

SUBVERTING THE PERIPHERAL OTHER: INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMALE GAZE IN *TEREDDÜT*

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IN THIS PRESENTATION...

- This paper analyzes the film “Tereddüt” directed by Yeşim Ustaoglu in 2016 by referring to the concepts of “intersectionality” and “female gaze”.
- This paper further argues that the feminist filmmaking employed in the narrative depicts the complicated relationship between the center and the periphery in Turkey from a gendered perspective.
- The film’s title was translated as “Clair Obscur”, originally an art term “Chiaroscuro”, which refers to the togetherness of light and dark in a composition.
- Winner of the “Best Film”, “Best Actress” and “Best Director” awards at Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival 2016; and “Best Actress” and “Best Director” at Istanbul International Film Festival 2017.

THEORY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

- The term "intersectionality" was conceptualized by American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article published in 1989, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics".
- Crenshaw (1991, p. 1244) discusses the different dynamics which oppresses black women and how these dynamics intersect in reproducing their subordination. According to Crenshaw (1991, p. 1246), These dynamics include gender, race and class, which altogether legitimize the discrimination of black women in the US.
- Intersectionality allows one to analyze the mechanisms of "discrimination, marginalization, and privilege along multiple axes of identity, including gender, race, sexuality, and class" (Richter et al., 2020, p. 1015).
- Intersectionality has been applied to the understanding of various other sources of marginalization in social life, including religion, disability, weightism and ageism.
- "Intersectional Feminism" has been influential in the forming of the Third Wave Feminism (Evans, 2015).

