepts are consequences of the modernity itself.

On the other hand, modernization is one of the most important aims and problems of non-western societies. "In the beginning, the confrontation of the Middle East with modernity forced Muslim countries to develop modernization projects...The notion behind nation-state projects was to combine traditional institutions with new, modern practices. Developments in family law, women's rights and the political arena were the main goals of these modernization projects."⁴

In this respect, we can look at modernization processes of Turkey and Tunisia by focusing on 1970-1980 period. The reasons of choosing 1970-1980 periods for the present study are the important social transformations, beginnings of second wave feminism, noteworthy developments in auteur cinema and social, political and cultural developments that led to changes in 1980s and 1990s in both countries.

When we look at modernization process in Turkey, we see that the status of women became an important concern for the new Turkish Republic after 1923. After the establishment of Turkish Republic, a rapid modernization process was started. With the recently established secular and democratic structure of the state, "the idea of modernity had brought the question of the status of women into the center of binary oppositions such as traditional and modern"⁵. Women became one of the most important elements of modernizing nation. Thus, the education of women, women's taking place in the public sphere, and women rights became important parts of modernization process.

We can see a similar situation in Tunisia. In Tunisia, after the independence in 1952, newly established state started to a rapid modernization project. Women's modernization became one of the most important elements and aims of the state. Actually, modernization and women has a relationship one within the other in Tunisia⁶.

When it is looked to feminism of this modernization process period, it is possible to call "state feminism," for both countries. State feminism "aimed to make women appear in the public sphere as modern daughters of the republic."⁷

In Turkey, "with the adoption of the Swiss civil code in 1926 polygamy became illegal, women gained the right to divorce, civil marriage became obligatory, and both sexes were considered equal matters of inheritance."⁸ Also women were taken right to vote in

1934. Although all these reforms encouraged women's taking place in the public sphere, they did not affect much the private sphere. "Turkish scholars such as Kandiyoti and Tekeli later criticized this aspect of the reforms during the liberal feminist movement."⁹ In Tunisia, Tunisian women perceived a change in their role after independence when the rights and freedoms were granted by the Code of Personal Status (CPS) in 1956.¹⁰ The CPS brought new regulations to lots of subjects related with women, such as procedure of marriage, divorce, rights of women in the marriage, care of children and household, custody and adoption, polygamy and inheritance.¹¹ Women were given equal rights with men such as in front of law, marriage and divorce, inheritance rights and education. Besides, polygamy was abolished and women were supported to take place in the public sphere.¹² Thus, a social transformation started.

By the mid-1960s, this social transformation accelerated and a psychological and cultural revolution had been set in motion. "Studies show that exposure to these agents of change was associated with increased willingness to re-examine traditional values and to adopt non-indigenous social codes, including ones pertaining to women."¹³ Educational and employment opportunities for women increased rapidly, women joined to public life with an increasing public acceptance and started to work together with men.¹⁴

But on the other hand, it is possible to say that modernization proceed has not spread to all parts of society both in Turkey and Tunisia. Lower class women cannot take advantages of modernization at first hand and suffer during the modernization process. This can be seen clearly among migrated women from rural to urban. Those women face with serious problems when they came to urban areas.

Because of the rural exodus, Turkey has for the past 25 years been scene of vast population movements. Although just a quarter of a century ago cities contained only a quarter of the population of this predominantly peasant society, today a high majority of the Turks reside in cities.¹⁵ But, Turkish family structure remains similar both in rural and urban contexes. A survey carried out at the national level in 1972 has established that family type is a function of relationship to property, a result corroborating observations made on the family in the last century.¹⁶ Today it seems that kinship and neighbourhood relationships continue to be a powerful force in urban families, whether they are newly arrived rural families or members of the middle classes.¹⁷ When it is looked to women's situation in migrated families, it is seen that the majority of the migrating women, who previously worked as unpaid family workers in agriculture, become housewives in the urban setting or engage in informal sector jobs.¹⁸ Besides, patriarchy is dominant in Turkish families. Turkish women have been, and in varying degrees still are, confined to the roles of daughter, wife, and mother. The traditional division of labour within married couples-husband as breadwinner, wife as homemaker- is enforced by traditional Islamic prescriptions concerning the behaviour of women and by beliefs about innate sex differences and children's needs.¹⁹

We can see similar situations in Tunisia. Women from lower classes live problems to take a good education, to be able to work outside the home, taking place in the public sphere. Besides, there is a patriarchal order in the society. Marriage is one of the most important institutions in the society. According to this, a woman can change her destiny with a good marriage. Moreover, traditional roles of a woman in the private sphere are almost a stable matter in the stages of women's modernization. Doing housework is the

main duty of a woman inside the house. Furthermore, kinship and neighborhood relations are still important elements of women's lives. When it is looked to women's situation in migrated families, similar to Turkey, it is seen that majority of the migrated women become housewives (as the character of the film "Aziza" which is selected for the present study) in the urban areas or work in informal sector.

