

Bilge Olgaç: A Turkish Political Filmmaker

M. Mert Örsler, University of Calgary

Abstract

My study presents a closer look at an early representative of women's cinema in Turkey; it situates Bilge Olgaç—one of the country's first (and most productive) female directors—in conversation with the global history of political cinema. This rich history has been recently revisited and re-conceptualized as *militant cinema*, one which emanated from the early Soviet film and infused with the new waves of the developed world and third cinemas of the Global South in the 1960s. The emblematic of this cinema was machismo; however, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the global identity politics and its reflection on the cinema challenged the aggressive masculinity of radical political film discourse. Feminist film groups like the Berwick Street Film Collective and woman filmmakers like Carole Roussopoulos started making films that sat uneasily beside the avant-garde works of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. In the local Turkish context, Bilge Olgaç appeared alone as a woman director representing this global trajectory in the world cinema of the 20th century. The early touchstones of her filmography were macho action/adventure films starring Yılmaz Güney, such as *Üçünüzü de Mihlarım* [*I'll Shoot Three of You*] (1965) and *Krallar Kralı* [*The King of the Kings*] (1965). Yet, in the mid-1970s, Olgaç was making political films that centered on class struggle like *Açlık* [*Hunger*] (1974) and *Bir Gün Mutlaka* [*Certainly One Day*] (1977), a work of collaboration with Güney (who manifested himself as a representative of Third Cinema in 1970s Turkey). In the 1980s, which saw the rise of second-wave feminism in Turkey, her films, such as *Gülüşan* (1985) and *İpekçe* (1987), reflected women's struggle more specifically. Putting Turkish cinema on the world map of women's political filmmaking and focusing on her films made in the 1970s and 1980s, my study approaches Bilge Olgaç from militant cinema theories.

Key Words: Bilge Olgaç; Militant Cinema; Political Cinema; Turkey; Women's Cinema

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Biographical Note

M. Mert Örsler is a graduate student and teaching assistant in the Department of Communication, Media, and Film at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. His research is situated at the intersection of film stars, media adaptations, and political cinema. Mert's work has appeared in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* and *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. His forthcoming research includes an article in *Celebrity Studies' Cultural Report* on Turkish celebrity culture and a book chapter, set to appear in a *Routledge Companion* on global literary adaptation.