



THE AUDIOVISUAL AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF GAYE SU AKYOL'S MUSIC

GAYE SU AKYOL MÜZİĞİNİN GÖRSEL-İŞİTSEL ESTETİĞİ VE POLİTİKASI

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Abstract

This textual study explores the politically motivated art of Gaye Su Akyol, a notable female voice in today's Anatolian rock scene, who opposes power-based inequities. Akyol's music partakes of local and global musical idioms, with politically charged lyrics and allegorical music videos, all of which warrant in-depth analysis. To this end, the research initially presents an overview of Akyol's background and Anatolian rock, her primary source of inspiration. The study employs intersectionality as a critical analytical tool to dissect the political subtexts within the audiovisual aesthetics of Akyol's art, for she utilizes a wide variety of politically constructed symbolic imagery that enhances the depth of her narrative. Subsequently, it analyzes her songwriting and music videos—namely, İsyen Manifestosu and İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir, to unravel the underlying political messages through the modes of close and contextual readings. The findings demonstrate that Akyol undermines dualities such as West/East, modern/traditional, man/woman, straight/queer, culture/nature, and human/nonhuman to foster empathy, reconciliation, transformation, and hope. Her artistic endeavors challenge prevailing injustices and biases and stand in solidarity with Others through a spotlight on inclusivity and diversity. The research concludes that Akyol crusades for progressive values against inequalities through her contrarian art.

Keywords: Gaye Su Akyol, Anatolian Rock, Intersectionality, Close Reading, Contextual Reading, Psychedelic.

Öz

Metin odaklı bu çalışma, günümüz Anadolu rock sahnesinin önemli kadın seslerinden biri olan ve güç temelli eşitsizliklere muhalefet eden Gaye Su Akyol'un politik güdümlü sanatını araştırmaktadır. Akyol'un, yerel ve küresel öğeleri harmanladığı müziğine eşlik eden politik içerikli şarkı sözleri ve alegorik müzik videoları derinlemesine incelemeyi gerektirmektedir. Bu amaçla araştırma, öncelikle Akyol'un artyetişimi ile başlıca esin kaynağı olan Anadolu rock müziğine genel bir bakış sunmaktadır. Araştırma, Akyol'un sanatının görsel-ışitsel estetiği içindeki politik alt metinleri irdelemek için kesişimselliği eleştirel bir analitik araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Nitekim sanatçı, anlatısına derinlik katan politik olarak inşa edilmiş çok çeşitli simgesel imgelemden yararlanmaktadır. Ardından, örtük politik iletileri ortaya çıkarmak için sanatçının şarkı sözleri ile İsyen Manifestosu ve İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir adlı müzik klipleri yakın ve bağlamsal okuma yoluyla çözümlenmektedir. Araştırma bulguları, Akyol'un duygudaşlığı, uzlaşımı, değişimi ve umudu teşvik etmek için Batı/Doğu, modern/geleneksel, erkek/kadın, heteroseksüel/queer, kültür/doğa ve insan/insandışı gibi ikilikleri zayıflattığını göstermektedir. Akyol'un sanatsal çabaları, yaygın adaletsizliklere ve önyargılara karşı çıkarken, kapsayıcılığı ve çeşitliliği öne çıkararak öteki kimliklerle dayanışma göstermektedir. Araştırma, Akyol'un muhalif sanatı aracılığıyla eşitsizliklere karşı ilerici değerleri desteklediği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gaye Su Akyol, Anadolu Rock, Kesişimsellik, Yakın Okuma, Bağlamsal Okuma, Psikedelik.



INTRODUCTION

Art, in its myriad forms, serves as a mirror to the complex layers of human experience. It transcends mere aesthetic *jouissance*: From ancient times to the present, artists have used their creations to challenge, contest, and reshape societal norms and beliefs. As Suzanne Lacy aptly puts it, communication is “intrinsic to art” (2022, p. xxiii). Artists communicate their emotions and messages through art, striving to promote progressive values and ideals. The transformative power of art lies in its ability to stir emotional and cognitive responses. In this way, it functions as “a therapeutic medium”, offering guidance, exhortation and consolation for self-improvement, countering “psychological frailties”, and serving as “a corrective of bad memory, a purveyor of hope, a source of dignified sorrow, a balancing agent, a guide to self-knowledge, a guide to the extension of experience, resensitisation tool” (de Botton & Armstrong, 2013, p. 5, 65). Moreover, art can influence social metamorphosis, inspire change, and challenge established norms. As a tool for critique, it functions “to raise consciousness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world” (Rancière, 2006, p. 83). In this context, art provides a platform for social critique and resistance against political injustices, illuminating social disparities and mobilizing public opinion. It can lead to profound personal change by stimulating thought, questioning existing understandings, and encouraging critical self-reflection. It can also reinvent social narratives, empowering individuals to challenge the status quo and fostering community cohesion.