All these things affect mostly women from lower classes in both countries. Films selected for this paper refers to these problems. Women characters of "Bride" and "Aziza" are migrated, lower class women living in families with a patriarchal order and housewives. Before analyzing these films, it would be relevant to make a general review of Turkish and Tunisian cinema.

3. CINEMATIC EXPRESSIONS

As we mentioned in the beginning, to understand the modernization processes, social changes and problems, and cultural debates, attending to visual arts like cinema is a good alternative to classical methods. Actually, both Tunisia's and Turkey's cinema structures were shaped by the modernization processes. When it is looked to beginnings of cinema in these countries, "on the one hand, cinema came as a sign of modernization, not only for the images of the West being projected onto the screen, but also for the conditions of its reception...On the other hand, cinema offered possibilities for the production of a 'national discourse'."²⁰

In Turkey, after the foundation of republic in 1923, Turkish cinema gained momentum. "Muhsin Ertuğrul represents the 'cinema' of the newly founded Republic."²¹ Films produced in these years are in effort to construct a national identity. Years following this period can be described as a transition phase. After this period, the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s is marked by a mode of production and film performance that is unique in the history of Turkish Cinema.²² This period can be titled as "Yeşilçam Sineması". Yeşilçam is a "melodram" genre cinema. It adopts a "classical narration" style. Narration is based on cause-effect relations with a chronological course in this type of films. Main genres in Yeşilçam are melodrama, comedy, historical action/adventure, detective/gangster movies and dramas.²³

In 1970s, since there was migration from Turkey to other countries and migration within Turkey from rural to urban, migration has been an important theme in Turkish cinema. Lütfi Akad's film "Gelin" which is selected for the present study is among these types of films.

After mid 1970s, because of political problems and chaos in the streets, and because of television, an economic crisis started. In order to survive in this economic crisis, a pornographic films period started until the military coup of 1980.

In 1980s, a new phase started. "The directors of post-1980 period were at pains to formulate their individual style of expression. The marketing campaigns conceived and introduced the director as an *auteur*. Lighting, colour, editing and camerawork gave films a European look different from the genre cinema of both Hollywood and Yeşilçam. Arguably one can observe the emergence of a New Turkish Cinema after the 1980s"²⁴ Women films were among this new Turkish cinema. With the effect of feminism spread

all over the world, 1980s became a period for Turkish films touching on women's problems such as emancipation, education, marriage, love, taking place in the public sphere etc.

When it comes to Tunisian cinema, it is possible to name it as well as all Arab cinema as "the Young Cinema" since the real beginnings of this young cinema start with the independence of Egypt and other Arab countries. Arab cinema and so Tunisian cinema have been affected modernization attempts and political developments since the beginning. But,

the Arabic cinema of the countries of the Maghrib -Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and to a lesser extent Mauritania- is the cinema most concerned with form and aesthetics, not merely out of formalistic concern, or because of its conscious awareness of European cinema and particularly the French new wave, but also because its quest for narrative codes capable of expressing a constantly shifting reality and an elusive and complex identity led it to sire a new language.²⁵

Tunisian cinema has a specific place in the Maghribi cinema, not only because of its beginning from cinema clubs, but also because of its approach heeding to women issue. There was amateur filmmaking in whole Maghrib during colonial period. But, professional film making could not find a fertile ground firstly because of the competition of European and then Egyptian films. Amateur film making continued during independence period in which a state controlled cinema sector was initiated. But amateur film making was strongest and most influential in Tunisia, where the *Association des Jeunes Cinéastes Tunisiens* (AJCT- Association of Young Tunisian Filmmakers) was set up in 1961 to promote amateur film and to provide a focus for the flourishing Tunisian amateur film-making movement.²⁶ The AJCT played an important role for the improvement of cinema in Tunisia. In 1968, it turned to *Fédération Tunisienne des Cinéastes Amateurs* (FTCA- Tunisian Federation of Amateur Filmmakers) and led to making of first feature films of various filmmakers in Tunisia.

