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To cite this article: Dilek Kaya Mutlu (2010) Between Tradition and Modernity: Yeşilçam Melodrama, its Stars, and their Audiences, Middle Eastern Studies, 46:3, 417-431, DOI: [10.1080/00263200902907169](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200902907169)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200902907169>



Published online: 09 Aug 2010.



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Between Tradition and Modernity: Yeşilçam Melodrama, its Stars, and their Audiences

DILEK KAYA MUTLU

Cinema in Turkey meant mostly European and American films until the 1950s, when an indigenous film industry funded by private capital and enterprise began to take shape on Yeşilçam Street in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. With the rapid increase in the number of film companies, domestic films, and cinemas, as well as a larger audience, cinema ceased to be an elitist activity available only in big cities and became popular entertainment, even spreading to small towns in Anatolia by the mid-1950s. Yeşilçam, which soon became Turkey's 'little Hollywood' with its own genres and star system, enjoyed its heyday between 1965 and 1975, with a yearly production of 200 to 300 films.¹ In 1966, with 229 films, Turkey was fourth (behind Japan, India, and Hong Kong) in world film production.² The majority of Yeşilçam films were melodramas revolving around heterosexual romance between characters from different social and economic classes.³ These were the golden years of Turkish popular cinema (known as Yeşilçam cinema) not only in terms of film production, but also in terms of movie attendance. Movie-going in those years was the major family entertainment and activity outside the home in Turkish society, mainly due to its lower cost than other social entertainment such as going to music halls. Moreover, unlike current Turkish cinema that functions without a corresponding industry with a yearly production of 60 to 70 films, Yeşilçam cinema was a social event that could not be reduced to mere film production or movie-going and film watching. The film industry in that period included various channels that contributed to the promotion of cinema and its continuation in extra-filmic forms. Magazine journalism and star journalism were the most prominent extra-filmic channels that contributed to the creation and diffusion of a vivid everyday cinema culture in Turkey, one that extended well beyond the movie screen.

The glory days of Yeşilçam came to an end in the late 1970s, owing mainly to the expansion of television (beginning in 1968) and increasing social chaos and political violence that culminated in a military coup in 1980. Social unrest on the streets caused an enormous reduction in movie attendance. Yeşilçam cinema has since, however, gained a significant place in Turkish social memory and cultural imagery. Besides their frequent appearance on Turkish TV, one often finds references to Yeşilçam films in Turkey's popular culture today, from commercials to talk shows, to music videos. Moreover, according to 2006 research conducted by the market

research company TNS PIAR, the Turkish public, even the younger generation, lists Yeşilçam stars first when they are asked to name three film actors/actresses that come to mind.⁴

Besides its phenomenal productivity and public popularity, Yeşilçam cinema was also a hot topic of critical debate among the intellectuals and film critics of the period. Early in 1958, Nijat Özön, a prolific film historian and critic, described Yeşilçam cinema as ‘the swamp that should be dried’ by arguing that it was a cultural machine producing nothing but ‘bad taste’.⁵ Critics not only viewed Yeşilçam films as undesirable and unacceptable but also condemned their viewers as ‘passive’, ‘irresponsible’, and ‘mindless’ masses. Gaining a more political tone, such criticisms sharpened in the 1960s. Overall, to the critical intellectual eye, Yeşilçam cinema was not only artless but uninterested in the ‘real problems of Turkish society’; it was ‘commercial’, ‘exploitative’, and ‘fake’ and did not represent ‘us’.⁶ Moreover, for Turkish film scholars, Yeşilçam films, especially melodramas, have provided a gold mine for ideological analysis, with the reproduction of patriarchal ideology being the most-discussed topic.⁷

This article attempts to explore the social experience of Yeşilçam cinema, especially of melodramas, in the 1960s with a particular focus on star–audience relationships. Rather than reproducing the discourse of ‘mass culture’ which posits popular culture as empty distraction and false consciousness, this article follows Fredric Jameson’s suggestion and approaches Yeşilçam cinema as ‘a transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies’;⁸ an attempt to manage and eradicate feelings of social anxiety and despair in a particular period. I argue that Yeşilçam melodramas provide useful sources for unravelling the social contradictions and anxieties caused by the Turkish modernization/westernization process, which began during the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and culminated with a top-down political and cultural revolution in the 1920s. The article begins by discussing the ambivalent discourse of Yeşilçam melodramas on modernization; how they construct modernity as a desired state while at the same time criticizing modernization as cosmetic westernization and affirming traditional social and cultural traits. The article then considers the contradictory images of Yeşilçam stars (seen both as the agents of this ambivalent discourse in films and the embodiments of truly modern/western lifestyles outside cinema). This is followed by an examination of the social reception of stars, especially of their off-screen star image that contradicts their screen image, based on 194 audience letters published in two popular film magazines of the period, *Sinema* (Cinema) and *Perde* (Curtain).⁹ The star image conveyed by the letters contradicts the image of the star as an extraordinary, divine, and unattainable person. Moreover, it is observed that rather than trying to escape to the ‘modern’ attractive world of Yeşilçam stars, many Yeşilçam audiences attempted to bring stars to their own ‘modest’ world. Consequently, although Yeşilçam derived its star system from Hollywood, and Yeşilçam audiences were quite familiar with and fond of Hollywood stars, the glamour of Yeşilçam stars, the article attempts to show, do not fully compare to that of western (especially Hollywood) stars.¹⁰

