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AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI
ANA BİLİM DALI

THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN
BLUES AND ARABESK SONG LYRICS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the popularity of blues and arabesk music, little is known about the persistent depiction of women in these lyrics. *The Presentation of Women in Blues and Arabesk Song Lyrics* mainly tries to bring light to the images of woman in the so called men's music. This thesis explores the representation of women in both blues and arabesk music lyrics to show how both music forms portray the female character and the reasons why she is presented in that way. Hundreds of lyrics were analyzed and tens of Arabesk films were watched to complete the study. The overall type and the most compelling images that emerge from both blues and arabesk lyrics are negative: the unfaithful women, the deserting women and the gold-digger women. However, the larger implication of this thesis is the reason why men depict her as evil: it is the wish to control her. So this work intends to increase the understanding of how and why women become the "other", and to contribute to future research on similar topics.

WOMEN IN BLUES AND ARABESK LYRICS

INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the main character, Prospero, used to be the Duke of Milan, but his brother usurped his position and forced Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, to take to the sea in a rickety boat. However, as the play opens, the situation has been reversed, for now Antonio, Prospero's brother, is shipwrecked upon the same island, where Prospero is now king. The play concerns Prospero's loss of his throne to his brother and how he re-establishes his power again.

In his efforts, Prospero does not hesitate to use all the characters for his strategic scheme. The only female character, however, is Miranda, his daughter, whom Prospero can control in a very easy and practical way because he is able to put her to sleep whenever he wishes and whenever he does not need her presence. Prospero arranges a meeting between Miranda and the prince Ferdinand, Antonio's son, and, after he blesses the couple, he even starts to talk with his future son-in-law about Miranda's virginity, while she stands quietly by and listens naively. Prospero tells Ferdinand to be sure not to "break her virgin-knot" before the wedding night (IV.i.15), and Ferdinand replies with no small anticipation that lust shall never take away "the edge of that day's celebration" (IV.i.29). With this marriage, Prospero is able to gain his aristocratic place again, and his daughter makes a very good match.

As Miranda's name suggests, she seems to be a mix of miracle and wonder. She is almost fifteen years old, and not only extremely beautiful, but also a presentation of complete goodness. She is depicted as an ultimate fantasy for any male person, becoming more desirable with the fact that she has never been touched or even seen by another male. Indeed, Miranda is a completely imagined character for the male world; but

although this passiveness and naiveté may fascinate the male audience, it is unbearable for women.

In fact, many feminist writers are aware of this passive characterization, Caroline Ruth observes that Lorie Jerrel Leininger, “in ‘The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*,’ points out Prospero’s dominance over Miranda:

Prospero needs Miranda as sexual bait; and then needs to protect her from the threat which is inescapable given his hierarchical world – slavery being the ultimate extension of the concept of hierarchy. It’s Prospero’s needs – the Prosperos of the world – not Miranda’s, which are being served here (Ruth, 348).

Taking this idea further, Margeret Atwood observes the many uses of a female body:

The Female Body has many uses. It’s been used as a door knocker, a bottle opener, as a clock with a ticking belly, as something to hold up lampshades, as a nutcracker, just squeeze the brass legs together and out comes your nut. It bears torches, lifts victorious wreaths, grows copper wings and raises aloft a ring of neon stars, whole buildings rest on its marble heads. It sells cars, beer shaving lotion, cigarettes, hard liquor; it sells diet plans and diamonds, and desire in tiny crystal bottles. (114)

The only way to tolerate the female, it would appear, is not only to use her body, but to squeeze her into a stereotypical shape, too.

Nowadays, stereotypes work so implicitly that we are mostly unaware of them.

They appear not only in such media as television, in advertisements, in newspapers and in magazines, but also in literature, the theatre, art and music. However, several studies have shown how music in particular works with images of gender and gender-based metaphors. As Susan Mc Clary notes in her book, *Feminine Endings*,

Literature and visual art are almost always concerned (at least in part) with the organization of sexuality, the construction of gender, the arousal and channeling of desire. So is music, except that music may perform these functions even more effectively than other media...music is able to contribute heavily (if surreptitiously) to the shaping of individual identities: ...music teaches us how to experience our own emotions, our own desires, and even (especially in dance) our own bodies. (53)

A good example of this is the way both blues and arabesk music gave voice to strong emotions such as hatred, pain, suffering, love, anger, joy, and fear. However, while indicating those feelings in the music, people were unaware that they were continually using the “woman figure” as a vehicle. This thesis will explore the representation of women in blues and arabesk music to show the way both music forms portray the female character and the reason why she is portrayed like this.