Tunisian cinema can be better understood when main themes are examined. When it comes to main genres, it is seen that by the effect of domination of Egyptian cinema for years, and the effect of Arab culture, there is a noticeable weight of melodramas. Musicals and comedy follow them. But, difference and specific characteristics of Tunisian cinema do not depend on genres common in the whole Arab world. Its specificity depends on the point of view to the subjects within these genres.

As we mentioned above, Tunisian cinema has been affected by the modernization process and political developments. In this context, main themes of Tunisian cinema can be count as: national identity, independence, migration from rural to urban areas, tradition, modernity and gender. It is important here to mention that, when a general overview of all these themes are made, it is seen that in almost all films there is a touch, albeit to different degrees, to women question in the women's suffering, identity, modernization and emancipation manners.²⁷ It can be said that, gender issue and woman image are among the main characteristics of Tunisian cinema. That's the point that gives its specificity to Tunisian cinema within the whole Arab world.

Before analyzing selected films, it would be relevant to say that representations of women from lower classes shows that modernization has not spread to all society yet

and lower class women suffer during the modernization processes of Turkey and Tunisia.

4. "BRIDE" AND "AZIZA"

BRIDE (GELİN)

Director : Ömer Lütfi Akad
Scriptwriter : Ömer Lütfi Akad
Year and Country : 1973/ Turkey
Duration : 97'
Cast : Hülya Koçyiğit, Kerem Yılmaz, Kahraman Kırıl, Ali Şen, Aliye Rona, Kamuran Usluer, Nazan Adalı, Seden Kızıltunç

Ömer Lütfi Akad

He was born in 1916 in İstanbul. He shot films from mid-1940s to end of 1970s. He is one of the most important film directors of Turkey. In his first film "Vurun Kahpeye" (1949), he showed his different cinema language. He has a social realist cinema style. Lütfi Akad who has a cinema language beyond his period, draws portraits of women living under and fighting with social pressures and traditional rules in most of his films. Akad started to work on a trilogy in 1970s about migration from rural to urban. These films are Gelin (Bride), Düğün (The Wedding) and Diyet (Blood Money). Women characters of the three films were played by the same actress (Hülya Koçyiğit). In all films, immigrated women characters who live under social and traditional pressures were reflected in detail.

Summary of the Film

Meryem migrates to İstanbul with her husband Veli and their son Osman. They started to live with Veli's family in a neighbourhood of İstanbul. Meryem's father in law Hacı İlyas is a patriarchal family head who tries to protect feudal structure of the family. Hacı İlyas invests the family's all money to a little grocery in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood they live in is full of immigrated people from the different regions of country.

All family members start to work for the grocery. Grocery runs well in a short time. At that point Hacı İlyas takes an important decision to open a bigger market in a better and richer neighbourhood and borrows a great amount of money. This enterprise needs to a great effort of all family members who live in an environment full of ignorance, stubbornness and religious superstitions.

Meryem's son Osman gets sick. Hacı İlyas tries to cure the child with praying. But Meryem takes the child to a doctor with the help of a friend of her who works in a factory. She hides this event from the family. She learns at the hospital that Osman had a dangerous illness with his heart and he needed an operation. But Hacı İlyas needs money for the new market. Veli's brother's wife gives her jewels to spend for the market. Meryem does not want to give her jewels since she wants to sell them and use the money for Osman's operation. She tells that she had taken Osman to hospital and learned that he has a serious illness. Family members do not consider Osman's illness important and take Meryem's jewels.

Osman dies in the first morning of Kurban Bayramı (Muslim Festival of Sacrifices) as if he was a sacrifice. Meryem sets free the ram which was bought to be sacrificed in the festival and leaves the house. She finds a job in the factory as a worker with the help of her friend. Family members see this situation as an honour matter and decide to kill Meryem. They give a gun to Meryem's husband Veli and send him to kill Meryem. Veli waits for Meryem in front of the factory, but he does not kill her. He asks Meryem that was it possible finding a job in the factory for him. He understands the rightfulness of Meryem and decides to live with her.