The Turkish revolution of 1923 which marked a change from monarchy to republic was primarily a ‘revolution of values’, in that more than changing the social structure, it attempted to change the symbolic system of society, namely the culture, within which Islam played a fundamental role.¹¹ With the establishment of the

Republic Turkey entered a rapid process of modernization/westernization. The founders of the Republic, led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), and the modernizing elites viewed modernization and westernization as inseparable and inevitable. The Kemalists saw Islam as 'a marker of oriental identity' and believed that 'in order to westernize they had to de-Islamize – that is, they had to remove the influence of Islam from their societies'.¹² Assuming secularism as its founding principle, the Republican government undertook many reforms that distanced the country from its Islamic and eastern past and from 'backward' and religious traditions in order to bring it closer to contemporary western societies. Reforms included the abolition of the Caliphate; the abolition of the religious courts; the proscription of the fez and its substitution with the western hat; the dissolution of the dervish orders and brotherhoods; the adoption of the western calendar and the Latin alphabet; the adoption of civil, commercial, and penal codes based on European models; the abolition of traditional religious schools and the establishment of a secular system of education; and the abolition of the clause in the constitution that named Islam as the religion of the Turkish state.¹³ The Kemalists attempted to modernize/westernize not only the public but also the private sphere by discoursing on 'matters from the clothing of its citizens to the music they were to listen to, from the type of leisure activity they would be engaged in to the type of family relations they would have'.¹⁴ All these developments caused several polarizations around dichotomies (such as domestic/foreign, eastern/western, tradition/modernity) that have continued until the present day in Turkish social and cultural arenas.

There was already a critical discourse on Turkish modernization/westernization before the establishment of the Republic. For instance, the nineteenth-century *Tanzimat* literary tradition criticized the 'cosmetic westernization' adopted by the Ottoman elites as an 'imitation of western ways' and maintained that 'modernization was possible without resorting to Western codes of conduct that were usually portrayed as ridiculous for being artificial and phoney'.¹⁵ Yeşilçam melodramas produced a similar discourse by establishing a contrast between traditional and 'artificial' modern/western lifestyles. In Yeşilçam melodramas the tension between tradition and modernity is reflected also as a tension between different social and economic classes, while modernization is associated with the westernized upper class urbanites and upward class mobility. Notably, the golden years of Yeşilçam and melodramas coincided with the acceleration of urbanization along with a phenomenal immigration from rural to urban areas. Cities witnessed the development of a new urban life characterized by private cars, apartment blocks, and an increasingly heterogeneous population, made up of different social and economic classes. These changes are also reflected in the transformation of the melodrama genre in Turkish cinema from the 1950s to the 1960s. While the 'village melodramas' of the 1950s were set in the countryside and revolved around heterosexual romance between same-class (poor rural) characters, melodramas of the 1960s were set in urban areas (predominantly in Istanbul) and portrayed romance between characters from different social and economic classes (rural versus urban, rich versus poor). Class differences between lovers was so typical to those melodramas that they also used to be referred to as 'poor girl – rich boy' (or vice versa) films.¹⁶

Yeşilçam melodramas constructed an image of urban upper class that symbolized the 'ills' of western bourgeois modernity, namely hedonism, opulence, immorality,

artificiality, selfishness, and even intellectualism. The urban upper class were represented through such clichés as opulent homes, private cars, fashionable dress, house parties, discos, and whisky as well as through writing a novel or having an interest in western music. This image of urban upper class is contrasted with an image of a rural lower class living in modest or impoverished homes and neighbourhoods and bearing characteristics such as innocence, simplicity, modesty, sensibility, sincerity, loyalty, and morality. Needless to say, from the first instance, Yeşilçam melodramas side with the ‘good’ rural lower-class characters. These good and bad characters could be compared to the teams of ‘the just’ and ‘the unjust’ discussed by Şerif Mardin, which emerged in the Ottoman past and have continued into the present.¹⁷ The ‘just discourse’ produced by these melodramas could be seen as an attempt to manage anxieties caused by increasing urbanization, modernization/westernization, and class conflict.

Yeşilçam melodramas invested in the social desire to move from one class to another and from village to big city. Nezih Erdoğan remarks that, ‘possibilities of identification in these films are a matter of justifying the audience’s (especially female audience’s) desire for, and wish to be desired by, the upper class. Yeşilçam melodramas thus offered a sense of legitimacy to the squatters who had migrated from rural areas’.¹⁸ However, although these films, on the one hand, affirmed the desire for upward social mobility, on the other hand, they criticized the urban upper classes for their ‘degenerate’ modern lifestyles that contrasted the ‘modest’ but ‘honest’ lifestyles of rural lower classes. They affirmed traditional gender roles and social mores and indigenous cultural traits in the face of modern/westernized lifestyles.¹⁹