However, when exploring the depiction of “woman” in blues and arabesk music, I will bear in mind how Miranda as a character was used and formed by male ideals. For this reason, I shall not try to give a biography of women who were actively involved in blues and arabesk, nor give a musical history, but I will try to explain or bring to light the image of the “Woman” in so called men’s music.

Although I have analyzed hundreds of blues and arabesk songs, this work is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of all those lyrics. What I will be doing is trying to draw a representative sample of blues and arabesk lyrics, mainly from books and diverse web pages. Other sources for analyzing the female representations are certain advertisements from “race records” and some Turkish arabesk films. Indeed, there are a lot of stereotypes of the female that can be found in this genre, but I will only address the

most common and compelling types such as the unfaithful woman, the deserting woman, and the gold digging woman.

Briefly defined, the unfaithful woman to the bluesman is the one who has a secret relationship with another man. The bluesman is rather disappointed and furious when he finds out that he is deceived by the woman he loves. The arabesk man also never accepts back a woman who was unfaithful to him. For the arabesk man even a lie is evil as being unfaithful, whereas being unfaithful can end with a murder for honor.

Secondly, the deserting woman is the most complex type of woman, because she, according to both the blues and arabesk man, dares not to explain why she is deserting him. After the shock and frustration of being left alone, the bluesman curses his woman, whereas, the arabesk man begs his woman to return and does not tire of waiting long years and for her.

The gold - digging type of woman is the most unbearable for man, because in this case he loses control over his woman by the lack of money. Both blues and arabesk men think that the gold - digger woman treats man according to his property and his money. Men try to receive back some attention and love as an answer to their gifts. However, as soon as he has no money left, the gold digger woman does not hesitate to stop seeing him. It is the more devastating if she leaves him for a man who can offer more.

However, before starting to lay out a detailed analysis, it is helpful to give a short historical introduction to both blues and arabesk music.

CHAPTER 1: THE BACKGROUND TO BLUES AND ARABESK

Blues music is a type of cultural phenomenon, not only as indicating a historical experience, but also something that has influenced the whole of American popular culture. Theory of the blues are generally answered us by its Africa origin. To trace the early influences of the African people is quite difficult, for the thirteen colonies said very little about the black population and still less about its music (Kubik 61). Several eighteenth-century sources testify that the slave traders encouraged the African people being transported as slaves to sing and dance on the ship's deck in order to prevent them falling into depression and death. Bryan Adams observes in his letters from the time that, "In the intervals between their meals they (the slaves) are encouraged to divert themselves with music and dancing; for which purpose such rude and uncouth instruments are used in Africa, are collected before their departure" (qtd. in Kubik 7).

This singing continued to accompany the African slaves during their work on the plantations in the form of shouts and field hollers. John W. Work says that, "In these 'hollers' the idiomatic material found in the blues is readily seen; the excessive portamento, the slow time, the preference for the flatted third, the melancholy type of tune...many...could serve as lines of blues" (qtd. in Oster 12). It is said however, that the work songs were meant to prevent the slaves from whispering or talking to each other. But most of these African people were separated from family and acquaintances, mixed with other African tribes and sold to different places of the New World. The only thing that remained with them, and which united these African people, was their sense of spirituality. In addition to the hollers and field cries, there was the sound of sorrow, a distinctive early element of the blues. When African slaves were converted to Christianity, they started to sing religious music, utilizing their own style of "call and

response”, rhythm and harmony (Floyd 2). The mournful tone of work songs was used also in these spirituals.

However, singing did not only serve these people in work and prayer; it was entertainment, too. The fiddle songs, juba dances and corn songs of the harvest season were tolerated by the slave holders. Still the songs were not allowed by the church, and they were even called the devil’s music as we can see from a letter by Reverend George Whitefield, written in 1739-40, to the colonies of Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina: “I have great reason to believe that most of you purpose to keep your Negroes ignorant of Christianity; or otherwise, why are they permitted thro’ your Provinces, openly to profane the Lord’s Day, by Dancing, Piping and such like?” (qtd. in Kubik 11).

The Emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment in 1868 brought social changes for both African American men and women. Although now free according to the law, sharecropping systems, the Ku Klux Klan, racism, poverty and the lack of civil rights presented new tortures for the African American people. Under the sharecropping system, the entire family had to work to survive; only women had the chance to work outside the farms. Interestingly, however, women in the slave system always seemed to be superior to men: “Under the slave system, the Negro woman frequently enjoyed a status superior to that of the man. In the lower - class family today a pattern similar to that of the slavery period persists” (Johnson 58 - 59). Indeed, As Mathew B. White states, “In many ways African American women were less dependent on their husbands than middle-class women of the day, an independence which effected interaction between black men and women” (2). Life was not much better in the urban centers, as White points out: “As a result of the seasonal employment/ unemployment, jobless men would congregate in the central areas looking for work and simply passing the time” (2). Nevertheless, music still continued as a source of comfort and inspiration; African

American migrants, usually the men, used to sing their ballads for several community occasions such as parties and community dances.

Yet, it was the women who moved the blues toward professionalism. Unlike many male singers who followed the migrant work circuit, women worked in more stable jobs as entertainers in vaudeville shows and traveling minstrel shows. In 1920, Mamie Smith was the first woman vocalist to be recorded, and her “Thing Called Love” was quickly followed by her second record, “Crazy Blues”. Singing the blues provided money and brought recognition and fame among African and European Americans alike. Sandra Lieb says that the blues was “indelibly recreating a world of black experience and making visible the lives and aspirations of millions of black Americans” (1).

Indeed, by studying blues lyrics we are able to discover “...a sociological picture of the yearnings, frustrations, attitudes, beliefs, and impulses typical of folk Negro Society” (Oster 29). This insight is invaluable for gaining a sense of the thought patterns of the creators of these songs. Since most blues songs are sung by men, the male perspective is the one that is primarily presented.

Interestingly, when B.B King, one of the greatest blues singers and guitarists, said that the “blues is an expression of anger against shame and humiliation” (qtd. in Ragsdale 1), he was, in many ways, also defining arabesk music. With the emergence of arabesk music, many Turkish people found that they could identify themselves and their daily struggles in the lyrics of arabesk songs. Actually, arabesk music is inspired by Turkish folk music and Middle Eastern music, and the emergence of arabesk coincided with Atatürk’s Reforms after the War of Independence in 1923, a time when Turkey not only went through political and economic changes, but also experienced cultural transformations.

It was the ideas of Ziya Gökalp about what is “Turkish” that influenced music immensely. Gökalp divided music into three types, such as Eastern music, which is “sick music”; Turkish folk music, which represented “healthy music”, and finally Western music whose techniques should be used to produce folk music. According to Gökalp, Western music had improved on Greek music and thus developed itself to the modern music of today (146). As part of the changes, the old Ottoman schools for music such as *Mabeyn Orkestrası*, *Mızıka-yı Humayün*, *Tekke*, and *Zaviye* were abruptly closed in 1925. The radio channel was also shut down for months in 1934 and, on re-opening in 1936, faced restrictions. As a result, says the musicologist Yılmaz Öztuna, “the Turkish folk were forced to switch to the Arabian radio, and found it more familiar than the Western music,” and so, when the new Turkish music, *Türk Müzikisi*, became more common on the radio, “the arabesk music was already popular and could not be thrown away anymore” (51).

The main influence on arabesk music was Egyptian music, which was introduced through Egyptian films after 1938. The plots of these films involved tragic narratives and crimes of honor. The newly formed Turkish film industry was impressed by the popularity of Egyptian cinema and copied it considerably. The Turkish version, however, used arabesk singers as the protagonist. With the arabesk film, the arabesk singer was able to advertise his songs. Although of this double success of both film and song, the sophisticated levels of the Turkish society considered arabesk as kitsch. The reason why arabesk music earned a bad reputation as being “kitsch” and in “bad taste” is due to the migrations of poor, village people to the big cities in the 1950s. Timur Selçuk explains that, “around the 1950s, artificial, planless and fast growing cities, the expanding slums around them, fluctuations in industry, agriculture and politics disturbed those who were already living in the cities” (58).

