

**Between Desire and Truth: The Narrative Resolution of  
Modern-Traditional Dichotomy in *Asmalı Konak***

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**Zeyneb Feyza Akınerdem**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Between Desire and Truth: The Narrative Resolution of Modern-Traditional Dichotomy in *Asmalı Konak***

**by Zeyneb Feyza Akınerdem, November 2005**

This thesis seeks to analyze a television serial *Asmalı Konak*, which has been aired in Turkey for two years and become the most popular television serial during this period. *Asmalı Konak* is worth examining as a cultural text, which raises crucial questions concerning the modern-traditional dichotomy in Turkey, which has been the uppermost conflict to be resolved to become properly modern in the nationalist imaginary of Turkey.

In order to answer the question why *Asmalı Konak* has been so popular, I follow an ethnographic approach. I first analyze the visual, generic and narrative qualities of the serial. The visual aspects are handled as the setting of the narrative. For the generic analysis, I compare the genres of soap opera and melodrama arguing that the genre has to do with the wider social context. Further, I make a narrative analysis arguing that *Asmalı Konak* is a story of change that is constructed through the narrative structure that involves conflict resolution processes.

After looking at how the text is encoded, I undertake a qualitative research to investigate how it is decoded. I conducted four focus group interviews with the middle class woman viewers of *Asmalı Konak*. How they decode the conflict resolution processes, and how they assess the characters within those processes are the questions I seek to answer in my analysis of the ethnographic data. I argue that there are two registers according to which the viewers comment on the narrative: register of truth and register of desire. In my analysis of the decoding process, I elaborate on how they construe the narrative according to these registers.

## KISA ÖZET

**Arzu ve Doğru Arasında: Asmalı Konak'ta Modern-Geleneksel İkiliğinin**

**Anlatısal Çözülmesi**

**Zeyneb Feyza Akınerdem**

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Bu tez Türkiye’de iki yıl süreyle yayınlanan ve bu süre içinde ülkenin en popüler dizisi haline gelen *Asmalı Konak* dizisini incelemektedir. *Asmalı Konak* Türkiye’de milliyetçi tahayyülün modern olabilmek için çözülmesi gereken en önemli çatışma olan modern-geleneksel ikiliğiyle ilgili önemli soruları gündeme getiren kültürel bir metin olarak incelenmeye değerdir.

*Asmalı Konak* ’ın neden bu kadar popüler olduğu sorusuna cevap verebilmek için etnografik bir yaklaşım benimsedim. Öncelikle dizinin görsel, türsel ve anlatısal özelliklerini inceledim. Görsel özellikler anlatının dekoru olarak ele alındı. Tür analizi için, türün daha genel toplumsal bağlamla ilgili olduğu iddiasıyla, pembe dizi ve melodram türlerini karşılaştırdım. Daha sonra, *Asmalı Konak* ’ın bir değişim hikayesi olduğu ve bu değişimin problem çözme süreçlerini içeren anlatısal yapı aracılığıyla kurulduğunu iddia ederek anlatı analizi yaptım.

Metnin nasıl kodlandığına baktıktan sonra, bu kodların nasıl çözüldüğünü incelemek için niteliksel araştırma gerçekleştirdim. *Asmalı Konak* izleyicisi orta sınıf kadınlarla dört odak grup mülakatı yaptım. Etnografik verileri analiz ederek izleyicilerin problem çözme süreçlerini görmeye ve bu süreçler içerisinde yer alan dizi karakterlerini nasıl değerlendirdikleri sorusuna cevap bulmaya çalıştım. İzleyicilerin anlatı üzerine iki çeşit yorum yapma biçimi olduğu kanaatindeyim. Kod çözümü sürecini analiz ederek izleyicilerin anlatıyı bu yorumlama biçimlerine göre nasıl anlamlandırdıklarını incelemeye çalıştım.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Turkish television industry experienced a television serial boom in the last decade, a short period after the privatization of the television channels in the 1990s (Öncü, 2001). The local as well as the imported serials were attracting the Turkish television viewers' attention. We can say that *Asmalı Konak* is distinguished among the other serials and became the most popular one with its interesting subplots, as well as its visual qualities, famous players and charming soundtrack. It was aired for two seasons in prime time, and during this period, it especially attracted woman viewers in front of the television screen. *Asmalı Konak* is also aired in Greece presently and is as popular as it became in Turkey.

I was also one of the viewers who were charmed by this serial. While I enjoyed it as a viewer, I, as a researcher also began to wonder why *Asmalı Konak* was so popular. Why were the viewers so charmed by this serial? What was distinctive in *Asmalı Konak* from other local and imported television serials? How could we relate it to the social context as a locally produced media text in the age of satellite technology? I tried to find an answer to the question in my mind and conduct an ethnographic study of the serial, paying attention both encoding and decoding processes.

I think *Asmalı Konak* is worth examining as a cultural text, since it raises crucial questions in terms of Turkey's postcolonial experience: questions related to the modern-traditional dichotomy. It is important to note that I desist from using the terms traditional and modern as objectively defined criteria for understanding human societies. I use them as ethnographical terms: i.e. as basic ingredients of the social imaginary in Turkey (Sirman, 2000). I use post-coloniality to refer to the experience

of modernity in countries where “social practices, especially those related to the position of women in society, are assessed and rendered meaningful only in relation to those in the developed West” (Sirman, 2004). Sirman refers to Hall’s definition of post-coloniality as a term that “should be used to cover global relations after a particular time, the time of globalization”. This is to say that, rather than a specific condition referring to the period after colonization, post-coloniality refers to the tragic conflict of becoming modern and protecting the essence of the nation at the same time (Chatterjee, 1993). I refer to this conflict as a tragic conflict, because the modern and the traditional are imagined as mutually exclusive, yet people have to merge them in their every decision in their daily lives, and hence make an impossible choice. This condition of being in the position of making an impossible choice can be seen as the definition of the tragic hero (Heilman, 1968).

What is distinctive in *Asmalı Konak* is that it narrativizes this conflict embodied in two lovers, and is dedicated to resolve it. That is why, I argue, *Asmalı Konak* attracted a great deal of attention.

To decipher how the modern-traditional dichotomy is encoded in *Asmalı Konak*, I look at the visual, the generic and the narrative qualities of *Asmalı Konak*. The visual aspects are handled as the setting of the narrative. Following Öncü’s (2005) classification of Eastern serials, I investigate how the setting in *Asmalı Konak* is constructed as the East, as an index of tradition, in contrast to the modern both through outdoor and indoor images.

In terms of genre, I compare the melodrama and soap opera genres. As a television fiction whose main theme is love, *Asmalı Konak* can be seen as a soap opera. However, the main distinctive feature of the soap opera genre is that it never

ends (Modleski, 1990). I argue that the most important narrative quality of *Asmalı Konak* is that it has an end, which is reached through gradually occurring conflicts.

Melodrama both as a literary and a television genre refers to those stories telling the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of the good over the evil (Heilman, 1968; Armbrust, 1996). Although *Asmalı Konak* does not narrate a struggle between good and evil, I argue that this struggle is transformed into the struggle of the traditional versus modern in the case of *Asmalı Konak*. Indeed, this is represented by various nationalist discourses as the uppermost conflict to be resolved in Turkey, a conflict which is central to the daily concerns of the people. That is why I come up with the idea that this specificity of *Asmalı Konak* as a melodrama has to do with the wider social context that can thus be defined as post-colonial. We cannot categorize *Asmalı Konak* with the soap operas produced in the Western contexts if, as Ien Ang (1985) soap operas serve to insert excessive emotion in the ordinary lives of ordinary people enjoying the fruits of the welfare state, that is, where modernity is not experienced as a tragic conflict to be resolved.

Further, in order to have a closer look at how this conflict between the traditional and the modern is encoded, I handle the text as a narrative. I take narrative as a theoretical path to analyze this media text, and focus on the narrative qualities of *Asmalı Konak*. As I watch the serial, I find that the narrative structure of *Asmalı Konak* consists of subplots including conflict situations and resolutions of those frequently-occurring conflicts, leading to a change in the normativity imagined within the narrative. I handle these subplots with Turner's concept of social drama, which refers to the "aharmonic phases of the ongoing social process" (Turner, p. 32). The gradually occurring conflict situations are resolved in ways that constitute a breach in the normative order. I argue that through these conflict-resolution



processes, the social (normative) order is questioned, and love as a natural phenomenon is pitted against the social. In this way the narrative poses the natural as an index of modernity against the social as an index of tradition, which I will also try to explain throughout my analysis of the encoding of the serial.

However, following Hall's (1980) semiotic approach to media research, I think that it is also necessary to look at the decoding process to come closer to understanding why and how *Asmalı Konak* attracted the viewers' attention. He describes communication as a set of practices:

The 'object of these practices is meanings and messages in the form of sign-vehicles of a specific kind organized, like any form of communication or language, through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of a discourse. The apparatuses, relations and practices of production thus issue, at a certain moment (the moment of 'production/circulation') in the form of symbolic vehicles constituted within the rules of 'language' (Hall, p. 166)

According to Hall, the media text is produced through a set of discursive practices, which constitute the 'encoding' process. Afterwards, the encoded text circulates discursively, namely is 'decoded' among a wide range of audiences. As he points out clearly, "the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical":

The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of 'source' and 'receiver' at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. (Hall, p. 169)

As Hall also points out, there may be various types of readings, and one may be hegemonic to others. Following his arguments, I pay attention to both encoding and decoding processes. The ethnographic research enables me to compare these two sides of the communication circuit.

Hence, I also pay attention to the decoding of the breaches, turning to the ethnographic data collected through focus group interviews conducted with women viewers of *Asmalı Konak*. As I analyze the decoding process, I try to understand how they talk about *Asmalı Konak*, as well as what they talk about it. I distinguish two different registers according to which the viewers comment on the narrative. The first is a register of truth, while the second is a register of desire. According to the first register, the viewers articulate their expectation of consistency with reality. I argue that as they make judgements such as the realistic/unrealistic nature of the narrative, the viewers construct a normativity which belongs to the regime of truth that they are subject to. I tried to understand what is constructed as normative through this quest for truth.

According to the register of desire, on the other hand, viewers adopt an individualistic point of view and assess the characters of the melodrama according to emotional states. As the viewers' articulate their desires, they focus on three characters – Seymen and Bahar as the main protagonists, and Sümbül as the viewers' favourite character. This time, desires are pitted against normativity, and they appreciate according to the second register what they criticized in terms of the first register. I look at these shifts in the viewers' viewpoints, as I analyze the decoding process.

The thesis is organized in three chapters. The discussion of genre is discussed in the first chapter, after a description of visual characteristics and the story of the serial. In the second chapter, I focus on the narrative qualities of *Asmalı Konak*, and look at how the viewers read this narrative according to the register of truth. Finally, in the third chapter, I investigate how the viewers articulate their desires, as they talk about the main characters of *Asmalı Konak*.

### **Methodology:**

To make a coherent analysis of a television serial, I depart from ethnographic studies of the media in post-colonial contexts (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Armbrust, 1996; Mankekar, 1999). In all of these studies, they pay attention to how the viewers relate themselves with the characters. In my analysis of *Asmalı Konak*, rather than looking at characters as ideal images the viewers identify themselves with, I prefer to make a narrative analysis. That is to say, I handle it as a narrative of change, and trace the conflict resolutions leading to a change in normativity. Narrative analysis, according to Ricoeur, is the analysis of the said as well as the mode in which it is said (Ricoeur, 1981). What the reader gets out of listening to (or, in this case, watching) a narrative is this said, that is the meaning. At this level of meaning, I argue that the plot *Asmalı Konak* consists of breaches and conflict resolutions. The characters, in their turn are also handled as the actors of these breaches and conflict resolution processes.

Further, to find out how the viewers comment on the narrative, and how they relate themselves with the characters of this narrative, I conducted focus group interviews. The participants of the four focus groups conducted were all women viewers of *Asmalı Konak*. I preferred to study with women, because of my observation that although *Asmalı Konak* is a prime time programme, which means that it is aired at the time all the family members are expected to be in front of the television, the majority of the viewers of *Asmalı Konak* were women. All of the participants were educated, and can be defined as middle-class women. The women's ages range from 22 to 60.

The first group interview was conducted with six women living in the same apartment, in Çamlıca, Istanbul. The second group consisted of six teachers working in the same school, in Üsküdar, Istanbul. The third focus group interview was

conducted in a Central Anatolian city, Konya, which is near the place *Asmalı Konak* is shot. Five women participated in the interview, living in the same (middle-class) neighbourhood. The last group interview was conducted in Istanbul, with a group of women who are an active group of parents whose children are educated in the same school, in Kadıköy, Istanbul. In addition, one of the participants in the group was a young university student. All of the women in the groups are married, except Helin, the university student in the fourth group.

Indeed, their enthusiasm for talking about this popular television serial facilitated the burden of ethnographic research. In all of the groups, the conversation started with pleasure, as soon as I asked the first question on their general opinions about the serial: ‘What do you think of the serial, what is it about?’. The discussions were unstructured, and went on to cover the subplots or the characters they mentioned in their first comments.

## **Chapter One**

### **Asmalı Konak: My Reading**

In my view, we begin with a narrative that already contains a beginning and an ending, which frame and hence enable us to interpret the present. It is not that we initially have a body of data, the facts, and we then must construct a story or a theory to account for them. Instead, to paraphrase Schafer (1980: 30), the narrative structures we construct are not secondary narratives about data but primary narratives that establish what is to count as data. New narratives yield new vocabulary, syntax, and meaning in our ethnographic accounts; they define what constitute the data of those accounts. (Edward M. Bruner, p. 143)

Bruner's (1986) argument on ethnography as narrative locates me in two interrelated subject positions, while studying a media text. First, I, as the viewer, watch and find pleasure in the serial. My desire to follow up the serial to learn what happens next belongs to my audience-subject-position. Second, I, as the researcher/ethnographer, extract a narrative from the whole text, which I count as data. This time, I am the subject of an academic discourse or discourses, which is also a contested terrain. My desire is to be successful in having a text which is academically worthy, that is, the primary narrative which will hail me to the discourse(s) of the academia. The relationship between the two subject positions is ironic: the latter is possible if the former is a fact and only if I am aware of that subject position I share with a great number of television viewers. On the other hand, this awareness is possible only if the latter subject position is a matter of fact. The two subject-positions bring about each other.

What I am trying to do in this chapter is to tell the narrative which I count as data. First, I will focus on the visual aspects of the text: the location as well as the material setting – clothing, decoration, housing, eating, etc. It is crucial to note that my analysis of *Asmalı Konak* mostly derives from the narrative, rather than visuality. I will handle visuality in this chapter as the setting of the melodrama. Second, I will tell the narrative, which is my reading of quite a long text, i.e. a melodrama that lasted 54 episodes and concluded with a film. Third, I focus on genre, since it is one of the peculiarities of the text which gives a frame to the narrative. I argue that these three aspects of a television serial make it a text worth examining in relation to the wider social context.

## 1. The Setting

It is sunset on the large empty lands and the men of the *konak* in their luxury cars are on their way back to the house. Meanwhile, women (maids) are in a hurry to prepare the dinner in the *konak*. The *konak's hanim* (lady) is on the balcony, waiting for her husband to arrive before the sunset, as he did for the last forty years. We are introduced to *Asmalı Konak* with these scenes, and impressed with the beautiful music which sounds authentic and the sunrises and sunsets marking the beginning and ending of day.

*Asmalı Konak* is located in Ürgüp which is a Central Anatolian town, known with its unique geography, a volcanic land decorated naturally with *peri bacaları*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The corrosion of the tuff structure of the valley by the waters of the floods and winds had formed strange and interesting formations named ‘*peribacasi*’. As the flood waters find their way through the steep slopes, the hard rocks cracked and break off. As the easily abrading material found at the lower parts of the valley was carved deeply the slope was moved backwards, therefore forming a hat like formation on the top and a conical shaped body part preserved without corroding. The *peribacaları* with hat like formations are mostly encountered at the vicinity of Ürgüp district and are with conical bodies carrying a block of rock at the top section. The body is a

The emptiness of the land is due to the fact that it is a state-protected area, as well as to the large agricultural fields. What is crucial is that the emptiness and uniqueness of the area chosen as the setting, along with other visual aspects, in order to mark the land and the people as eastern. This, according to Öncü (2005), makes *Asmalı Konak* to be classified as one of the so-called ‘Eastern serials’. I use the term ‘east’ as Öncü defines it: “a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved problem in that space, which continues to plague the health and well being of Turkish nation”. (Öncü, p. 1) The melodramas in Turkey, Öncü argues, attract the viewers’ attention because of the fact that, they are a *mise-én-scene* of this symbolic geography.

Traveling in the direction of ‘the East’, means moving backwards in time, towards a distant past fraught by ethnic cleansings and sectarian violence – which refuse to go away in the present. Its symbolic geography marks the ‘outside of the nation, at the margins. Yet it is such an “indelible part of the nation’s body” (to directly translate from Turkish) that it must be defended against all threats to tear it apart, “at any cost” –as recently demonstrated by the ravages of the fifteen year war of attrition between armed Kurdish dissidents and the Turkish military. (Öncü, p. 1)

In fact, the uppermost dichotomy the narrative of *Asmalı Konak* speaks for is the traditional vs. the modern. The traditional has three elements: it is in the East, it belongs to the past, and it is social. The modern is encoded by means of a contrast to this trilogy: it is global, it is new, and it is natural. The visuality, as well as the narrative is encoded through conflicts stemming from these dichotomies. The point is

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variety of rock composed of tuff, tuffite and volcanic ash; and the hat like formation is formed from hard rocks like lahar and ignimbrite. Namely, the rock type forming the hat like formation is more resistant than the rock type forming the body part. This is the first condition for the formation of a *peribacası*. According to the resistance of the rock at the hat like formation, the life span of the *peribacaları* varies between long or short periods” ( <http://goturkey.kultur.gov.tr/> )

that the narrative leads to the new, global and natural to overcome the past, the Eastern, and the social.

Hence, the setting in *Asmalı Konak* is constructed as the East, as an index of tradition, in contrast to the modern. What is the symbolic language (what are the metaphors) of Easternness in *Asmalı Konak*? We have already mentioned the sceneries of strangeness and emptiness of the land, which Öncü argues are features of Eastern serials:

While much of the action takes place indoors, viewers are constantly reminded of the ruggedness of the land, which lies beyond. The harshness, the bareness of the land itself is used both to remind the viewer that this is “the East”, and also to accentuate the intensity of emotions characters experience. When characters stare out the window towards the mountain ranges beyond for instance, or a car (sometimes convoys of cars) speeds along a highway, which stretches across a desolate, barren landscape, we know as viewers, that this is moment of high drama. (Öncü, p. 10)

The emotional structure of melodrama and the construction of the East as the locale of the narrative, thus work together in the images of empty land. The excessive emotions of despair, fear, doubt, anxiety, loneliness, nostalgia etc. are heightened by means of setting out an unknown and uncomfortable decor, which implies that we are spectators of the East. This is the case in *Asmalı Konak*, when Bahar, as a new-comer, stands on the balcony gazing at the small town and large empty land surrounding it; or when Sümbül stands on the same place with despair on her face, perhaps thinking about her past after she learnt that her husband had been cheating her for years; or when Seymen wants to scare/threaten Yaman taking him to the peak of a hill to show all the land (and the people) he owns. Seymen’s suicide also takes place in such a setting. He drives his car into a mine field in the Mardin



border, crossing the wire entanglement to an immense and unknown territory. He commits suicide on the margin of the East, when he is plunged into despair about his relationship with Bahar.

The locale of *Asmalı Konak* is constructed through these outdoor images. In addition, the construction of the location as the East is at work inside the *konak*<sup>2</sup>, as well. If we recall that the social implies the traditional, the organization of the *konak* illustrates how the social is organized by and for *Asmalı Konak* community.

The Karadağ family lives in an old manor house, known as *Asmalı Konak*, where most of the serial takes place. It is *asmalı* (vine), because the grape leaf jeweled on a pair of rings is the family symbol of the Karadağ family, perhaps because they engage in wine-making. All of the rooms in *Asmalı Konak* are decorated with handicrafts, hand-made carpets/rugs – carpet-weaving is an important craft, constituting a crucial part of the economy of the region. We have the feeling that the Karadağ family has been living in that house for generations – at least we know that Sümbül came to the *konak* as a bride.

We can argue that *konak* life is typical for Sirman's description of house society "wherein large houses provide the units ordering social relations, which she

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<sup>2</sup> *Konak* is a special type of housing which has a long history in Turkey. Basically, it is the residence of the extended family, as Ahmet Turhan Altınar and Cüneyt Budak describes in "Konak Kitabı". As described in the book: "Konak differs from the usual houses either with its extraordinary size, or with its owner's social situation, or special architectural characteristics and ornaments. It can be thought that the word *konak*, which is derived from the verb "to settle", symbolizes sedentary life and bourgeoisie. *Konak* was a real urban residence in which a great family with its children, grandmothers and grandfathers, sons-in-law and mothers-in-law and an army of servants living together. A *konak* with 10-20 rooms is counted as small, whereas one with 20-40 rooms is counted as big. Even *konaks* which are located in the intense urban mazes had large gardens, however in 19th century, *konaks* started to be located among row houses as well." (Altınar and Budak, p. 15 )

prefers to kinship-based society in which “kinship acts as a social code which defines social position as well as rights and obligations among members of the society”:

These houses constitute the basic authority structure within which everyday life can unfold in an orderly and predictable way. In both urban and rural Turkey, the house (*hane*) usually refers to people who live under one roof and make up a single unit of production and consumption. (Sirman, p. 4)

The organization of the *konak* indeed represents the relationship among the family members, which is a hierarchical and conflictual one; conflictual, because of the overlapping claims to power, or the ambiguous position of the new-comers.

There is a courtyard, and rooms are organized around it, typical of the image of *konak* in eastern serials, according to Öncü (2005). Public conversations take place either in the hall (*salon*), or in the courtyard (*avlu*). Members of the Karadağ family take their breakfast and dinner in these places. The courtyard is open to everyone. That is to say, it is the public space for the inhabitants of *Asmalı Konak*, including the servants/maids. The hall, on the other hand, has a much more privileged position: it belongs to the members of the Karadağ family. Most of the serious topics concerning the family are discussed there. The maids do not sit in the hall or participate in their conversation, and enter there only to serve the meal. The guests are also welcomed in the hall or in the courtyard. We can say that the hall and the courtyard are the public spaces, where certain rules of publicness operate for the people occupying that space. These rules belong to tradition (the social): rules of what to say/not say, to act properly as did all of the people who ever lived in *Asmalı Konak*. The ‘rules’ become visible as soon as they are broken, which we will turn to later.

The kitchen is, on the other hand, the servants' place, where they gossip, and mock/make fun of the events taking place in the public space. They eat there, prepare the food for the household, and constantly talk about them. Although they do not participate in the dinner, they all know what is going on in *Asmalı Konak*. It is crucial that the kitchen is liminal for the Karadağ family. The hierarchical relationship between the members of the household becomes invisible, when Zeynep comes to the kitchen, for example. The power positions of the members *vis á vis* others can be understood from this viewpoint. The more powerful one is, the less he/she enters the kitchen. We almost never see Seymen, or Seyhan in the kitchen for example – the men of the Karadağs. On the other hand, Bahar and Zeynep are regular visitors of the kitchen, while Sümbül rarely comes in.

There is a hierarchy among the servants, as well. This hierarchy is organized according to proximity to the Karadağs. Bekir, the butler (*kahya*) is the head of the maids, who has a closer relationship with Seymen. Seymen calls him Bekir *Kirve*, which we can define as a pseudo-kinship term, implying a kind of co-parenthood. According to Sirman (2004), this is also a way of organizing social relations within the house system: "Idioms of service to the house (keeper of the door, coffemaker etc.) are added on to the idiom of kinship to depict and organize relations both within and between houses" (Sirman, p. 4). The *Kirve*'s wife is also the closest maid to Sümbül, who sometimes can act as a friend to Sümbül. On the other hand, the boundaries of this proximity becomes visible, when the *Kirve*'s son and Seymen's sister fall in love and marry secretly, which will be discussed in the second chapter.

The bedrooms are the private spaces of the members, organized according to the familial hierarchy of the house. Seymen and Bahar own a flat in the *konak*, whereas Seyhan and Lale live in Seyhan's small room. Sümbül's bedroom opens to

the courtyard, very central to the *konak*. The butler/*kirve* and his family also have a small part, and the maids (Hayriye and Asya) share a room in the *konak*. Although *Asmalı Konak* burns down in the middle of the narrative, and they move to another one, which is also an old construction bigger than the previous one, the distribution of rooms is similar. The power hierarchy as well as the name of the Karadağ residence does not change after the fire.

It is crucial that Istanbul is also used as the setting of the serial. Indeed Istanbul is Bahar's original place, where she always wished to live with Seymen. Hence, Istanbul is the place for modernity/ where modernity comes from. Istanbul is modern, so that Zeynep and Salih go there for their university education. Bahar opens her first exhibition in Istanbul. Sümbül does not wear her scarf in Istanbul. The fantasy of moving to Istanbul is a crucial subplot of the narrative.

I agree with Öncü in her argument that the image of the *konak* as “the physical setting and organizing center of bristling tensions among extended family members” (Öncü, p. 11 ) is one of the ‘formulaic tropes’ in encoding the setting as the East. The notion of the extended family is a nostalgic critique of the modern family in Turkey, yet the nostalgia is possible from a modern viewpoint. That is, modernity is constructed by means of a nostalgic view of what is lost through modernization. Yet the modern in this text is the desirable one, and nostalgia is possible only if one constructs his/her place as modern.