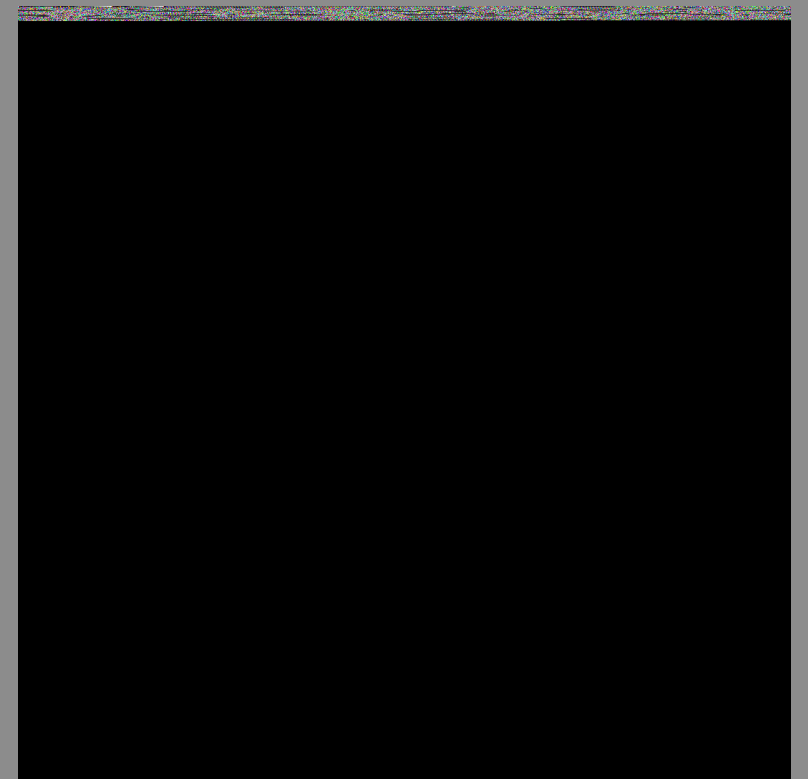


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FEMALE GAZE

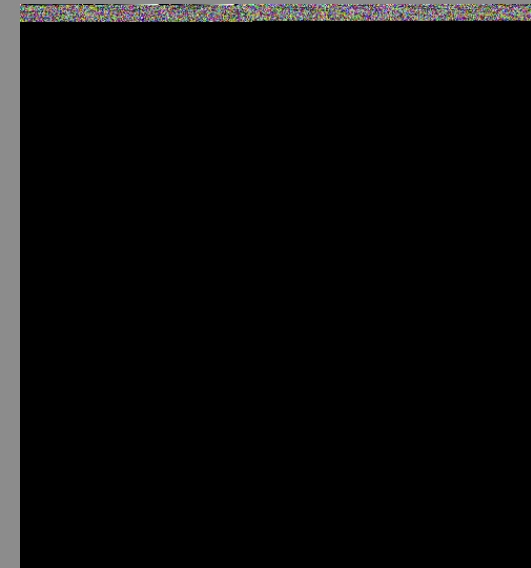
- The concept of “Female Gaze” was theorized after feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey’s discussion on the “male gaze”.
- In her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Mulvey (1975) discusses that classical Hollywood cinema situates men as the main spectator, whereas women on the screen are positioned as an object of desire.
- Mulvey conducts a psychoanalytical criticism of cinema and argues that Hollywood film represents the “unconscious” of the “phallogentric” social order by facilitating the “male gaze”.
- According to Mulvey, alternative representations of gender is possible through “strategies informed by feminism and avant-garde cinema” (Sassatelli, 2011, p. 124).
- The concept of “female gaze” refers to alternative ways of feminist spectatorship (Stacey, 1994), which provides women with active positions of seeing, contrary to passive position of being seen in male-dominated culture.
- Feminist cinema employs female gaze to portray powerful female characters, and/or promote male sexual imagery as the object of desire by the female gaze (Olayiwola, 2021, pp.6-7).
- Female gaze is a central notion in the making of a “feminist visual culture”, which subverts the traditional, patriarchal ways of seeing and representing women (Moletsane, 2009, p. 316).

METHODOLOGY

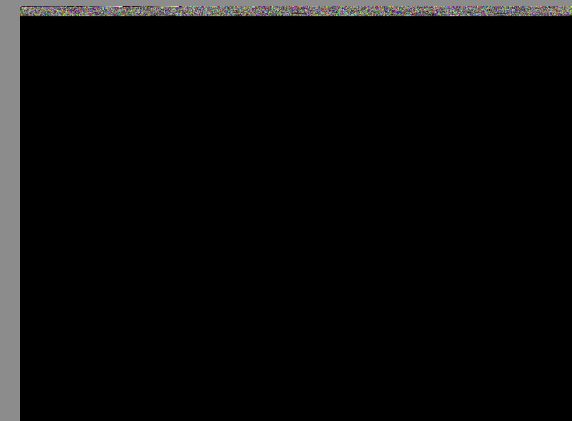
- This paper employs “Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis” (FCDA) in the critical reading of the film narrative from an intersectional perspective. According to Lazar (2005), FCDA aims to analyze how gendered power relationships are “(re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices” (p. 11).
- Lazar (2005, p. 6) defines FCDA as a “praxis-oriented research”, which aims to create awareness regarding gendered representations by exposing power relationships produced by discourses.
- From this perspective, this paper will critically analyze the discourses of gender, sexuality, class and culture as reflected by the film’s narrative.
- This paper will discuss the different ways in which the director Yeşim Ustaoglu attempts to employ female gaze in the narrative.
- The discussion will further argue that the female gaze provides the opportunity to explore the complexities of women’s subordination from an intersectional perspective.
- Finally, the film facilitates a critical discussion of Turkey’s center-periphery relations through the stories of two female characters belonging to different classes and cultures.

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR)

- *Tereddüt* narrates the story of two women, Şehnaz and Elmas, who meet in Kocaali, a peripheral coastal town in Turkey's Black Sea region.
- Şehnaz is working as a psychiatrist in her mandatory state service in the town, whereas Elmas is a teenager girl married to a local man. Şehnaz is living together with Cem, an architect based in Istanbul. Elmas was forced to "child-marriage" at the age of fifteen.
- Şehnaz meets Elmas in the hospital after Elmas is brought in by the police to psychiatric examination for suspected murder. Elmas is living under strict patriarchal culture; she is forced to look after her sick mother-in-law, cannot go in public freely whenever she wants, lives under constant surveillance of his husband, and is traumatized due to marital rape.
- After going through a series of traumatic incidents, Elmas is depressed; at this point of the narrative, it is revealed that Elmas' husband and mother-in-law died due to carbon monoxide heater poisoning.
- This incident marks the beginning of the relationship between Elmas and Şehnaz throughout a series of therapeutic sessions.