This study, positioned at the intersection of communication, screen studies, literature, and music, commences its investigation by posing a question: Could art catalyze addressing, if not wiping out, deeply ingrained inequalities and promoting social cohesion, unity, and peace for the future? The research aims to explore hypothetical answers to this inquiry by focusing on Gaye Su Akyol’s art. Her music, imbued with political critique, serves as a tool that opposes power and questions the established norms at both local and global scales, signaling a call for change and transformation. She is acknowledged as a prominent figure in the resurgence of Anatolian rock¹, a genre highly appreciated in the music landscape of Türkiye during the 1960s and 1970s (Gültekin, 2019; Uyar, 2021). Akyol’s eclectic art challenges comprehension, given her mix of musical genres coupled with her political lyrics and artistically crafted music videos, all of which invite closer scrutiny. To achieve this goal, the study initially probes into the diverse facets of Akyol’s background, self-identity, and values, thereby establishing a framework for her artistic endeavors through a deductive lens while also touching upon Anatolian rock, her biggest inspiration. Akyol’s musical and lyrical themes closely mirror her political concerns. Therefore, the study proceeds to examine the rhetorical strategies she employs in her songwriting, alongside an analysis of her music videos, namely *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2019) and *İsyân Manifestosu* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020b), which distinctly convey her ethos and function as political allegories subverting the power structures.

The research integrates two distinct reading approaches, namely close reading and contextual reading, to analyze Akyol’s audiovisual work. Emerging in the early 20th century, close reading serves as a literary analysis approach rooted in the frameworks of Practical Criticism and New Criticism (Kusch, 2016, p. 32). It is a popular mode of reading in literary analyses (Kehya, 2023, p. 90), but it can be applied to any text (Kusch, 2016, p. 33). As Wolfreys et al. note, close reading focuses on formal analysis of the recurrent figures, motifs, and tropes of a text, intending to reveal the underlying unity or organic arrangement of the work (2014, p. 22). Analyzing Akyol’s work through close reading will allow for the examination of the specific wording and figures of speech she uses to articulate her political narrative throughout the lyrics and video content. However, close reading primarily concentrates on the text itself, dismissing biographical, social, political, and historical contexts that contribute to its overall significance (Bennett & Royle, 2004; Wolfreys et al., 2014). Thus, the research will adopt contextual reading as a second analysis method. According to Kusch, understanding a text requires an analysis of its historical and cultural context, which is vital for appreciating the text itself as well as the larger cultural, historical, and societal influences at play (2016, p. 56). Through contextual reading, the study will then reveal the deeper significances of the political imagery Akyol constructs and the broader contexts it refers to. Applying this framework is

¹ Also known as Anatolian psychedelia or Turkish psychedelic music/rock.

essential for elucidating the political subtexts that inform the artist’s work. The research seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- Which rhetorical devices (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, allegory, symbolism, personification) does Akyol employ to convey meaning and intensify the communicative impact in her audiovisual work, and what themes and patterns recur throughout her narratives? How do they contribute to constructing the political imagery?
- What political concerns does the artist prioritize in her works? Which political contexts does she refer to?
- How does the artist position herself ethically in her body of work? Which standpoints does she advocate for or criticize?

The political that permeates Akyol’s artistic pursuits has multifarious guises. Hence, the study employs Kimberle Crenshaw’s concept of *intersectionality*. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) observes that race and gender categories overlap, thus suggesting the concept of intersectionality as a critique device to deal with the marginalization of women of color. Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2016, 2019) delves deeper into the concept by introducing *the matrix of domination*. Through the lens of intersectionality, she illustrates how intertwined systems of oppression, like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, sustain inequalities rooted in race, gender, sexuality, and class. Intersectionality allows for a critical examination of the interconnectedness of identities and systems of power. Applying intersectionality as a critical analytical framework will help expose the nuanced political layers in Akyol’s work, facilitating a deeper exploration of the initial question. The study analyzes Akyol’s creations through a textual lens to investigate their potential for transformation without speculating on audience reception. Also, it is limited to the song lyrics and music videos referenced in the analysis. This article is an expanded version of an oral presentation initially given at the “1st International Symposium on Women in Audiovisual Culture”, which was organized in Istanbul on May 23-25, 2024, by the collaboration of Istanbul Okan University Cinema TV Department and Public Relations and Advertising Department. I, the corresponding author, confirm that it has not been previously published elsewhere.