Further, encoding the setting of *Asmalı Konak* as the East is an important element of constructing the tradition, and hence the best decoration for a narrative on the question of modernity. The narrative makes use of the tension between the traditional and the modern and focuses the viewer's attention very much to the nostalgia of ‘the good old days’. But it also includes the icons of modernist fantasies

of people living in Turkey: cell phones, luxury cars, home cinema (which Seymen buys to make the women of the *konak* happy) flights to Istanbul or New York when ever they wish, etc.; i.e. the fantasy of limitless richness, the inevitable condition of being modern in Turkey.

## 2. The Story

The story begins on the day when Mahmut Ağa, Seymen's father, is killed in a trap. It is the moment that the *ağa* title is inherited by Seymen, when his mother Sümbül gives the *asmalı yüzük* (a ring engraved with a grape, the family symbol of Karadağs) to him, with the words:

**Sümbül:** I hope you become as aspicious as your father to your country, to your homeland, to your house.<sup>3</sup>

Seymen, who is a young man educated in the USA becomes the head of the Karadağ family, and one of the most powerful figures of Ürgüp. Indeed, this means that he is placed into a network of power relations. His powerful situation will be questioned in his relations to Seyhan (brother), Sümbül (mother), Dilara and Zeynep (sisters), and Bahar (wife), as well as Hamzaoglu Ali, another *ağa* who has been in love with Sümbül for forty years.

He meets Bahar in the USA, two years after he gains the title of *ağa*. The central theme of the serial is Bahar and Seymen's love, which ends with a quick marriage at the very beginning of the narrative. This is unconventional for a love story. In a usual love story the couple's struggle to come together is narrated. However, *Asmalı Konak* starts at the point where those usual love stories finish.

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<sup>3</sup> **Sümbül:** Sen de baban gibi yurduna, toprağına, ocağına hayırlı bir insan olurun inşallah.

Hence, the overarching problem of this narrative is to carry on this relationship, despite all the problems they come up with in the course of their marriage.

Seymen, as the male hero, stands for the social in the narrative. I have pointed out that the traditional is represented as socially constructed, which means that the life in *Asmalı Konak* entails a set of social norms. This normativity reigns over the natural, in other words, the social roles ascribed to the inhabitants of *Asmalı Konak* stand above all natural desires. Within this context, Seymen, as the head of the household is dedicated to preserve this normative order. He is a handsome, educated, respectful *ağa* with whom Bahar suddenly falls in love. Besides, he assumes an omnipotence that makes him sometimes a violent man, so that he can rudely punish a young skater because he hit Bahar by accident. Hence, Seymen is portrayed as having excess heroic virtues at the beginning of the narrative. The narrative is dedicated to cure Seymen's excessive parts of masculinity in Bahar's hands.

After the wedding ceremony, Bahar starts to live with Seymen in *Asmalı Konak*, as '*gelin ağa*'. In contrast to the heroic virtues of Seymen, stemming from the social situation he is assigned to, which is an obligation, as he explains to Bahar, Bahar's heroism comes from her naturalness, which is depicted as a modern virtue (which refers to her western/modern roots). She is free from the bonds that limit the people she is living in relation to – Seymen and his family. The only bond in her life is her great love for Seymen. This is such a powerful and great love that it weakens all other obligations people carry towards each other in the traditional *konak* life, which is the only possible life style for the Karadağ family. That is to say, love has a destructive character in *Asmalı Konak*, creating a dangerous confrontation between the host and the new-comer, the traditional and the modern, the social and the

natural, etc. Hence, the narrative has to cope with this destructive character of love, in order to reach a happy ending.

The main theme of the serial is Bahar and Seymen's love, and the narrative is built upon the troubles they go through in their relationship. One of the main subplots of the narrative is Seymen's jealousy towards Yaman, who is Bahar's friend from Istanbul and later becomes Seymen's partner. Indeed Seymen is aware of Yaman's secret love for Bahar, which drives him mad towards the middle of the narrative. He uses violence towards Bahar, attempts to rape her, after Bahar leaves the *konak* because Seymen threatens Yaman. Afterwards he commits suicide on the Mardin border – the destructive phase of their love. Seymen's excessive masculinity is mostly narrated through jealousy.

Bahar also fall into trouble with the women around Seymen. First is Dicle, who is a very beautiful woman working in the *konak*. She is in fact one of the mysteries that Bahar decides to solve. *Konak* people both protect her on one hand and show hatred towards her on the other, calling her '*cadı*' (witch), and warn Bahar about not eating or drinking any thing Dicle offers. Dicle is mad about Seymen's marriage, since she hoped that Seymen will marry her, because of their illegitimate son, Rıza. Dicle is a rival for Bahar, trying to take the advantage of having Seymen's son. On the other hand, Bahar is so curious about Dicle, but does not know that Rıza is Seymen's son.

The second threat is an outsider: Ayşe Melek enters *Asmalı Konak* in the second season, as Yaman's cousin and consultant –indeed Yaman's female-counterpart. This is the period after Seymen's suicide: a period when both Seymen and Bahar question their love after such a destructive experience. Seymen is ignorant, that Bahar is pregnant. On the other hand, Ayşe Melek is a business-

woman, spending a great deal of time with Seymen in the business place – the new hotel Seymen and Yaman own. Indeed nobody in the *Konak* likes Ayşe Melek, since she is not only a rival to Bahar, but a serious threat to the well-being of the Karadağ family and the *Asmalı Konak* community. She is not accepted even as a friend to the Karadağs, while Yaman is at the end accepted and becomes Dilara's *fiancé*.

At the beginning of the serial, Dilara is also not very friendly to Bahar. She also thinks that her family does not respect her marriage, which ended with her husband's death. Indeed, she holds her own family responsible for the death of her husband.

In addition, Bahar witnesses another interesting scene in the first days of her marriage. A marriage gift is sent to the *konak*, from another *ağa* family, the Hamzaogulları. The hatred between the two families appears on the doubtful eyes as Bekir, the butler, opens the gift: it is a hand-crafted dagger. This is another mystery waiting for an explanation. Indeed the hostility between the Karadağs and Hamzaogulları has a history, beginning with Sümbül's preference of Mahmut Karadağ to Ali Hamzaoglu. Later on, Dilara and Hamzaoglu's brother Osman fall in love, and they get married

Bahar is a bare/simple transparent figure compared to the issues of mystery and intense hatreds. She is not carrying a network of family behind her that the Karadağs have to cope with. She is just watching with curiosity, sometimes with jealousy when it comes to Dicle, but always watching as an outsider. She is really an outsider but an accepted one, because she is 'the good' character of this story. Moreover, in the course of the narrative, she converts all those mysterious and hateful relations to relations of love, acceptance and tolerance. Hence, she represents the natural in contrast to the social.



The other love relationships are defined *vis à vis* theirs, and enhance the superiority of this love. Others emulate Bahar and Seymen, yet they always lack something with respect to their love. Sümbül and Ali cope with the shortcomings of their age: they are too old to live a passionate love. Indeed this problem is mainly Sümbül's, since she is not only old, but also a widow with children, and hence it is too late for her to run after her passion. On the other hand, Seyhan and Lale are always a step behind Bahar and Seymen, because they can not love as much as Bahar and Seymen. Seyhan is the little brother, who has always been the background. Their love best-illustrates the perfectness of the love of Bahar-Seymen.

There are two other loves which bring the question of whether love has a class. One is Hayriye and Memo, the maid and the driver of the *konak*. Memo is selected as the proper husband for Hayriye by other workers in *konak*, for practical reasons; their marriage is a kind of arranged one. On the other hand, Hayriye fantasizes a love relationship like Bahar and Seymen's. Her fantasies are screened with irony, as if she desires what belongs to the people of Bahar's class. When she acts like Bahar, or articulate her desires as Bahar does, it is a comical scene, not a romantic one, as it would be for Bahar.

Zeynep and Salih's love is much more problematic, which is a very crucial subplot of the narrative. Their love is cross-class, and impossible. Although all of the people in *Asmalı Konak* know that they love each other beginning from childhood, they all act as if there is not such a love, since it should not exist at all. Zeynep also gets confused when she meets Tamer Hamzaoglu, who she finds socio-economically compatible to herself.

The point is that all of these problematic relationships exist in the narrative, because Seymen and Bahar love each other. That is to say, their love enables the

others' to exist, and to be lived further. After they learn to love each other, they, indeed Bahar, brings a new perspective to the impossibilities stemming from the social positions of the lovers. Seymen is the one who must forbid these relationships, because of his obligations as *ağa*. Bahar, on the other hand, is the one who shows him that he can renounce these obligations, and that doing so will not lead to disorder but that things will run their natural course. She wants him to submit to love, as they both have done for their relationship, since this is the natural one. She thus reminds him of his own agency in upholding what he sees as duty.

Hence, I handle *Asmalı Konak* as a love story that narrates Bahar and Seymen's love, as it passes through difficult twists and turns. Difficulties stemming from the excessive parts of their love, their masculine and feminine virtues, etc. are again solved by submission to love: the ultimate moral of the serial is the superiority of love to other forms of relationship, hence the natural to the social.

*Asmalı Konak* concludes with the last difficulty Seymen and Bahar have to cope with. The threat to their love is now a natural one, unlike the previous difficulties. In the last episode of the serial, we learn that Bahar is ill: she has cancer, a threat which cannot be solved through Seymen's power-claims. Cancer makes all other social positions/ obligations/ power struggles meaningless, and hence the struggle with the illness is not an allegory of the tradition-modern dichotomy. Rather, it is the ultimate claim of the meaningless of social obligations.

### **3. The Issue of Genre**

It is difficult to attribute a genre to *Asmalı Konak*, since it both coincides with and contradicts the elements of several genres. As stated above, Öncü classifies it as an Eastern serial, due to both the narrative structure and visual qualities of the serial. The differences as well as similarities between *Asmalı Konak* and other Eastern serials are

worth examining in the Turkish context. It must also be handled through generic qualities of similar television serials investigated in various cultural contexts.

### 3.1 Soap Opera

*Asmalı Konak* is, above all, a television *serial*, not *series* “in which the individual episodes are completely separate from one another from a narrative viewpoint (only the hero(ine) of the series and the basic situation are the connecting elements between the individual episodes)” (Ang, p. 52). A television serial, in contrast, is a ‘continuous narrative’ in which each episode is connected to each other. The main characteristic of a tv serial is, as Ang (1985) points out that it “appeals to a historical sense of time: it constructs the feeling that the lives of the characters go on during our absence – i.e. between two episodes.” (Ang, p. 53) To encourage this feeling, a “cliffhanger” is used: “the narrative is broken off at a moment of a very great suspense, so that the viewers are encouraged to see the following episode if they want to know how the story goes on”. (Ang, p. 53) Ang argues that in *Dallas*, the cliffhanger is a psychological one, rather than an action whose result is unknown:

An episode ends most often at the moment when one of the characters lands in a new, psychologically conflictual situation. The last shot of an episode is then nearly always a close-up of the face of the character concerned, which emphasizes the psychological conflict she or he is in. In one of the following episodes – it does not necessarily need to be the very next one – we are then shown how she or he handles the conflict, but meanwhile time proceeds and life goes on as normal. The very next episode usually begins with a new day. Such a construction offers viewers the possibility of having the feeling that time in *Dallas* more or less keeps pace with the time in which the viewers themselves are living. This fact in itself takes care of a specific dimension of ‘everyday realism’ – the life of the Ewings in *Dallas* flows on just like our own life. (Ang, p. 53)

The historical sense of time constructed through a cliffhanger invests on the audiences' realistic view of the serial. In this sense, reference to realism is an inevitable quality of a television serial. Then, the psychological cliffhanger is a crucial element of emotional realism, which Ang uses against the empiricist realistic criticisms of television fictions, "in which a comparison of the realities 'in' and 'outside' a text is central" (Ang, p. 36). She is critical of the empiricist realist view of a media text on the grounds that:

This is to ignore the fact that everything that is processed in a text is the result of selection and adaptation: elements of the 'real world' function only as raw material for the production process of texts. The empiricist conception denies the fact that each text is a cultural product realized under specific ideological and social conditions of production. (Ang, p. 37)

In contrast to this, she brings forward the concept of emotional realism, through which "the concrete situations and complications are rather regarded as symbolic representations of more general living experiences: rows, intrigues, problems, happiness and misery" (p. 45). Hence, the text is recognizable in terms of the emotional states/reactions to various situations.

The issue of realism will be discussed later in detail. Her point is crucial for our discussion of genre, in terms of the centrality of emotions in the encoding of tv serials. In her discussion of Dallas as a soap opera, she examines the narrative qualities of the serial *vis-à-vis* the characteristics of the soap opera genre, yet stressing, at the same time, the visual superiority of the serial over other soap operas as a prime time program, and the encoding of emotionality specific to the melodrama as a cultural form.

Ang argues that the main characteristic of the soap opera genre is that everything appeals to personal life, even the issues related to the public sphere: "In

the world of the soap opera all sorts of events and situations from the public sphere occur only in so far as they lead to problems and complications in the private sphere” (Ang, p. 60). This point is meaningful when we think in relation to *Asmalı Konak*, where the main locale of the narrative is the *Konak*, the residence of the Karadağ family. The work place is also part of the narrative, the wine factory and the new hotel building, but we know about those places only as far as they are related to the private sphere. Yaman is an important character in the serial not as Seymen’s partner in business, but for his secret love for Bahar. Indeed, he comes to Ürgüp and becomes Seymen’s partner because of his love, to see Bahar frequently. Furthermore, Seymen threatens him with burning the new hotel where both Seymen and Yaman have invested a great deal of money because he is jealous of Yaman and Bahar’s close friendship.

If the private sphere is the main context for the soap opera, the topics related to the private sphere are encoded by repeating similar subplots within a(n) (potentially) infinite narrative (Ang, 1985; Geraghty, 1999). Ang defines soap opera as “a continuous coming and going of mini-narratives, in an uneven rhythm” (p. 57). There is no central issue to be handled within such a long narrative, but a large number of subplots, which are similar as well as leading to each other. Geraghty stresses the similarity of these mini-narratives, arguing that their coming and going serves to test out all of the possibilities that a person comes up with within daily life. Hence, she attributes a pedagogical role to the repetition of similar subplots, through which a female audience can find out the best way of coping with the burdens of daily life.

This lack of a single/central plot leads to another determining quality of the soap opera genre: the lack of a central hero. Modleski points out that:

Instead of giving us one 'powerful ideal ego ... who can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator can', soap operas present us with numerous limited egos, each in conflict with the others, and continually thwarted in its attempts to control events because of inadequate knowledge of other people's plans, motivations and schemes...(Modleski, p. 193)

Modleski's main point on the lack of a 'powerful ideal ego', together with the multiplicity of the subplots, is that soap operas portray a liberal view and the spectator, identified with an ideal mother, is 'the liberal par excellence', so that she can even forgive the villain:

identifying with each character in turn, is made to see 'the larger picture' and extend her sympathy to both the sinner and the victim. She is thus in a position to forgive all. As a rule, only those issues which can be tolerated and ultimately pardoned are introduced on soap operas. The list includes careers for women, abortions, premarital and extra-marital sex, alcoholism, divorce, mental and even physical cruelty. (p. 194)

Ang asks that if there is no main character in the soap opera, his/her role is carried out by a community, which has its own laws and logic:

In fact the unity of the soap opera is not created by all the individual characters together, but by the community in which they live. In that community (Dallas) they each occupy an established position. This community also appears to determine which possibilities of action are open to the various characters. Not a single one of the soap-community is an enclosed community, like a village, a street, a hospital. (Ang, p. 58)

Hence, the soap opera revolves around a number of similar subplots, belonging to the private sphere, with no central hero standing out among the problems/conflicts occurring in the course of the narrative. Hence the narrative never ends, as long as the television channel is able to screen the program. We are also familiar with

American soap operas like *Dallas*, *The Bold and the Beautiful* (Cesur ve Güzel), *The Young and the Restless* (Yalan Rüzgarı), and we cannot even remember how many years they lasted.

Despite the fact that the imported soap operas aroused great interest among television viewers in Turkey, the locally produced serials cannot be classified as soap opera. First of all, no matter what genre -whether sit-com, or melodrama- the serials in Turkey last three years at most.<sup>4</sup> If this period exceeds two-three years, the viewers get bored and complain of the unnecessary extension of the narrative. Hence, unlike the imported soap operas, Turkish serials reach a resolution. *Asmalı Konak* also has an ending, on which a great deal of speculation took place, and it was finally produced as a film, attracting millions of *Asmalı Konak* fans to the cinema.

Furthermore, we can argue that the lack of a central theme and central hero, in the soap opera genre, is indeed the founding characteristic of the Turkish serials, among which *Asmalı Konak* occupies an important place. As we have seen in the previous section, the story revolves around Seymen and Bahar, and all the subplots indeed invest to their love. This may be the case for soap operas, since the centrality of emotional experiences of individuals is a common feature of the genre. However, Seymen and Bahar's heroism comes from their central position in the lives of the other characters: they give a new way of thinking/reasoning to the old-fashioned 'rules' of the *Asmalı Konak* community, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. This difference between the soap operas which are produced in the West and consumed in the global context, and locally produced television serials (in Turkey) is

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<sup>4</sup> The serial *Bizimkiler* is different from others, in this respect, which has been aired for more than a decade as far as I remember.

crucial to a proper discussion of genre, since we are handling the television serials as cultural texts.

In this sense, it is useful to think *Asmalı Konak* in relation to other melodramas produced in other postcolonial contexts, about which we have an idea through the studies carried out by Abu-Lughod (2005), Rofel (1998) and Mankekar (1999). Below, I will investigate the term melodrama, which they all prefer to classify the television serials they are studying. Finally, I will contextualize *Asmalı Konak* among the locally produced serials in Turkey.

### **3.2. Melodrama**

We have already pointed out that, despite the similarities in narrative qualities of *Asmalı Konak* with soap operas, it has fundamental differences in narrative structure and visual qualities stemming from the context it is encoded in. I argue that these differences cannot be understood independently of the experience of modernity in Turkey. I think that it is necessary to grasp the differences between the soap opera and the melodrama that appears to be the most popular genre among television serials in post-colonial contexts.

Ang (1985), in her study on *Dallas* as a soap opera, juxtaposes the two genres that I am trying to distinguish. She pays special attention to the emotional effect of the narrative and argues that *Dallas* is, like many other American counterparts, a melodramatic soap opera. She uses the term melodrama to indicate “the name for cultural genres whose main effect is the stirring up of the emotions”:

Within the framework of a popular fiction form like soap opera, exaggerated events such as kidnappings, marital dramas and chance meetings with great consequences should not be regarded and assessed for their referential value, but as bearers of the melodramatic effect. (Ang, p. 64)



According to Ang's argument, the melodramatic effect is the ultimate aim in encoding the soap opera. The role of the melodramatic imagination for the western tastes is clear in Ang's argument:

There are no words for the ordinary pain of living of ordinary people in the modern welfare state, for the vague sense of loss, except in half-ironic, half-resigned phrases such as: 'You win some, you lose some.' By making that ordinariness something special and meaningful in the imagination that watching melodramatic soap operas like *Dallas* can be pleasurable: *Dallas* offers a starting point for the melodramatic imagination, nourishes it, makes it concrete. (Ang, p. 80)

Thus, she points out that the melodramatic imagination is the tool for inserting excessive emotion, to the people's lives enjoying the fruits of the modern welfare state. Doubtlessly, this is not the case for Turkey at all. The melodramatic imagination is not something belonging only to the realm of the entertainment industry in postcolonial contexts. The melodramatic emotions stand for an inner conflict about modernity: the anxiety of losing the values. Sirman (2000) remarks on the experience of modernity by saying, "For many of those post-colonial countries that created modernism through nationalism, modernity is itself a basic ingredient of the social imaginary" (p. 265). This is to say that, to be modern itself is a problem to be solved within the nation-formation process. I refer to this as the 'post-colonial tragedy', since it is an inner conflict that post-colonial societies experience, between creating the essence of the nation and being yourself on the one hand, and envying and striving for what is already achieved in the West (Chatterjee, 1993).

To find an answer to the question 'what makes *Asmalı Konak* a melodrama', we have to contextualize it in this tragedy experienced in every life in Turkey. In contrast to the untragic lives of the people enjoying the welfare state, where ordinary pain becomes something meaningful through the melodramatic imagination, post-

colonial societies strive for this state of living, devoid of tragedy and the melodramatic imagination. Inserting excessive emotion into *their* ordinary pains is indeed about this tragedy. The melodramatic imagination encourages this yearning, and this is perhaps what makes postcoloniality tragic. *Asmalı Konak* narrativizes the desires embedded in this tragedy, turns the tragedy of postcoloniality into everyday misery and concludes this narrative by presenting the nuclear family as the untragic mode of living.

Further, Abu-Lughod's argument on the differences between family dramas/melodramas in Egypt and American soap operas is helpful. Egyptian melodramas are the products of the state-sponsored modernist discourse which is hegemonic in the Egyptian television industry. As we learn from Abu-Lughod, Egyptian melodramas, like their Turkish counterparts (such as *Asmalı Konak*), are finite narratives of ordinary people, unlike the infinitely expandable soap operas. Apart from this structural difference between Egyptian and Western television productions, a much more important one which is crucial to our discussion is that melodramas in Egypt are much "more emotional and forthright in their moral lessons than contemporary Euro-American television dramas" (Ang, p. 113).

Then, it is preferable to call *Asmalı Konak* a melodrama, because it is a form specific to the modern imaginary, as Peter Brooks, inventor of the term "melodramatic imagination" remarks. Brooks (1976) points out that melodrama is a modern cultural form, "a mode of conception and expression, a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, [that] as a semantic field of force", (p. 14 ) came into existence in the nineteenth century. His main argument is that melodrama is the form of expressing the private: "the effort to make the "real" and the

“ordinary” and the “private life” interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture that lay bare the true stakes” (Brooks, p. 14).

The expression of emotions as a cultural form is indeed the declaration of the central position of the individual in the conception of life of the modern imaginary. Brooks remarks that the founding characteristic of the melodrama is the ‘polarization of good and evil’. What is crucial is that this polarization is a worldly and personalized one:

Melodramatic good and evil are highly personalized: they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized... Good and evil can be named as persons are named – and melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of moral universe. (Brooks, p. 16)

The representations of good and evil in melodrama are concrete individuals. That is, unlike the tragic hero who is divided as a consequence of a moral conflict stemming from the inside of the hero (Heilman, 1968), in melodrama, both the hero (the good) and the villain are not divided: they are perfect representatives of the two poles. The conflict is from outside, belonging to the mundane, to the ordinary, to the private life (Brooks, 1976). The moral is something which can be expressed, by dramatizing this polarization:

Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. It plays out the force of that anxiety with the apparent triumph of villainy, and dissipates it with the eventual victory of virtue. It demonstrates over and over that the signs of ethical forces can be discovered and can be made legible. (Brooks, p. 20)

Hence, the adjective ‘melodramatic’ makes its referent somehow related to modernity, by means of the possibility of expressing/making explicit what was forbidden before (tradition). According to Brooks, this expression is “a central fact of modern sensibility” (Brooks, p. 20). The expression is enacted through the most visible confrontation of good and evil, and the ultimate victory of the virtue over the villain. Indeed the struggle of the good and evil is the tool of formulating what ‘modern virtue’ is.

Armbrust’s study of an Egyptian melodrama handles this struggle in a similar way. Armbrust focuses on the plot and characters of the tv serial “The White Flag” aired in Egypt. The plot is basically built on an idea of struggle between good and evil: “On a more concrete level, it is about an Egyptian struggle to preserve local identity but, as the anonymous tanks, planes, and bulldozer suggests, it is also a battle for civilization itself.” (Armbrust, 1996).

The sharp opposition of good and evil, at first glance, appears typical of melodrama, a genre usually assumed to be antithetical to a “realist” perspective. But events and characters in reality and drama alike may actually be marked by sharp differentiation, exactly as melodrama suggests. Cairo is, after all, a city in which twenty-five LE 250,000 cars pass by multitudes of LE 100per-month workers in the three minutes it takes a man to cross a bridge. Not to address such a remarkable disparity would perhaps be more unreal than making it a basic condition for the narrative. In any case, “White Flag” does not really resolve its oppositions, as one might expect in melodrama. The opposing sides may be clearly marked, but the relations between them are ambiguous, as are many things in Modern Egypt. (Armbrust, p. 16)

I think in such serials, no matter how sharply the distinction between good and evil is encoded, it is never decoded as such. The villain is never an absolute villain,

since his/her villainess is also very plausible and stems from the very core of daily life. We have seen a similar plot in *Zerda*, where the villain Mahmut Ağa gradually became a character we like, especially after the hero's death. He was not an absolute bad man. Armbrust also refers to this ambiguity between the relationships of the characters representing two poles. The villainess, Fadda, was appreciated with her colorful and plausible image, in contrast to Dr. Mufid's 'too good to be real' character.

'Authenticity' seems to be the central term around which all the discussions of modernity in Egypt turn, and the serial well-illustrates those discussions. How to preserve/construct authenticity in order to make modernity acceptable? "The "modern man" is understood by the audience to be educated, Westernized, and yet imbued with *asala* (authenticity) –all elements of an ideal personality spelled out in terms familiar to the viewer" (p. 22). This ideal person is Dr. Mufid. However, he is also not totally accepted by the audience. He is not very plausible/recognizable.