Yeşilçam melodramas articulated the desire for modernity and its possible dangers especially through the female characters. For instance, in many of the films a poor, lonely woman is discovered by a music hall owner while singing a song on her own and is invited to sing in the music hall. However, the woman must first undergo a process of refinement; she has to learn modern codes of conduct and manners; namely how to look, eat, walk, and talk like a ‘civilized’ modern woman (the ideal image of women that the Republican modernization project aimed to create). The woman might undergo a similar process of self-transformation also in order to win the love of a man. Remarkably, a non-Muslim instructor – Armenian or Greek or Turkish – teaches the woman these modern manners.²⁰ However, while modernity is thus attributed to the West (represented here by minorities), the process of self-transformation is encoded as cosmetic westernization/modernization, and as imitative, artificial, ridiculous, and snobbish – like the non-Muslim instructors themselves. Moreover, while change is shown as being possible and rapid, upward social mobility does not guarantee happiness. Sometimes, even western technology is ridiculed. For example, in *Karagözlüm* (My Dark-Eyed One) (Atıf Yılmaz, 1970), the vacuum cleaner, an icon of modern/western lifestyle, is contrasted with a traditional broom. The latter is posited as being outmoded but more faithful than the former since it can still be used during power cuts.²¹

Overall, Yeşilçam melodramas constructed modernity as a desirable state, as a process that should be experienced, but one that required the remedial intervention of rural lower classes and their traditional ‘virtues’ and ‘spirituality’ in order to avoid social degeneration.²² In the end, urban upper-class characters end up with a ‘new

sensibility' under the influence of rural lower-class characters.²³ In this respect, it could be argued that while constructing upward class mobility as a social utopia, Yeşilçam melodramas ideologically displace class conflict through cooperation between rural lower and urban upper classes. Thus, Yeşilçam melodramas create illusions of social harmony by exploring the possibilities of achieving a compromise between tradition and modernity.

Yeşilçam cinema was also star-driven cinema. Female and male stars, such as Türkan Şoray, Hülya Koçyiğit, Fatma Girik, Filiz Akin, Göksel Arsoy, and Ediz Hun, had a determining role in the formation and continuation of the habit of movie-going in the 1960s. Regional film distributors, who were the most influential figures in the system, commissioned films that involved specific stars whose films had been profitable in their region. They could also demand changes in plot and casting. Films might be written to feature a given star, or alterations to the story might be made to preserve a star's social image.²⁴ Burçak Evren, a prominent Turkish cinema researcher, remarks that in the 1960s, the cinema was 'the only place where the stars descended to the earth'.²⁵ Indeed, more than being a place for film watching or socializing, the cinema was a place to meet stars, albeit imaginarily, in the easiest and cheapest way. Moreover, Yeşilçam melodramas, which often presented stars' bodies and faces in close-up, offered 'a gaze at bodies of stars closer and more sustained than the majority of real-life encounters'.²⁶ Yet it is a well-known fact that the star image is an intertextual construct, namely, a combination of screen appearances and off-screen media news and rumours about a star's private life.²⁷ Film magazines, which included biographies, interviews, photographs, news, and stories relating to stars, provided an alternative space for the production, exhibition, and consumption of star images. To put it another way, Yeşilçam stars were also the heroes and heroines of various stories circulating outside the cinema, which were as popular with the audiences as the melodramas themselves. There was, however, a striking difference between the stars' screen images and their off-screen star images in film magazines. While the films relayed an ambivalent or resistant discourse on modernization/westernization through the bodies and practices of rural lower-class characters played by stars, film magazines portrayed Yeşilçam stars as truly modern, urban subjects leading western bourgeois lifestyles. Yeşilçam stars were not bourgeois by birth. Usually, they came from lower or middle classes, but, like some 'good' female characters of melodramas, they underwent a process of refinement and star making that economically and socially moved them upward.²⁸ Living in sumptuous homes, wearing expensive clothes, driving expensive cars, having several love affairs, and enjoying a variety of entertainment were some of the major characteristics of stars' off-screen images. In this way, film magazines attempted to construct stars as objects of desire and as identifiable to audiences. In what follows, I attempt to examine the social reception of off-screen star images as they contradict with Yeşilçam stars' screen images, based on letters published in *Sinema* and *Perde*. But first I need to consider the value of letters as data for such a project.

Agah Özgüç, one of the most prominent film journalists of the 1960s and a contributor to *Sinema*, states that letter writing is one of the major characteristics that distinguishes 1960s cinema audiences from current audiences. He remembers that film magazines were receiving 'sacks of letters' in that period. Özgüç adds that letters printed in the magazines were genuine, but they were edited for spelling and

length.²⁹ Kadri Yurdatap; another film journalist of the period, one of the editors of *Sinema*, and currently a producer; gives similar information. He explains that eight or nine people from the staff of the magazine dealt with the letters in rotation. Each week, a different person examined the letters and selected a few to be printed. Yurdatap adds that the magazine did not attempt to manipulate its readers by creating fake letters or by making biased selections.³⁰ Yet using letter pages as data for the study of cinema audiences might have some methodological limitations. As Jackey Stacey puts it, letters 'are written by cinema spectators, but within the institutional constraints of editors and often in response to agendas set by film magazines which are part of the film industry'.³¹ Therefore, the letters cannot represent all audiences, and they might be affected by editorial bias. However, questions of representation and mediation apply to any type of data used in the study of audiences, including ethnographic ones. As Henry Jenkins argues,

Whether we are looking at personal diaries and letters, trade press reports, newspaper reviews, net discussion-group debates, or focus-group interviews, we are reading the 'tea leaves' left behind by a more immediate process of reception, which we may never directly observe nor fully reconstruct.³²