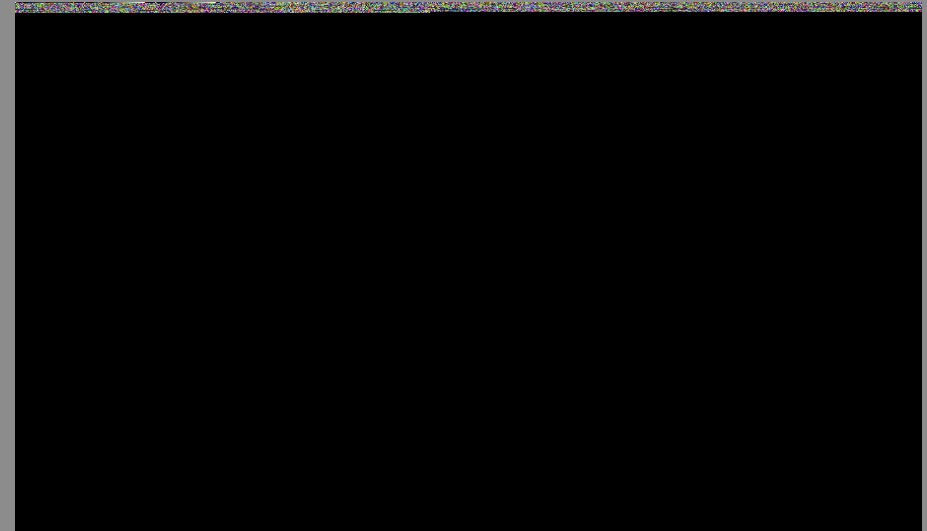
34:43,
Şehnaz
during the
initial
examination
of Elmas.



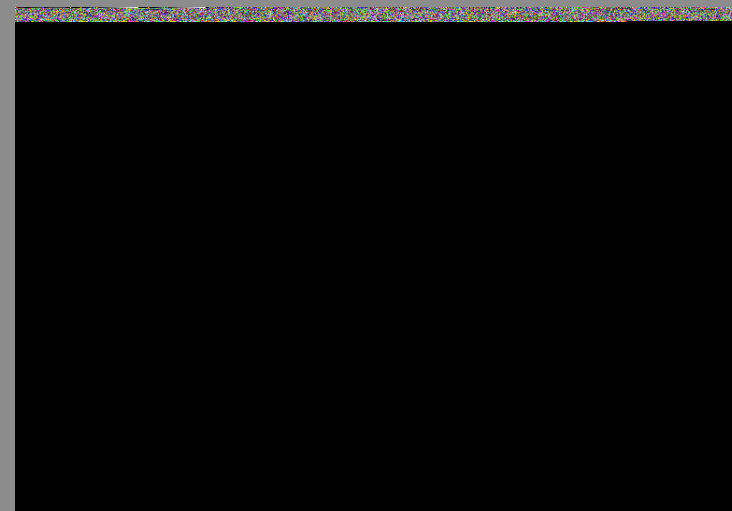
40:28: Elmas
during
therapy
session.

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR) - ELMAS

- Once she was brought in the hospital, Elmas was physically and sexually assaulted by her husband.
- “Representation of rape” constitutes the most critical part of the narrative that facilitates the **female gaze**.
- Unlike phallogentric film language which legitimizes rape culture and turns it into a spectacle for male gaze, the director focusses on the suffering of the female victim. By using the contrast between light and dark, the rape scenes do not portray the rapist’s actions, and rather center on the victim’s oppression.
- The following scenes avoid “over-dramatization” of the incident and provides a truthful depiction of Elmas’ victimization as she goes to the bathroom.