Brooks shows that melodrama is a form of representation in modernity, both as a literary genre and in more general terms as a new 'semantic field'. This is the primary reason why I prefer to call *Asmalı Konak*, as well as other serials similar to *Asmalı Konak*, melodrama. However, the plot of *Asmalı Konak*, as I have told in the story section, is not mainly constructed on the struggle of the hero and the villain/the good and the evil, which is a necessary condition of the melodrama. I call *Asmalı Konak* a heroic melodrama, since there are two central heroes of the narrative: Seymen and Bahar. Nevertheless, their heroism does not stem from their struggle against threats coming from outside. Neither is their struggle against each other. The main tension which sustains the narrative is their struggle to cope with modernity, represented by their love.

Love in *Asmalı Konak* is depicted as an index of modernity which comes to *Asmalı Konak* through Bahar. The melodrama is at work in the expression of love, after Bahar and Seymen open the terrain in which love is explicable. However, it is not an easy task to open this terrain. The struggle of good and evil is enacted in the dilemma of the order of tradition vs. modernism, though none of them is represented as villain. That is to say, *Asmalı Konak* as a melodrama narrates the struggle between tradition and modernity, yet none of them are constructed as essentially bad. In this sense, *Asmalı Konak* narrates an everlasting struggle between these two eternal rivals, who have to live together, in the name of two lovers. The other struggling figures of the serial – Seymen-Yaman, Bahar-Dicle-Ayşe Melek, Seymen-Ali Hamzaoglu... - are all subplots of the same dichotomy, yet none of the parties exactly stand for a stable position in this dichotomy. In this sense, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity is not an embodiment of the melodramatic struggle between good and evil, but much more resembles a tragic conflict between social [imperatives] and [natural] impulses (Heilman, 1981) The amplitude of this conflict is diminished in every episode of the serial until it becomes a non-conflict.

The two sides of this conflict are represented by Bahar and Seymen. Bahar stands for the modern, whereas Seymen is ascribed as the leader of the tribal order (tradition). They first have to solve the problem of passionate love, which dragged them to the edge of disasters. Afterwards, Seymen's role as the tribal leader is questioned. The serial ends when Bahar, Seymen and all other inhabitants of the *konak* finally move to Istanbul.

## Chapter Two

### Breach and Resolution in *Asmalı Konak*

#### 1. What is a Conclusion to a Narrative?

The experience of following a serial is, above all to wait for the conclusion with a continuous enthusiasm and curiosity. People actually watch television serials to learn ‘what happened’. To encourage this curiosity, there are conclusions to the events which occur in every episode, as well as an ultimate ending which is always postponed. “The story’s conclusion is the pole of attraction of the entire development,” Ricoeur (1981, p. 170) suggests. Thus, the pleasure of following a serial persists as long as the conclusion is delayed with a number of obstacles, problems and conflicts occurring in each episode.

Taking film and novel as ‘public forms of fantasy’, Elizabeth Cowie (1997) points out that “The fantasy depends not on particular objects, but on their setting out; and the pleasure of fantasy lies in the setting out, not in the having of the objects.”(p 133):

Within the day-dream and more especially in fictional stories, the demands of narrative may obscure this, for the typical ending will be a resolution of the problems, the wars, feuds, etc., the achievement of union in marriage of the hero and heroine, etc. Yet inevitably the story will fall prey to diverse diversions, delays, obstacles and other means to postponing the ending. For though we all want the couple to be united, and the obstacles heroically overcome, we don’t want the story to end... Fantasy, as a *mise-én-scene* of desire is more a setting out of lack, of what is absent, than a presentation of a having, a being present. (p 133)

We have already mentioned that the studies on soap operas point to the infinite delay of resolution as a crucial determinant of the genre (Modleski, 1990; Ang, 1985;

Geraghty, 1999). The plot of the soap opera is built on enhancing the expectation of a conclusion, yet never satisfies this expectation, and succeeds in attracting the continuous attention of the viewer. In this sense, the soap opera is a good example of a 'public form of fantasy'.

Modleski (1990) argues that keeping the expectation alive, yet never reaching a conclusion serves the ultimate aim of the soap opera's encoding process: there is no perfection to be reached, yet the viewer inevitably desires it. The woman audience who expects the resolution is identified with the ideal mother, 'who possesses greater wisdom than all her children, whose sympathy is large enough to encompass the conflicting claims of her family (she identifies with them all), and who has no demands or claims of her own (she identifies with no one character exclusively).'" (Modleski, p. 193) She always strives for familial harmony, but always comes face to face with the fact that this is impossible, that every solution gives way to another tension. The desire is hidden in this persistent waiting for the fulfillment of the expectation; however the desire persists as long as the expectation is not fulfilled.

According to Roland Barthes, the hermeneutic code, which propounds the enigmas, functions by making 'expectation... the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation. This design implies a return to order, for expectation is a disorder.' But, of course, soap operas do not end. Consequently, truth for women is seen to lie not 'at the end of expectation', but in expectation, not in the 'return to order', but in (familial) disorder... (Modleski, p. 191)

I argued that *Asmalı Konak* is a melodrama, and as such, it has a resolution. Indeed, the narrative worth of *Asmalı Konak* derives from the conflict situations that occur in each episode, leading to as well as delaying the ultimate ending. It is true that the pleasure is in waiting for the solution to those conflict situations. However, I



think the audiences of the melodrama waits for the conclusion so as to decide to either accept or deny it according to the 'regime of truth' they are subjects of/subjected to.

The pleasure of waiting for a resolution is refreshed in every conflict situation in *Asmalı Konak*. What is distinctive in this narrative is that every conflict situation ends up with an unexpected solution. The pleasure is not in watching the conflicts following one another, but in the unexpected solution to the conflict, which causes a shift in the normative order of the narrative. That is, the narrative sets out a normative order, and a conflict occurs within that normative order, which is resolved in an unconventional way.

This kind of conflict can be described with the term breach, which refers basically to the violation of the norm. The truth belongs to the realm of the structure, which is canonical, and authoritative:

The perpetual constitution and reconstitution of the past provides the forms of canonicity that permit us to recognize when a breach has occurred and how it might be interpreted. (Bruner, p. 20)

In Bruner's (1991) terms, the violation of the norm is a breach, which indeed makes a narrative worth-telling. Breach is a phase in the social dramas, which Turner (1975) uses to refer to "public episodes of tensional irruption" (Turner, p. 33). He rejects the idea of linear development or cyclical conception of cultural systems, and uses a cultural form, a literary term, drama, as the 'metaphor and model' to understand change in human societies. By doing this, he emphasizes the difference between natural and cultural systems:

With my conviction as to the dynamic character of social relations I saw movement as much as structure, persistence as much as change, indeed, persistence as a striking aspect of change. I saw people interacting, and, as day succeeded day, the

consequences of their interactions. I then began to perceive a form in the process of social time. This form was essentially dramatic. My metaphor and model here was a human aesthetic form, a product of culture not of nature. A cultural form was the model for a social scientific concept. (Turner, p. 32)

According to Turner, there are three phases of social dramas: The first is breach, which is defined as “deliberate nonfulfillment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties”. (Turner, p. 38) The second phase is crisis, the liminal phase following the breach, and indeed a phase during which the breach extends. After the crisis, a redressive action takes place, to limit the extension of the breach. The final phase is either reintegration or division of the conflicting parties.

Social dramas took place in what Kurt Lewin might have called “aharmonic” phases of the ongoing social process. When the interests and attitudes of groups and individuals stood in obvious opposition, social dramas did seem to me to constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process. Not every social drama reached a clear resolution, but enough did do to make it possible to state what then called the “processional form” of the drama. (Turner, p. 33)

This view does not deny the harmonic, regular, atemporal structure. Rather, Turner uses structure as a tool, through which changes, divergences and conflicts become visible, and vice versa. If breaches are non-fulfilment of norms, it is the conflict itself that makes both the norm and the breach obvious.

Turner’s concept of social drama enables us to handle the conflictual phases of cultural systems in a narrative form, to which a conflict and a subsequent resolution to that conflict is essential. Furthermore, I will use his conception to analyse a narrative, a melodrama which I take as a cultural text, turning the concept ‘drama’ to the place Turner picks it up from. The conflictual situations, the breaches within the narrative perpetuating the viewer’s attention will be the object of my analysis. I first

try to identify the breaches encoded in the narrative. What norms are violated, and who carries out the resolution are questions I seek to answer. However, the definition of the breach has to be revised after ethnographic research. For the purposes of ethnography, the breaches of the text appear at the points where the audience finds a gap between the real and what is narrated. Where do the audiences feel unsatisfied? When/where do they find the narrative worth telling? I examine these questions below.

## **2. Breach in *Asmalı Konak***

We have noticed that *Asmalı Konak* is a heroic melodrama, in which the hero and the heroine's love is the central theme. The narrative is basically their involvement in the conflict-resolution processes. According to the logic of the melodramatic genre, the one who solves the conflict is the hero of that narrative. The themes worked out through the narrative ends up either with a catastrophic event, or the hero's unexpected decision that cause a major turn in the normative order. The term 'breach' refers to those processes which create fundamental changes in what is portrayed as the *status quo*. It enables me to analyze the events/major turns that cause the change in the norms, and to identify the hero within the narrative.

The focus of conflicts revolves around the issue of love. *Asmalı Konak* is a love story, but not a usual one, as I stated before. Bahar and Seymen's love is narrated from the time they were married. From that time on, they come across several problems that have to be resolved. The narrative also problematizes other various combinations of love: cross-class love, love of the old, insufficient love, etc. The primordial love is certainly Bahar and Seymen's love, with reference to which the others are also discussed.

There are three main issues to be handled with reference to love. First is the problem of passionate love, enacted in Seymen and Bahar's relationship, which creates an imbalanced relationship between two people, and hence has to be tamed. The first season of the serial is dedicated mainly to this problem. It is crucial that the problem of passionate love is not a novelty in the literature of love stories in Turkey, but an old conflict to be resolved in the making up of the new nation. Sirman, in her study on Halide Edip's novels written during the establishment of Republican Turkey, traces the narrative construction of women as 'national and conjugal subjects' in love stories. She argues that the problem of passionate love, which is resolved by appealing to God in traditional love tales, is questioned again in the modern period. The authority of the old rule is replaced by modern sensibilities, and the women of modern Turkey are constructed as emotional subjects who willingly give up their personal desires (passionate love) by appealing to notions of the companionate family, and further to the well-being of nation. The meaning of love is figured with two mutually exclusive Turkish words:

There are two words for love in Turkish: *aşk*, passionate love and *sevgi*, the deep attachment between intimate persons such as friends, parents and also between the individual and the nation, citizen and state and among citizens themselves that creates the fraternity described by Anderson in his analysis of nationalism (1983)... According to Halide Edip's version, *aşk*, when transformed into *sevgi*, has the power to curb both femininity and masculinity to create the subjects of companionate marriage. (Sirman, p. 263)

So, the feminine and masculine sides have to be curbed, to reach the true companionate family, which brings about the issue of gender within the love relationship. Seymen and Bahar are constructed as the subjects of love, trying to reach an equilibrium, passing through difficult phases of love. Bahar prioritizes

passionate love (*aşk*) while Seymen has to both respond to this and act as the head of a large and powerful house.

The second important conflict of love within the narrative is Ali and Sümbül's love, which became an important subplot in the focus group conversations where it was mentioned not less than Seymen and Bahar. In Sümbül and Ali's case, their love is a problem because of their age whereas in Seymen and Bahar's relationship the problem occurs because it does not turn into reasonable love (*sevgi*).

The third conflict brings the issue of honour into question, which makes the boundaries of love visible. Honour is one of the most problematic issues in the experience of modernity in Turkey. Sirman points out different viewpoints to honor crimes which are in struggle in post-colonial contexts:

Those who live according to the code of honour see such violence as necessary for the protection of virginity and of gendered values, while those who try to struggle against them define these crimes and the value system they are related to as ways of controlling women and their bodies. The politically hegemonic groups in these societies, in their turn, see these crimes as remnants of a traditional order that will be eradicated through education and modernization. (Sirman, p. 39)

Resolving the problem of honour killings is a crucial as well as a contested issue of the hegemonic discourse of modernization in Turkey. Hence, honour conflicts constitute a significant subplot of *Asmalı Konak*, an issue which also took place in the media discussions in the period it was aired.

I will elaborate how the serial resolved these conflicts in the discussion below.

## **2.1 The Problem of Passionate Love**

Seymen and Bahar's love is the initiator of a social drama, an aharmonic phase in the narrative, because of Bahar's entrance to *Asmalı Konak* as an outsider and as a

lover. Bahar is a new-comer in Seymen's life, that is to say, she is not a part of the harmonic structure within which the Karadağs live. Moreover she brings a new form of relationship to them: love is the only bond that brings Bahar and Seymen together, which can undermine other relationships.

The pathology of their love is narrated around Seymen's jealousy, and the subplot is Bahar's engagement in painting. They are doubtlessly in love, and very happy to be married. Besides, Seymen is a considerate ağa, granting Bahar her wish to paint. However, he is also a tough/jealous man, an 'excessively Eastern man' (his masculinity is defined by means of his Easternness), so that he claims to control the boundaries of Bahar's desire to paint, as well as anything related to Bahar. The problem is that, Bahar does not want to stay within those boundaries. In contrast to Seymen, she is 'excessively natural', that is, she is depicted as outside those power relations of which Seymen is the center. She can talk about anything everywhere regardless of a sense of social hierarchy, living her love in public<sup>5</sup> (*Asmalı Konak*), and painting with no sense of time, place or social hierarchy.

She is unaware of the power struggle between Seymen and Yaman, which turns around her desire to paint. Yaman challenges Seymen, by presenting Bahar painting equipments. On the other hand, Seymen is aware of this challenge, and threatens Yaman with burning the hotel in which they both invested lots of money. As soon as Bahar becomes aware of this struggle, we encounter the most violent scene of their love. She leaves Seymen and returns to Istanbul. Seymen finds her in her friend's house in Istanbul, and their quarrels turns into a violent fight, and Seymen attempts to rape Bahar.

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<sup>5</sup> *Asmalı Konak* is a typical example of the house as the residence of extended family, which contains both public and private spaces for the Karadağ household. For detailed explanation, see chapter 1.

Seymen's aggression/rape towards Bahar is the most apparent declaration of the harmful face of passionate love, which ends up with Seymen's suicide in the Mardin frontier. Bahar is also almost going mad in the hospital, trying to recover from her injuries. It is crucial to point out here that the catastrophic events highlight the need for a change in the meaning of love. That is to say, both Seymen's attempted suicide and Bahar's suffering in the hospital are allegorical and explicate the truth of love. Sümbül and Bahar discuss the outcome of these catastrophic events, questioning Seymen and Bahar's love experience:

**Sümbül:** One is not able to dispose of love, when young, isn't it? It's so sweet that one wants to swallow it at once. You love each other so much, I know that. You tire each other as well. But one might live love calmly, might not ill-treat or not squander it.

**Bahar:** How is love lived calmly mother, is it possible?

**Sümbül:** If you hold a very precious glass in your hand, do you rush roughly? If you drop it, doesn't it smash to smithereens? Is it possible to glue and fix it anymore? You will protect your love as if you're protecting a valuable glass in your hand.

**Bahar:** I wish I have never come into his life. I damage him. All these things were because of me. If he didn't get confused, he wouldn't have had the accident.

Seymen smashed to smithereens.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>**Sümbül:** Gençken insan aşkını idareli kullanmayı bir türlü beceremiyor değil mi? Öyle tatlı ki, bir seferde bütün bir pastayı mideye indirmek istiyor. Siz birbirinizi çok seviyorsunuz biliyorum. Birbirinizi çok da yoruyorsunuz. Ama aşkı sakın yaşamak, hırpalamamak, oradan oraya saçıp dökmek lazım.

**Bahar:** Aşk nasıl sakın yaşanır anneciğim, bu mümkün mü?

**Sümbül:** Elinde çok kıymetli bir sırça kadeh tutsan onunla hoyratça koşturur musun? Bir düşürürsen tuzla buz olmaz mı? Bir daha yapıştırılıp tamir olur mu? Aşkı da öyle elindeki sırça kadehi korur gibi koruyacaksın.

**Bahar:** Keşke onun hayatına hiç girmeseydim. Ona zarar veriyorum. Bütün bunlar benim yüzümden başına geldi. Akli bu kadar karışık olmasaydı kaza filan da yapmazdı. Tuzla buz oldu işte Seymen.

Seymen's suicide constitutes a breach, through a catastrophic event, with the potential to turn a crazy love into a calm relationship. Bahar returns to *Asmalı Konak*, and after a period of estrangement, the redressive action takes place. Seymen shows his devotion and his resolve to start where they were broke off, by means of a gift: a painting room in *Asmalı Konak* for Bahar. Hence, he shows that he is the only man who can grant her wish to engage in painting, besides showing Bahar that he loves her so much that he accepts her wishes, of course, within the boundaries of his control. Hence, the first conflict of passionate love the one who carries out the resolution process is Seymen, in. There will surely be other problems, crises during the second season, but we are sure that they are committed to each other, and are accepted by other members of the Karadağ family. Bahar's pregnancy is metaphoric in this sense, preceding the transformation of Seymen and Bahar's transformation into a family.

**Sümbül:** This baby will make us forget all the troubles.<sup>7</sup>

The crisis constituting a threshold in their relationship is revived in several other subplots, especially after Ayşe Melek enters the serial as Yaman's cousin and Seymen and Yaman's consultant. Jealousy is now at work on Bahar's side, too. Indeed Ayşe Melek brings a kind of equilibrium to Seymen and Bahar's struggle to 'normalize' their love relationship. Rather than giving harm to Bahar or himself, Seymen is now enacting his jealousy by making Bahar jealous with Ayşe Melek.

Bahar's other rival from the very beginning is Dicle, who creates the second serious crisis in their relationship. Dicle is one of the maids raised in *Asmalı Konak*. She seems to be in love with Seymen. Ayşe Melek is a threat from outside, whereas

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<sup>7</sup> **Sümbül:** Bu bebek bütün dertlerimizi unutturacak.



Dicle is an insider, who has a mysterious authority among the konak people. The mystery is that Seymen is the father of Rıza, Dicle's son. Everybody, including the viewers knows this, except Bahar. However, Bahar, from the first day of her marriage, is curious about Dicle's special position in the Konak. Towards the end of the serial, Dicle tells her the truth just before going to hospital for a surgical operation. Dicle not only tells her that Rıza is Seymen's son, but hails her into the order of extended family (polygamy), entrusting Rıza to her before going to the hospital, reminding Bahar that she is also a mother of Rıza. Bahar is extremely angry with Seymen, since this violated a set of norms in Bahar's world: he has an illegal son from a maid and he does not act as his father; and more importantly, he is dishonest to Bahar. Hence, the norm which is breached belongs to Bahar's world, to the code of love.

Bahar leaves Seymen again, but does not go very far. She goes to Piraye's hotel, and they have another tough quarrel there. The resolution comes with another critique of the destructive character of their love: Gül, Bahar's sister criticizes her for being so aggressive towards Seymen that he had to lie her, she provokes those lies by her extreme reactions:

**Gül:** I told you what I think. Okay, it is not nice that the man lied you, but how can one behave towards some maniac like you? Look at yourself. Can one talk to you in a mature manner? Don't forget that unless you control your behavior, he will lie to you for life... You are creating those lies – with your behavior.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **Gül:** Ben söyleyeceğimi söyledim. Tamam, adamın sana yalan söylemiş olması hoş birşey değil ama senin gibi manyağa başka nasıl davranılır ki. Şu haline baksana. Olgun bir şekilde birşey konuşulacak gibi misin? Bu tavırlarını kontrol altına almadığın sürece ömür boyu sana yalan sayılacak bunu unutma... O yalanları sen yaratıyorsun- bu tavrınla.

Bahar gets angry with her sister, and tells her that her husband has already cheated her:

**Bahar:** The reason of the lies your husband tells is your manners, then.<sup>9</sup>

She immediately remembers that she had also lied to Gül, in order to protect her sister's marriage. This is the most apparent articulation of the importance of the family, that one can even tell a lie in order to protect it.

**Bahar:** My sister. Sorry. I didn't mean that.

**Gül:** Look at the one suffers from betraying. Then, Duygu gave met that call since she got angry with you. What were you thinking of while lying to your own sister, you silly thing! Firstly give an account of this.

**Bahar:** Sister, your marriage would go to ruin...

**Gül:** Damn you, your marriage... You are all disgusting.

**Bahar:** Your husband has already regretted it. He was struggling for regaining you. I didn't want you to divorce. I know you love him. Duygu had no meaning for him. Sister...<sup>10</sup>

Bahar understands through her own words that some lies can be forgiven, for the sake of the continuity of familial bonds. She returns home, submits to Seymen and accepts Rıza as Seymen's son, even criticizing him being too distant from his own son.

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<sup>9</sup> **Bahar:** Eniştemin attığı yalanların sebebi de senin tavırların o zaman.

<sup>10</sup> **Bahar:** Abla. Özür dilerim. Öyle demek istemedim.

**Gül:** Arkadan vurmaktan şikâyet edene bak. Demek Duygu sana kızdığı için o telefonu etti bana. Kendi öz ablana yalan söylerken kafandan ne geçiyordu sersem şey. Sen önce bunun hesabını ver.

**Bahar:** Abla ben evliliğinizin yıkılmasını...

**Gül:** Sana da evliliğine de... İğrençsiniz hepiniz.

**Bahar:** Eniştem pişman olmuştu. Seni tekrar kazanmak için uğraşıyordu. Ayrılmanızı istemedim. Onu sevdiğini biliyorum. Duygu'nun onun için bir anlamı yoktu. Abla...

After Bahar returns to the Konak, the reintegration takes place. We come up with a compromise between two women who are in love with Seymen, as Bahar tells Dicle she does not hate her, that, on the contrary, even likes her for the sake of love:

**Bahar:** Dicle, I didn't want you to be sent away from here. If something happened to you, I would look after and raise your child as my own. I am not jealous of you. You won't believe me, but I like you in my own way. You are the woman that taught me how I should love Seymen. I don't know whether I would love him to such an extent if I hadn't met you. I am imitating you. You remind me of the clean, poor and animal-like feelings that human beings possessed before they became vulgar. I reveal my animal like side thanks to you.

**Dicle:** Don't mention it (*estağfirullah*) *gelin ağam*.<sup>11</sup>

Dicle and Bahar represent Seymen's inner conflict, since they both construct his masculinity, but with different stakes in mind. They constitute Seymen's two conflicting sides, one rooted in the order of extended family, and the other hailing him to the nuclear family, as imagined within the narrative.

## 2.2 Love of the old: Sümbül and Ali

One of the major issues of the melodrama is Ali's everlasting love for Sümbül, which makes him a good man towards the end of the melodrama, since we learn that his hostility towards the Karadağ family was caused by his love. However, their age is a problem. Sümbül is a widow, with four children, mother of an *ağa* (indeed two

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<sup>11</sup> **Bahar:** Dicle, buradan gönderilmeni ben istemedim. Sana bir şey olsaydı oğlunu kendi oğlum gibi koruyup büyüttürdüm. Seni kıskanmıyorum. İnanmayacaksın ama seni kendime göre seviyorum bile. Sen bana Seymen'i nasıl sevmem gerektiğini öğreten kadınsın. Seni tanımasaydım onu bu kadar sever miydim bilmiyorum. Ben seni taklit ediyorum. Bana insanların adileşmeden önceki dönemlerde içlerinde taşıdıkları temiz, saf ve hayvansı duyguları hatırlatıyorsun. İçimdeki hayvan tarafı ortaya çıkartıyorum senin sayende.

**Dicle:** Estağfirullah gelin ağam.

*ağas*), and hence we all know that this is an impossible love conventionally/traditionally within that context. Because of his ağa position, Seymen is in a position to forbid this relationship, in order to protect (the name of) his family. This also turns into an issue of power between Seymen and Sümbül, stemming from their conflicting roles. Whether Sümbül is powerful as Seymen's mother or Seymen as the head of the household is complicated. When Seymen rebukes Sümbül at Piraye's bidding, she reminds Seymen not to violate the boundaries of respect towards her:

**Sümbül:** I wouldn't believe you will talk to me like that if I saw it in my dream. I have been the lady of *Asmalı Konak* for thirty five years. I've never been a matter of gossip.

**Seymen:** You forced me to cross the frontiers.<sup>12</sup>

In order to solve this conflict, one of the sides of this struggle has to give in, and something fundamental has to change. First, Ali is acquitted from being the villain of this story, after Yaman and Seymen's car crash. We learn that, the only source to his hostility is his love. Second, we learn that Mahmut Ağa had cheated Sümbül for years, which vindicates Sümbül's love affair. She does not have to stay loyal to Mahmut Ağa.<sup>13</sup>

The change in normativity is screened metaphorically. Sümbül's scarf flies over her head as she walks with anger towards Bekir, when Bekir follows them and

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<sup>12</sup>**Sümbül:** Benimle böyle konuşacağını rüyamda görsem inanmazdım. Asmalı Konağın otuz beş yıllık hanımıyım. Hiçbir zaman dedikodu malzemesi olmadım.

**Seymen:** Sınırları geçmeye beni sen mecbur ettin.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the resolution of the problem of Sümbül's love affair by accusing his husband with adultery already marks a shift in the normative order that is set by the narrative, in a context where the loyalty to husband is a cultural code which started to be discussed very recently.

Ali takes Sümbül from the car. Her scarf symbolizes tradition and locality (a local practice linked to her age, position, etc.). Hence, this scene is metaphorical, referring to her anger/break off with tradition, a denial of the conventional restrictions.