No matter what methodology is used, it would be naïve to claim that audiences could be available to the researcher in a direct way. Moreover, emphasizing mediation and distortion would be to claim that 'there is pure cinematic experience beyond the limits of representation'.³³ Therefore, it would be a mistake to dismiss letters pages just because of their methodological limitations. Moreover, although the letters might only partially represent audiences and might not be 'authentic' enough, it is important that they are read by other audiences; that they become a part of audiences' cultural and discursive repertoires and, therefore, constitute a part of the 'generative mechanisms' of cinema reception.³⁴

Readers' letters in *Sinema* and *Perde* constituted a socially produced discursive space in which a variety of meanings about Yeşilçam cinema were formulated and circulated. These letters, therefore, could at least provide a sense of some social subject positions and discursive strategies that were available for audiences within that historical moment and 'give us a range of possible influences on spectatorship' with regard to the social reception of Yeşilçam cinema and its stars.³⁵ Moreover, the overwhelming interest in stars, on the one hand, confirms the idea that 'the agenda for legitimate topics [was] largely framed by the producers of the magazine[s]'.³⁶ On the other hand, for just this reason, these letters provide good material for the study of 'audiences' responses to the discourses of stardom produced by the film industry of the time' and this is the subject for the remainder of the article.³⁷

Many of the audience members who wrote letters were fans of the stars and exhibited typical fan behaviour such as wondering about specific stars' biographies, private lives, tastes, and preferences and requesting photographs and contact with stars. However, rather than asking for information or making requests, the majority of the letters were expressive; they communicated an opinion, suggestion, satisfaction, complaint, or criticism relating to Turkish cinema, including Yeşilçam stars. Moreover, the topics covered in the letters often extended beyond cinema to issues such as morality, social norms, honesty, and fidelity/infidelity in love.

Therefore, the letters constituted a space for public debate, complaint, and confession, giving audiences an opportunity to 'hear' their voices in public, to communicate with other people, and to become members of imaginary communities.

Certainly Yeşilçam stars were desirable to audiences. A male audience member from Diyarbakır, in south-eastern Turkey, who wanted to become a movie star himself, described Yeşilçam stars as follows: 'it is they who have entertainment, who play in films, who appear in dreams, and who enjoy all varieties of love'.³⁸ Remarkably, this audience member considered appearing in films as just one of the fruits, rather than a necessary condition, of being a star – and thus underlined the intertextual nature of the star image. The letters suggest that knowledge about the details of the professional and private life of a star was not only shared in everyday conversations but also became the basis of a lifestyle for some audiences. Some audience members bought into the modern and affluent off-screen star image and attempted to imitate stars' appearances and behaviours in their everyday lives. Such rituals, which Stacey calls 'extra-cinematic identificatory practices',³⁹ were especially common among those audience members who seemed to have adopted modern, urban, western lifestyles. For instance, in the letter below, a female audience member from Turkey's capital, Ankara, describes how her social community imitates Leyla Sayar's lifestyle.⁴⁰ Between the lines, this writer carefully distinguishes herself and her community as being urban upper class by noting that she is a graduate of *kolej* (the name given to private high schools in Turkey attended only by those who can afford the high tuition fees) and has a distaste of slums:

I met a friend at the hairdresser. I asked her when she gets up in the morning and what food she likes. She gave me such answers as, 'I get up when Leyla [Sayar] gets up!' 'I like the food that Leyla likes most!' Probably her hairstyle was also like Leyla's. Nothing like that existed even during our private high school years when we were snobbiest. We heard that she would perform in a film shown in one of the theatres in Ankara. We reserved our seats although the theatre is in a slum. Everybody wears their rings on their middle finger. Everybody supports Fenerbahçe [a local soccer team] because she is doing so.⁴¹

Similarly, a female audience member from Balıkesir imagined a 'perfect day' she spent with various male and female stars. To put it differently, she paid an imaginary visit to the world of Yeşilçam stars, which is characterized by Istanbul, leisure, and consumption; an image promoted by film magazines.

A perfect day for me:

If I had the opportunity, I would go to Istanbul and spend my day with the following stars:

I would have breakfast with MUZAFFER NEBİOĞLU,

Go swimming with AYHAN IŞIK,

Have lunch with BELGİN DORUK,

Go shopping with SUNA SELEN,

Have dinner with GÖKSEL ARSOY,

and return to my home with the joy of the perfect day I spent.⁴²

Fans' attachments to stars have generally been viewed as a type of escapism. Stacey argues:

Generally escapism is associated with leaving behind one's own life and participating in another imaginary world for a short period of time. ... The differences between these fantasy worlds which the stars inhabited and those of the spectator provide the possibility for the spectator to leave her world temporarily and become part of the star's world.⁴³

Stacey makes this argument based on accounts of female British audiences of Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s, and such interpretations are not limited to studies of western film stars. For instance, in their discussion of the star system in India, Behroze Gandhi and Rosie Thomas note: 'Obviously film stars are valued in India for many of the same reasons as in other cultures: they offer audiences whose lives are limited in various ways – materially and emotionally – the vicarious pleasure of identification and exploration of the realm of the extraordinary.'⁴⁴ The tendency to discuss Yeşilçam stars as extraordinary, almost divine beings or as a special group of 'elites' envied by audiences is also common among Turkish film scholars and researchers.⁴⁵ In the 1960s, film magazines played a crucial role in the construction of Yeşilçam stars as these extraordinary, divine, and unattainable elites. However, film magazines were not fully successful in making audiences buy into this star image. The star–audience relationships observed in many letters transgress such notions as adoration, devotion, imitation, extra-cinematic identification, or escape. Disavowing Yeşilçam stars' status, many audience members addressed stars as if they were their friends, lovers, sisters, brothers, relatives, or neighbours. Many letters began with such expressions of address as 'sister', '*yenge*' (a brother's or a friend's wife), or 'brother' and were signed as 'your sister' or 'your brother'. The letters also included such expressions as 'I am so sorry', 'Don't hurt me', 'I am offended', and 'Don't upset me', all of which imply a feeling of intimacy. The letters also suggest that audiences engaged in a variety of 'imaginary social relationships'⁴⁶ with stars that paralleled the sincere relationships among rural lower-class characters in Yeşilçam films or those among the inhabitants of a traditional Turkish neighbourhood characterized by interpersonal closeness, intimacy, and responsibility.