GAYE SU AKYOL: THE PORTRAIT OF A FEMALE ARTIST

Gaye Su Akyol, born in 1985 in Istanbul to a painter father and a civil servant mother, grew up in a culturally rich environment. In an interview with Shane Woolman, she points out that her wide-ranging music preferences were deeply influenced by her family members’ different musical interests, from Turkish classical and folk music genres to Western classical music, rock ‘n’ roll and grunge (Akyol, 2018c). Akyol’s music draws from a broad spectrum of influences, encompassing Anatolian rock pioneers, Turkish classical music legends, and Western rock stars (Akyol, 2018c; Romero, 2022). With aspirations in music and painting already in mind, Akyol was persuaded by her uncle to study social anthropology at university. She reflects on her academic journey, noting that anthropology has enabled her to embrace an impartial view of cultures and human interactions, question existing beliefs and acknowledge the absence of cultural superiority, resulting in a deep understanding of the socially constructed nature of the *enemy* and *Other* (BloombergHT, 2023).

Akyol sheds light on the impact of anthropology on her music, expressing: “In my songs [...], I like combining sounds that seem unlikely to harmonize [...] or that have been encoded specifically to coalesce, thereby deconstructing and reconstructing these coded ideas” (BloombergHT, 2023). Her music, which she describes as “a compilation of all the music I have listened to since childhood” and “pursuit of personal archaeology rather than a calculated, prearranged quest (Hep Yeni Kal, 2021), is a reflection of her comprehensive, evaluative, and deconstructive approach to art and life. It bridges the East and West and the traditional and modern, incorporating varied genres played with a wide selection of musical instruments (Glitterbeat, n.d.-b; Glitterbeat, n.d.-d). She sees commercially motivated genre classifications as “unnecessary”, giving importance instead to the philosophical foundations and thematic content of music. She believes music should reflect the country’s historical context and societal realities, acting as “a witness to its time” (BloombergHT, 2023).



Akyol adopts non-capitalist approaches to music production and distribution. She collaborates with a small circle of associates and refrains from relying on or seeking endorsement from mainstream media (Akyol, 2016b). She champions an autonomous DIY ethos that derives its power from its freedom, stating that her artistic endeavors cannot be constrained or corrupted by capitalist or top-down obligations (Glitterbeat, n.d.-b; Glitterbeat, n.d.-d). Her albums are released in Türkiye through Dunganga Records, co-founded by Ali Güçlü Şimşek and Gaye Su Akyol (Dunganga Records, n.d.), and globally by Glitterbeat, a Germany-based company (Glitterbeat, n.d.-a). Akyol's commitment to promoting female visibility and participation in the music industry is evident in her disapproval of prevalent male-dominated environments. She engages in all aspects of music creation, including singing, writing lyrics, composing music, co-producing, and art direction. She supports the acknowledgment of women's strength and achievements, along with the advancement of feminist ideals, to counter the neglect of female presence and labor (Akyol, 2018a; Glitterbeat, n.d.-d).

Anatolian rock, as previously mentioned, has a significant impact on Akyol's music, both artistically and politically. Across different interviews, she pays homage to Anatolian rock legends, emphasizing the political undertones of their musical oeuvre and the socio-political context of the genre (Akyol, 2018a; Akyol, 2018c; Akyol, 2019b; BloombergHT, 2023). The artist, in conversation with Alex Marshall, describes the genre as a unique Turkish invention with its own distinct "philosophy" and "mathematics" (Akyol, 2019e). Anatolian rock, as Kenan B. Sharpe explains, is an "experimental genre [that] combined melodies, instruments, and lyrics from the Turkish countryside with world currents of surf, psychedelic, and progressive rock" (2021, pp. 366-367). Of genres Sharpe mentions, psychedelic² rock, also an essential component of Akyol's music, developed in the US as a sonic reaction to the widespread use of LSD, blending the psychedelic experience with aspects of Eastern religions and non-Western culture, integrating musical scales and instruments from India and the Middle East. This style was marked by vivid visual sensations reminiscent of an acid trip, often recreated through dynamic lighting and multimedia presentations at concerts, with no required association with drug use. And Anatolian psychedelic rock combined rock with Near Eastern influences to suit the Turkish context (Luhrsen & Larson, 2017, pp. 283-284, 378).

The inception of Anatolian rock coincided with a coup d'état in 1960 and constitutional changes in 1961, which led to the democratization of the country's socio-political and cultural spheres, marking a departure from the oppressive rule of the previous regime (Söylemez, 2022, p. 179). The Golden Microphone Song Contest, held in the progressive climate of 1960s Türkiye, also profoundly impacted its growth. The contest was instrumental in advancing prominent figures, mandating performances in Turkish with Western musical idioms (Bengi, 2022; Meriç, 2006; Spicer, 2018). The genre is, therefore, interpreted as the realization of Kemalist modernization and Westernization in the music domain (Hecker, 2012; Sharpe, 2021), blending indigenous musical traditions with contemporary Western elements to form a synthesis (Camgöz, 2020; Eren, 2018; Gürses, 2017). The global 1960s' socio-political climate significantly impacted Anatolian rock stars, leading them to embrace leftist ideologies (Eren, 2018; Sharpe, 2021; Spicer, 2018; Yildirim and Guler, 2022). The genre was heavily invested in societal issues such as working-class struggles, class discrepancies, labor rights, poverty, injustices, and challenges for Turkish immigrants (Güler, 2023; Gürses, 2017; Sharpe, 2021; Yildirim and Guler, 2022). Hence, it is regarded as the predecessor of protest music in Türkiye (Eren, 2018; Söylemez, 2022). Given Anatolian rock's political inclinations, it is no surprise that this genre has significantly shaped Gaye Su Akyol's politically engaged music. In what follows, the study will examine her lyrics and music videos to unearth the political messages embedded within.