Bahar's role at this stage is crucial. From the very beginning, she starts to question Seymen's imagined power position within the Karadağ family. His role is to guard the family, to set the boundaries, or protect the boundaries that already exist. Hence, he has to stand against his mother's love, as the representative of 'the social'. Nature, which stands for love in all situations, and against 'the social', is obviously Bahar:

**Seymen:** Mothers don't flirt Mrs. Bahar.

**Bahar:** Why Mr. Seymen? At what age do one's needs to another person, to warmth, to love, to the opposite sex end? Is there an end like that? Why do they have to live alone while they are alive? Should they be buried alive as Egypt pharaohs with their wives?

**Seymen:** You're so dangerous for this house, do you know that?<sup>14</sup>

Yet, Seymen never accepts his mother's relationship. Bahar is a danger/threat for the Karadağ family, bringing a new way of thinking that undermines the imagined power of the *ağa*, and the hierarchy of the house. Indeed, she is asking Seymen to give up his claims stemming from his *ağa* position, and submit to the omnipotence of love.

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<sup>14</sup> **Seymen:** Annelerin flörtü olmaz Bahar hanım

**Bahar:** Neden Seymen Bey? Sence insanların başka bir insana, sıcaklığa, aşka, karşı cinse olan ihtiyaçları kaç yaşında sona erer? Böyle bir son var mı? Sağken neden yaşamlarını yalnız geçirsinler? Mısır firavunları gibi diri diri eşleriyle mi gömülsünler?

**Seymen:** Sen bu ev için çok tehlikelisin, biliyor musun?

### 2.3 Honour as Conflict:

There are three phases of the subplot in which Seymen has to cope with his little sister, Zeynep. First is her relationship with their servant's son, Salih, for whom Zeynep committed suicide when Sümbül forbade her to see Salih in the early periods of the serial. When he gave Salih permission to see Zeynep in the hospital, Bahar appreciates Seymen's respect for love. This is one of the early talks in which Bahar articulates the truth of love:

**Bahar:** Girls and boys carry the same type of heart. Simply said, it is a human heart. They all beat the same. At every age. Your heart, my heart, heart of our unborn daughter, son. Zeynep's, Salih's. They are so unprotected and incurable at this age. They groan in older people's hands. Think, there's nothing they can manage about their lives. Especially if they fall into cruel people's power. It's nice that you permit Salih to meet Zeynep my dear. It's very good that you gave them a chance to live though all the pressures and traditions which suffocate humans. I understood that you're different at the moment I fell in love with you. Or did I fall in love after I understood that?<sup>15</sup>

Bahar makes a distinction between Seymen and others, remarking that he alters those obligations belonging to the tribal order (*töre*) and gives a chance to 'the natural' to have authority over 'the social'. This event is one of the earlier

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<sup>15</sup> **Bahar:** Kızlarla erkekler tıpatıp aynı tip kalp taşırlar. Buna kısaca insan kalbi deniyor. Hepsi aynı şekilde atıyor. Her yaşta. Seninki, benimki, doğacak oğlumuzunki, kızımızunki. Zeynebinki, Salihinki. Onlar bu yaşta o kadar korumasız, o kadar çaresiz olurlar ki. Büyüklerin ellerinde inim inim inlerler. Düşünsene, yaşamlarıyla ilgili hiçbir şey kendi ellerinde değil. Hele zalim insanların ellerine düşerlerse... Salihin Zeynep'i görmesine izin vermen çok güzel birşeydi sevgilim. Bu kadar baskının, insanı boğan bu kadar törenin üstesinden gelip onlara yaşama şansı vermen çok güzel birşey. Senin çok farklı olduğunu sana âşık olduğum an anlamıştım. Yoksa anlayıp mı sana âşık olmuşum?

manifestations of the superiority of love over the rule of the extended family, and Bahar's attempt to question Seymen's position within the Karadağ family.

In the second phase, Seymen faces a much more serious problem to be solved. It is Zeynep's rape by her short-term boyfriend Tamer, the villain, who is from her class, but not compatible with her culturally. Zeynep goes out with him for a while, but she gets bored soon. She tells Bahar that she wanted to break up with Tamer, since he was a drunken man with a null brain who never read a single book. On the other hand, he is Ali Hamzaoglu's nephew, striving for revenge from the Karadağ family, because of his uncle's hostility towards Karadağs.

Rape is a critical subplot in such a narrative on masculinity. The issue is the ağa's action towards such an invasion of the boundaries he was dedicated to protect. According to the code of honor, he has to show counter-violence. We all waited for how Seymen is going to cope with such a difficult task, in which the expected decision could only have been Zeynep's marriage to him, or a violent retaliation, including Tamer's death. Indeed, we were not sure whether Seymen was 'Eastern enough' to commit an honour killing (*namus cinayeti*). Seymen does not choose such *traditional* solutions, and he shows great compassion to his sister. He does not go to the police. Rather, he punishes Tamer himself, but not at the expected level of violence. In other words, he does not deny his responsibility by submitting the rapist to the police/state. However, he acts out a different type of masculine power, protecting, rather than punishing the victim, and punishing the villain with a reduced level of violence.

Within the narrative, this event constitutes a breach in traditional norms at the level of honour. Seymen's excessive masculinity screened as violence towards Bahar is cured by a new definition of masculinity, in his attitude towards Zeynep.

The next step is his acceptance of Zeynep and Salih's marriage, as the final resolution of the breaches screened before about Zeynep. They get married secretly, because Tamer is threatening Zeynep, telling her that she has to marry him sooner or later.

The point is that everybody is waiting for Seymen's decision about his sister's marriage with the butler's son. According to the norms of the extended family, he must punish them; Sümbül expects nothing else from him. On the other hand, as the mother of the Karadağ family, Sümbül represents the traditional norms, and decides to make Zeynep and Salih to divorce, and wants Bekir (Salih's father) to leave *Asmalı Konak* and take his family back to the village.

As soon as the members of the Karadağ family learn this marriage, both Seymen and Seyhan stand with them against Sümbül, and declare their respect for love. Indeed, this subplot stands for submission to love, and giving up the social responsibilities for the omnipotence of nature. In Seyhan's words:

**Seyhan:** We shouldn't have a word to say if they love each other.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Seymen does not accept his mother's solution as the ultimate decision-maker. He accepts their marriage, and tells them that if they have chosen to marry, they have to take care of themselves, as a new (nuclear) family. At the closing scene of this event in the serial, we hear Bahar's view of this event as she talks to her baby in their bedroom: what a rude man Seymen was when they met, that after living a family life with Bahar, how she has managed to make him such a man that he makes such a decision in this event, etc., how he became a '*cici ağa*'.

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<sup>16</sup> **Seyhan:** Onlar birbirlerini seviyorlarsa bize söz söylemek düşmez.



### 3. How do the Audiences Read Breaches: The Quest for Truth

We have already mentioned the resolutions as the crucial points where the narrative is pushed further. In *Asmalı Konak*, these resolutions cause a shift in the normative order. What is crucial in *Asmalı Konak* is not the intensity or nature of the conflicts the characters face – indeed, they are very well-known conflicts common both in melodrama and soap opera genres. The distinctive feature of *Asmalı Konak* is that the norms violated throughout the three subplots are fundamental issues of the experience of modernity in Turkey. All of the breaches handled as separate subplots merge into an ultimate submission to love, and a breaking up with traditional ways of solving conflicts. It is crucial to note that this dichotomy is constructed within the narrative, by making use of the traditional and the modern imaginaries in the Turkish context: The norm violated belongs to the former, and the unexpected resolution reconstructs the latter. Hence, it is crucial to look at these imaginaries contextually. For this reason, I will reflect on how the viewers interpret these breaches.

Cowie (1997) looks at narrative strategies/structures to trace how the audience is positioned to the knowledge offered by the narrative in cinema. She argues that the reader is passive in this positioning since waits to receive the knowledge encoded within the narrative. However, the desire of the reader is crucial in making him/her an active participator:

The spectator must ‘wait to know’. But, to work as narrative, a desire to know must also be set in motion in the spectator, and this is fuelled by the plot’s formulation of an enigma, of a problem or conflict. As a result the spectator becomes an active pursuer of the knowledge about the enigma, trying to piece together the information afforded by the narration, and to anticipate what will

happen next and how characters will respond on the basis of knowledge already acquired in the narrative. (p. 47-48)

However, for Cowie, the knowledge that the viewer seeks to acquire exists only within the narrative, and the resolution comes in the way the story is narrated (narration process): Narration is the representation of a relationship to knowledge where the problem of knowledge in relation to events is set up wholly by and within the text, and thus the text will resolve the problem” (p. 46).

The process of narration constitutes the relationship between the knowledge offered by the text, that is the answers to the questions ‘what happens’, or ‘how happens’, and the spectator who seeks those answers. Her activity stems from her desire to know, and throughout the narration process, her identification with the protagonists, that is, she is active or passive as much as the protagonist she identifies with. That is to say, the narrative hails the spectator to a subject position, from which she demands and acquires knowledge from the text, and identifies herself with the protagonist who acts out those answers.

It is true that the problems occurring within the narrative will be resolved throughout the text itself, in the cinema genre. That is, the audiences of the cinema are passive in the encoding processes of those breaches. The resolution of the conflicts can be encoded with the aim of giving a message. The nature and frequency of the conflicts can also be pedagogical in television serials, as Modleski (1990) argues for the soap opera genre, so that “everyone cannot be happy at the same time, no matter how deserving they are” (Modleski, p191). However, I argue that for the television fictions the viewer’s position *vis á vis* the text is constructed within wider social context, in which the text itself is also encoded. If, as Culler (1982) quotes from Barthes, “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers

of culture” (p. 33), both the text and the reader are subject to the same diverse and contradictory cultural codes. Thus, I argue that the viewer of the melodrama is essentially active both in the encoding and decoding processes, as the bearers of culture as well as the readers of the cultural texts.

We have already pointed out that the narrative in *Asmalı Konak* consists of breaches, which cause a shift in norms. It is necessary to look at how the audiences read those breaches. It is important to note that the subplots I traced from the beginning to the end of the narrative of the serial as a whole can never stay in the audience’s mind in such a totality. Rather than telling the whole story, they remark on what in the text is pertinent to their subject position and only in terms of a few subplots. This constitutes the decoding process.

I realized that the viewers who participated in the focus groups I conducted mention the narrative where they find it worthy of telling. There are two levels of speaking on *Asmalı Konak*, in all of the groups I conducted. First, they mention the subplots which they find problematic, that is, where they find a gap between the true and what is narrated. In relation to this truth; the narrative seems to have excesses and lacks that are worth mentioning. It is crucial that the subplots that I call breaches are also the main topics of the focus group conversations and are introduced by the respondents from the very beginning of the conversations, as they answer the first questions such as, ‘What did you think of the serial, what was it about?’. They sometimes appreciate, sometimes criticize the occurrence of the conflicts which I call breach, or the ways they are resolved. Second, they articulate their desires, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

To analyze the first level of speaking, I turn to White's (1981) description of the relationship between narrative and reality. He makes his arguments on the basis

of that narratives of history construct reality by narrativizing the truth (norm) in a sequence of cause and effect:

The very distinction between real and the imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which “the true” is identified with “the real” only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity. (White, p. 6)

The truth is produced as the real, as soon as it is narrativized. White uses this theory for the deconstruction of the narratives of history. For the narrative fictions, this can be a useful tool for analyzing the viewers’ expectation for realism. What is interesting that, the viewers expect from the serial to be consistent with reality as in the case of historical narratives. I argue that, the viewers talk simultaneously about their expectation of realism and truth from the narrative fiction since, like the narratives of history, the narrative poses the truth within a sequence of cause and effect, so that the truth is perceived as the real.

I have already pointed out that the narrative sets out a normative order, and breaches occur in that order. What is crucial is that the norm which is violated also belongs to the regime of truth that the audiences subject to, since, as pointed out above, both the text and the reader are bearers of same (contradictory) cultural codes. The audience begins by finding a gap between this narrative and the real. They seem to be denying the reality of the narrative because they refuse to accept it as normative. And yet, I will try to show that the discussions do reveal a coincidence between the real and the narrative. This is accomplished through changing the frame of normativity.

In analyzing all conversations on the subplots I asked them to discuss, I paid attention to those qualifications about reality. From which subject positions do they talk? When do they accept or deny the resolutions to the conflicts? How do the

norms change? How does fantasy work through/despite those qualifications? These are the main questions I seek to answer, as I ‘read’ their ‘reading’.

Before investigating the viewers’ handling of the breaches, a brief introduction of the focus groups is needed. I call the groups in numbers, according to the order I conducted. The first group consists of women living in the same apartment, in a middle-class neighbourhood (Çamlıca, Istanbul). The second group is a group of teachers from the same school. The third group is conducted in a Central Anatolian city, Konya, with a group of women living in the same middle-class neighbourhood. Finally, the fourth is a group of mothers whose children are in the same school, and who are an active group of parents in a school, and in addition a young university student, Helin who participated in the group by chance. All of the participants are married, except Helin in the fourth group. All of them are educated, being at least high-school graduates.

### **3.1 Seymen and Bahar**

Seymen and Bahar’s relationship is one of the prevailing topics in the focus group conversations. In three groups, the respondents refer to their love as one of the unrealistic subplots of the narrative. The respondents sometimes accept the resolution suggested by the narrative. However, they sometimes do not accept the resolution by arguing that it is unrealistic. This is the way the three focus groups’ respondents have a relationship with truth: they refer to the narrative as unrealistic when they find it to be inconsistent with the social and normative order they think to be depicted in the narrative.

Seymen’s and Bahar’s long-lasting love is problematized in the second group conversation in this manner. The discussion on realism is opened up with Emine’s criticism of Dicle’s superstitious powers as supernatural, arguing that she does not

like such unrealistic events in television fictions:

**Emine:** When I see absurdity in the serial, I lose my enthusiasm for it. I still watch it, but don't enjoy. Supernatural things don't attract me. It should be realistic.

**Question:** What was realistic in this serial?

**Emine:** Love between the couple was realistic, because in my opinion couples both fret and love each other in marriage. If they fall in love with each other once that love never ends, though it hurts. I, as someone experiencing... (laugh together) I mean I found that so realistic, everyone, I mean, many can live it.<sup>17</sup>

After Emine's point that love is realistic in *Asmalı Konak*, I ask the other women to discuss this point further. Leman rejects Emine's point, arguing that passionate love (aşk) ends after a while between married couples, and she finds Bahar and Seymen's love unrealistic, because it lasts after marriage:

**Leman:** I didn't find it that realistic. It's not realistic that their love lasted so long, but, because, love doesn't last long after marriage, it ends. Their love continued. In my opinion, love ends in marriage, when people get married. I believe in that.<sup>18</sup>

I asked others whether they agree with Leman:

**Münire:** I don't agree. This is a common idea, it is said that love ends after marriage. That's not the case actually. If relationship begins with a good love, after

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<sup>17</sup> **Emine:** Ben bir dizide saçmalık gördüm mü soğuyorum. İzliyorum ama, öyle, zevk almıyorum yani.

Olağanüstü şeyler beni çekmez. Gerçekçi olması lazım.

**Soru:** Neler gerçekçiydi bu dizide?

**Emine:** Aşk bence gerçekçiydi, aralarındaki ve bence çünkü eşler hem birbirini yıpratır evlilikte, hem de sever. Eğer baştan aşık olmuşlarsa birbirlerine, o aşka asla bitmez, acı da verse. Yaşayan biri olarak... (gülüşmeler)  
Yani ben orayı çok gerçekçi buldum, herkes, yani çok kişi yaşayabilir.

<sup>18</sup> **Leman:** Yani ben çok fazla gerçekçi bulmadım ama seyrettim. İşte onların aşkının çok uzun sürmesi bana fazla gerçekçi gelmedi ama, çünkü evlenince aşklar biter bana göre, uzun sürmez. Bunların aşkı sürekli devam etti. Benim düşünceme göre evlilikte, evlenildiğinde aşk biter. Ben ona inanıyorum.

marriage, even if after problems, love doesn't end if relationship starts with real love. I believe in that. I believe, since I lived. There is nothing as sweet as loving. Nothing.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to Münire's argument, Leman and Ayten make a distinction between *aşk* (passionate love) and *sevgi* (reasonable love), and they argue that *aşk* leaves its place to *sevgi* after marriage:

**Leman:** But that enthusiasm ends. Still it is love [*sevgi*], but... I don't mean that.

**Münire:** Enthusiasm... I don't know, because I live it...

**Ayten:** I mean, other kinds of enthusiasm begin. Other things arise as product of that love [*sevgi*].<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Emine points out that long-lasting love is acceptable in *Asmalı Konak*, because of the catastrophic events they come up with, during their relationship.

**Emine:** To bring love to life in the serial, they screen painful things. I mean, like the illnesses of Bahar. I think they are what keep love afloat.<sup>21</sup>

Emine points out that the catastrophic events (which in my view designate the breaches in the problem of passionate love) are strategic tools of the melodrama that give the impression that love lasts forever. Hence, she constructs a meta-discourse to

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<sup>19</sup> **Münire:** Ben katılmıyorum. Hep böyle derler aslında, evlenince aşkın bittiği söylenir. Aslında hiç öyle değil. Ya gerçekten güzel bir aşkla başladıysa ilişki, beraberlik, o evlense de, üzerinden birçok ceremeler geçse de, eğer gerçek bir aşkla başladıysa bitmez. Ben ona inanıyorum. Yaşadığım için de inanıyorum. Sevmek kadar güzel birşey mümkün değil yani. Olamaz.

<sup>20</sup> **Leman:** Ama o heyecan bitiyor, yine sevgi oluyor da... Onu kastetmek istiyorum.

**Münire:** Heyecan... Bilmiyorum ben yaşadığım için...

**Ayten:** Yani başka heyecanlar başlıyor. Çocuk heyecan oluyor. Yani çok böyle vıcık vıcık olmuyorsun eşinle ama, o sevginin ürünü olarak başka şeyler çıkıyor.

<sup>21</sup> **Emine:** Aşkı canlandırmak için dizide, sürekli acımaclık şeyler koyuyorlar araya. İşte Bahar'dan kaynaklanan hastalıklar filan. Bence o aşkı ayakta tutan şeyler oluyor.

the narrative, as she explains why long-lasting love is reasonable in the narrative, despite it being unrealistic.

Thus, the second group viewers evaluate the narrative according to the truth of love: passionate love between a married couple lasts for a short period, living its place to *sevgi*, which lasts forever. They identify any divergence from this truth as unrealistic. I argued previously that the breaches throughout the subplots of the love between Bahar and Seymen do not bring an ultimate resolution to the problem of passionate love, but reduce the intensity of the crisis. The viewers come up with an argument that their love lasts because of catastrophic events.

In the third group the main problem in the Bahar-Seymen relationship is the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive realms according to the viewers: the traditional and the modern. Indeed they think that it is an impossible love, because a woman like Bahar can not accept Seymen's traditional lifestyle. Thus the realism of the normative is again at stake.

The discussion about realism starts with Saniye's depiction of the melodrama as 'exaggerated, inconsistent and unrealistic'. They constantly talk about the unrealistic events occurs in the melodrama. The predominant inconsistency stems from the juxtaposition of the modern with the traditional. Gönül says she finds it amazing that the modern individuals who are educated in the USA continue to live according to the traditional life style:

**Gönül:** It reminded me the last period of the Ottoman Empire. They live together in a house, bride and the mother-in-law. A crowded family. Watching it reminded the last periods of the Ottoman Empire. Maybe we are unfamiliar with these now, but modernity in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, I mean they are educated in America, but they carry on the same thinks, although they are educated abroad. I



mean although it is a modern family, they live together<sup>22</sup>

The respondents discuss events in the serial in terms of whether they are in accordance with the Turkish family structure, or not. That is to say, they refer to the events they find unrealistic as inconsistent with the ‘Turkish family structure’. For example, Seymen’s protection of Rıza in his house is found realistic, according to the tradition:

**Nilgün:** She gave birth to a child contrary to her will, but she looked after him, didn’t leave.

**Gönül:** I mean it had aspects suitable to Turkish family structure.<sup>23</sup>

However, what is unrealistic is Bahar’s acceptance of the life style in *Asmalı Konak*, even after she learns that Seymen is Rıza’s father. The modern as a norm is articulated in the name of Bahar:

**Gönül:** Actually in real life, can such a girl that got education in the West, live under those conditions regardless of how wealthy he [Seymen] is. That is a bit questionable. Regardless of the strength of their love.<sup>24</sup>

The boundary between the traditional and the modern is so clearcut, and any interference between the two is identified as unrealistic. Hence, the third group viewers do not accept the resolution of the breaches that occurred in the Seymen-Bahar relationship.

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<sup>22</sup> **Gönül:** Bana Osmanlı’nın son dönemini hatırlattı. Bir evde beraber yaşıyorlar, gelin, kayınvalide. Kalabalık bir aile. İzlerken Osmanlı’nın son dönemlerini filan çağırıyordu. Belki şu anda yabancıyız ama, Osmanlı’nın son dönemdeki o modernite, işte Amerika’da tahsil görmüş gençler ama yine aynı şeyi devam ettiriyorlar, dışarıda tahsil yaptıkları halde. Yani modern bir aile olduğu halde, birlikte yaşıyorlar.

<sup>23</sup> **Nilgün:** Kendi isteğiyle olmadığı halde bir çocuğu olmuş, ona da sahip çıkmış, bırakmamış.

**Gönül:** Yani Türk aile yapısına uygun tarafları vardı.

<sup>24</sup> **Gönül:** Aslında gerçek hayatta öyle bir kız, Batı’da okumuş, ne kadar varlıklı olursa olsun, yaşayabilir mi yani. Orası da biraz şey. Sevgi ne kadar olursa olsun.

Despite the fact that the respondents view the boundary between the two realms as being clear-cut, yet their discourse during the discussions reflects the contrary: the traditional/modern dichotomy cannot be sustained since the respondents sometimes speak the language of modernity, sometimes of language of tradition, and often the language of one in the name of the other.

The fourth group, like the third, sees the main issue of the serial as the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern. Yet, unlike the third group, they see the narrative as resolving this dichotomy, through breaches and resolutions.

This is the case as Helin and Didem discuss the last conflict in the Seymen-Bahar relationship when Bahar learns that Seymen has an illegitimate son. Helin points out that it is unrealistic for such a woman as Bahar to accept living in the same house with Dicle – the woman who has a son from her husband:

**Helin:** But the character of Bahar in the serial was not a character who can easily accept such a situation, continue to live in the household together with the woman.

**Didem:** But Bahar had moved forward so much. She changed a lot after she entered the household as a bride until the end. I mean she changed.

**Helin:** Nobody can change that much.

**Didem:** She rebelled some of the times, but she changed drastically.

**Helin:** Every character. Bahar, the tempteous girl, turned into an easy-going mother. Seymen, the tempteous man who beats his wife turned into a very nice daddy.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> **Helin:** Ama dizideki o Bahar karakteri öyle bir şeyi kabullenip de, o evde oturup da, o kadınla aynı evde yaşayabilecek bir karakter değildi.

**Didem:** Ama işte Bahar çok yol katetti. Eve geldiği günden sonuna doğru bayağı bir değişti. Değişti yani.

**Helin:** Kimse o kadar değişmez.

**Didem:** Kimi zaman isyan etti, ama epey değişime uğradı Bahar.

**Helin:** Tüm karakterler. Bahar, hırçın kız, uysal bir anne oldu. Seymen, hırçın adam, karısını döven adam, gayet

Didem answers Helin's argument by pointing out to a change in Bahar character. Helin argues that such a great change is unrealistic, but she also admits a change in Bahar and Seymen. So, the resolutions to the conflicts are acceptable because the respondents handle the text as a narrative of change, like I did.

Hence, by making statements on the realism/unrealism of the narrative, the viewers accept or deny the resolutions of the breaches that occur in the normative order *Asmalı Konak* refers to. Each group finds another aspect of the serial unrealistic. The second group finds long-lasting (passionate) love unrealistic, whereas the third and fourth group viewers find Bahar's acceptance of Seymen's traditional lifestyle unrealistic.

The first discussion group I interviewed handle the text in a very different way. Rather than realism, the message-giving function of the serial is the main topic of the discussion. They discuss whether the character is right while carrying out the action. Seymen's violence towards Bahar, his dishonesty about Rıza, or his decision on Zeynep's rape are the topics discussed around whether Seymen is right in doing this, and whether the right message is given by that action. They expect the serial to give the right message and they interpret each breach of normativity in terms of whether it gives this right message or not. This is the case in Tülay's point that it is the right message that Seymen's aggression towards his wife is named as a rape, which means that it is also a crime to be punished:

**Tülay:** But there were also advisory points of it.

**Question:** For instance?

**Tülay:** For instance, Bahar interpreted the incidents, the quarrels they had as rape.

**Hatice:** She told that he had raped her.

**Meral:** So did she follow judicial procedures about it?

**Tülay:** No she did not, but there were advisory points for us in the event.<sup>26</sup>

The other respondents think that she would better go to the police to report her husband's rape. This is not to say that it would be so in reality, but this is the right message. Jealousy is acceptable to protect the family, but violence towards the wife is unacceptable, and has to be punished:

**Meral:** He was jealous of his friend, his partner.

**Hatice:** Yaman

**Tülay:** Hah, jealous of Yaman.

**Hatice:** What Yaman did was a total mistake, conscious of her marriage I mean.

**Question:** Do you think that Seymen was right?

**Meral:** Yes, I think Seymen was right on that situation.

**Hatice:** His interest to Bahar was obvious from his gazes though her. Seymen could see it. Bahar was innocent here. She had never encouraged him. She had never interested him.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> **Tülay:** Ama ders verici yönleri de vardı.