Audience members did not simply follow the good and bad events in stars' professional and private lives (for instance, successes, failures, marriages, separations, divorces, and illnesses), but also transformed these into sources of personal satisfaction, pride, or pain. Often they counselled stars like a close friend. Sometimes, they even shared their own private lives with stars. In the letter below, a male audience member tells Göksel Arsoy, a prominent, young, and handsome Yeşilçam star, about his own love affairs in a very intimate manner:

Hello, Göksel,

Don't be offended, my brother, but I used to be mad at you. I was having fun with a girl. We broke up because of her passion for you. At the beginning, I was angry with you because you deprived me of the girl. However, now I like you. To my surprise, another girl had been in love with me, but she couldn't tell me because I was dating somebody else. Now, my days are so beautiful. I regret I

did not meet her before. See, my friend Göksel? Now I like you. I take the girl to your films and tell her: 'See, this is the boy who initiated our affair'. So you have two more regular followers. Don't send me a picture, don't write me back either. I am sending this letter to *Sinema* magazine; read it.⁴⁷

The feeling of closeness led some audience members to request personal favours from stars, who were assumed to lead an easy and prosperous life. For instance, promising that they would pay it back, some audience members wanted to borrow money from stars as if they were borrowing it from a wealthy friend or relative:

Çolpan *yenge*!

I have a request for you, one that is very important to me. For the first time in my life, I am in such a terrible situation that I must beg. I need two hundred liras until the end of this month. I promise on my honour that I will pay this money back as soon as possible. Please, *yenge*, don't offend me. This money may be less than your pocket money, but I assure you that it is worth thousands of liras to me.⁴⁸

The letter above, written by a male, affirms the star image of an affluent and extravagant person. Yet, the letter writer addresses the star with the word '*yenge*', which suggests a feeling of closeness or familiarity. In Turkish, the word '*yenge*' is used in a couple of senses. Similar to 'sister-in-law' in English, it normally refers to a brother's wife or an uncle's wife. However, traditional Turkish men also use it to refer to a friend's wife or to address any middle-aged woman in a public space. In this latter usage, the word '*yenge*' implicitly conveys the message that the man does not see the woman as a love/sex object, but rather as his brother's or friend's wife, and therefore he does not pose a sexual threat to the woman.

To prove their emotional attachment or to concretize their imaginary connection to stars, some audience members asked to meet, but as if they were asking a close friend. Below is an exceptional case, in which the motivation for meeting the star extends beyond a simple appointment. A female audience member tries to persuade a star couple, Çolpan İlhan and Sadri Alışık, to engage their son to her sister. Like many other audience members, she addresses the couple as 'sister' and 'brother', and, more importantly, she addresses them as if they are not stars but parents of a family living next door:

My beloved sister Çolpan,

I have a sister called Selma. She is about your son Kerem's age. You would like her very much if you saw her. I am sure Kerem would like her, too. My sister likes Kerem, too. She always takes Kerem's picture with her that I cut out from a magazine. My beloved sister Çolpan, here is what I am going to say: Let me bring my sister Selma to your home. If you like and love her, let's engage her to Kerem. Please don't ridicule and laugh at me, I would be offended. Tell my demand also to my brother Sadri. Let my brother Sadri see Selma. I can bring my sister any time you like. If you accept my demand, we, the whole family, would be happy. My mother and father also know about this. We can have the engagement ceremony at your house or at ours. Please, my beloved sister

Çolpan, write me a reply. I am looking forward to your letter. Don't forget to say hello to Kerem for my sister Selma.⁴⁹

Sometimes, audiences attempted to meet stars in their fantasies. In the letter below, a male audience member from Istanbul refers to *Mahalleye Gelen Gelin* (The New Bride in the Neighbourhood) (Osman Seden, 1961), a typical Yeşilçam melodrama in which Fatma Girik plays a rich and snobbish girl who wants to write a novel about lower-class people. She disguises herself as a worker in her uncle's factory to get familiar with lower-class lives, but she falls in love with a truck driver from this class. At the beginning of the letter, the letter writer fantasizes about being married to Girik, and leading a modern, affluent lifestyle:

I haven't been able to forget you [Fatma Girik] since I saw *Mahalleye Gelen Gelin*. You don't need to be a novelist. What a great happiness for a man to have you as his wife! One should have you sit in a corner like an ornament. But you should get up sometimes, walk, and breathe. Oh, my God, what a great happiness this is. . . . Me, I should earn 1500 liras instead of 600 liras per month. We should live in a wonderful apartment flat. We should have cassette players, telephones, and record players.⁵⁰