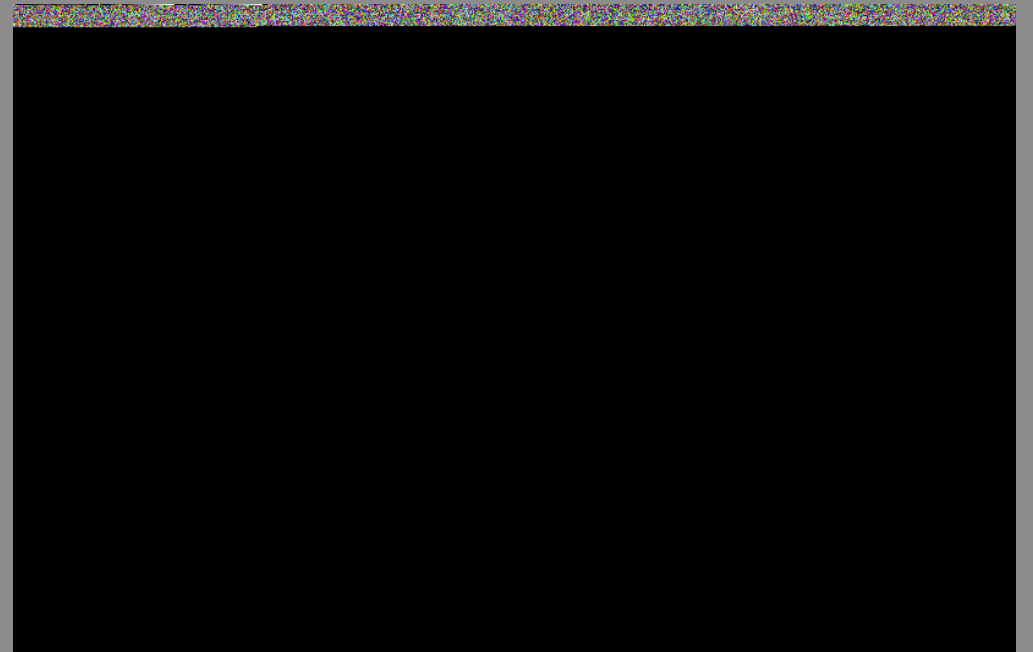
29:16
Representati
on of marital
rape



31:12 Elmas
going to the
bathroom
after the
sexual assault

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR) - ELMAS

- The following scene depicts Elmas sitting in the balcony the next morning. She is severely traumatized and recognized by her friend living in the next bloc.
- Soon it is revealed that the deaths of Elmas' husband and mother-in-law have taken place and she is brought to the hospital by the police.
- The scene employs the **female gaze** by not openly pointing at Elmas as the perpetrator of the possible crimes.
- The narrative illustrates that there is a possibility that Elmas may be the perpetrator, but the audience cannot make sure of it since it may also be an accident.
- This ambiguity in the narrative enables the audience to sympathize with Elmas and identify with her experiences.
- The director does not openly refer to her as the criminal; even if she committed the crime, it is possible to understand it as self-defense as an outcome of the traumas she faced so far.



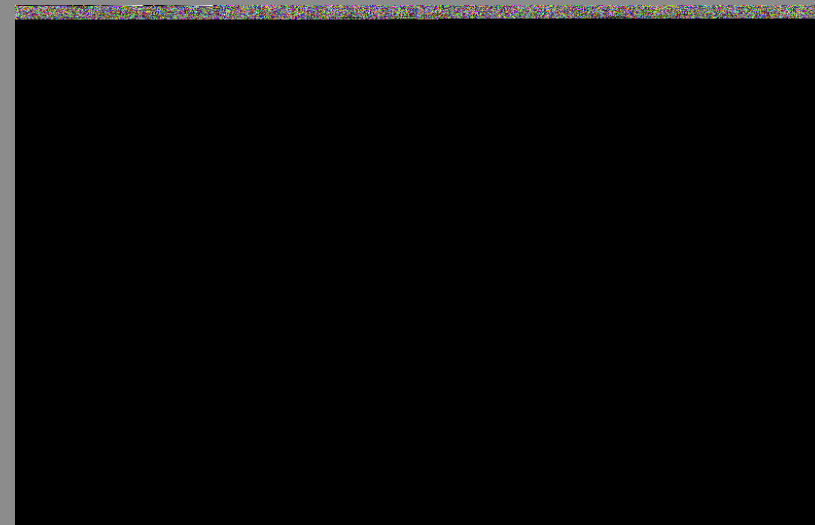
32:17: Elmas traumatized after the incident