**Soru:** Mesela?

**Tülay:** Mesela eşiyle olan şeyleri, münakaşaları Bahar tecavüzden saydı.

**Hatice:** Tecavüz etti bana dedi.

**Meral:** Hukuki yollardan aradı mı hakkını?

**Tülay:** Aramadı.

**Tülay:** Şey yapmadılar da, yine de, bir ders çıkıyordu oradan.

<sup>27</sup> **Meral:** O arkadaşından kıskanıyordu, ortağından

**Hatice:** Yaman

**Tülay:** Hah, Yaman'dan kıskanıyordu.

**Hatice:** Yani Yaman onun evli olduğunu bile bile bir hataydı Yaman'ın yaptığı.

**Soru:** Seymen haklı mıydı peki?

**Meral:** Seymen haklıydı orada bence

**Hatice:** Bahar'a bakışlarından ona olan ilgisi anlaşılıyordu. Seymen de bunu görüyordu. Bahar'ın suçu yoktu.

Hence, the women in the first group speak according to two sets of norms: the norm of the family, and the norm of the state/law. This is crucial because the state as a norm-setting authority is introduced in focus group conversation, despite its absence in the serial. In his violence towards Bahar, Seymen is acquitted for his jealousy according to the norm of the (nuclear) family, but is accused according to the norm of the state.

The pre-2005 Turkish Penal Code classifies sexual crimes as ‘crimes against public morality and the familial order’, rather than ‘crimes against the individual’ (Sirman, 2004). Hence the norm of the Turkish state, far from being in conflict with the familial order, was dedicated to uphold it. Sirman also points out that the rape of the husband is a crime to be punished only in the recently renewed version of the Turkish Penal Code, which was discussed during the period I conducted this research. Hence, rather than noticing a norm belonging to the order of the state, the first group respondents articulate their desire for a breach which exceeds the one intended in the encoding of the narrative. That is to say, the narrative intends to resolve the conflict of passionate love by submission of both husband and wife to the order of the nuclear family. The viewers, by contrast, express their desire that the ‘rape’ (the breach) breach is treated as a desire that precede the changes in the law.

### **3.2 Sümbül’s Love**

Ali and Sümbül’s love is the primordial topic discussed in the second, third and fourth groups. In the second group, the conversation on Sümbül’s love started with Münire’s comment on how unrealistic subplot it is. For Münire, Sümbül’s love is unrealistic for a women living in the context of the extended family, and as the mother of two sons living in Central Anatolia:

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Bahar hiç ona öyle bir yüz vermedi. Ona bir ilgi göstermedi.

**Question:** Münire Hanım?

**Münire:** I also analyzed the serial as family structure. I mean the siblings' being altogether, since I myself come from a crowded family. The siblings' being altogether, their being tolerant to their mother. But there is one thing that confuses my mind, I said it a while ago. It had aspects that contrast our Turkish traditions, Muslim traditions. Namely, as far as I see they are faithful to their mother in appearance, they do everything according to norms, I mean according to customs and traditions. Although she had two sons, they overlooked her flirtation with Ali bey, they pretended as if they overlooked. I was surprised with that. I mean although we look modern in appearance and have an enlightened view; I think sons for instance, can never share their mother in this kind of a situation due to some things we carry out in our genes. The issue that made me most was this.<sup>28</sup>

The other women in the group oppose her, bringing arguments to make Sümbül's relationship acceptable. Filiz comments on her love, as an escape from the burden of patriarchy, a search for an affectionate hand:

**Filiz:** There were moments that Sümbül felt herself very much alone in the family. Sometimes, do you remember the moments she was left in the room alone, experiencing loneliness deeply? People may change so do the feelings. Maybe she had not thought like this when she was young, but her children and every member

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<sup>28</sup> **Münire:** Ben de diziyi aile yapısı olarak inceledim. Yani kardeşlerin hep beraber olmaları, ben kendim de kalabalık bir aileden geldiğim için. Kardeşlerin hep bir arada olmaları, annelerine çok idareci olmaları. Fakat kafamı kurcalayan birşey var, biraz önce de söylemiştim zaten. Bizim Türk geleneklerine, müslüman geleneklerine uymayan bir tarafı vardı. Şöyle ki, gördüğüm kadarıyla geleneklerine, annelerine bağlı bir aile tablosu veriyorlar, herşeyi kuralına uygun yapıyorlar, işte örflere adetlere göre yapıyorlar. İki erkek çocuğu olmasına rağmen Sümbül hanımın mesela Ali beyle flörtüne göz yumdular, göz yumar gibi yaptılar. Ben buna şaşırdım. Yani ne kadar modern görünüştü, ne kadar aydın bir yapıya sahip olsak da bizim genlerimizde taşıdığımız bazı şeylerden dolayı, bazı durumlardan dolayı mesela erkek çocukları annelerini, böyle bir şeyde asla paylaşamaz diye düşünüyorum. Beni en çok şey yapan, nasıl diyeyim, kafamı kurcalayan konu buydu yani.

of her family separated and went to different directions. After her matriarchy weakened, she searched for an affectionate hand.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the group finds her relationship acceptable, since Sümbül also learns that she had been cheated for years:

**Elif:** Her relationship with this man came into scene after she learned that her husband had been unfaithful her, didn't it? She learned he had did that, after his death.

**Leman:** She behaved in a more comfortable way after that.

**Elif:** Since she learned that her husband had become unfaithful, she got relaxed as far as her conscience was concerned. He wasn't faithful to me, and now me too... (approvals)<sup>30</sup>

When they mention Sümbül's love as unrealistic and unacceptable, they articulate the order of the extended family. The breach occurs in the norms of the extended family, which is enacted in the Karadağ family. However, it is crucial that the breach is never completed, that is, redressive action and reintegration never takes place in the case of Sümbül and Ali, since the norm violated belongs to tradition, and it is not in conflict with other norms.(state, i.e.) That is, the norm is so clearcut that the violation is unacceptable. On the other hand, Sümbül's love which is mentioned as a breach is accepted/tolerated because of Sümbül's husband's adultery. However,

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<sup>29</sup> **Filiz:** Sümbül'ün aile içinde kendini çok yalnız hissettiği anlar oldu. Bazen, hatırlar mısınız odada tek kaldığı, kendini yalnız hissettiği zamanlar oluyor. İnsanlar değişebilir, duygular da değişebilir. O gençliğinde öyle düşünmemiş olabilir ama çoluğu çocuğu, hepsi bir yere, hayatları başka yönlere gitti. O da o anaerkillikten yavaş yavaş çekilince, kendine şefkatli bir el aradı.

<sup>30</sup> **Elif:** Bu Ali beyle ilişkisi, kocasının kendini aldattığını öğrendikten sonra ortaya çıktı değil mi? Aldattığını öğrendi sonradan, öldükten sonra.

**Leman:** Ondan sonra daha rahat hareket etti.

**Elif:** Kocasının aldattığını öğrendiği için, daha rahat oldu vicdanen. O beni aldatmış, ben de şimdi... Kendini haklı gördü. (onaylamalar)

this acceptance of the resolution is enabled only when respondents focus on the individual rather than the social (order). That is to say, the toleration of Sümbül's love in view of her husband's adultery marks a crucial shift in the discourse the women articulate.

In the third group, Sümbül and Ali's relationship, is the main theme of the conversation. Nilgün opens up the conversation on their love, as the most striking subplot of the narrative:

**Nilgün:** But the most impressive side of the film was Ali bey's love for Sümbül hanım that lasted or years. <sup>31</sup>

Saniye argues that such a flirt is impossible in reality, in Central Anatolia. She argues that she can marry, but flirt is not acceptable, for a woman with two sons:

**Saniye:** I do not mean that she shoudn't marry, indeed she can. But it is weird that she engages in those simple love tricks. It is wrong. It is wrong to us.

Above all, imagine you have two sons, and they will accept this. It is okay, if the man offers, she can marry. <sup>32 33</sup>

She articulates the norm of the extended family, located in the East. The imaginary of extended family is placed in Anatolia (the East) for the viewers living in Konya. Indeed, in all focus group conversations, the viewers define the extended family in which the mother's love relationship is impossible, as a crowded household with two sons (ağas), living in a small Anatolian town. That is, the family structure

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<sup>31</sup> **Nilgün:** Ama filmin en etkileyici tarafı Ali beyin, Sümbül hanıma duyduğu, yıllarca süren aşkıydı

<sup>32</sup> **Saniye:** Evlenmemesi değil, evlenebilir. Ama kalkıp da böyle ufak tefek aşk oyunlarına girmesi bana biraz garip geldi. Ters yani. Bizde olmaz öyle. Hele öyle iki tane aslan gibi evladın olacak, onlar bilecek, normal karşılayacak. Yani evlenebilirsin, onu anlarım. Adam ister, gönlün varsa olur hani

<sup>33</sup> I argued that the viewers find the serial unrealistic, when they find a gap between the normative order the narrative constructs. It is crucial to note that Saniye points out a normativity not belonging to the normative order of the narrative, but to the normative order that she herself is subject to.



as well as the place is stressed to show the inconsistency of Sümbül's love with the norms.

The other respondents in the group disagree with her, pointing out that they all waited Ali and Sümbül to come together at the end. Like the previous groups, they also find their relationship acceptable, after Sümbül learns her husband's adultery:

**Gönül:** Sure everybody wished them to come together. And they revealed the unfaithfulness of her husband. All of us thought that Sümbül hanım would get closer to him after that.

**Question:** Why after the unfaithfulness of her husband?

Semahat: She wouldn't marry that man due to her faith to her husband. When she learned that her husband hadn't been faithful to her, probably she thought she could also marry.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, unlike the hesitation regarding the way the conflicts Seymen and Bahar faced are resolved, the second and third group viewers accept the resolution in Sümbül's case. What is crucial is that this acceptance already marks a breach in the women's perception of adultery. The perception of adultery as guilt is not a norm belonging to the imaginary of extended family. They are here complicit with the narrative, and thus concur the breach the narrative depicts.

Indeed, Sümbül's love is least problematized and most appreciated in the fourth group. Gaye starts a conversation on Sümbül's love as an unrealistic subplot. She argues that in reality, a woman in such a position would kill herself in order not to be in such a situation. Dilek, on the other hand, does not criticize Sümbül's love,

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<sup>34</sup> **Gönül:** Tabii herkes birleşsin istiyorlardı. Bir de kocasını ihanetini ortaya çıkardılar. O ihanetten sonra da sanki daha Sümbül hanım onunla yaklaşacak diye düşünmüştük hepimiz.

**Soru:** Neden kocasının ihanetinden sonra?

**Semahat:** Kocasına bağlılıktan dolayı evlenmiyordu güya o adamla. Kocasının da ona sadık olmadığını öğrenince artık ben de evlenebilirim gibi filan düşündü herhalde.

and states that she is glad to see such an extraordinary relationship between two older people. She mentions it with pleasure:

**Gaye:** I mean I don't think that they can live their love so easily. It is impossible in real. Think that she will have sons, she would bury that love to her inside, she would even kill herself, even if she is in love. Is it possible in Turkey? I mean, think that I also have two children, even in this [younger] age. Is it possible for me to live a love with, say, my former lover? It is inconceivable.

**Dilek:** That's why we enjoyed watching it. Oh, so nice, so nice.<sup>35</sup>

The discourse on unrealism shifts to a discourse on desire, with Dilek's words, which is the second level of speaking on *Asmalı Konak*, as a narrative consisting of desires of the viewers.

### 3.3 Zeynep's Rape

We have pointed out that Zeynep's rape is a crucial subplot within the narrative, drawing the boundaries of love. The subplot constitutes an important part of the focus group conversations, as well.

The first group's message-seeking view of the narrative prevails as they are talking about Zeynep. When I ask about Zeynep's rape, Tülay answers that it is one of the 'bad examples' (*kötü örnek*) set by the serial:

**Tülay:** She was raped. They did not want to accept this as if it did not happen at all. They did not tell to the brother.

**Hatice:** Later on, the brother understood.

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<sup>35</sup> **Gaye:** Yani onların ben öyle aşklarını yaşayabileceklerini hiç sanmıyorum. Gerçekte böyle bir şey olamaz. Öyle oğulları olacak filan, gömer içine, öldürür kendini kadın, eğer aşksa da. Türkiye'de olabilecek şey mi bu? Yani şimdi bile biz bu yaşta, iki tane çocuğum var. Eski aşkımla karşılaşp onunla yeniden aşk yaşamak filan, olacak şey mi? Aklım almıyor bunu yani

**Dilek:** Zaten olağan üstü olduğu için seyrettik onu. Ah ne kadar güzel, ah ne kadar güzel.

**Tülay:** Then, she escaped from the household and they married, concealed from the family. It was considered as a negative case, wasn't it? <sup>36</sup>

The group agrees with her that the narrative does not give the right message in the case of Zeynep's rape. They think that the conflict is not resolved, at all. Tülay stresses that in reality, the solution would be either killing Tamer, or to marry them off. When I asked what the ideal solution would be, they answer that the event should not be hidden/ignored, at all:

**Ümmühan:** Incidents may occur differently. If Seymen was an ağa, he would have spoken about the issue with the family carefully.

**Tülay:** The issue should not have been covered up.

**Ümmühan:** Do you realize that every serious subject was covered up. Each issue which may contain social message was being passed over. <sup>37</sup>

They think that the ideal solution is to go to the police and have Tamer punished according to the law of the state. They all think that as it is. Since Tamer is not killed, they are not married, and they did not go to the police. The message, according to Ümmühan, should be to talk this event among the household members. They all agree that the rape subplot ended simply by ignoring the event.

Further, Aslı explains this with the conflicting norms of tradition and modernity:

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<sup>36</sup>**Tülay:** Tecavüze uğradı kız. Ondan sonra yine görmemezlikten geldiler. Abiden saklandı, falan.

**Hatice:** Abi anladı sonra

**Tülay:** Ondan sonra evden kaçtı, gizli evlendiler aileden. Yani hep kötü örnekmiş ya, değil mi?

<sup>37</sup> **Ümmühan:** Yani şöyle olabilirdi: O bir ağaysa, Seymen ağaysa, oturacaktı o aile bu konuyu güzel bir tartışacaktı.

**Tülay:** Bu kadar üstü kapalı geçilmemeliydi.

**Ümmühan:** Bakın hep çok ciddi konular hep üstü kapalı geçilmiş. Topluma mesaj verilecek olaylar hep geçiriliyor.

**Aslı:** If it were us, we would report it to police, but they do not have enough courage for it.

**Meral:** Because they were a well-known family.

**Aslı:** They do not have courage to force the girl to marry him neither, because the family is experiencing clash of cultures on the other hand. They have traditions on the one hand and...<sup>38</sup>

The norm of the extended family (tradition) is in conflict with the norm of the state (modern). They cannot go to the police, to protect the name of the Karadağs. On the other hand, Aslı argues that the norms of the extended family are in question in *Asmalı Konak*, so that they could not find a way to resolve the problem.

There is a multiplicity of norms that regulate the issue of rape, as we have seen in the previous group discussions. Jealousy is acceptable, but violence towards the wife is unacceptable, as we have already noticed. However, when it comes to the issue of *namus*, a certain level of violence is accepted and moreover, expected. There are fewer contradictory norms with which to evaluate a breach of honour. When they say that ‘Seymen’s attitude is unrealistic and lacking’, they articulate the truth belonging to the order of the extended family for which Seymen as *ağa* is responsible.

The viewers of the second group do not find the resolution of Zeynep’s rape subplot satisfactory, either. The state discourse prevails in the second group. According to Leman, honor killings are totally unacceptable according to the norm of the state:

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<sup>38</sup> **Aslı:** Yani biz olsak polisi devreye sokardık ama onların ne buna cesareti var,

**Meral:** Çünkü tanınmış bir aile.

**Aslı:** Ama ne de kızı onunla zorla evlendirmeye cesaretleri var, çünkü bir taraftan da kültür çatışması yaşıyor bu aile. Bir ayağı gelenekte öbür ayağı...

**Leman:** Of course we are against deaths, honor killings. The boy had to be punished, had to be punished legally, but because they were a well-known family, it would result the girl's name stained. Therefore they preferred to cover it up. I mean, that was the only reason. On the other hand, it was nice that they had cared about her. If we would have a look at today's genocides, we conclude that the society did not effect from the serial last year and the year before. Honor killings are still continuing.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, like the first group viewers who seek a message from the narrative, Leman complains that honour killings still occur in Turkey, despite the fact that the rape subplot in the serial is resolved without an honour killing.

Leman's words illustrate well the conflict between two truth regimes: the extended family, which requires violence in an honour conflict, and the state's order which rejects the tribal order with a discourse on honour killings. Hence, women talking about Zeynep's rape occupy multiple subject positions, which are in conflict.

The respondents in the third group do not find Seymen's action towards Tamer and Zeynep realistic according to the norms of 'Traditional Turkish family structure'. That is to say, they think that if it were a real event Seymen would show a higher level of violence towards Tamer and he would hardly be so tolerant towards his sister. Gönül stresses that such a conflict could never have been resolved in this way in a Turkish family living in Anatolia. On the other hand, Nilgün too thinks that the ideal message is given with the resolution, although she also does not find it realistic.

**Nilgün:** I think Seymen's attitude was good. What could he do? It would be worse.

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<sup>39</sup> **Leman:** Tabii ki ölüme karşıyız burada, Namus cinayetlerine de karşıyız. Orada çocuğun ceza görmesi, hukuksal bir ceza görmesi gerekiyordu ama, onların çok tanınmış bir aile olması, kızın adının çıkmasına vesile olacaktı. Bundan dolayı onu örtbas ettiler. Yani tek neden buydu. Yoksa orada kıza sahiplenmeleri güzeldi. Orada, şu günümüzdeki cinayetlere bakarsak, geçen sene evvelki sene verilen bu diziden demek ki pek etkilenmemiş toplum. Yani halen namus cinayetleri sürüyor.

And they may intend to give a message. I mean the elder brother tolerated and protected his sister.

**Saniye:** I mean their common sense has been positive than destructive. <sup>40</sup>

The point is that they first remark a difference between the real and what is narrated. Seymen does not act according to the norms. They think that this behaviour aims to give a message, a pedagogical act to show the audience the convenient action after in such an honour conflict. Hence, they think that although Seymen's attitude towards his sister is unrealistic, it gives the ideal message. On the other hand, three of the groups do not think that the rape subplot is resolved, because Tamer is not punished either according to the norm of the state, or the norm of the extended family.

The respondents of the fourth group problematize the characters and subplots, the least. They, like the others, refer to a gap between reality and what is narrated in the case of rape. They think that if Karadağs is a traditional extended family, they should either kill or marry off Zeynep and Tamer:

**Didem:** So was on this event. Normally, they should either force them to marry, or shoot them. I mean, if they set the family through eastern customs, they should force them to marry.

**Helin:** Or they would shoot them both.

**Didem:** Yea, they should do it according to the situation but they act flexible. <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> **Nilgün:** Bence Seymen'in tavrı iyiydi. Ne yapabilir di başka? Daha kötü yola gidebilirdi. Acaba bir ders vermek istemiş olabilirler mi? Yani abi anlayışla karşıladı. Kızkardeşini korudu.

**Saniye:** Yani orada daha olgun karşılamaları yapıcı oldu. Yani yıkıcı olacağına yapıcı oldu

<sup>41</sup> **Didem:** Bu olayda da öyle. Aslında normalde ya evlendirmeleri lazım, ya vurmaları lazım. Yani doğru kültürüyle bir aile kurdularsa evlendirmeleri lazım.

**Helin:** Veya ikisini de vuracaklar.

**Didem:** Gidişata göre öyle yapmaları lazım. Ama esnek davranıyorlar.

On the other hand, contrary to the previous groups, when I ask what would be the ideal solution they answer that the resolution in the narrative is the ideal one:

**Question:** What would be the ideal solution? Was that the ideal solution?

**Dilek:** I thing it was the ideal solution. I liked it.

**Didem:** So was for me.

**Dilek:** One side went away. And the girl could continue her own life.<sup>42</sup>

The conversation goes on by talking about Zeynep's marriage with the butler's son, Salih. They all appreciate the marriage with laughters, approving Didem's point that the marriage is so beautiful. The point is that, the fourth group viewers do not problematize the conflicts, because they accept the resolutions. They handle the events occuring one after another in a flow, and hence perceive the subplots as breaches, so that they do not problematize the resolutions. This is most visible in Dilek's words:

**Dilek:** They forced to make everything and we watched normally. We accepted.

That means it was possible.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, towards the end of the conversation on Zeynep and Salih's marriage, Dilek says that one of the most beautiful scenes throughout the serial was Salih's defense of his marriage against his father:

**Dilek:** I think it was one of the most impressive scenes. The child asked father:

“Haven't you ever been loved anyone? Haven't you ever fall in love?” I was

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<sup>42</sup>**Soru:** İdeal çözüm sizce ne olurdu? Bu ideal çözüm müydü?

**Dilek:** Bence ideal çözümdü. Böyle olması hoşuma gitti.

**Didem:** Benim için de öyle.

**Dilek:** Bir taraf gitti. Kız da kendi yaşantısına devam etti.

<sup>43</sup> **Dilek:** Herşeyi yaptırdılar, öldurdular, biz de bir güzel izledik. Biz de kabullendik, olabiliyor demek ki.

amazed on that scene. It was so nice, so beautiful. <sup>44</sup>

Throughout the fourth group conversations on the subplots the other groups problematize, I see that the fourth group viewers bear the characteristics of the soap opera viewer as the ideal mother, who forgives all of the characters in the serial (Modleski, 1990 ). I argue that, the second level of speaking prevails in the fourth group: it is the articulation of desires. The fourth group's acceptance of the breaches and resolutions of *Asmalı Konak*, and their appreciation of love, makes me move on to grasping the viewers' articulation of desires.

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<sup>44</sup> **Dilek:** Bence en etkileyici sahnelerden biriydi. Çocuk babasıyla konuşurken “sen hiç sevmedin mi? Hiç aşık olmadın mı?” diye. Ben orada kopmuştum. Çok hoştu, çok güzeldi.



## Chapter 3

### The Subjects of Narrative, The Subjects of Love

I have already focused on the plot of *Asmalı Konak* to trace how the normative order of the narrative is transformed through breaches. White (1981) argues that narrative closure is possible with a central subject “about which a story could be told”. I already pointed out that *Asmalı Konak* is a heroic melodrama, and the hero is the central subject who engages in those conflict resolution processes. Seymen and Bahar are the central subjects of the narrative, and their love is the central theme of the story.

Throughout the subplots in which passionate love is questioned, gender is the uppermost conflict to be solved within the traditional-modern dichotomy. As soon as they get married, Bahar starts to question Seymen’s power position both in their relationship and towards the other members of the family. That is to say, Seymen’s masculinity and heroism is interrogated throughout the problems the Karadağ family confronted. Each of these problems lead to breaches of existing norms and expectations. The main actor of this period of questioning is Bahar. It is she who gives the first signal for change in a conversation about the new *Konak*, after the burning of *Asmalı Konak*:

**Bahar:** It is beautiful. It is beautiful enough to forget your past. Powerful, inaccessible, tidy(orderly). The house likens its inhabitants to itself in the course of time. We will all change in this house.<sup>45</sup>

The fire is metaphorical: what has been burned down is the old life style. The new one, on the other hand, is being constructed by means of gradual occurring

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<sup>45</sup> **Bahar:** Güzel. İnsana geçmişini unutturacak kadar güzel. Güçlü, ulaşılmaz, düzenli. Ev içindeki insanları kendine benzetir zaten. Biz de bu evde hızla değişeceğiz.

breaches. The point is that Seymen and Bahar are both the main subjects of this process of change. Thus, Seymen and Bahar are the central hero and heroine of the narrative.

Besides, I investigated how the viewers read these breaches by making distinctions between the real and the narrated, and occupy multiple subject positions according to the subplot they find worth mentioning. Interestingly enough, I came up with the fact that they also privilege Sümbül as an important character of the narrative, as they make these distinctions.

In this chapter, I focus on these three characters, namely Sümbül, Bahar and Seymen, by looking at how the viewers talk about them, at the second level. The second level of speaking consists of viewers' articulation of their desires by talking about the characters – the images of women and men in the serial – at the individualistic level.

Cowie (1997) focuses on the construction of the image of woman “as identity which is possessed and appropriated by the woman as social agent and psychical subject”. She points to the dividedness of the subject, “constituted, Lacan says, in that splitting which arises when the subject identifies with its image as other, taking that image as its own. As a result our image of ourselves always comes to us from outside ourselves, from the place of the other” (p. 3). According to Cowie, the image on the screen is the mirror-image of the viewer, and the viewer is the split subject. A crucial element of this construction of subject is desire, as Cowie suggests. Her argument is that identification with the image is the acting out of the desire for the complete image on the mirror.

Understanding the role of recognition and identification is central to understanding role and power of images. Identification does not involve a simple matching of self and image. What we are dealing with here is the desire for such images, so that

through these images, narratives, etc. we come to know ourselves as we truly are, truly know ourselves to be, at the same time only discovering all this in the moment of reading, in the act of watching, the novel and film. (Cowie, p. 5)

Hence, a crucial element of this construction is desire, as Cowie suggests. The desire for the image and the knowledge of the impossibility of fulfilling this desire is the process of identification for the woman in front of the screen.