Up to this point, the letter writer appears to escape to the attractive world of the star where he can enjoy love and consumerism. However, besides disavowing the 'intellectual' character (the novelist) the star played in the film, the conclusion of the letter, quoted below, suggests that the world escaped to can no longer remain only the modern bourgeois world of the star. Rather, it is transformed into an imaginary home where the star becomes the personal asset of a man who is insistent on his lower- or middle-class lifestyle and tastes and who reproduces those classes' patriarchal gender ideology: 'I should arrive at home at 6 p.m. in the evening. There should be shopping bags, breads, and meats in my arms. You must prepare a *raki* table for me. We should be together for hours, days, and months. We should never get separated.'⁵¹ The phrase 'you must prepare a *raki* table for me' is of particular importance here. In Yeşilçam melodramas, the consumption of expensive western drinks such as whisky and champagne signifies membership in the urban upper class, whereas *raki* (a traditional Turkish alcoholic drink) and a *raki* table (a combination of *raki* with cold Turkish dishes) are associated with poor rural classes. It is significant that the letter writer does not fantasize about the star preparing a whisky for him but a *raki* table. It could be argued that he affirms modernity for its material abundance, but negates it as a lifestyle.

Audiences' feelings toward their favourite stars were not always in the form of love, praise, or appreciation. They also complained about stars, especially when certain attitudes and activities of stars threatened or broke the imaginary bond between fans and their favourite stars, such as not responding to letters and requests, getting married, and leading scandalous private lives. In such cases, audiences carried on imaginary arguments with stars. Again, letters involving such complaints are marked by feelings of intimacy. Audiences saw stars as being close enough to them that they could be insistent in their demands and they wrote in a reproachful manner when their expectations were not met. For example, audiences wanted to see

their favourite stars as honourable and well-mannered ladies and gentlemen outside the cinema. This perfectly parallels the moralistic universe of Yeşilçam melodramas. Brief love affairs, becoming subject to rumours, and appearing in ‘inappropriate’ public places or exhibiting ‘inappropriate’ manners that contradicted their screen image, caused not only disappointment for the stars’ fans, but more importantly, made them feel embarrassed, humiliated, and betrayed. Audience members (male and female) wrote as if stars (male and female) represented their own honour, as if stars were family and had dishonoured the family with their socially and morally ‘inappropriate’ or ‘unacceptable’ behaviour. Accordingly, some audience members charged themselves with the duty of warning stars and showing them the ‘right’ way in a parental manner. For instance, pointing out that he loved Hülya Koçyiğit like a sister, a male audience member criticized the female star for appearing in a magazine next to a male celebrity known for his short-lived marriages. The letter writer even advised her on whom she should be with:

One day a friend of mine came to my workplace. He had *Perde* magazine in his hand. He opened the magazine, showed me the picture of sister Hülya with Nihat Akçan. And he told me: ‘This is your dear sister Hülya, whom you are proud of’. I went out of myself for a moment. When I came to myself I found a pen. Nihat Akçan married Yıldız Kenter, and they divorced soon after. He married Tijen Par and he divorced again. It is obvious that Nihat Akçan does not have an eye on setting up a home. Dear sister, I see you more suitable for Gürel Ünlüsoy than Nihat. I hope you come to your senses before it is too late.⁵²

As another and unparalleled example, film magazines’ rumours about a love affair between 20-year-old Türkan Şoray, the ‘Sultana’ of Yeşilçam cinema, and Rüçhan Adlı, a married industrialist in his 40s, garnered strong reactions from audiences. Seçil Büker and Canan Uluyağcı have speculated that although magazine journalists objected to this love affair, Şoray’s fans were willing to tolerate it because she was a star, a member of ‘a group of elites’ in the eyes of audiences.⁵³ However, the letters examined in this study suggest that this was not really the case. The love affair activated a long and heated debate among the audiences who wrote to *Perde*. Şoray’s insistence on being with Adlı to the point of accepting being disowned by her mother was ‘scandalous’ and ‘subversive’ to the values of society. For many, it was impossible to accept that Şoray, one of the most ‘beautiful’ and ‘honourable’ women in film, was a ‘mistress’ and a ‘home wrecker’ outside the cinema. Therefore, many audience members counselled her – sometimes in a friendly, sometimes in a parental manner.⁵⁴

Based on all these examples, it could be argued that rather than fully buying into the off-screen star images and trying to escape fully to the desired but distant ‘modern’ world of Yeşilçam stars, many Yeşilçam audiences attempted to bring stars to their own world and back into the traditionalistic and moralistic universe of Yeşilçam melodramas. Rather than leaving their own world behind, audiences inscribed their own life upon the worlds that stars supposedly inhabited. I would call this process ‘bringing stars back home’. This can also be regarded as a mode of popular reading, which Michel De Certeau names ‘insinuation’. Insinuation, for De

Certeau, refers to ‘the introduction of a supplementary element, bearing the mark of the individual subject, into a structured consumption of other elements in such a way as to alter the configuration and hence signification of these elements’.⁵⁵ It is observed that audiences reworked and appropriated stars’ off-screen images in terms of their own values, lifestyles, and dispositions and thus changed their configurations. This could also be interpreted as a way of ‘bringing stars back home’ by cheating them of their stardom.