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR) - ŞEHNAZ

- As the protagonist of the narrative, Şehnaz also faces her traumas and victimization from a gender perspective.
- She has a troubled relationship to Cem, who is regularly watching pornography and developing a narcissistic personality.
- The director employs the **female gaze** by focusing on Şehnaz's point of view during their sexual intercourse, which becomes a disappointment for her.
- After their intercourse, the camera continues to follow Şehnaz, instead of Cem, and portrays her frustration since Cem tends to treat her merely as a sexual object.
- Rather than focusing on how the male character fulfills his desire, the director focusses on the female character's disappointment, traumas and unfulfilled desires; thus reverting the phallogentric film discourse.



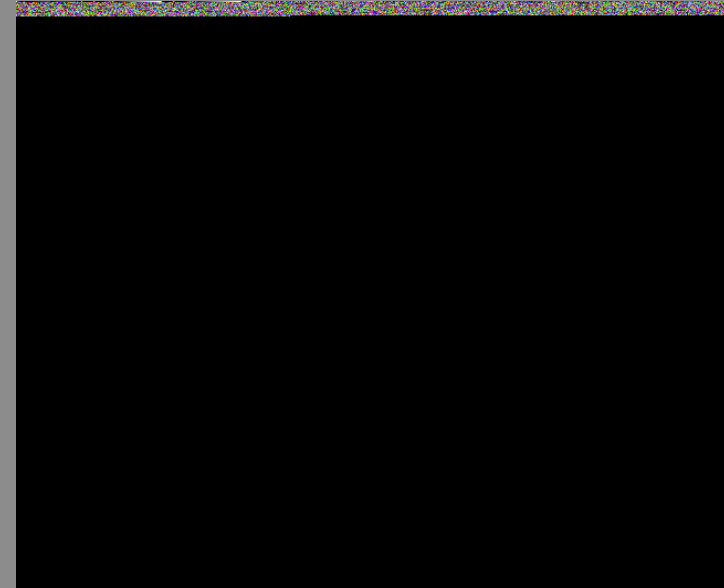
48:40 Şehnaz is traumatized due to how she was treated by Cem



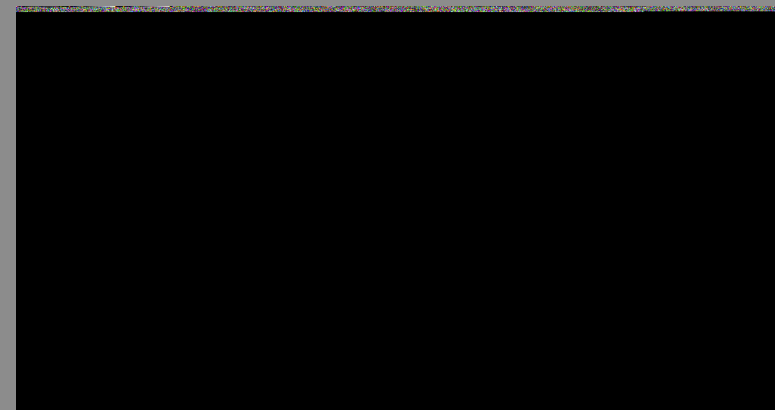
49:35: Şehnaz cries after the intercourse

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR) - ŞEHNAZ

- As the therapy sessions with Elmas continue at the hospital, Şehnaz begins a relationship with Umut.
- Umut works as a doctor in the same hospital specialized in gynecology.
- After his frustration in her relationship with Cem, Şehnaz finally finds passion and love in her relationship with Umut.
- At 01.16.00, they have a sexual intercourse, where the director employs the female gaze, by continuously focusing on Şehnaz's face, without depicting Umut and how he is satisfied. The scene portrays female sexual satisfaction from women's point of view, once more reverting phallogentric film discourse.
- However, Şehnaz is once again frustrated when she realizes that Umut has gone.