THE ANALYSIS OF AKYOL'S AUDIOVISUAL WORK

Akyol, a self-proclaimed "political dissident", does not align with any specific ideology, opposing injustices whoever seizes power: "Should a [political] party I support be to rise to power tomorrow, I

² Psychedelics [...] are powerful psychoactive substances that alter perception and mood and affect numerous cognitive processes (Nichols, 2016, p. 266). The term *psychedelic* also functions as an adjective that describes experiences similar to those induced by psychedelic substances or the cultural phenomena associated with the psychedelic drug movement of the 1960s (see. Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

would still stand in opposition” (BloombergHT, 2023). Her emphasis on sustained political engagement (Akyol, 2019a) and the need for “collective action” (Akyol, 2022a) against “organized evil” (Bambaşka Sohbetler, 2023) underscores her belief that political engagement should not be confined to institutionalized political bodies, ideologies, or designations. Pervasive inequality, in this sense, inherently calls for political participation. In an interview, she firmly denies being characterized as *highly political* and her lyrics as *increasingly politicized*. She rejects classifying the advocacy for environment, human rights, or diverse sexual orientations as *political*, maintaining that these issues pertain to fundamental standards of morality and ethics, not political schemes. She disapproves of labeling these positions as political, stating that doing so is a politicized act per se (Akyol, 2016b). Akyol exemplifies this attitude in *İçinde Uyanıyoruz Hakikatin*, in which she criticizes a variety of issues, ranging from the 1980 military coup in Türkiye to endangered animal species in the present day:

Me, the last cannibal of the Atlantean tribe
The axolotl of my own turf

And I stop the herd of bison
In my room with a whipping knot
Anadol is my time machine, I pulled over in 1980 on September 12
My favourite memories died unlived
And all the suns of a country waned (Gaye Su Akyol, 2022b).

Plato, in *Timaeus and Critias* (2008), depicts Atlantis as a sophisticated society brought to ruin by arrogance, eventually submerged in the sea due to natural disasters. Among the animals featured in Akyol’s lyrics, the bison are classified as near threatened, while the axolotl, a freshwater aquatic species, is listed as critically endangered by the *World Wildlife Fund* (WWF, n.d.; 2021). Akyol extends her narrative to include the 1980 military coup in Türkiye, criticizing the profound impact on people, illustrated by the symbolic line seven. Akyol’s criticism of human disruptive behavior and her impartial treatment of both human and nonhuman beings correspond with Donna Haraway’s (2004) concept of *natureculture*, which merges both spheres, underlining the interconnectedness of the natural and cultural, and the intricacies of the human and nonhuman. Her critical stance, which disassembles the hierarchy between the human and nonhuman, also aligns well with Karen Barad’s (2007) *agential realism*. According to agential realism, phenomena are “the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting agencies” (Barad, 2007, p. 139). Barad proposes a shift from interaction, where individual agencies are assumed to exist separately before engaging with each other, to *intra-action*, which “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (2007, p. 33). She enriches her approach by incorporating a perspective of “posthumanist performativity”, which opposes the premise of human superiority, challenges the dualities of culture/nature and human/nonhuman, and acknowledges the active participation of nonhuman agencies in natural/cultural processes (2007, p. 32, 136). Akyol’s narrative can be interpreted through a Baradian lens, highlighting the battle for survival against various forms of subordination, where both human and nonhuman entities are endangered by anthropogenic harm, local or global. In this sense, Akyol ties together unlikely references and promotes equal treatment for, say, an axolotl, bison or human being, vulnerable to human-induced evil. She advocates for the equal right to life for human and nonhuman beings while also hinting at entangled agencies commonly dismissed under human exceptionalism. Her emphasis on the interlinked nature of life strongly underlines the detrimental outcomes of human activities that put the delicate nature/cultural harmony at risk, affecting both human and nonhuman welfare. Akyol’s critical position also implicates in an ethical framework that calls for “responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part” (Barad, 2007, p. 393). She spotlights the significance of reevaluating ruinous acts through *İçinde Uyanıyoruz Hakikatin*, which portrays how various types of oppression intersect and how power dynamics operate similarly worldwide, cautioning about the ramifications of Atlantean hubris.