As Yeşilçam melodramas attempted to displace class conflict and achieve a compromise between tradition and modernity through cooperation between different classes under the guidance of rural lower classes, the audiences themselves imagined cooperating with the stars. The prevailing feelings of caring and intimacy towards Yeşilçam stars and the attempt to ‘bring stars back home’ could also be read as audiences’ attempts to deal with the anxieties caused by rapid modernization and urbanization and, eventually, by the replacement of traditional neighbourhood cultures by the ‘modern’, ‘introverted’, ‘isolated’, and ‘alienated’ lifestyles that began in the 1960s.⁵⁶ Audiences’ intimate approaches toward Yeşilçam stars are reminiscent of the sincere relationships among the rural lower-class characters in Yeşilçam films and of the supposed social relationships among the members of a traditional neighbourhood. Certainly, the star–audience relationships observed in the letters do not fully compare to star–audience relationships formulated within a western context.⁵⁷ Yet to push the subject behind these letters to ‘the realm of the pre-modern or traditional’ or to view the star–audience relationships implied by these letters simply as ‘anomalies’ would be to interpret Turkish modernity from a Eurocentric perspective (as a form of modernity that does not comply with European norms).⁵⁸ If we accept that ‘modernity is not one, but many’,⁵⁹ it might be more productive to see the different star–audience relationships implied by the letters as ‘creative adaptations’, as a critical site where audiences meet, negotiate, and appropriate modernity, which cinema and stars are part of, in their own fashion.⁶⁰

Notes

The author would like to thank Professor Haldun Özaktaş and Professor Nezih Erodoğan for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

1. D.K. Mutlu, ‘Turkey’, in B.K. Grant (ed.), *Schirmer Encyclopedia of Film* (New York: Schirmer Reference, 2006), p.264.
2. N. Özön, *Karagözden Sinemaya: Türk Sineması ve Sorunları*, Vol.1 (Ankara: Kitle, 1995), p.388.
3. Among other popular genres were comedies, historical action and adventure, detective, and gangster films. For a brief discussion of these genres, see N. Erdoğan and D. Göktürk, ‘Turkish Cinema’, in O. Leaman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Cinemas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.536–7.
4. See A.A. Bir, ‘İslami gözlüklü medya’, *Hürriyet*, 23 April 2006.
5. N. Özön, ‘Kurutulması Gereken Bataklik’, *Akis*, No.203 (1958), pp.30–31.
6. For examples of this type of criticism, see the issues of *Yeni Cinema* journal throughout the 1960s. See, for example, N. Özön, ‘Türk sinemasına eleştirmeli bir bakış’, *Yeni Sinema*, No.3 (1966), p.12; A. Gevgilili, ‘Çağdaş sinema karşısında Türk sineması’, *Yeni Sinema*, No.3 (1966), p.17.
7. See for example, N. Abisel, ‘Popüler Yerli Filmlerde Kadının Kadına Sunuluşu’, in N. Abisel, *Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1994), pp.125–81; A. Yumul, ‘Türk Sinemasında

- Aşk ve Ahlak', in D. Derman (ed.), *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 1* (Istanbul: Bağlam, 2001), pp.47–54; H. Maktav, 'Melodram Kadınları', *Toplum ve Bilim*, No.96 (2003), pp.273–93.
8. F. Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', *Social Text*, No.1 (1979), p.141.
 9. Since no state or private archives in Turkey contain historical material on cinema audiences, I had to base my research on the letters pages in film magazines. Among all the magazines held at the National Library in Ankara, which holds the largest collection of Turkish film magazines from the 1960s, only *Sinema* and *Perde* proved to have letters pages. Reader columns that published only answers to readers' questions existed in many film magazines, but *Sinema* and *Perde* were the only ones to print the letters themselves. Therefore, the audience sample constituted by the letters used in this article is an incidental sample; a sample based on availability.
 10. Hollywood films and stars were favourites of Turkish cinema audiences, especially during the late 1930s and 1940s. Writing about the 1940s, Giovanni Scognamiglio, a prominent Turkish film historian of Italian origin, remarks, 'Turkish viewers want Hollywood stars, want action, wealth, spectacularity and glamour; they want excitement and emotion. They want dreams and they pay to have dreams' (quoted in N. Erdoğan and D. Kaya, 'Institutional Intervention in the Distribution and Exhibition of Hollywood Films in Turkey', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.22, No.1 (2002), p.49). Turkish film magazines of the 1940s, some of which even had 'Hollywood' in their titles, were full of topics relating to Hollywood stars. The dominance of Hollywood films in the Turkish film market continued during the 1950s. While all kinds of American films were welcomed in cinemas, domestic films found almost no place for exhibition. Turkish film producers saw official limitation of foreign film imports as the only way to develop the domestic film industry. Although this proposal had never been put into practice, the constant devaluation of the Turkish lira indirectly caused a serious reduction in foreign film imports, starting in the mid-1950s. By the 1960s, then, Yeşilçam films had replaced American films in terms of exhibition and public popularity. Parallel to this trend, Yeşilçam stars then dominated the pages of film magazines, including letters pages, from the 1960s onward.
 11. Ş. Mardin, 'Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.2, No.3 (1971), pp.202–9.
 12. B.S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1997), p.69.
 13. Ş. Mardin, 'The Just and the Unjust', *Daedalus*, Vol.120, No.3 (1991), p.126.
 14. A. Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.15.
 15. A. Kadioğlu, 'The Paradox of Turkish nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.32, No.2 (1996), p.181.
 16. B. Kılıçbay and E. Onaran İncirlioğlu, 'Interrupted Happiness: Class Boundaries and the "Impossible Love" in Turkish Melodrama', *Ephemera*, No.3 (2003), p.240.
 17. Mardin, 'The Just and the Unjust', p.117.
 18. N. Erdoğan, 'Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama between 1965 and 1975', *Screen*, Vol.39, No.3 (1998), p.266.
 19. A similar theme is also observed in Iranian cinema between 1968 and 1978. See E.J. Pardo, 'Iranian Cinema, 1968–1978: Female Characters and Social Dilemmas on the Eve of the Revolution', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.40, No.3 (2004), pp.32–3, 49–50.
 20. H. Akbulut, 'Sinemanın medeniyet halleri: Türk sinemasında kimlik, medeniyet ve modernleşme temsilleri', *Düşünen Siyaset*, No.17 (2003), pp.232–3; Erdoğan, 'Narratives of Resistance', p.267.
 21. Akbulut, 'Sinemanın medeniyet halleri', p.233; Erdoğan, 'Narratives of Resistance', p.268.
 22. Erdoğan, 'Narratives of Resistance', pp.265–6; N. Erdoğan, 'Üç seyirci', in D. Derman (ed.), *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 2* (Istanbul: Bağlam, 2001), p.223.
 23. Kılıçbay and İncirlioğlu, 'Interrupted Happiness', p.244.
 24. Erdoğan and Göktürk, 'Turkish Cinema', p.535; A. Özgüç, *Nasıl Artist Olabilirsiniz* (Istanbul: Martı, 1984), p.67.
 25. B. Evren, *Yeşilçam'la Yüzyüze* (Istanbul: Açı Yayınları, 1995), p.13.