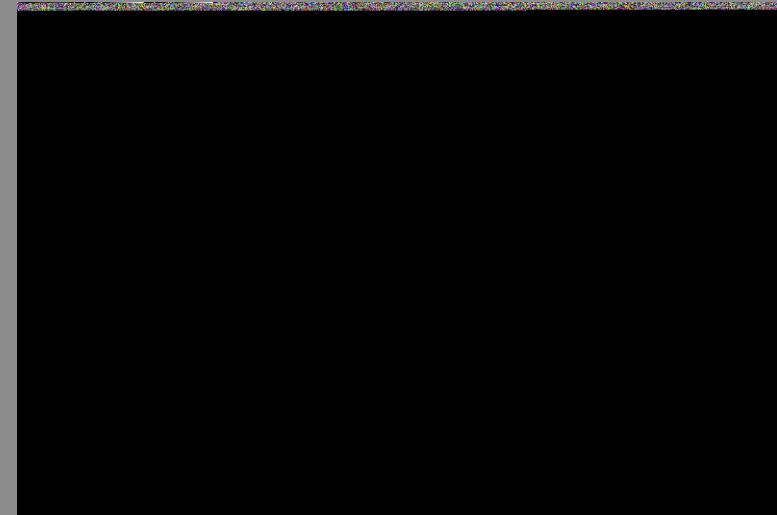
01:04.38
The meeting
of Umut and
Şehnaz



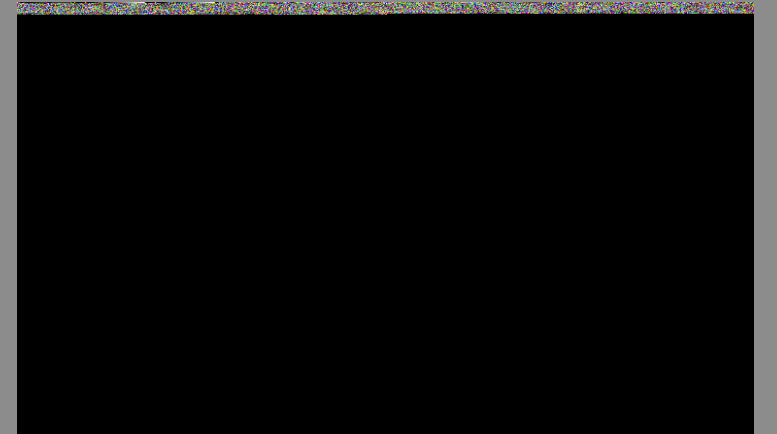
1:14.52:
Şehnaz
fulfilling her
desires
with Umut

TEREDDÜT (CLAIR OBSCUR) – ŞEHNAZ & ELMAS

- As the narrative unfolds, Şehnaz is increasingly frustrated as she and Cem had a big quarrel after the departure of Umut.
- Contrarily, Elmas begins to heal, and speak, as she manages to bear witness to her traumatic past with the help of Şehnaz during the therapies.
- At this point of the narrative, the film illustrates the **intersectional** dynamics of women's subordination according to gender, class and culture.
- Şehnaz's seeming better socio-economic conditions does not indicate they she is not a victim. The film depicts how her victimhood is reproduced at the intersections of gender and sexuality. On the other hand, cultural identity, class, gender and sexuality interplay in Elmas' subordination.
- Eventually, the film employs a **female gaze** through **intersectionality**: Two female characters encounter and empower each other to facilitate a solidarity. Şehnaz manages to face her conflicts in her life as Elmas manages to find a language to heal.