The viewers of *Asmalı Konak* have two levels of relationship with the narrative and characters of the melodrama. The first is constructed as a search for a consistency with reality and truth claim in the narrative. This is about the viewers' construction of reality. It has to do with norms and what the viewers considers to be possible within existing normativity. The second level of relationship is about their desires. This is about identification, and further, subjectification. Although norms also figure in this second level, the law according to which these norms are formulated do not necessarily coincide with that of reality because desires are perceived as being natural and therefore normless. I will investigate the focus group conversations to grasp how the women viewers articulate their desires as they speak about the melodrama to find out how both identification and subjectification occurs.

I have stated that love is the central theme of *Asmalı Konak*. The ethnographic research shows that love is also the central theme in the decoding process of the melodrama, which attracts the viewers' attention, gives content to their talk of desire. Elif's point on the qualities of a good serial is a shared idea among all of the respondents:

**Elif:** There must be love, there must be pain and there must be beauty. The woman must be so beautiful, and the man must be so handsome.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> **Elif:** Aşk olmalı, acı olmalı, güzeller olmalı. Kız çok güzel olmalı, erkek de çok yakışıklı olmalı.

Love is discussed around the main characters of the melodrama. I have already pointed out that the viewers talk about the narrative at two levels: the level of reality and the level of desire. At the level of reality, the characters are told as members of a community – an extended family, and inhabitants of an Anatolian town – and their actions are appraised according to the norms of those structures and locations in which they are imagined to be. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the viewers mention the characters when they cause or figure in a process of breach. Hence, the characters are told as the subjects of a social structure. Second, at the level of desire, the viewers talk about the characters at an individualistic level, and refer to them as subjects of love. For example, Sümbül (who is mentioned as the mother of the *ağa*, as the oldest member of the Karadağ family, and a well-known woman in Ürgüp, and hence whose love relationship is unacceptable normatively) is also depicted as a lonely woman who has the right to be happy in a love relationship at an advanced age, and hence whose love is acceptable, and further, desirable. Indeed, the characters within the narrative are told as subjects of love, no less than being subjects of the social structure.

I argue that, as the viewers talk from a normative viewpoint, they articulate the conflicts stemming from the modern-traditional dichotomy. They occupy multiple subject positions as they refer to the norms the characters of the narrative are subject to. This is because they are talking about the tragic dividedness of modernity in Turkey. That is to say, according to the subject-position they temporarily occupy, they sometimes talk from the norm of the state which stands for the modern and sometimes from the extended family/house norms which stand for the traditional. While doing this, they locate the characters within the *imagined* social structure. On the other hand, as they mention the characters as subjects of love, they also talk about

love as a desirable phenomenon and articulate their fantasy of love. By means of assessing the loving characters of the melodrama from an individualistic point of view, they constitute themselves as modern subjects, and articulate the fantasy of romantic love. This time, the characters are told as individuals, as free-floating subjects, devoid of any anchoring in a specific social structure.

Departing from this point, I will investigate how the women viewers talk about the characters they think to be the central subjects of the narrative. How do they articulate their own desires, as they talk about those characters they identify themselves with? How does the identification take place? Ultimately, how do they talk about the traditional-modern dichotomy, and articulate their fantasy of romantic love as they talk about the characters and their love relationships? These are the questions I seek to answer below. It is crucial to note that they pay more attention to the women characters of the melodrama and talk much more about their love. The men of the melodrama, including Seymen, are discussed mostly in relation to the women characters.

## **1. Sümbül**

I handled Sümbül's love as one of the important subplots of the narrative, which constitutes a breach in the norms of the extended family, as imagined within the narrative. Sümbül's words illustrates the difficult conflict situation she is in, as she talks to Kader, Ali bey's sister, after Ali bey's marriage proposal:

**Sümbül:** If I say no, God knows when I can see him again. Perhaps we cannot see each other, ever. If I say yes, the house, children, the town, relatives, everybody rise against me. My sons already lour after Ali bey talked to Seymen. They cannot think of you as a woman with a heart, deserving happiness. They only think of you

as a woman following her desires despite her old age. How can I answer to him?

Could you, if you were me? <sup>47</sup>

Indeed, the narrative poses Sümbül both as a part of the social context, and as a woman who is in love. This two-folded representation is visible in the viewers' conversations on Sümbül, as well.

As I stated before, Sümbül and Ali's love constitutes (perhaps the most) crucial topic discussed in all of the focus group conversations. In almost all of the groups, the respondents answer to the first question 'What did you think of the serial, what was it about?', by talking about Sümbül. I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, they find her love relationship unrealistic and contrary to the norms. On the other hand, Sümbül's love is one of the most thrilling themes that make *Asmalı Konak* a charming narrative for them. They have a smiley face even as they talk about how unrealistic such a love is according to the norms.

This is the case in the first group. They start to talk about Sümbül, when I ask what they thought of the Sümbül character. First, Tülay mentions her as a tough mother-in-law. Then, they talk about her love affair with Ali. When I ask what kind of a person Sümbül is, Tülay giggles as she says that Sümbül's love affair is not a good example for the viewers,:

**Question:** What kind of a woman was Sümbül, then?

**Tülay:** A tough mother-in-law (laughters). Aauthoritative.

**Ayşe:** Later on she flirted with Ali bey.

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<sup>47</sup> **Sümbül:** Hayır desem, kimbilir Ali'nin yüzünü bir daha ne zaman görürüm. Belki artık birbirimizin yüzünü dünya gözüyle görmek bile nasib olmaz. Evet desem, ev, çocuklar, kasaba, akrabalar, sülale birbirine girer. Tefe koyarlar beni. Zaten Ali bey gelip konuştu diye oğlanlar yüzlerini sarkıtmaya başladılar bile. Sen onların gözünde kalbi olan, mutluluğu hak eden biri olmuyorsun ki. Bu yaşta azıtan, hala gözü oynışta olan bir kadın oluyorsun. Nasıl cevap verebilirim? Sen olsan verebilir miydin?

**Tülay:** Who was he? Ali bey. She was dressing up and going out with him secretly. I mean there were not so much good examples in the serial.

**Hatice:** It is wrong, of course. I mean at her age, with those children, she was not arranged with him before. I mean, she was flirting before the eyes of her children.

**Tülay:** But there is no proper age to fall in love, they say.<sup>48</sup>

Hatice, as the oldest woman in the group stresses that Sümbül's behaviour is wrong. The younger woman, on the other hand, responds with the cliché that "There is no proper age to fall in love" (*aşkın yaşı yoktur*). Hence, the other women reply to Hatice's normative viewpoint by stating the omnipotence of love. That is to say, they shift between two levels of speech. Hatice makes her point on Sümbül's love by speaking about the norms of the extended family, that is, reality. Tülay, on the other hand, shifts the discourse by talking about love as a natural and global phenomenon, context-less. This is the articulation of pure desire.

The second group viewers also pay attention to Sümbül and Ali's case, as an unrealistic but desirable subplot. They talk about the subplot from the very beginning, in answer to the first question on their general opinion about the melodrama. Ayten, as one of the younger women in the group, opens up the conversation by mentioning Sümbül as an unrealistically good mother-in-law. After

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<sup>48</sup> **Soru:** Sümbül nasıl birisiydi peki?

**Tülay:** Zor bir kayınvalide. (gülüşmeler) Otoriter

**Ayşe:** Fazla da dinleyen yoktu ama (gülmeler)

**Meral:** Sonradan ciilvelendi. Ali beyle...

**Tülay:** Kimdi o, Ali bey miydi?

**Meral:** Karıştıyordu ama, herşeye karıştıyordu.

**Tülay:** Süslenip süslenip kaçamak yapıyordu. (gülmeler) Yani pek iyi örnekler yokmuş yani dizide.

**Hatice:** Yanlış tabii. Yani o yaşta, çocuğu çocuğu evinde, önceden verilmemiş... Ne bileyim, o yaşta çocuklarının gözü önünde kaçamak yapıyor.

**Tülay:** Aşkın yaşı yokmuş yalnız.

Ayten's initial comments, Münire and Filiz mention Sümbül's love as the most striking subplot in the melodrama. Like Hatice in the first group, Münire places Sümbül in the structural context – the extended family; and points out that she finds her relationship unrealistic, as we have already pointed out in the previous chapter. On the other hand, Filiz explains this in terms of the specific condition of modernity in Turkey, as an EU candidate, and argue that the viewers enjoyed watching such an extraordinary subplot in this context, adding that love is the most well-known and enjoyable theme in the global realm:

**Question:** Filiz hanım?

**Filiz:** Now, as this serial started, while watching, I thought from social side and made decisions. I think, this serial is the first messenger of us, our Turkish society as being in front of the European Community gate. Such that, we want to be modernized in one side. Youngsters in the serial, such as family's little girls' some ideas, some speeches.. She continuously says I'll do that, I'll do this... We want to stay traditional on the other side and it's represented by older generations. So it's like the mirror image of the Turkish community that's before European Community. We want to join it as well as we don't want to quit our roots and traditions. But we know from some of the things that maybe we will lose. In my opinion, European Community has positive sides but we may have some damages about our traditions.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> **Filiz:** Şimdi ben bu dizi başladıktan sonra izlerken, kendi kendime, ben toplumsal açıdan düşündüm ve kendi kendime bazı sonuçlara vardım. Bence bu dizi bizim Avrupa Birliği kapısındaki ilk habercisi, bizim Türk toplumunun. Şöyle ki, bir yanımızla modernleşmek istiyoruz. Dizideki genç çocuklar, mesela ailenin küçük kızını bazı fikirleri, bazı konuşmaları, sürekli olarak, ya da annesiyle şimdiki gençlerin şunu yapacağım, bunu yapacağım gibi. Bir yanımızla geleneksel kalmak istiyoruz, onu da eski kuşaklar temsil ediyordu. Yani bir yerde Avrupa Birliği öncesi Türk toplumunu aynası gibiydi, yansıması gibiydi bana göre. Çünkü bir taraftan girmek istiyoruz, bir taraftan da köklerimizden, geleneklerimizden vazgeçmek istemiyoruz. Ama bazı şeylerden biliyoruz



However, Filiz speaks from a meta-viewpoint and, rather than judging the characters' actions according to the norms belonging to the imaginary of tradition, she puts a readerly-distance between herself and the narrative, contextualizing it within the current experience of modernity in Turkey.

Love in *Asmalı Konak* is handled in a similar manner. She takes the serial as one of the love stories widely-read/screened (consumed), and makes the point that love is the most common theme in popular television serials and novels enjoyed/appreciated globally:

**Filiz:** If we come to the love issue, love wins evrywhere in the world. Even if a small quantity of love enters a serial or a novel, love makes it widely watched and sold. The relationship between Bahar and Seymen was important here, but I think there was a wide range of middle-aged viewers. I mean it is a difficult think to love in those ages, you know in our culture everything is finished, covered up. We found interesting to see that it is lived again.<sup>50</sup>

Filiz changes the flow of the conversation with her meta-viewpoint to the narrative. She does not refer to the relationship between the narrative and reality and hence does not handle the characters like *real* subjects who are to act according to normativity. Thus, she does not problematize Smbl's love. She thinks that her love is enjoyed by middle-aged viewers, not despite, but because it is unrealistic. This is to say that love as an impossibility is a desirable phenomenon. Further, she points out

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ki kaybedebileceğiz, belki de. Bana gre Avrupa Birlięi'nin olumlu ynleri olduęu gibi, geleneklerimizle ilgili bazı zedelenmeler olacaęını dşnyorum ben...

<sup>50</sup> **Filiz:** Buradaki aşk konusuna gelirsek, nerede, dnyanın neresinde olursa olsun aşk kazanır her zaman. Ufacık bir damlası bile girse bir diziye, bir romana, onu çok sattırır ve izlettirir. Buradaki Bahar'la Seymen arasındaki aşk nemliydi ama bana gre orta yaşılların esas yani seyreden byk bir kesim vardı. Yani bizde o yaşıllarda pek grlmeyen bir aşk şeyi, yani bizde biliyorsunuz belli bir dnemden sonra herşeyin kapanır st. Onun tekrar yaşılanması topluma bir deęişik geldi.

that middle-aged women enjoyed watching Sümbül because they identified themselves with her. She, as a lover, is the image of what the viewer desires to be, yet she also knows well that she cannot. Indeed, according to the ethnographic research I conducted, the viewers' relationship with their desires is basically based on this impossibility. The identification is accompanied with a sense of impossibility.

I open the conversation on Sümbül and Ali's love towards the end of the second group conversation again. Keeping Filiz's meta-viewpoint in mind I ask them what they thought of screening this love in a widely-followed serial:

**Ayten:** I think it is well, actually.

**Leman:** I think love is possible at every age. It is normal because both of them are single. It would be worse if they were married. Their love is nice because they are single.

**Münire:** I regard it strange because Sümbül refused him since he is uneducated. Later on she acted him as they say 'my ugly stay here, if I find my beautiful I will be with him, if I can't I will turn to you'. He was a substitute after her husband's death. I worried about Ali. If I were Ali, I would not accept. <sup>51</sup>

Especially the shift in Münire's discourse is striking. She is the one who first makes the point that Sümbül's love is unrealistic according to the norms of the extended family. Towards the end of the conversation, she joins Leman's point with an individualistic assessment of Ali and Sümbül. She still tells that she finds

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<sup>51</sup> Ayten: İyi oldu aslında ya.

Leman: Bence aşk her yaşta mümkün. Bunların ikisi de bekar olduğu için normal bana göre. Evli olsalardı çok daha çirkin olurdu. İkisi de bekar olduğu için yaşadıkları aşk da güzel oldu. Ama yaşadığımız toplum yadırgadık. Ama aslında normal.

Münire: Ben şu açıdan yadırgadım. Sümbül önce eğitimsiz diye reddetti. Sonradan, çirkinim sen burada dur, ben güzelimi bulursam alırım, bulamazsam sana dönerim hesabına döndü. Eşi öldükten sonra o yedekte duran birisiydi. Ben Ali açısından üzül müştüm. Ali yerinde olsam kabul etmezdim.

Sümbül's love problematic, but this time Sümbül is an autonomous individual who makes a choice between two men, and because of that choice, does not deserve Ali's love. What is crucial is that this time, Münire talks about Sümbül at an individualistic level, not as the subject of norms (i.e. reality), but as a woman whose own actions position her within a love relationship (desire).

This approach to the narrative can be understood better by looking at its difference to Emine's. Emine is not involved in Sümbül's love at all, because she cannot identify herself with Sümbül. In contrast to Filiz's distanced viewpoint, Emine talks as if she is one of the characters of the narrative. She says that Bahar and Seymen's painful love is realistic because she finds similarities between their life and hers, whereas she does not get involved in the other women's talk about Sümbül. She talks about her towards the end of the conversation and points out that she categorically rejects the image of aged lover:

**Emine:** I was going to the kitchen when thier love is screened. (laughters)

**Question:** That of Sümbül and Ali's?

**Leman:** Oh, I liked it.

**Emine:** I was getting bored in those screens.

**Question:** Why were you getting bored?

**Emine:** I don't know, I mean it was boring. It is impossible I thought, the old does not fall in love (laughters).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> **Emine:** Ben onların ilişkisi, sahneleri geldiği zaman mutfağa gidiyordum. (gülüşmeler)

Soru: Sümbül'le Ali mi?

**Leman:** A ben seviyordum.

**Emine:** O sahnelerde sıkılıyordum.

**Soru:** Neden sıkılıyordun?

**Emine:** Bilemiyorum yani sıkıcı geliyordu bana. Olmaz gibi geliyordu, yaşlılar aşık olmazlar. (gülüşmeler)

The others do not agree with her, bringing forward an individualistic point of view. That is to say, Filiz and Münire answer Emine's point, taking Sümbül not as mother of Karadağs but just a lonely woman:

**Münire:** Wine becomes valuable as it gets old, so do women.

**Filiz:** There were moments that Sümbül felt herself very much alone in the family. Sometimes, do you remember the moments she was left in the room alone, experiencing loneliness deeply? People may change so do the feelings. Maybe she had not thought like this when she was young, but her children and every member of her family separated and went to different directions. After her matriarchy weakened, she searched for an affectionate hand.<sup>53</sup>

We come across Filiz's individualistic view of Sümbül in these latter comments again. She is perceived as a lonely woman who needs an affectionate hand in her old age. Finally, the group agrees with the idea that Sümbül deserves Ali's love, because she was cheated by her husband throughout her life.

For the viewers of *Asmalı Konak*, Sümbül's love inspires the desire for a long-lasting love in a middle-aged woman. The third and fourth group respondents handle Sümbül's love in a similar manner. After Nilgün opens the conversation on Sümbül and Ali, Gönül brings forward the idea that they like to watch Sümbül's love as the most impressive subplot within the melodrama, because they are also middle-aged:

**Nilgün:** But the most impressive part of the film was Ali Bey's love of Sumbul Hanım which survived for years.

**Gönül:** Yes, that was nice.

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<sup>53</sup> **Münire:** Şarap yaşlandıkça değerlenir, kadın da öyle.

**Filiz:** Sümbül'ün aile içinde kendini çok yalnız hissettiği anlar oldu. Bazen, hatırlar mısınız odada tek kaldığı, kendini yalnız hissettiği zamanlar oluyor. İnsanlar değişebilir, duygular da değişebilir. O gençliğinde öyle düşünmemiş olabilir ama çoluğu çocuğu, hepsi bir yere, hayatları başka yönle gitti. O da o anaerkillikten yavaş yavaş çekilince, kendine şefkatli bir el aradı.

**Nilgün:** The most unforgettable part of it.

**Gönül:** Maybe that's because we are in our middle ages... (Laughs)<sup>54</sup>

The normative viewpoint to the narrative prevails in the third group. That is to say, the subplots are handled as breaches, as violation of norms. Hence, the characters are also handled as subjects of social structure, rather than as subjects of love with an individualistic view. On the other hand, as soon as Nilgün opens up the talk on Sümbül's love as a desirable subplot, they bring forward their age as the reason they enjoyed watching her life. Hence, the third group respondents identify themselves with the Sümbül character in *Asmalı Konak*. Further, this short discussion of Sümbül is set at a distance to the narrative. In the next part of the conversation, Gönül says that the film of *Asmalı Konak* is criticized because it does not pay attention to Sümbül and Ali's relationship.

**Gönül:** Thus, there were many critiques to the film since it did not include that love. Since, it was not continuing in the movie.<sup>55</sup>

The fourth group viewers, whose average age is lower than the previous groups, also make this point about middle-aged viewers. Didem and Dilek draw attention to Sümbül and Ali's love, from the very beginning of their talk. Rather than pointing out how unrealistic a subplot it is, both Didem and Dilek talk about it with appreciation:

**Didem:** The love between Sumbul Hanim and Ali Bey was the most impressive part of the serial according to me. I mean, I did like it so much. They were just

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<sup>54</sup> **Nilgün:** Ama filmin en etkileyici tarafı Ali beyin Sümbül hanıma duyduğu, yıllarca süren aşkıydı.

**Gönül:** Evet o çok güzeldi.

**Nilgün:** En çok akılda kalan o.

**Gönül:** Orta yaş grubu olduğumuz için mi acaba... (gülüşmeler)

<sup>55</sup> **Gönül:** Hatta filminin içinde o olmadığı için filmi eleştirenler de çok olmuş. Filmde de devam etmediği için...

living that love, in their old age, secretly, not revealing because of customs and traditions, concealing from everyone else; I like so much I mean.<sup>56</sup>

Didem says that she likes to watch Smbl's love affair, which is secret due to customs/tradition. She points to an inconsistency between love and tradition, but rather than problematizing this, she says that she enjoys watching such a secret love. Following Didem, Dilek talks from the meta-viewpoint, adding that the subplot addresses the middle-aged viewers, giving the message that middle-aged people can also love. Didem agrees with her, giving her aunt as an example:

**Dilek:** Not only the youngsters, but also the old people are watching it. A middle aged-person can also fall in love and like someone.

**Didem:** I myself, in my private life for instance, am together with my aunts, not with my parents. And there are many people, began watching the serial because of Ozcan Deniz, but the love between Sumbul Hanim and Ali Bey was very important especially for middle aged-people. They had either flashbaced certain incidents that they could not live, or remembered. Me too, I mean, I enjoyed it very much too. And I thought whether I will think about the past when I will become that old.

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Like the viewers in the second and third groups, Didem and Dilek talk from a meta-point of view, positioning themselves at a meta-view from the narrative. They

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<sup>56</sup> **Didem:** Beni de en ok etkileyen bu dizide Smbl hanmla Ali beyin akıydı. ok houma gitti yani. O yatan sonra bu akı yaamaları, bir de gizli kapaklı yaamaları, bazı eyleri rf ve adetlerden dolayı aıklamamaları, gizli kapaklı yapmaları, o ok houma gitti.

<sup>57</sup> **Dilek:** Srf genler izlemiyor bunu, orta yalılar da izliyor. Orta yalı bir insan da aık olup birini sevebilir.

**Didem:** Ben mesela zel hayatımda, annemlerle deęil de, halamlarla filan birlikteyim. Hem herkes zcan Deniz hayranı olarkten bu diziye balayıp ama bu Smbl'le Ali beyin akı ok konuuldu bu ya kesiminde zellikle. Ya yaayamadıkları bir takım eylere geri dndler, hatırladılar. Yani ben de, benim de ok houma gitti. Hani hep dndm, o yaa geldięim zaman ben de hani eskiyi dnr mym

look at their own lives and that of older people around them to find examples with which to make sense of the serial.

Perhaps among the focus groups I conducted, the individualistic view is most apparent in the fourth group conversation. They mention Smbl and Ali as loving characters, rather than as subjects of the traditional order fulfilling critical roles within the extended family:

**Question:** You said that the love between Sumbul and Ali is very important?

**Dilek:** I mean they were also enemies before. Then they had started, to each other, they also liked each other, there was also love. I mean, they were also enemies before. I don't know; it was nice.

**Helin:** Was there any tendency on Sumbul?

**Dilek:** She liked him.

**Helin:** Yes sure, but I remember in another way. There were two choices for her, but she chosed her husband because she was in love with him. It was more like one-sided.

**Gaye:** Not so one-sided but there had been an order, that kind of a family. Think that she crushed the order suddenly and went to Ali Bey, what would people say about it? <sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> **Soru:** Smbl'le Ali'nin aşkı çok önemli demiştiniz?

**Dilek:** Yani hem düşmanlardı önceden. Sonradan birbirlerini, zaten aşk varmış, hoşlanıyorlarmış. Bilmem, güzeldi.

**Helin:** Smbl'de var mıydı bir şey?

**Dilek:** Beğeniyordu.

**Helin:** Mutlaka ama ben şöyle hatırlıyorum. İki seçenek var ama çok sevdiği için kocasını tercih ediyor. Tek taraflı gibi.

**Gaye:** Çok tek taraflı değil de yani öyle bir düzen kurulmuş, öyle bir aile var. Onu yıkıp da Ali beye gitmesi, acaba ne derler.

The women in the fourth group enjoy watching their struggle to live their love within that social context, and they are on the side of love in this struggle. They wish love to overcome in this struggle that they like to watch.

Further in the discussion, the participants of the fourth group conversation continue to appreciate love as the central theme in this subplot, discussing the position of Sümbül, Ali and Piraye, that is to say, comparing the relationships between Sümbül and Ali, and Ali and Piraye ( the woman who is in love and have had a relationship for twenty five years with Ali):

**Dilek:** There was another interesting point. Ali Bey's connection with the woman, the hotel's manager, Piraye Hanim and the relationship between the three... (approvals). I felt so sorry for the Piraye Hanim.

**Helin:** I felt sorry too.

**Gaye:** Because she was both loving and can not just abandon. Ali Bey was managing her; both saying "okey" and going back to Sumbul Hanim; preferring her, and the dilemma that the woman was in. Piraye Hanim was accepting the situation in every way. Although she know the existence of Sumbul Hanim..<sup>59</sup>

The point is that the viewers in the fourth group most apparently appreciate the primacy of love to social obligations. They mention love as the ultimate aim within the narrative, distancing themselves from the exact form in which love is screened in television fiction. The women viewers of *Asmalı Konak* enjoy mentioning the love they watch as a distant but desirable phenomenon.

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<sup>59</sup> **Dilek:** Bu arada şey de çok ilginçti. Ali beyin o otel, pansiyon işleten, Piraye hanımla olan, yani o üçünün ilişkisi beni çok (onaylamalar)... Piraye hanıma çok üzüldüm açıkçası.

**Helin:** Ben de üzüldüm.

**Gaye:** Çünkü hem çok seviyor, vazgeçemiyor. Ali beyin onu idare etmesi hem tamam sensin deyip arkasından Sümbül hanıma dönmesi, Sümbül hanımı tercih etmesi, o kadının yaşadığı ikilem. Piraye hanımın da her türlü, her şekilde kabul etmesi. Sümbül hanımın varlığını bile bile.



I argue that the respondents who mention the charm of Sümbül and Ali's love, articulate their desire from a distant viewpoint. The respondents who enjoy watching their love talk about it as outsiders. They do not refer to reality, or do not problematize the inconsistency, so that they can "live in contradiction without shame" (quoted from Barthes by Culler, p. 31). They celebrate the long-lasting love embodied in Sümbül and Ali's love, and it is eternal love that they fantasize/desire.

This distant viewpoint is enabled through the viewers' identification with Sümbül. However, rather than imagining themselves in the place of Sümbül, they detach Sümbül from the social structure she belongs to and put her in their place. I argue that this is the way they imagine their place through a difference with Sümbül's, or the Karadağ's, and hence a difference with the traditional realm. When they imagine Sümbül outside the norms of the social structure she is subject to they find Sümbül's love unrealistic, but understandable and desirable. This is the difference between identification via desire, and identification via reality.