AZIZA

Director : Abdellatif Ben Ammar
Scriptwriter : Abdellatif Ben Ammar
Year and Country : 1980/ Tunisia
Duration : 85 min.
Cast : Yasmin Khlat, Raouf Ben Amor, Dalila Rames,
Mohamed Zinet, Mouna Nouredine, Taoufik Jebali

Abdellatif Ben Ammar

Born in 1943 in Tunis. He studies cinema in IDHEC (Paris). He worked as reporter and cameraman for a while. Then he worked as assistant director in various films (George Cukor's film *Justine* in 1968, Roberto Rossellini's film *Le Messie* in 1974, Claude Chabrol's film *Les Magiciens* in 1975 etc.). Then he directed three feature length films which are among the best films of Tunisian cinema of the 1970-1980 period: *Une Simple Histoire* (1970), *Sejnane* (1974) and *Aziza*(1980). *Aziza* won the Golden Tanit at the Carthage Film Festival in 1980. Ammar specialized in documentaries and advertising films then and co-financed several future length films.

Summary of the Film

Aziza was raised by her uncle since her father had left their family when she was five, and her mother had married another man. She lives with her uncle and her cousin. She does not have a paid work; she stays at home and does all the housework. Her cousin Ali dreams of being a rich businessman one day. Her uncle is an old and sick man who sells candles at the bazaar. They move to a neighbourhood of Tunis (capital city of Tunisia) since Ali wants to open a restaurant there. While Ali tries to open the restaurant, uncle starts to go to bazaar to sell his candles. He has to go there by bus every day and *Aziza* helps him each day. Besides, she writes letters to Hedi, her boyfriend who goes to university. But their relationship seems hopeless, since they belong to different worlds. Moreover, Ali envies Hedi and depreciates him since he also loves *Aziza*.

One evening, Ali comes home and shows the car he bought to *Aziza* and uncle. Then he takes them for a car cruise. They meet with Ibrahim whose car broke down in the road. Ali helps him and they drive him to his hotel. Ibrahim, from Saudi Arabia, introduces himself as a rich businessman. *Aziza* finds new friends in the neighbourhood they moved in. One of them is Jamila, woman who lives at the next house. The other one is Aicha, who works as an actress in Tunisian television. Women living in the neighbourhood blame and exclude Aicha because of her job. According to them, being an actress is something needs to be blamed. Aicha helps uncle's get out off the bus one day. She and

Aziza meet then. Aziza and Aicha become good friends as time goes on. Aicha tells that she lost her father three years ago, and started working in TV in order to look after her little brother. Since she acts on TV, people living in the neighbourhood labelled her indecent and immoral.

Then, Uncle gets sick and was taken to the hospital. Officers tell that his son's signature on the documents is necessary for the medical treatment of him. Aziza waits for Ali in the house and they go to the hospital together. Ali refuses to sign the documents since he found the expenses too much. Thereupon, Aziza says that she would sign and pay. Ali gets angry, and stops her. He says he would sign the documents because he is his son. When they go home, they argue about that subject and Ali blames her for trying to embarrass him. Ali expels Aziza from home. Aziza goes to Aicha's house and starts living with her. Aicha helps Aziza to find a job. Aziza starts working in a factory. She starts a new life. But then, Aicha decides to go with Ibrahim. Even if she is not in love, there is no way out for her but this. Uncle dies. Aziza starts living alone. One night, Ali comes and apologizes. She lets him in. We can never find out whether she loves Ali or not. In the Ramadan, women of the neighbourhood wish good luck from the God as Aicha did. Only Aziza does not wish anything. She does not have any wishes, she would go to work, and survive.

Analysis

In Turkey and Tunisia, woman issue is one of the most important parts of the modernization process. It is possible to determine some aspects of "modernizing" woman. According to this, taking a good education, having a paid job and taking place in the public sphere can be stated as indicators of a modernized woman. But actually, these issues do not come out in a healthy way in all parts of the society. When we look at two films over these concepts (taking a good education, having a paid job and taking place in the public sphere), we see that female characters of the films live serious problems about these issues.

First of all, female characters of both films are uneducated, immigrated and lower class women who live under a patriarchal order. They both live in the private sphere (I mean "inside" the houses) and make housework and other traditional works of a woman like child caring or helping male members of the family. Secondly, in both films there is the representation of hopes of founding a new life in a big city. But it seems that, this "hope" is only for male members since it seems that there would not be any changes in the lives of woman. They continue doing whatever they do before they came to urban area, in other words to a more "modernized" area. Their only way to get out such a life becomes possible by working in a factory. But this also does not seem as a solution and/or emancipation for female characters. Because, they enter into a capitalist order and they work for long hours for little money.