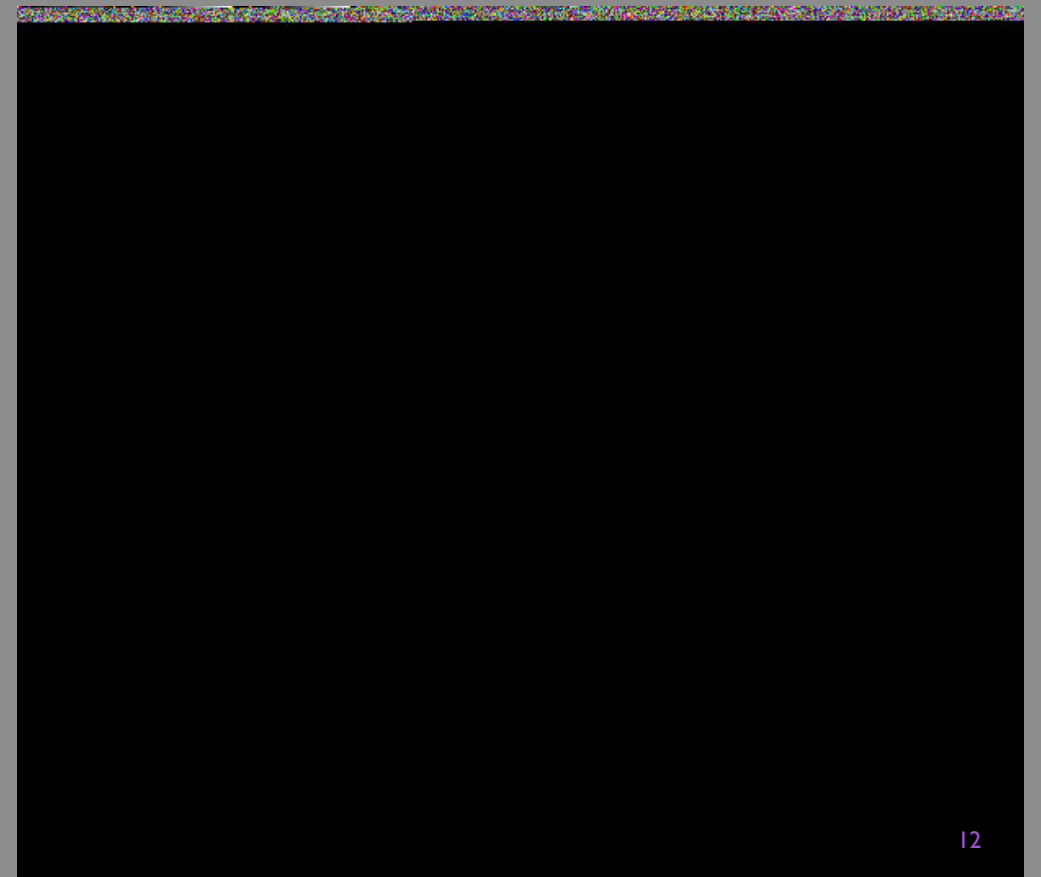
01:31.04:
Şehnaz and
Cem
quarelling



01:27.43:
Elmas
listening to
music with
her friend

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS: THE QUESTION OF THE PERIPHERY

- The film finalizes in an open-ending style as Şehnaz drives away from town, crying after her quarrel with Cem.
- Finally, **female gaze** and **intersectionality** in *Tereddüt* provides insights to facilitate a discussion on how center-periphery relations are represented in the film.
- According to Şerif Mardin (1973), Turkish society and politics is mainly divided into two entities, characterized by the wealthy, secular center as opposed to the conservative, peripheral other.
- It is possible to read *Tereddüt* as an attempt to truly depict and understand the peripheral subject (represented in Elmas), without stereotyping, degrading and discriminating it. In Turkish and Hollywood cinema, there has been an established ideological pattern to depict the peripheral other in a stereotypical way, emphasizing its inferiority in comparison to the subject at the center.
- To conclude, the film subverts the peripheral other by empowering Elmas, by at the same time deconstructing the supposedly powerful subject at the center, characterized in Şehnaz.



01:33:39: The final scene where Şehnaz drives away

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