This can be better understood in their conversations on Bahar. I will seek to answer how identification takes place, in their discussions about Bahar, who is the representation of the modern.

## **2. Bahar**

Except for the first group, almost all of the respondents in the focus groups mention Seymen and Bahar's love as the most interesting theme that attracts their attention. As we have already seen, Sümbül's love is the most central theme in the second group conversation, either as a breach, or as desirable. The subject of love in *Asmalı Konak* for them is primordially Bahar, who has to cope with the conflict between love and normative structure. The conversations about Bahar are mostly opened up when I ask, and turn around her unified and powerful character.

Filiz in the second group starts to mention Bahar, by placing her within the context of a serial rather than real life. She makes her point by contextualizing *Asmalı Konak* with other tv programs/shows about daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationships, and she defines Bahar primarily as the bride of the Karadağs. Filiz and Elif point to the message-giving aim of the melodrama: they argue that the melodrama says that daughter-in-laws are more powerful because they are economically independent from their husbands and husbands' families:

**Filiz:** In fact there was a message to the brides and mothers-in-law of the future here. In the beginning, the mother-in-law wanted to adjust the bride. But she couldn't. On the contrary, if you are aware of it, the bride adjusted the mother-in-law to herself. Today, bride-kaynana serials are commonly watched. I think this is a clue for mothers-in-law of the future. Mothers-in-law began to leave their seat to brides. Elif: Because power is in the hands of the women anymore. Women are working, too. She is not dependent on her mother-in-law, on her husband.

**Filiz:** The mother-in-law struggled to adjust the bride for long. <sup>60</sup>

The conversation goes on by noting how deviant a character Bahar is, for the social structure as imagined within the narrative. Ayten and Filiz describe her as 'dişli, mücadelecı', and Ayten says that it is impossible to be as formidable/tough (*dişli*) as Bahar in such a family:

**Filiz:** The mother-in-law struggled to adjust the bride for long.

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<sup>60</sup> **Filiz:** Aslında burada ileriki gelin ve kaynanalara bir haber de vardı. İlk başta kaynana gelini kendi şekline sokmak istedi. Fakat sokamadı. Tam tersine, farkındaysanız gelin kaynanayı kendisine uydurdu. Günümüzde de gelin-kaynana dizileri bu kadar izleniyor. Bence geleceğin gelin kaynanalarının da habercisi. Kaynanalar biraz gelinlerine yerlerini bırakmaya başladılar.

**Elif:** Çünkü güç artık kadınlarda. Kadınlar da çalışıyor. Kaynananın eline bakmıyor, kocanın eline bakmıyor.

**Ayten:** Then she saw that the girl is geared, very geared. I don't know whether one can be such geared in that kind of a family. Because everyone can't manage to do that. <sup>61</sup>

Filiz tries to explain Bahar's deviance from the norms of the extended family in terms of an individualistic account of the Bahar-Seymen relationship. Although Bahar's character is deviant from the extended family norms, she has to be such a tough character to be compatible with Seymen. She describes her as a powerful and dominant woman:

**Filiz:** But she must be powerful in order to be in harmony with Seymen, she was like that from the beginning. She was fighter (mücadeleci). Do you remember their scene, we didn't see here, where they both throw the items of the house away, do you remember their quarrel? Think of that, is it possible that a woman throws all the items away in a quarrel? This shows that Bahar is a very dominant character.

**Ayten:** And think that this happens in a small settlement. What does that family do to her, I can't imagine it.

**Münire:** Oo, why? An event had occurred. May be you remember when I mention. Bahar didn't want to enter the house, put the chair in front of the door. They carried food for her with tepsiler. My daughter, come in, ayıp oluyor, this is a small town, what do the people say, she didn't utter one word, she didn't enter. In the end, Bekir called her husband. Her husband came. He looked into her eyes, put her on his back at one go, everyone applauded. <sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> **Filiz:** Kaynana çok uğraştı yani, gelinini uydurmak için

**Ayten:** Sonra baktı kız dişli, bayağı bir dişli. Öyle bir ailede o kadar dişli olunabilir mi onu da bilemiyorum artık. Herkesin harcı değildir çünkü

<sup>62</sup> **Filiz:** Ama bak karakterde Seymen'le uyuşabilmesi için onun da güçlü olması lazım, en baştan öyleydi. Çok mücadeleciydi. Hatırlar mısınız hani onların, burada göstermedi, evdeki eşyaları dışarı atma şeyleri vardı, ikisinin de. Hatırlıyor musunuz oraları, kavgalarında? Şimdi düşünün bir kadının mümkün mü bir kavgada bütün eşyaları dışarı atması falan. Bu Bahar'ın çok baskın bir karakter olduğunu gösterir.

Ayten insists on the idea that this is an inconsistency, because she thinks that Bahar, as the bride, has to be a part of the social structure. On the other hand, Münire gives an example from the narrative which shows that the only power that Bahar submits to is her love for Seymen – not Seymen’s power stemming from the order of the extended family. That is to say, she submits to him because she loves him, not because of his ağa position/title:

**Question:** So, you think that Bahar is submitting to Seymen?

**Münire:** Of course she is. She loves him so much.

**Filiz:** But she submits willingly.

**Münire:** She was so much in pain, hatred, but still continuing to repeat his name as "Seymeeen, Seymeeen".

**Filiz:** There was a famous saying last year, from a song of Ozlem Tekin. It was saying: "Does love forgive everything?". It was very much on the agenda last year. It is somewhere in the serial also. The serial is a reflection of the saying "Love forgives everything".<sup>63</sup>

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**Ayten:** Küçük yerde bir de düşünün. Olabilir mi yani? O aile ne yapar onu, hiç düşünemiyorum yani.

**Münire:** A, neden? Bir olay olmuştu. Ne olduğunu söyleyince hatırlarsınız belki. Bahar eve girmek istemedi, kapının önüne sandalyeyi koydu. Önüne tepsiyle yemekler geldi. Kızım gel bak çok ayıp oluyor, burası küçük yer, ne der millet filan, hiç sesini çıkartmadı, girmede. Bekir en sonunda şeyi aradı, eşini aradı. Eşi geldi. Şöyle bir göz göze gelip, Bahar’ı hop diye sırtına atıp içeri aldı, herkes alkışladı.

<sup>63</sup> **Soru:** Bahar Seymen’e boyun eğiyordu, öyle mi?

**Münire:** Tabii eğiyordu. Çok seviyordu.

**Filiz:** Ama isteyerek eğiyordu.

**Münire:** İsteyerek, tabii. Baskıyla değil. Çok seviyordu çünkü. O kadar acı çekiyordu, nefret ediyordu. Ama yine de “Seymeen Seymeeen” diye inliyordu kadın ya.

**Filiz:** Geçen sene meşhur bir söz vardı, Özlem Tekin’in mi ne şarkısı hani: Aşk herşeyi affeder mi diye. O çok gündemdeydi geçen yıl. Bu dizide bir yerde o da var. Aşk herşeyi affeder mi, bu dizide onun yansıması da vardı.

They think that Seymen loves Bahar despite/because of her strong character, adding that Seymen likes powerful women. Bahar fulfills the image of the powerful woman for the second group respondents.

The difference between their discussion of Sümbül's and Bahar's love is crucial. As I mentioned in the previous section, they talk about Sümbül at two levels. First, they tell Sümbül as the subject of the social structure – as an old and well-known (*eşraftan*) woman, and as a mother of two sons; second, this time from an individualistic point of view, they define her as a woman in love, or as a woman who needs love. Bahar, however, is only the subject of love. They always talk about Bahar from individualistic point of view, whether they are making judgements on her actions within the social context or her actions with regard to her love. This is because she is an outsider, and not a part of the social structure within which the norms are embedded. The point here is that love is an outsider, does not recognize any law, social or otherwise.

My argument is that, by means of defining Bahar as an outsider, they make a contrast between the social and the natural, identifying Bahar with the natural, because she is not a part of the social structure, and she submits no to normative order but to love. Love stands for the natural, which overcomes social obligations/and hierarchies stemming from the social structure. The women in the focus groups articulate their desire to love/to be loved in the name of Sümbül. On the other hand, when they talk about Bahar, they construe love as an unsurmountable force, as the natural and hence, as the inevitable which brings submission. I argue that, by naturalizing love, they naturalize submission to love, making Bahar's submission to Seymen a natural tendency. After Münire gives examples on how Bahar submits to Seymen I ask them about their feelings to such a submission:

**Filiz:** Why is it so important to be under control/ possessed?

**Leman:** The nature of women...

**Ayten:** It is in the nature of women.

**Münire:** I mean it stems from our society.

**Leman:** No no, not from our society, it is in the nature of women.

**Ayten:** It stems from the nature of human being, from the nature of being a human being.<sup>64</sup>

They discuss whether submission stems from the nature of all women, or the nature of Turkish women. Leman and Ayten reject Münire's point that it stems from the nature of Turkish women, and generalizes it to all; as a natural tendency devoid of any social construction.

Bahar's natural character is at stake in the third group, as well. In the third group, respondents first talk about what a crazy/eccentric character Bahar is. Gönül stresses her frivolity, adding that this is also accepted by the Karadağ family. For the women in the third group, Bahar is 'the good' of the melodrama. They describe her as the most precious character within the narrative. They use the words 'intimate, natural, lowly/modest (*mütevazı*), with a strong character'. Nilgün emphasizes that even Dicle, as the rival of Bahar, likes her. This, she says, was a crucial part of the melodrama that attracted her attention:

**Nilgün:** But the most strange side was that even Dicle liked Bahar.

**Leyla:** Yes, she had good relations with the maids.

**Nilgün:** She even liked because she (Bahar) was natural and humble. The wife of the man whom she loved...

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<sup>64</sup> **Soru:** Neden sahiplenilmek bu kadar önemli?

**Leman:** Kadınların doğasında...

**Ayten:** Doğasında var.

**Münire:** Yani bizim toplumumuzdan kaynaklanıyor.

**Leman:** Yok yok, bizim toplumumuzdan değil, kadının doğasında var.

**Ayten:** İnsanın doğasından kaynaklanıyor yani. İnsan olmanın doğasından kaynaklanıyor.

**Saniye:** Bahar was of good character. .<sup>65</sup>

Further in the discussion on Bahar, I asked them the difference between Lale, the second bride of the Karadağs, and Bahar:

**Question:** What was the difference between Lale and Bahar?

**Nilgün:** Bahar was of better character. Bahar daha karakterliydi.

**Semahat:** She [Lale] was superficial.

**Saniye:** She was a bit out of balance. (laughters)

**Gönül:** I think she wasn't as natural as Bahar. She was gossiping. Maybe that influenced us. .<sup>66</sup>

As they compare Bahar and Lale, Gönül uses the word 'natural' as a difference between Lale and Bahar, because Bahar does not gossip as Lale does. It is crucial that gossiping refers to a liminal and negative form of communication, especially attributed to women in Turkey. Hence, a gossiping woman symbolizes woman acting within the social structure, but in an improper way. That is to say, gossiping is one of the illnesses of Turkish culture to be cured, and gossiping women are far from being natural, and hence being properly modern.

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<sup>65</sup> **Nilgün:** Yalnız en şey tarafı Bahar'ın, Dicle'nin bile sevmesiydi.

**Leyla:** Evet, hizmetçilerle filan arası iyiydi.

**Nilgün:** Doğal ve mütevazi olduğu için, onun bile sevmesi. Aşık olduğu adamın karısı...

**Saniye:** Bahar karakterliydi

<sup>66</sup> **Soru:** Lale'yle Bahar'ın farkı neydi?

**Nilgün:** Bahar daha karakterliydi.

**Semahat:** Yüzeyseldi.

**Saniye:** O kız biraz dengesizdi. (gülüşmeler)

**Gönül:** Yani bence Bahar'daki o doğallık onda yoktu. Dedikodu filan yapıyordu ya. O filan belki biraz bizi etkiledi.

It is crucial to note that Lale is not an insider, either. She is also an outsider to the Karadağ family, and further, she is not accepted by them. Her family is a nuclear family living in Ürgüp, and her father Süleyman bey is an official of the municipality who criticizes the Karadağs for carrying on the feudal order in Ürgüp. Hence, Lale's family represents the modern in place of the traditional lifestyle of the Karadağs. However, their modernity is not appreciated; that is to say, Lale and her family do not represent modernity as a desired lifestyle. Lale and her mother Keriman, as gossiping women, represent improper modernity in *Asmalı Konak*. On the other hand, Bahar is the perfect image representing the natural. The third group respondents' discussion of gossip points to this distinction between good modernity and bad modernity. After Gönül's comment on Lale's tendency to gossip as a negative feature, in contrast to Bahar's natural character, Saniye and Semahat point out that gossiping is inevitable, though it also has rules that Lale could not manage. They argue that Lale gossips because her family is closer to her. Gönül answers that Bahar also talks with her sister about what is going on in the Konak, but she is natural because she can say anything anywhere, she does not gossip secretly:

**Semahat:** Is it possible that one doesn't gossip?

**Saniye:** She wasn't gossiping cleverly.

**Gönül:** But the other bride, since she wasn't like that, the other bride. But the other bride, since she wasn't like that, the other bride.

**Semahat:** But she didn't have a family.

**Gönül:** Why? She had a sister, father.

**Semahat:** Her sister was in İstanbul.

**Gönül:** But they were gathering together, almost in every episode. No, but, she was doing everything naturally. She also told to the others what she told to her



sister easily. The other, for instance, was warned several times for revealing the secrets of the family.

**Semahat:** Actually everyone tells that, but she didn't know correct way. She could't do that intelligently. <sup>67</sup>

In contrast to the second group's depiction of Bahar's naturalism in the context of love, the third group focuses on her actions within the house (*konak*). That is to say, the third group respondents pay as much attention to Bahar's position within the house. Thus, they also mention her within the social structure. Moreover, for the third group respondents, she acts properly within the social context.

In the fourth group conversation, the characters of the melodrama are mentioned as the perfect lover images and love is mostly appreciated. Their first comments on Bahar's personality are similar to the previous groups'. They describe her as "snappy, crazy, free, and as a vagabond". They underline the fact that she has not a family so that she is excessively free:

**Dilek:** Energetic, bawdy, can do just anything comes to her mind, grown up as a little bit comfortable, since her family was away.

**Gaye:** A little bit vagabond.

**Dilek:** Grown up comfortable. She can just jump on anything without hesitation.

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<sup>67</sup> **Semahat:** Dedikodu yapılmaz mı ya?

**Saniye:** Ayarlı yapmıyordu.

**Gönül:** Hayır ama öbüründe, o öyle olmadığı için, öbür gelin. O böyle çok doğal yaşıyordu herşeyi.

**Semahat:** Ama aile filan da yoktu ki.

**Gönül:** Niye? Ablası vardı, babası vardı.

**Semahat:** Ablası İstanbul'daydı.

**Gönül:** Biraraya geliyorlardı ama, hemen hemen her bölümde. Hayır yani o herşeyi doğal yaptığı için. Ablasına söylediklerini onlara da söyleyebiliyordu rahatlıkla. Öbürü mesela, ailenin sırlarını, kaç kere o yönde ikaz aldı filan.

**Semahat:** Aslında onu herkes söyler de, o biraz yolunu yordamını bilmiyordu. Akıllıca yapamadı onu.

**Didem:** And people had praised, yes praised. There was something she gave there. How should I say? Özcan Deniz's family is a more settled, connected to each other, continuing their old traditions. Whereas, Nurgül does not have a mother and grown up in a dispersed formation, away from the country, the family is disconnected. She could not easily adapt to the very orderly family, with regular meal times. She acted a little bit aggressive.

**Dilek:** But she could adapt.

**Didem:** She could adapt because she loved too much.<sup>68</sup>

Bahar is not mentioned as a purely positive character, in contrast to the third group. According to the respondents of the fourth group, Bahar is placeless and out of order, whereas the Karadağ family is settled and subject to traditional norms. She is seen as accepting such a lifestyle because of her love. What is interesting is that, according to the viewers, in Sömbül's case, love hails Sömbül to disorder and conflict, whereas in Bahar's case love hails her to the order of the extended family. The fourth group viewers think that Bahar changes throughout her life in *Asmalı Konak*, and she also becomes the subject of social structure, because she is the

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<sup>68</sup> **Dilek:** Hareketli, deli dolu, istediğini yapan, biraz rahat yetişmiş. Ailesinden uzak yetiştiği için

**Gaye:** Biraz serseri.

**Dilek:** Rahat yetişmiş. Her şeye gözü kapalı atlayabiliyor.

**Gaye:** Annesi yok değil mi?

**Dilek:** Yok.

**Didem:** Biraz da övmüşler, övmüşler. Onun da verdiği bir şey vardı orada. Nasıl diyeyim. Özcan Deniz'in ailesi biraz daha yerleşik düzen, birbirine bağımlı, eski geleneklerini göreneklerini yürüten bir aile. Ama Nurgül'ün annesi olmadığı için dağınık düzende yetişmiş, yurtdışında, kopuk birbirinden. O aileye girince o ailede gördüğü düzen, birbirleriyle aynı saatte yemeğe oturmak, o düzende de pek yapamadı. Biraz agresiflik gösterdi.

**Dilek:** Ama uydu.

**Didem:** Uydu evet. O da çok sevdiği için uydu.

subject of love. That is to say, love binds her to the order of the house to which she is totally an outsider.

They talk about this change as they discuss Bahar's reaction when she finds out that Rıza is Seymen's son. Helin thinks that her acceptance of Rıza is impossible in real life. Didem points out that this is because she changed. The change is from the free-natural girl, to the calm and affectionate mother:

**Helin:** But the character of Bahar in the serial was not a character who can easily accept such a situation, continue to live in the household together with the woman.

**Didem:** But Bahar had moved forward so much. She changed a lot after she entered the household as a bride until the end. I mean she changed.

**Helin:** Nobody can change that much.

**Didem:** She rebelled some of the times, but she changed drastically.

**Helin:** Every character. Bahar, the angry girl, turned into an easy-going mother. Seymen, the ill-tempered man who beats his wife turned into a very nice daddy.

**Gaye:** But that's how it is usually in daily life. We also were mad before we were married in our own households. But we are unable to do them after we got married.

(Laughs)<sup>69</sup>

Gaye argues that this change represents the experience of all married women, including herself. It is through this process of change through which marriage means

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<sup>69</sup> **Helin:** Ama dizideki o Bahar karakteri öyle bir şeyi kabullenip de, o evde oturup da, o kadınla aynı evde yaşayabilecek bir karakter değildi.

**Didem:** Ama işte Bahar çok yol katetti. Eve geldiği günden sonuna doğru bayağı bir değişti. Değişti yani.

**Helin:** Kimse o kadar değişmez.

**Didem:** Kimi zaman isyan etti, ama epey değişime uğradı Bahar.

**Helin:** Tüm karakterler. Bahar, hırçın kız, uysal bir anne oldu. Seymen, hırçın adam, karısını döven adam, gayet hoş bir baba oldu.

**Gaye:** Ama bu böyledir, normal hayatta da evlenmeden önce hepimiz kendi evimizde çılgındık. Ama evlendikten sonra yapamıyoruz. (gülmeler)

for women that they identify themselves with Bahar. Thus, love, according to the fourth group viewers, hails Bahar to the order of marriage. Helin makes this point clear by referring to the latter image of Bahar in the melodrama as a calm-mother image. For the fourth group viewers, Bahar and Seymen, throughout an experience of love, become the ideal image of father and mother. This point is made possible by their individualistic approach to the characters of *Asmalı Konak*.

### 3. Seymen, ‘The Macho Modern’

Heroism in *Asmalı Konak*, at first glance, is constructed around the male hero of the narrative: Seymen. He is a young, handsome, powerful *ağa* living in limitless richness. He is the one who is born to make all decisions concerning the Karadağ family – including the maids and the *kirve*’s family. In this sense, he, as the *ağa*, is in charge of guarding both the extended family and its rules. On the other hand, he is educated in the West, and married with Bahar, which implies that he is also modern. Hence, he is in a conflictual situation squeezed between protecting the essence of the traditional order and being modern.

His masculinity is defined in the narrative throughout this conflict. According to Cornwall and Lindisfrane (1994), masculinity is not a single term, nor the binary opposite of femininity. There are hegemonic masculinities, which are defined in contrast to/above other types of masculinities.

... We argue that interpretations of maleness, manhood or masculinity are not neutral, but rather all such attributions and labels have political entailment. In any given situation they may align men against women, some women against others. In short, the processes of gendering produce difference and inequality: and nowhere more obviously than in the versions of masculinity associated with (masculinized) notions of power. (p. 10)

Seymen is the most powerful figure among the men of the narrative so that he is the hero. His masculinity is also defined *vis à vis* the other men, mainly Yaman, Seyhan, and Bekir. He epitomizes hegemonic masculinity, which is defined through a difference from other types of masculinities, and it is the authoritative one. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne quotes from Carrigan et al.:

Hegemonic masculinity is far more complex than the accounts of essences in the masculinity books would suggest... It is, rather, a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance. (p. 19)

What is interesting is that Seymen represents the hegemonic masculinity among the men, yet his powerful position is questioned through his relationship with women. In other words, he is between inhabiting the positions of power or breaking them up. His complete/powerful subject-position is undermined in his confrontation with love. The most important and charming aspect of this narrative is this confrontation.

After Bahar's entrance to his life, Seymen's (excessive) masculinity is the main issue questioned throughout the breaches, discussed in the previous chapter. Bahar is the main character representing the modern coming from the outside. On the other hand, Dicle hails him to the order of tradition. Both of the women are in love with Seymen, one undermining, the other enhancing his heroism. They construct two different types of men, while defining two contradictory meanings of womanhood.

Within this framework, I investigate how the viewers mention Seymen, the central subject of the narrative. As in the case of Bahar and Sömbül, the viewers' two-level relationship with the narrative is visible in their comments on Seymen as well. He is mentioned either as the decision-maker in the conflict resolution

processes (subject of social structure-reality), or the man Bahar is in love with (subject of love-desire). As we have already mentioned in the previous section, the woman viewers of *Asmalı Konak* identify themselves with the woman characters, putting themselves in the place of the characters. They do not have such a relationship with Seymen. Then, as they are talking about Seymen who is the main protagonist of the melodrama, what kind of relationship do they present? How they articulate their desire, as they talk about Seymen?

One of the common characteristics of the focus groups is that they do not spend so much time talking about Seymen's personality. I did not ask about Seymen directly, and waited for them to mention him. It is crucial to note that most of the time they talk about him in relation to Bahar.

The first level of relationship with the narrative prevails in the first and second groups. Seymen's power as an ağa is emphasized in these discussions. They reflect mostly on his power stemming from money: he is the ağa because he owns the control of the Karadağs' wealth, so that everybody has to submit to him.

The first group viewers talk about Seymen, after a discussion on Bahar and Lale's position within the Karadağ family. Seymen is mentioned as the ağa of Karadağs, as the symbol of power:

**Ümmühan:** The brides don't have back. There is gap between family and individual here. There is constant struggle for superiority. I mean this is the case in this serial. Seymen will be powerful as agha. He will govern everything here.

**Tülay:** I mean *ağa* is the symbol of power there.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> **Ümmühan:** Gelinlerin arkaları yok mesela. Aile birey kopukluğu da var burada. Onların ailes, bunların ailesi. Hep bir üstünlük savaşı var. Zaten bu dizide böyle yani. Seymen ağa olarak güçlü olacak. Burada herşeyi o yönetecek.

**Tülay:** Yani ağa gücün simgesi orada.

The second group conversation is opened up in a similar context. This time, I asked the second group viewers to compare Seymen and Seyhan's power positions within the Karadağ family, as they were talking about Bahar and Lale. Emine answers by emphasizing money as the main source of Seymen's power:

**Emine:** In that family, even his mother respects Seymen. She almost sees him like a father. I claim that every woman in the house harmonizes the one who has the money and does everything he wishes. Nobody would care Seymen if he didn't have money. Nobody would listen him to that extend. Power is in the hand of the one that has money and his word is valid. Since Seymen rules the money, all women serve him with obedience.

**Elif:** I completely agree with that.

**Question:** Then, why did they give the control of money to Seymen?

**Emine:** Since he is the elder brother, the eldest brother in Anatolia.

**Ayten:** Because he is a man.<sup>71</sup>

When I ask further, why Seymen owns the control of money, they stress his position within the extended family, as the eldest son. He is powerful because he is the eldest male, and as a consequence, he owns the money. Hence, the first and second group viewers talk about Seymen in the context of power.

The only one who does not submit to him due to his powerful position is Bahar. All of the respondents agree that she submits to Seymen not because of his

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<sup>71</sup> **Emine:** Bir de Seymen'in o aile içerisinde, annesi bile ona saygı duyuyor. Onu adeta baba gözüyle görüyor. Para kimdeyse, evdeki bütün kadınlar, iddia ediyorum, ona uyum sağlar ve onun her dediğini yapar. Parası olmasa Seymen'i hiç kimse dikkate almazdı. Bu kadar dinlemezdi. Para kimdeyse güç onda ve onun sözü geçiyor. Paranın yönetimi Seymen'de olduğu için bütün kadınlar ona köle.