Meryem, female character of "Bride", is an uneducated immigrant woman who lives in a family with a patriarchal order. When they come to İstanbul, they start to live in a neighborhood with her husband's family. In the family, male characters are dominant. As an uneducated woman who grew up in the private sphere, Meryem does all the traditional roles such as household chores and child caring. She even goes to hospital in secrecy from the family. In the beginning, she does not try to break this vicious circle. But, when

her son dies because of the ignorance and money ambition of the male members of the family, she rebels to this situation and leaves home. She starts working in a factory. Having a paid job is always seen as a major element of women's modernization. By having a paid work outside the house, women take place in the public sphere to some degree.²⁸ But, when she starts working in the factory, this seems as a move from feudal family structure to capitalist structure. Even if she earns her own money, this is not a real emancipation for Meryem.

"Aziza" also important scenes related with the subject. First of all, it is the portrait of a young woman who tries to stand on her feet. But as a woman who grew up far away from the outside, uneducated and living inside the home by doing all the housework, Aziza realizes her necessity to be independent when she remains alone in the life. Searching her identity and standing on her feet are seemed impossible for Aziza at the beginning. We see traditional roles of a woman in the film. Aziza does all household chores and serving her uncle and cousin. Her role in the society is becoming a housewife. When Ali expels her from the house, she needs to look after herself and finds a job with Aicha's help. Similar to Meryem character of "Bride", that is a starting point for Aziza for taking place in the public sphere as a worker girl who earns her own money and realizes that she needs anyone to survive. But, when she starts working in the factory, this seems as a move from feudal family structure to capitalist structure. As we can understand from the last scene of the film, there is no hope for Aziza actually. That's why she does not wish anything in Ramadan. She does not have any wishes, she would go to work, and survive.

5. CONCLUSION

When it is looked at problems in two countries' modernization processes, we see that modernization is not an easy process in non-western societies. They are educated, higher class and elite women who meet the advantages of modernization. They can take education, can take place in the public sphere, and have a paid job. But, modernization's reflections become different to uneducated, immigrant and lower class women. They suffer in this process. Most of them continue to their traditional roles in private sphere. When they find paid job outside the home, they enters to a capitalist system and have to work for long hours for little money. There is no real salvation for woman in both situations. In both films selected for the present study, we see portraits of such women. Even they are fiction stories, they devoted to social reality of their periods. Thus, we can make inferences about the modernization processes of the two countries by looking at these two films.

When it is looked at the subject from a cinematic angle, since visual arts are very effective in modern societies and vision is thought as the key instrument of knowledge in modernity, I tried to look at modernization processes of Turkey and Tunisia in terms of uneducated, immigrant and lower class women by analyzing two films (one from each) from these countries. Since I believe these two films represent these countries' social structures in detail, I think that making an analysis over cinema will be an alternative to classical methods.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 108
 - ² i.b.i.d: 116
 - ³ Gelgeç Gürpınar, 2006:1
 - ⁴ i.b.i.d: 5
 - ⁵ i.b.i.d: 41
 - ⁶ Coşkun, 2006
 - ⁷ Gelgeç Gürpınar, 2006: 43
 - ⁸ i.b.i.d: 44
 - ⁹ i.b.i.d: 46
 - ¹⁰ Coşkun, 2006
 - ¹¹ i.b.i.d: 43
 - ¹² i.b.i.d,2006
 - ¹³ Tessler, 1978: 145
 - ¹⁴ Coşkun, 2006: 48
 - ¹⁵ Vergin, 1985: 571
 - ¹⁶ Timur 1972 in Vergin, 1985: 571
 - ¹⁷ Dirks, 1969 in Vergin, 1985: 571
 - ¹⁸ Işık, 2007: 57
 - ¹⁹ Çulpan and Morzatto, 1982: 339
 - ²⁰ Erdoğan and Göktürk, 2001: 533
 - ²¹ i.b.i.d: 534
 - ²² i.b.i.d: 535
 - ²³ i.b.i.d: 537
 - ²⁴ i.b.i.d: 538
 - ²⁵ Hafez, 1995: 39
 - ²⁶ Armes, 2001: 420
 - ²⁷ i.b.i.d: 2001
 - ²⁸ Cindoğlu, 1991

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