Akyol’s all-encompassing approach embodies a non-hierarchical, non-speciesist, and anti-dualist philosophy that intersects with a pro-feminist and queer perspective, despite her aversion to specific

labels. In conversation with Güneş, she accentuates her self-identity as “an individual” rather than conforming to social gender standards, giving importance to her humanity with the declaration: “I do not perceive myself as a mere detail within the masses” (Akyol, 2016b). Similarly, when interviewed by Dilek Şen, she reiterates her position yet concedes the transitory relevance of labels such as *feminist* until society changes its gendered mindsets. She describes the idea of gender as “toxic”, questioning established gender standards: “[Imagine] I could present as male but emotionally identify as female, or I could present as female but emotionally align with being male. Why should the private nature of this matter concern others?” (Akyol, 2018b).

In multiple interviews, Akyol characterizes the LGBTQ+ movement as a “struggle for emancipation” (Akyol, 2019c) and exhibits endorsement and unity (Akyol, 2022b). She draws parallels between the LGBTQ struggle and the rock ‘n’ roll spirit, emphasizing their shared values of “being true to oneself, pursuing liberation, and standing up against injustice, oppression, and marginalization (Akyol, 2019c). She pays tribute to queer figures like Zeki Müren, David Bowie, and Virginia Woolf, who boldly embraced their true selves, defied conventional standards, and forged distinctive identities (Akyol, 2018c; Akyol, 2019c). Akyol exhibits pro-queer stance in *Sen Benim Mağaramsın*, as shown by lyrics such as “Both male and female / My inner lost goddess is you” (Gaye Su Akyol, 2022c), dismantling gender binaries and departing from heteronormative restrictions.

According to Akyol, “real music” that embodies “feelings, riot visions, and rock’n’roll perspective, enriched with a new kind of symbolism” has the potential to bring about change (Akyol, 2019b). This perspective is reflected in her discography. Each album showcases a description incorporating a promotional narrative about the artist and her work, the stories behind the tracks, and an artist statement where Akyol elaborates on the album’s conceptual foundations, intricately entwined with political themes. She emphasizes the importance of fighting against “organized evil” through “consistent dreaming” (Glitterbeat, n.d.-d) and highlights the value of “collective action” (Glitterbeat, n.d.-b), with a resolute hope for “change” (Glitterbeat, n.d.-c).

In *Berduş*, Akyol subtly alludes to organized evil and brings to light the contradictory notion of authority’s weakness with the following lyrics:

Like a hapless Bedouin in the desert
I am surrounded by polar bears
Bears confident in their thick skins
Were shit yesterday but crowned king today (Akyol, 2016a)³.

In *Bağrımızda Taş*, she contemplates the outcomes of what she portrays as organized evil:

The whole country is a hookah cafe
We are suffocating in its smoke (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020a).

In both songs, Akyol utilizes figurative language to bolster her rhetorical impact. In the introductory lines of *Berduş*, she employs a simile (Like a hapless Bedouin...) while also articulating her discontent with the political landscape by juxtaposing the seemingly incongruent figures of a “Bedouin in the desert” and “polar bears” to describe the vulnerability and menace. Lines three and four reveal a critical stance, as Akyol elaborates on the metaphor by personifying bears as politicians who ascend to positions of authority regardless of their evident incompetence. Given this framework, the country is symbolized as a “desert”, “Bedouin” as its populace and the suppressive inept politicians as “bears”. Within the context of *Bağrımızda Taş*, Türkiye is analogized to a hookah cafe, where the populace is overwhelmed by the oppressive political climate, resembling suffocation in smoke. Akyol’s critique in *Nargile* takes on a more accusatory tone:

So, you built your mansion

³ My translation.

You adored its mortar
You sold us out well!
You have a palace but
It's just empty four walls
Possessions mangle mortals (Akyol, 2016c; Spicer, 2018, p. 114)⁴.

Akyol employs metaphors in *Nargile* to criticize authority and moral decay, a strategy similarly evident in *Berduş* and *Bağrımızda Taş*. The abstract “You” she talks to signifies authority rather than a particular person, and “mansion” and “palace” represent power and wealth obtained through the sacrifice of the populace. The first three lines indicate that those intoxicated with power prioritize material success, insinuating that this achievement is marred by betrayal and exploitation. The palace depicted as “empty four walls” metaphorically signifies the ephemerality of worldly possessions, and as the closing line highlights, neither power nor material gain lasts forever. Akyol promotes collective action straightforwardly in *İsyen Manifestosu*, demonstrating her resolve with the words, “I already knocked that wall down, maşallah!” which can be interpreted as a direct response to the “empty four walls” metaphor in *Nargile*:

Rebel, rebel to each and every one of ‘em
To the ones that turn us against each other
To the ones that sink the ships
To the ones that haunt the dreams (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020b).