**Elif:** Aynen katılıyorum. (gülüşmeler)

**Soru:** Peki para gücünü niye Seymen'e verdiler?

**Emine:** Ama abi olduğu için, Anadolu'da en büyük abi

**Ayten:** Erkek olduğu için

powerful position but because of her great love for him. On the other hand, we have already seen that for the second group respondents Bahar is also a dominant and powerful character, which makes her a spouse equal to Seymen. Indeed, we can point out from their conversation on the Seymen-Bahar relationship that Seymen loves her dominant character, and Bahar loves his protective character, which is mentioned as an Eastern value:

**Emine:** And in first confrontation, in the first episode, Seymen had seen Bahar's reactions in the first day. He loved her despite of this. That was very interesting.

**Filiz:** The women he knew used to always obey him. He met a different woman for the first time.

**Ayten:** This means he loves powerful women.

**Münire:** But something else stemmed from the fact that Bahar lived in USA. There is no protective man like him in America. I don't think there is any. There is no excessive claim of ownership. I mean there is no extreme jealousy. She didn't live it there. We see that another man kisses someone else's wife and eats together. These are wrong for us. With the words of my husband, it is not the accepted way of doing things [racona ters]. So Bahar liked it.<sup>72</sup>

As they talk about Seymen and Bahar, they define Seymen as an Eastern man (subject of social structure) by comparing Seymen and the Western (American) man. Being protective and jealous is mentioned as an Eastern value, which the Western

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<sup>72</sup> **Emine:** Bir de bu ilk karşılaşma, ilk dizide, Seymen Bahar'ın karşı koyuşlarını daha ilk günden görmüştü. Buna rağmen onu sevdi. Orası çok ilginçti.

**Filiz:** Tanıdığı kadınlar hep ona boyun eğiyordu. İlk defa farklı bir kadın geldi karşısına.

**Ayten:** Güçlü kadın seviyordu demek ki.

**Münire:** Ama Bahar'ın da Amerika'da yaşamasından belki kaynaklanan birşey vardı. Amerika'da belki böyle sahiplenilen erkek hiç yoktur. Olacağını da sanmıyorum yani. Çok aşırı sahiplenme olmaz. Yani çok aşırı kıskanma. Orada onu yaşayamadı. Görüyoruz mesela birinin karısına gelip öteki herif şap şup öpüp, ne bileyim onla yemeğe çıkabiliyor. E bize bunlar ters. Yani eşimin deyimiyle, racona ters. E Bahar'ın da hoşuna gitti yani.



men lack, but is something desired by all women. Hence, as they talk about Bahar's dominant character, they point out to Seymen as the desired man who carries Eastern values that a woman desires.

On the other hand, the third group respondents talk about Seymen at the individualistic level, as an emotional man, as they answer the question 'Why is love so important?'.

**Gönül:** We don't experience these feelings freely as the whole society. We are restricted in the issue of love [*sevgi*]. The constraints about the opposite sex begin in adolescence.

**Semahat:** Do we find the things we couldn't have experienced? It is also possible. We love that he is in dead nuts on his wife or he prioritize love. I mean all of us, as women, enjoy that. First of all, we like emotional men.<sup>73</sup>

Seymen represents the emotional man, for the third group viewers. On the other hand, when I ask them to elaborate on whether Seymen is an emotional man, they emphasize his contradictory character: he is both emotional and tough. The point is that the former is appreciated and the latter is criticized as being divergent to Seymen's real character. Semahat says that she likes his emotional character, but dislikes the tough one, referring to his attempt to rape Bahar.

**Question:** Was Seymen an emotional man?

**Gönül:** Of course he was.

**Semahat:** I said there were contrasts.

**Saniye:** Sometimes like this, sometimes like that.

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<sup>73</sup> **Gönül:** Bu duyguları çok doya doya yaşayamıyoruz toplum olarak. Kısıtlanıyoruz sevgi konusunda. Ergenlikte belki başlıyor karşı cinse karşı kısıtlamalarımız filan.

**Semahat:** Kendi hayatımızda acaba yaşamadığımız şeyleri mi buluyoruz. O da olabilir yani. Karısını ölümüne sevmesi ya da aşkı çok ön plana alması çok hoşumuza gidiyor. Kadın olarak hepimizin hoşuna gidiyor yani. Duygusal bir erkek hoşumuza gidiyor herşeyden önce.

**Semahat:** I mean there were ebbs and floods. Once he is a harsh man, once insightful tu his wife. I mean there were consrasts. I don't know whether we liked those contrasts or his insightful side.

**Nilgün:** Of course it digressed the monotony marriage life brings about. They lived in extremes. We live normal lives. We found the things lived there different. Maybe we watched because of this.<sup>74</sup>

**Semahat:** We loved sentimentality, but I didn't like sharpness. For instance, when they were first put out with each other they fought. Those were horrible. I liked their feelings for each other, their respect to mother, but why didn't they restrict that.

**Nilgün:** That wasn't suitable for Seymen character. Seymen was like, he was emotional, well intentioned, protective to his family, a good father to his child. I mean that didn't befit to Seymen there.

The third group viewers approach the Seymen character through an individualistic point of view, as they define his real vs. deviant characteristics. They do not mention his *ağa* position within the Karadağ family. By doing this, they

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<sup>74</sup> **Soru:** Seymen duygusal bir erkek miydi?

**Gönül:** Duygusaldı tabii

**Semahat:** İşte zıtlıklar vardı dedim ya

**Saniye:** Zaman zaman öyle, zaman zaman öyle yani.

**Semahat:** Gelgitler vardı yani. Bir bakıyorsun çok sert bir erkek, bir bakıyorsun eşine karşı çok anlayışlı filan. Yani zıtlıklar vardı. O zıtlıklar mı hoşumuza gitti, duygusal yönü mü hoşumuza gitti bilmem.

**Nilgün:** TABii evlilik hayatının getirdiği monotonluğun dışına çıkıyordu. Çok uça yaşıyorlardı. Biz normal bir hayat yaşıyoruz. Orada yaşananlar farklı geldi. Belki ondan seyrettik.

**Semahat:** Duygusallık hoşumuza gitti de, keskinliklerisevmedim ben. Mesela, o karısıyla ilk küstüklerinde kavgaları filan oldu. Onlar iğrençti yani. İşte birbirlerine karşı olan duyguları, anneye saygı, onlar hoşuma gidiyordu ama, onu niye sınırlayamıyorlardı yani

**Nilgün:** Seymen karakterine yakışmadı o. Şeydi Seymen, yani duygusal, iyi niyetli, ailesine sahip çıkan, çocuğuna iyi bir baba. Yani oradaki seymen'e yakışmadı.

define the ideal (desired) man. According to the third group viewers, Seymen is a romantic/emotional man, who should not be so violent towards Bahar. The real Seymen is the emotional and respectful one, and the one in the violence scenes is deviant. As Nilgün describes Seymen as an affectionate, kindhearted, protecting man, and a good father to his child, they articulate the desired man. His violence towards Bahar is defined as a deviation from ‘real Seymen’, and hence of ‘the ideal man’.

The fourth group respondents, with an individualistic view, mentioned Seymen more than the previous groups, both as the Seymen character of *Asmalı Konak*, and the actor, (media personality) Özcan Deniz. For them, He is the main reason for following *Asmalı Konak*. Three respondents, Gaye, Dilek and Didem say that they started to follow *Asmalı Konak* for Özcan Deniz. Gaye’s first comments are on Özcan Deniz, and the Seymen character, mentioning media images in and out of the narrative:

**Gaye:** We watched the serial with enjoyment. In fact I find Özcan Deniz macho. I like his physical appearance, but his behaviours are macho here. He is a character that wants to safeguard a woman. The woman he wants to safeguard is not an ordinary woman. Not an ordinary Turkish woman. A cultured, educated woman. This woman also yearns for this kind of a man. As all Turkish women do so. And as all Turkish men do. To manage to safeguard this kind of a woman. Özcan Deniz is sometimes being a naughty child beside his mother. By the way, it is not affectionate that he doesn’t speak with his own voice. And Nurgül Yeşilçay [Bahar] is a woman like cock. (laughters) <sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> **Gaye:** Diziyi beğenerek izledik. Özcan Deniz’i aslında maço buluyorum. Fizik olarak beğeniyorum da, burada hareketleri maço. Bir kadını böyle kanatları altına almak isteyen bir tip. Kanatları altına almak istediği kadın da sıradan bir kadın değil. Sıradan Türk kadını değil. Kültürlü, okumuş bir kadın. O kadında da yine böyle bir

Gaye describes Seymen's (Özcan Deniz's) masculine virtues, through an individualistic approach, without placing Seymen within the social world created in the melodrama. She finds Seymen macho<sup>76</sup>, although he is a handsome man. We understand from Gaye's words that physical attraction and being macho are inconsistent qualities, and thus she uses the term macho as a negative characteristic for a man. Further, she opens up what she means about the term macho: a man who is willing to protect/dominate a woman. On the other hand, she describes Bahar as a

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erkeğin özlemi var. Bütün Türk kadınlarında vardır. Bütün Türk erkeklerinde de var. Böyle bir kadını kanatları altına alabilmek.

<sup>76</sup> Cornwall and Lindisfrane (1994) explore the contexts in which the term macho is used: "The term 'macho' is a fairly recent importation into colloquial English, from Mexico via North America. It is used widely, in very different ways, to present multiple masculinities. Though macho derives from the Latin *masculus* and the Spanish term *macho*, both of which denote the 'male sex', Chambers' dictionary has recently defined macho as 'ostentatiously virile' (1986: 578) In Britain, the macho man is not everyman; he is less a stereotype than a caricature in which distinctive attributes are selectively presented. Some aspects of usage carry with them accretions from their etymological source, echoing essentialized images of Latin male as vigorous and often violent. However, in Britain, Latin men are also portrayed as romantic and emotional, although such expressiveness (and perhaps dependence) is deeply at variance with popular images of the macho man: thus, images of the 'soft' Latin appeared in the racism directed at Argentinian soldiers during the Falklands War. In short, there is no singular notion of macho masculinity, but a cluster of elements which may be contradictory or oppositional according to the context." The term macho has been imported to Turkish very recently; that is why we can not find the word *maço* even in the most recent Turkish dictionaries (TDK and Büyük Türkçe Sözlük cited). Yet, we can argue that macho connotes the pre-modern man, with excessive heroic virtues, such as violent, rude, and over-protective to women. In this sense, it has negative connotations, for the ideal of modernization. On the hand, it is also articulated as a desired characteristic for women, to some extent. So, it has also contradictory usages in Turkish. We can compare macho with the word 'maganda', which is used with a totally negative connotation. "In the mid 1990s, the word maganda had entered mainstream language as an all-encompassing epithet to describe and identify a "publicly offensive other who actively intrudes to contaminate the public spaces he occupies." (Öncü, 2002)

cultured and educated woman who would refuse to be dominated. Yet, she thinks that Bahar desires a protecting man like Seymen.

It is interesting that Gaye generalizes the qualities she attributed to Seymen and Bahar to the all Turkish men and women. So, she thinks that Bahar and Seymen represent all the women and men living in Turkey. The discussion on Seymen continues by other respondents comments on Seymen's *easternness*:

**Didem:** A typical Turkish man, then.

**Helin:** typical means eastern.

**Didem:** A structure that took good education but can't leave his roots, experiences, traditions aside totally; fluctuates between the two. <sup>77</sup>

According to Didem, Seymen is a 'typical Turkish man', which means, for Helin, being Eastern. Didem explains the typical Turkish/Eastern man as connected to his roots, customs and traditions: i.e as a subject of social structure. Yet Seymen is educated, which should free Seymen from the bonds of tradition.

So, for the fourth group viewers, Seymen primarily represents the Eastern man. On the other hand, he is educated, which refers to 'modern Seymen', yet he cannot give up his traditional roots. Didem describes him as 'macho modern', referring to this inner conflict.

To some extent, Seymen's easternness is also desirable. As they are talking about his violence towards Bahar, Dilek tries to legitimize and determine the acceptable level of violence, appealing to jealousy as a 'natural' state of being.

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<sup>77</sup> **Didem:** Tipik Türk erkeği yani.

**Helin:** Tipik derken, doğulu

**Didem:** Eğitimi iyi almış ama sonuçta köklerinden, gördüklerinden, göreneklerinden pek fazla vazgeçemeyen, ikisi arasında bocalayan bir yapı.

Seymen's violence towards his wife is unacceptable, yet jealousy to some extent is acceptable, necessary, moreover, desired.

**Dilek:** Maybe it was not normal that he beat Nurgül but his jealousy was normal. I don't mean his beating, but mean his jealousy and anger. Noone can endure.

**Helin:** Why did he get jealous?

**Dilek:** She made free with Yaman, she spent so much time with him. Today neither my husband nor I can like such a thing, probably he doesn't like my making free with someone else, even if he is a friend that he already knows, I don't like it either. (approvals) 78

They think that marriage allows the women in the group, the means to assess Seymen accurately. Jealousy cannot be understood from a single person's point of view:

**Helin:** Yes, sure. For instance, I don't think Seymen's behaviour is right. I couldn't even accept that episode, it would be a dream and end. I didn't accept that episode, I mean Seymen isn't a man that can do that. He takes a swing at wall when he is very angry, maybe plugs somewhere else, but never damages Bahar.

**Dilek:** I mean sometimes his angry gaze in his facial expression, he presented him as he would beat.

**Helin:** But I couldn't stick that on Seymen.

**Dilek:** I did. Are you single or married?

**Helin:** I am single.

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**78 Dilek:** Nurgül'ü belki dövmesi normal değildi ama kıskanması normaldi. Dövmesini demiyorum, ama kıskanmasını ve kızmasını. Hiç kimse kaldıramaz.

**Helin:** Neden kıskanmıştı?

**Dilek:** E Yaman'la çok samimiydi, çok bir yerlere gidip geliyordu. Bugün ben de eşimde hoşlanmam, o da herhalde benim bir başkasıyla bu kadar, her ne kadar eskiden tanıdığı bir erkek arkadaşım olsa da hoşlanmaz, ben de hoşlanmam. (onaylamalar)

**Dilek:** I did, I can understand. (laughters)<sup>79</sup>

Helin does not understand Seymen's character within the narrative, and thinks that his attitude towards Bahar is inconsistent with his character depicted in the serial, whereas Dilek says that she understands his attitude because she is a married woman. She sees her husband in Seymen and maintains that his behaviour is realistic.

#### 4. Identification via Desire

I have pointed out that the viewers establish two types of relationship between themselves as viewers and the characters depicted in the serial. They seem to identify themselves with Bahar and Sümbül, as women of *Asmalı Konak*, and in Sümbül's case, they identify with her because of her age. Throughout their comments on Sümbül and Bahar, they sometimes articulate these similarities between themselves and the characters of the serial. On the other hand, as they talk about Seymen and his easternness and modernism, they articulate the desired masculine virtues. They sometimes criticise and often appreciate his actions and decisions within the serial. By doing this, they articulate the desirable image of a male subject of love.

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<sup>79</sup> **Helin:** Evet, kesinlikle. Mesela, Seymen'in davranışını hiç doğru bulmuyorum. Hatta ben o bölümü konduramadım. Rüya olacaktı, bitecekti. O bölüm olmadı, yani Seymen onu yapacak bir adam değil. Çok sinirlenince belki duvara yumruk atacak, belki başka bir yere kurşun sıkacak ama, asla Bahar'a asla zarar vermeyecek bir insandı.

**Dilek:** Yani bazen o mimiklerinden şöyle bir öfkeyle bakışı, sanki yani artık o dayağı yapacak gibi kondurmuşlardı.

**Helin:** Ama yani ben konduramadım.

**Dilek:** Ben kondurmuştum. Bekar mısın, evli misin?

**Helin:** Bekarım.

**Dilek:** Ben kondurmuştum, anlayabiliyorum. (gülmeler)

The studies on similar media texts seek to understand identification as a tool for interpellating the woman viewers to the proper subject positions of capitalist, patriarchal and/or nationalist discourses (Mankekar, Rofel, Kaplan). Ann Kaplan, in her article on the family melodramas (films), argues that:

... the family melodrama, as a genre geared specifically to women functions both to expose the constraints and limitations that the capitalist nuclear family imposes on women and, at the same time, to “educate women to accept those constraints as “natural”, inevitable –as “given”. (Kaplan, p. 25)

This is made through hierarchical representation of women and men within the melodrama, as well as the identification of the viewer with the passive woman characters:

The idealized male screen heroes give back to the male spectator his more perfect mirror self, together with a sense of mastery and control. In contrast, the female is given only powerless victimized figures who, far from perfect, reinforce the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists. (p. 28)

Mankekar in her ethnographic study on the woman viewers of the state-run television in India, also handles identification in a similar manner. Her argument is basically based on how the nationalist discourse in post-colonial India interpellates the women of the nation to the proper definitions of womanhood:

Viewers’ engagement with television narratives was central to their constitution as gendered and national subjects, to their construction of national and communal pasts, and to their understanding of violence committed in the name of the nation – thus revealing the political significance of texts dismissed by many social scientists as fictive and therefore inconsequential, as “mere” entertainment or, less charitably, as kitsch. The viewers I worked with intimately engaged themselves with the characters and predicaments depicted in Doordarshan’s narratives, thereby



blurring the lines between fantasy and experience, fiction and reality. (Mankekar, p. 11)

Mankekar pays attention to the post-colonial condition of India, where “Doordarshan [the state-run television] occupied a central place in constituting female viewers not just as women but as Indian women” (Mankekar, p10) She sees the various images of heroine of the locally-produced television serial as “women-oriented narratives” where the women are depicted either as “victims to be protected”, or as “heroines to be glorified” (Mankekar, p. 251). Hence, unlike Kaplan’s description of passive woman image, women are also depicted as the central heroines of the narratives, representing the essence of the nation. In both cases, she argues, the serial constructs the ideal Indian womanhood, and the viewers, as active pursuers of these narratives, are interpellated to the subject-positions constructed as such. This, she argues, is identification.

I agree with Kaplan and Mankekar that the narratives produce certain representations of masculinity and femininity and the viewers have a relationship based on identification with those images. However, I do not agree with Mankekar about her idea that the boundaries between fantasy and the real get blurred as the viewers identify themselves with the characters. Indeed, fantasy and the real enable the viewer to jump between two forms of relationship with the narrative.

I have already pointed out that the viewers have a two-level relationship with the narrative. At the first level, the viewers decode the characters’ behaviour according to the normativity encoded within the narrative, a normativity which the viewers are also familiar with. As a result, they make qualifications such as realistic/unrealistic according to that normativity. Second, as the viewers articulate their desires at the level of fantasy, the identification takes place as an engagement with the emotional states the characters portray. The subplots they find unrealistic are

forgiven at the second level, because this time they handle the characters as individuals, who follow up their emotions against the normative order. This time, the viewers appreciate the characters as emotional beings and despite the inconsistency with the norms, they like the characters to fall in love and to dismiss normativity for the sake of love. Indeed, the viewers identify with the desires of the characters. I, thus argue that the way identification takes place is via (the viewers') desires.

Thus, identification takes place not only by imagining the experience of what the characters exactly experience, or finding similarities between themselves and the characters' gender, age, or life history. There is a much more complicated relationship between the viewer and the narrative/characters.

I argue that, the viewers' identification with the characters' desires is crucial to understand the imaginary of being modern, in Turkey. The viewers articulate their desire for love in the name of characters because it is constructed as the natural and hence inevitable, in contrast to the socially constructed normative order. However, it is crucial that love as the main power which organizes the gendered relationships also entails a normativity: it is indeed the way women are constructed as modern subjects. As Sirman points out:

Modernity in Turkey is conceived as being made up of a collectivity of nuclear families within which reign peace and serenity. Relations between husband and wife, parents and children are supposed to be regulated according to love (*sevgi*), rather than the obedient respect of traditional Ottoman society. (Sirman, p. 266)

I have already pointed out that the narrative is encoded to question the normativity imagined to belong to the traditional order, and to glorify love as the

main reason for the characters' actions and decisions. What is crucial is that in Turkey this very natural way of reasoning is indeed an index of being modern.

## Conclusion

From the very beginning of my study on *Asmalı Konak*, I defined the serial as a heroic melodrama. I first traced the term melodrama, which is used in defining the locally-produced television serials in studies of the media in post-colonial contexts (Mankekar, 1999; Abu-Lughod, 2005). By contrasting western soap operas with post-colonial melodramas, I concluded that melodrama can be defined as a genre specific to the post-colonial condition of Turkey. The main reason for this specificity is that melodrama, unlike the soap opera genre, reaches a resolution which the viewers can either accept or reject. This is because melodrama entails a normativity: it is about truth. I argue that this quest for truth in television fiction can be understood by contextualizing it within the post-colonial condition.

In my quest among the literary genres to make a coherent definition of the genre of *Asmalı Konak*, I come up with the idea that we may call the Turkish experience of modernity a post-colonial tragedy, since people living within a post-colonial condition, like the tragic hero, see themselves as having to cope with an impossible choice between modern versus traditional imaginaries. However, in melodrama as a literary genre, in contrast to tragedy, the conflicts are not impossible: they reach a resolution.

From this perspective, *Asmalı Konak* first sets out a normativity belonging to the traditional realm, then a conflict occurs between that normativity and desire – love – and, through an unexpected resolution of the conflict, a breach occurs in that normativity. At the end the breaches in norms are resolved by breaking up with the norms and submitting to love, and hence to the natural. What ultimately reigns is the modern. Hence, I argue that in *Asmalı Konak*, being modern is encoded as the ultimate possibility of what can be said/done against the normative order. This is the

resolution the melodrama suggests to the impossible conflict of the traditional vs. the modern: the modern reigns over the traditional because it is represented with a natural force, love. The melodrama shows us that the conflict is not impossible any more.

Since a melodrama tells its story through the actions of its characters representing the two conflicting sides, I sought to decipher who the hero of this transformation was. Starting from the point that the one who solves the conflicts is the hero, I traced the narrative consisting of breaches to find out how heroism was encoded within the narrative. It first looked as though the melodrama was structured around the male protagonist, Seymen. He was the man who was assigned to solve the conflicts and carry out the resolutions. However, from the very beginning of the melodrama, Seymen's powerful position and masculinity started to be questioned as soon as Seymen fell in love with Bahar. Bahar, as the representative of the modern, was the central agent in this process of questioning. She was hailing Seymen to the natural in the place of his social obligations, and hence to the modern. In this respect, I thought that Bahar was the central hero of the narrative.

I thus tried to show how Seymen is encoded as the representative of the traditional realm, and Bahar the modern, arguing that the traditional is imagined as the social, and the modern as the natural. But, moving a step forward, I saw that the main agent of the natural and hence the modern was love. The narrative, suggesting resolutions based on a submission of everything and everybody to love, indeed presented love as the central subject and the hero, a narrative structure which defeated Seymen's heroism.

Second, through ethnographic research, I tried to find out who the viewers identified as the hero. The ethnographic research showed that the viewers promoted

Sümbül much more, as the most important character of the melodrama. It is crucial to note that I evaluated how viewers speak of the serial, as well as what they say. My ethnographic study shows that the viewers have two types of relationship with the narrative. At one level, they expect a consistency with the normative order the narrative itself constructs. They articulate this expectation by referring to the subplots as realistic or unrealistic. At this level, the characters are imagined as the subjects of a particular social structure. In the case of Sümbül, they find her love as an old woman unrealistic and contrary to the norms. However, at the second level, apart from the definitions of heroism, Sümbül's love is appreciated and brought forward as the most charming subplot of the narrative.

In their discussions of the characters as subjects of love, viewers articulate what they find desirable with an individualistic point of view. They have a relationship based on identification with the characters but this does not mean that they identify with the characters according to similarities between their life stories and the characters'. Rather, I argue that they identify with the desires of the characters – the emotions stirred up by the viewers through the melodramatic imagination, in Brooks' terms.

Thus, *Asmalı Konak* is a love story that interpellates the viewers to the call of the modern through modernity's seeming validation of desire as natural. I tried to show how the women living in the post-colonial condition of Turkey are hailed as the subjects of modernity through their desires.

This study initiates a discussion on how the normative structure of modernity is represented in media texts as the natural way of doing things. The answer to the question 'What kind of a new normativity does modernity entail' or the issue of the power relations that are condoned through recourse to the natural remain out of the

scope of this study and requires further studies on media texts and television viewing practices in Turkey.

My points on how the women viewers are interpellated to the normativity of modernity through their desires may be carried further with comparative studies on the male viewers of television serials. After all, my study shows that it would be useful to grasp the media ethnographically, to find an answer to the question regarding which subject positions the women and men are hailed within the new definitions of normativity in the age of globalization.

## Appendix





Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6





Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12



Picture 13



Picture 14



Picture 15



Picture 16





Picture 17



Picture 18



Picture 19

Picture 1: Seymen and Bahar. Sunset in Ürgüp at the back.

Picture 2: Seymen, Bahar and Sümbül in Asmalı Konak

Picture 3: Zeynep and Salih in Istanbul

Picture 4: Sümbül, Bekir Kirve and maids, talking with Seymen on the phone after he met with Bahar in New York.

Picture 5: Dicle and Hayriye (maids)

Picture 6: Dicle

Picture 7: Bahar, in her first meeting with Seymen in New York.

Picture 8: Bahar

Picture 9: Seymen and Bahar, a quarell in front of Bahar's painting.

Picture 10: Bahar, when she learnt Dicle's secret.

Picture 11: Bahar and her baby Hayat.

Picture 12: Bahar on the balcony.

Picture 13: Sümbül gives the asmalı yüzük ( the ring engraved with a grape) to Seymen.

Picture 14: Seymen in the bedroom.

Picture 15: Seymen

Picture 16: Seymen threatens Yaman.

Picture 17: Sümbül and Ali in Asmalı Konak .

Picture 18: A lunch with Ali bey

Picture 19: Sümbül

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