26. C. Gledhill, 'Signs of Melodrama', in C. Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p.210.
27. R. Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979), pp.68–72.
28. The best example here is Türkan Şoray. For a discussion of how she moved from being a rural lower-class girl to 'the sultana' of Yeşilçam, see A. Özgüç, *Türkan Şoray: Bir Yıldız Böyle Doğdu* (Istanbul: Göl Yayınları, 1974).
29. Interview with Agah Özgüç, 11 April 2002.
30. Interview with Kadri Yurdatap, 18 April 2002.
31. J. Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.58.
32. H. Jenkins, 'Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire's Kiss', in C. Gledhill and L. Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000), p.167.
33. Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p.56.
34. R.C. Allen, 'From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History', *Screen*, Vol.31, No.4 (1990), pp.353–4.
35. B. Klinger, 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies', *Screen*, Vol.38, No.2 (1997), p.114.
36. Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p.55.
37. Ibid.
38. *Sinema*, No.41 (1961), p.22. All translations of the letters into English are mine.
39. Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p.159.
40. Notably, Leyla Sayar was not a typical Yeşilçam star. Owing to her 'European' modern look and beauty, she mostly appeared in vamp roles in Yeşilçam films. Later, she assumed an Islamic identity and veiled herself. See A. Özgüç, *Türk Sinemasına Damgasını Vuran On Kadın* (Istanbul: Broy Yayınları, 1988), pp.75–81; A. Özgüç, *Türk Sinemasında Cinselliğin Tarihi* (Istanbul: Antrakt Yayınları, 1994), pp.32–3.
41. *Sinema*, No.34 (1961), p.29.
42. *Sinema*, No.24 (1961), p.15.
43. Stacey, *Star Gazing*, pp.116–17.
44. B. Gandhi and R. Thomas, 'Three Indian Stars', in C. Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.107–8.
45. See for example, S. Büker and C. Uluyağcı, *Yeşilçam'da bir Sultan* (Istanbul: AFA, 1993), p.40; Evren, *Yeşilçam'la Yüzyüze*, p.13; S. Kirel, *Yeşilçam Öykü Sineması* (Istanbul: Babil, 2005), p.90.
46. 'Imaginary social relationship', a concept developed by J.L. Caughey, refers to those relationships that are devoid of actual face-to-face interaction but that parallel a social relationship. Caughey remarks that '[o]ur "real" social world consists of the people with whom we actually interact'; but there are also 'other beings who may be very significant to [us], but with whom [we do] not engage in actual face-to-face relations'. Media figures, according to Caughey, constitute one class of these beings. J.L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp.17–21.
47. *Sinema*, No.53 (1961), p.12.
48. *Sinema*, No.80 (1962), p.6.
49. *Sinema*, No.80 (1962), p.7.
50. *Sinema*, No.65 (1962), p.23.
51. Ibid.
52. *Perde*, No.15 (1965), p.18.
53. Büker and Uluyağcı, *Yeşilçam'da bir Sultan*, p.40.
54. See for example *Perde*, No.24 (1964), p.21; No.7 (1965), p.18; No.8 (1965), p.18; No.10 (1965), p.18.
55. J. Ahearne, *Michel De Certeau: Interpretation and its Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p.174.
56. Kirel, *Yeşilçam Öykü Sineması*, p.27.

57. See, for example, Stacey, *Star Gazing*; S. Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Macmillan, 2001); R. Moseley, *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
58. For a more detailed discussion of the problems with viewing Turkish modernity from a Eurocentric perspective, see Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*, pp.1–4.
59. D.P. Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities', *Public Culture*, Vol.11, No.1 (1999), p.16.
60. For a discussion of 'alternative modernities' as 'creative adaptations', see *ibid.*, pp.16–17.