In the opening line, Akyol endorses defiance against subordination and inequity. She mainly targets those who fuel division (line two), bring about destruction (line three), and suppress aspirations and dreams (line four), thereby inciting resistance against oppressive forces. *İsyen Manifestosu*'s (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020b) allegorical music video includes psychedelic effects like shifting lights, intricate designs, repeating visuals, and overlapping images (Figure 1). These elements, along with surreal and futuristic visuals, harmonize rhythmically with the music and lyrics, warping perceptions of time and space. The overarching theme of the video concerns the conflict between good and evil, with Akyol depicted as a female samurai engaging in a confrontation with an antagonistic male samurai representing androcentric authority. The music video displays a mix of cultural references from Japan, Ancient Egypt, the Middle East, and Türkiye. Moreover, the inclusion of a queer zenne, a male belly dancer, enhances the visual representation of diversity (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Psychedelic imagery, queer zenne and the uprooted plant from *İsyen Manifestosu* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020b).

The video commences with a Japanese female shaman engaging in a molybdomancy ceremony. During this ritual, she envisions the male samurai that Akyol must confront to uphold peace. In a subsequent scene, Akyol is given an uprooted plant by a man, which she then plants and waters

⁴ The English translation of *Nargile*'s lyrics is cited from Spicer.

(Figure 1). Following this, the male samurai appears and engages in a battle with Akyol, evoking the intense face-off between O-Ren Ishii and The Bride in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (Tarantino, 2003) (Figure 2). Akyol ultimately emerges victorious against male authority, as foreshadowed by her earlier act of replanting the uprooted plant, a symbol of nurturing hope. This theme resonates with the lyrics and central concept of *İsyan Manifestosu*, stressing the significance of strife and restoration. Akyol combines diverse cultures, ethnicities, and sexual identities in a postmodern context, where distinctions merge to form a cohesive mixture, jointly questioning oppressive power structures. In this context, time and space undergo a metamorphosis when viewed through a psychedelic lens, challenging the altered perception of reality upheld by authority. Akyol hereby prompts individuals to oppose the limitations set by power dynamics, encouraging them to acknowledge and mobilize their inherent agency while envisioning a promising future.



Figure 2. Stills from *İsyan Manifestosu* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2020b) and *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (Tarantino, 2003).

Akyol maintains her defiance in *Anadolu Ejderi*, addressing the *mansion* owner directly, whom she accuses in *Nargile*:

Oh are you comfy in your mansion
While we are in exile at home

I'm neither super nor hero
Waiting, there's a time coming on the way
And when it arrives, look for
A hole to run in I'd say (Gaye Su Akyol, 2022a).

In this context, “mansion” denotes the sphere of political authority, while “home” represents the whole nation. Akyol denounces those in power who indulge in lavish living while the masses experience hardship. In the subsequent stanza, she draws attention to a moment of accountability, where corrupt politicians face consequences for their indifference to the people’s suffering. This scenario’s realization hinges on individuals’ collective action, symbolized by the awakening of the Anatolian dragon. In an interview, she affirms that the Anatolian dragon metaphor refers to “collective unity”, saying, “We won’t be handed the life we merit on a silver platter unless we leave our comfort zone and unite around ideals, emotions, good deeds, and responsibilities” (Bambaşka Sohbetler, 2023). The chorus of *Anadolu Ejderi* voices Akyol’s this aspiration. The lyrics “Ana ana tolian tolian dragon / One of us maybe” at the outset are reinforced in the subsequent section, “Anatolian dragon, one of us!”, suggesting that the Anatolian dragon signifies a collective sense of self (Gaye Su Akyol, 2022a). Overall, Akyol reproaches injustice, greed, and moral decay while also communicating a sense of

optimism for a future in which these disparities could be remedied in *Anadolu Ejderi*. Her song *Dünya Kaleska*, however, laments the political disharmony within the ethnically varied nation of Türkiye:

I am Gipsy
I am Armenian
Turkish, Kurdish
Ah, does it matter?
I am a blue apple
What would it matter? (Gaye Su Akyol, 2017).

The lines that explicitly refer to the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage in Türkiye demonstrate a rejection of categorization based on ethnicity. The significance of these labels is questioned by rhetorical questions (lines four and six), raising doubts about their accuracy in defining a person's essence. The metaphor "blue apple" utilizes surreal imagery to convey a sense of distinctiveness that challenges conventional norms, symbolizing marginalized identities striving for approval and empathy. *Dünya Kaleska* progresses with increasingly critical lyrics as Akyol mourns the disunion and segregation, attributing blame to those in power:

Alas, man is wolf to man!
Under the same sky a fire scene

Those whims are mundane
Take all those rocks and hills as yours
Can heavens satisfy the pleasure of desires

World a calash
Me, a lunatic in it
We burnt, we waned, oh, we are all beat up
We were raw then, now we are baked
All drowned in the shallows (Gaye Su Akyol, 2017).

The phrase in line one echoes Thomas Hobbes' (1998, p. 3) famous maxim "Man is a wolf to Man", which encapsulates the essence of conflictual human relationships, deep-seated misgiving and enmity, as portrayed in line two. In the subsequent three lines, Akyol addresses –as she does in *Nargile*– an undefined *you* whose insatiable desires cannot be fully quenched by rocks and hills, not even the heavens. The overall imagery of rock, hill and heaven symbolizes material and power desires, while *you*, the null subject, represents power elites intoxicated with earthly cravings in mortal life. The world-a-calash metaphor symbolizes life, and Akyol's self-identification as a lunatic during the journey of life illustrates her profound disillusion with schism and political corruption, as Rumi-inspired imagery in the subsequent lines shows: A path to self-awareness and wisdom inevitably culminates in failure due to arrogance of power.

Akyol articulates her dream for change in *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir*, prompting listeners to envision a world of solidarity and serenity. The lyrics resonate with this aspiration:

Consistent fantasy is reality
Is there death or is it a dream
Let my woes pour into yours

Consistent fantasy is reality
There is death and this is a dream (Gaye Su Akyol, 2019).

Akyol's opening words, as she navigates an existential conundrum, encourage listeners to engage in a philosophical journey with her. However, she addresses her question in the following section,

emphasizing the fleeting quality of life, comparing it to a “dream”. She promotes unity and mutual support in dealing with life’s adversities while confronting mortality, as indicated in line three. The music video for *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2019) breathes life into the message of cohesion and solidarity highlighted in the lyrics by weaving a tapestry of local and global elements, akin to *İsyen Manifestosu*. However, *İsyen Manifestosu* operates within a cross-cultural framework from a universal perspective, focusing on global power dynamics rather than solely on specific cultural contexts. In contrast, *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir* directly addresses the polarized political identities in Türkiye, striving to mend these divisions and achieve a long-awaited reconciliation between the conflicting sides.



Figure 3. The use of worry beads from *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir* (Gaye Su Akyol, 2019).

İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir’s music video is an allegory conveying Akyol’s desire to diminish the prevailing political polarization in Türkiye and bring together antagonistic groups. The video depicts Akyol as a female minibus driver, an uncommon occurrence in Türkiye, where the public transport sector is typically monopolized by male drivers who epitomize traditional Turkish masculinity, such as machismo, aggression, and dominance, thus rendering her representation a noteworthy deviation from the usual scenario. To illustrate, Akyol uses purple worry beads to signify female power and feminist struggle. The handling of worry beads is typically attributed to traditional Turkish masculinity, but she overturns the norm and challenges its gendered connotations (Figure 3).

The minibus’ unique and atypical style catches the eye, with traditional Turkish lace on its front and a pink license plate. The interior is decorated with action figures, superhero stickers like He-Man, and pictures of famous Turkish artists Zeki Müren and Müjde Ar, as well as slogans primarily from song lyrics such as “consistent fantasy is reality”, “there is death and this is a dream”, and “better together”. Also on board is a copy of the famous novel *Star Trek* by James Blish, with the minibus set to reach its final destination in either *fantasy* or *reality*. Akyol collects passengers waiting at bus stops, each personifying various identities in Türkiye: a macho man embodying traditional masculinity (Figure 3) contrasted with a queer man; an elderly man frowning at a trans woman; and a veiled woman juxtaposed with a secular middle-aged woman staring at her, and more. The minibus in this scenario represents Turkey, while each metonymic character embodies a distinct identity group. The journey evolves into a surreal escapade as it continues: With each acceleration or gear change by Akyol, the minibus navigates through bizarre landscapes induced by psychedelic effects that disrupt the sensory experience of time, space, and reality (Figure 4). The commuters hold onto each other firmly to stay balanced during the swaying of the minibus. The symbolic significance of the psychedelic experience here is meaningful, as it breaks barriers and encourages togetherness amidst social divisions.

After reaching the ultimate destination in the psychedelic realm of fantasy, Akyol leaves the minibus and raises her bağlama overhead, reminiscent of the cartoon character Prince Adam, who changes into He-Man by holding aloft his magic sword and exclaiming, “By the power of Greyskull”, which grants him superhuman power (Masters of the Universe: He-Man & She-Ra, 2018). He-Man, assisted by his

allies the Sorceress, Man-at-Arms, and Orkle, safeguards Castle Grayskull from Skeletor. Akyol, representing the female counterpart of He-Man in *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir*, acquires extraordinary strength by raising her bağlama to thwart evil forces and maintain order. In this scenario, evil forces denote the sinister authority as the primary catalyst for societal division, while the minibus, symbolizing Türkiye, replaces Castle Grayskull (Figure 4). Akyol strums the bağlama while the passengers alight from the minibus and dance along. Suddenly, a mysterious group of men wearing dark robes and masks appears, presenting Akyol with a crown and proclaiming her as the queen. The surrealistic scenes conclude with the passengers forming a circle, representing unity and companionship. This indicates resolving conflicts, overcoming divisions, and reestablishing peace (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Intertextual reference to He-Man, psychedelic travel, and the circle of unity (Gaye Su Akyol, 2019; Masters of the Universe: He-Man & She-Ra, 2018).

Akin to her approach in the *İsyen Manifestosu* music video, Akyol employs psychedelic visual effects in *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir* to dismantle the perceptions of reality distorted by power, establishing instead an idealized version of truth. These effects help uncover biases and fears beneath the surface of the collective subconscious, typically rooted in a lack of acknowledgment towards Others and the inaccuracies in presumed truths. She proposes imagining a novel reality, which she calls “consistent fantasy”, where divergences blend smoothly into fraternity and oneness. In this sense, the concept of dreaming acts as a “counter-reality” born from consistent fantasies to fight against “evil” (Akyol, 2019b), not framed as an “escape” from reality but rather a rejection of “escapism” through shared dreaming (Akyol, 2019d), as she elucidates in multiple interviews. *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir*’s music video offers hope for societal change, implying that communal dreaming can convert personal aspirations into reality.

Akyol’s consistent-fantasy realm is where the truth is perpetually questioned, with fantasies acting as a foil to twisted realities. These fantasies are not a way to evade reality but uphold forward-thinking values that challenge the dualistic nature of power relations. It is uncertain whether Akyol’s imagined reality will ever materialize. Nevertheless, as this study shows, she works towards reifying this consistent fantasy through her artistic endeavors.

IN CLOSING: CONSISTENT FANTASY IS REALITY?

This textual study has explored the potential of art to catalyze confronting, if not eliminating, entrenched inequalities while also fostering social unity, cohesion, and peace for future generations by zeroing in on Gaye Su Akyol’s work. The study findings reveal that Akyol subverts dualities such as West/East, modern/traditional, man/woman, straight/queer, culture/nature, and human/nonhuman through her artistic creations, adopting a highly critical stance against these categories of subordination from which authority gains legitimacy and derives power. Her music manifests, by

itself, her deconstructive mindset, breaking down the divisions between West/East and modern/traditional: The artist incorporates indigenous and global elements and blends genres in her music, positioning herself as an artist who welcomes the universal while also safeguarding the authentic. Through the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and personification, she effectively communicates political messages in her lyrics, where she tackles intersecting political issues and questions power that operates within both local and global contexts. She also engages with the complexities of identity politics and includes the marginalized, such as the LGBTQ+ community and the nonhuman, in her work, fostering diversity and inclusivity. Her songs deconstruct hierarchal binary contrasts and treat all the oppressed as equals, as evidenced by her metaphorical self-representation as an axolotl or her effort to halt the bison herd with a lasso as though she meant to save them from extinction.

Equally significant is the role of Akyol's music videos serving as political allegories that effectively undermine power dynamics. The inclusive and pluralistic backdrop of the *İsyen Manifestosu* music video, wherein various cultures, ethnic and sexual identities are merged into a coherent amalgamation within a postmodern framework, underscores the universal obligation to oppose dominant systems and encourages global solidarity. In the video, (re)planting an uprooted plant takes on a symbolic significance, suggesting themes of hope and empowerment to take action. This act ultimately culminates in the successful fruition of the struggle against androcentric power dynamics, represented by an evil male samurai. *İstikrarlı Hayal Hakikattir*'s music video also serves as a political allegory yet addresses the local resistance to authority within the context of Türkiye. The video skillfully captures the essence of the country by using a minibus as a symbol, where passengers metonymically embody conflicting societal groups. Both music videos use psychedelic effects to craft imagined realities that challenge the deceptive nature of power structures, which can warp how individuals perceive truth. In addition, intertextual references to fictive characters like He-Man and the fight scene in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, alongside nostalgic real-life figures such as Zeki Müren and Müjde Ar, contribute to the narratives' complexity and unveil Akyol's postmodern tendencies in her music videos.

This textual analysis posits that Akyol opposes inequalities by adopting a contrarian standpoint that permeates the audiovisual aesthetics of her art, akin to the political undertones woven into the fabric of Anatolian rock. It also suggests that her music confronts intersecting forms of oppression perpetuated by power dynamics by giving a voice to the silenced while advocating for progressive and democratic ideals, with a notable emphasis on themes of hope, resistance, and societal change. Despite the uncertainty about its influence on listeners, cultivating hope for change and nurturing consistent fantasies in minds could culminate in their materialization, as art wields such transformative potential.

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