At this time, migrants were characterized as low, or working-class, people who were fond of listening to arabesk. This music chronicled their daily struggles, poverty, and anti – sociality. Consequently, because it was identified with the low, uneducated class, the Turkish government and music associations did not accept arabesk, declaring that it was not music at all. However Meral Özbek argues that, “Contrary to being a misfit to the environment, arabesk is a success, as it reflects the rural population adapting itself to the environment and finds a way to survive” (27).*

Before proceeding with the analysis, I should like to mention some similarities between blues and arabesk music. The basic similarity may well be continually expressing a gloomy state. Although there are various definitions of blues, we should look at descriptions by blues singers, who concentrate on the blues as an emotional state rather than on its formal characteristics. Here is Robert Curtis Smith:

Well your girl friend, yeah, and then you think about the way things is goin' so difficult. I mean, noth'n work right, when you work hard all day, always broke. And when you get off the tractor, nowhere to go, nothin'to do. Just sit up and think, and think about all that has happened how things going'. That's real difficult. And so, why every time you feel lonely you gets that strange feelin' come up here from nowhere...That's when the blues pops up! The way I feel it's somethin' that is just as deep as it can go...Because the blues hurt so bad. (qtd. in Evans 17).

For Little Eddie Kirkland, being unlucky in love and in life provides the inspiration:

“What gives me the blues? ...Unlucky in love for one, and hard to make a success is two; and when a man have a family and it's hard to survive for” (qtd. in Evans 17). Similarly, the emotional element is at the heart of the blues for J.B Lenoir:

* Author's translation.

“And the blues is sprung up from troubles and heartaches, being bound and down, want a release...Now tha’s what the blues is originated from the blackman’s headaches and troubles.And he have a lot of it” (qtd. in Evans 18).

As with the blues singers, Orhan Gencebay, one of the most popular composers and performers of arabesk music, says “An arabesk that is carefree sounds funny to me. There is always something happening in music. There is joy and tragedy” (qtd. in Güngör (54). Similarly, Murat Ersin, a musician in Germany, tries to explain his work by comparing arabesk with blues: “Arabesk is a kind of protest, a music that defines how to dress, how to dance, how to speak. I don’t give any wrong promises of happiness in my songs. It is like the songs of blues musicians: we can hear a tension in the songs even if they are about happiness” (qtd. in Fischer 1).*

Similarly, Zeynep Hamamcı, in her thesis, *Cognitive Distortion in Turkish Pop and Arabesk Music*, explains how the gloomy state of arabesk songs has an influence on the listener. She notes that “the effect of arabesk music is very serious, because the cognitive distortion and the gloomy tone are thought to have some unfavorable results (2). Indeed, the research by Güner indicates that teenagers who listened to arabesk music were much more depressed than those who listened to heavy metal music (qtd in Hamamcı 11).

However, the class differences should be considered. Those Turkish teenagers who listen to foreign music are from the wealthy level, whereas those who listen to the arabesk are from the working classes.

An article in the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, 13 July 1987, points to the same subject:

*Author’s translation

In research on the subject of ‘The relation of arabesk culture to suicide’ by Faruk Güçlü, it was revealed that the arabesk *gecekondu* culture affected in particular the young population. In research which claims that the films and television programmes which spread arabesk culture are the cause of the increase in suicide cases, it was revealed that 28 of the 681 suicide cases that took place in Ankara between 1980 and 1985 had chosen suicide ‘in order to save themselves from those things they had bottled up inside them (*açmazlarından*)’, being affected by the cinema, the press, and the films which are broadcast on television. (qtd in Stokes, 108)

It goes without saying that there is a reason why arabesk and blues sound gloomy or blue: They are the music of “outsiders”. Indeed arabesk is associated with the *gecekondu*, squatter's houses, an association that “links the music with an image of an urban lumpenproletariat dislocated and alienated through the process of labour migration” (Stokes,108). Also blues music in the beginning was not accepted. As Clifford Endres says in his article, “*What Hath Rock Wrought? Blues, Country Music, Rock’n’ Roll and Istanbul*”:

Black music at first received little respect from the nation’s cultural establishment. The music of blacks was considered primitive, barbaric, tuneless, cacophonous, or at best, folk. Indeed, when the first recordings of blues and jazz were offered for sale by Columbia Records in 1920, record-company executives could think of no more descriptive category than “race music.” (33)

This presents another likeness between arabesk and blues music because, although both African American people and Turkish working class people have endured discrimination, the singers did not provide listeners with protest songs. David Evans says:

Basically, the problem of discrimination was until recently so overwhelming and so institutionalized that it had become a fact of life for the average blues singer. There was no point in singing about segregated facilities because the singer knew nothing else. Blues instead have dealt with the results of discrimination, such as broken homes, poverty, crime, and prison. In these areas there are at least some fluctuations. For blues to attack the institution of discrimination itself, they would need to express an ideology of progress and a belief in ultimate success in overcoming the problem. As noted earlier, this kind of ideology is alien to the spirit of blues, which instead allows only for temporary success. (26)

Similarly, the arabesk man avoids singing about politics and underlines his pitiful state by accusing fate of being the cause of his problems. Indeed, as Martin Stokes points out,

arabesk inculcates the quintessential but double-edged virtues of stoicism and the passive acceptance of fate. The free-market politics of the present government (the Anavatan Party of Turgut Özal) has benefited a wealthy minority at the expense of an increasingly impoverished and alienated majority. But instead of providing a focus for perceptions of exploitation, which would enable the work-force of the city to take effective political action, arabesk presents political and economical power as facts with no explanation other than fate. (110)

As can be seen, politics does not play a causal role in either the blues or arabesk music; it is accepted as a part of the background.

Thus, the most important commonality between the blues and arabesk, for both artist and listener, is that they have to experience problems and life's struggles in order to understand and to feel the music. Orhan Gencebay says in his interview with Meral Özbek:

“Singing is a feeling, it isn't easy to describe, and you can feel the meaning when you really get into that music. A person who has been trained in Western music has a different conception. He needs to interpret not only the words but the feeling, too”. (qtd. in Özbek 288)

In a similar way, Muddy Waters tries to explain that those without any experience are unable to feel what they are singing:

“I think that they are great people, but they are not blues prayers...These kids are just getting up, getting stuff and going with it, you know, so we're expressing our lives, the hard times and different things we been through. It's not real. They don't feel it. I don't think you can feel the blues until you've been through some hard times.” (qtd. in Guralnick 84)

As I mentioned earlier, this short background summary is not intended to give a detailed history of the music that I will discuss. However, it does help to set the scene for the kinds of emotions and ideas that are commonly seen in the blues and arabesk music. In the following chapter, I will describe and analyze how women are depicted in the lyrics of blues music.

CHAPTER II: THE PRESENTATION OF WOMAN IN BLUES LYRICS

“If it is true that the blues is to be heard and not written it is also equally true that the blues eminently deserves to be written about”.

Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning*, 9

“That the blues is poetry is beyond doubt, that there are those who doubt this is beyond belief” (Garon 1).

The scholar J. Mason Brewer says in *American Negro Folklore* that the folklore of the American Negro was characterized by work, worship, superstition and fun as the factors which constituted his chief interests during the period of his enslavement (1). Later, songs about women were taken from several sources: from the farm, mines, factories, jails, the dances, parties, and the minstrel shows. As Niles Abbe says in the introduction to *Blues: An Anthology*, those songs were sung by “barroom pianists, street-corner guitar plays, wandering laborers, the watchers of incoming trains and steamboats” (qtd. in Handy 12). However, for Newman I. White, the reason why women appear in these songs can be summarized as follows: “Wherever the Negro is at work on a task which allows his mind to wander – and most of his tasks are of this description – it wanders sooner or later to his woman” (311). In any body of popular music, most of the songs are about love and American music is no different. Yet, the blues has its own special perspective on the theme of love, and, as Oster points out, “infidelity occurs with greater frequency in the blues than in other types of American folk music” (29). In the lyrics of blues music women are mostly depicted as victimizers, deceivers, gold - diggers,

and as unfaithful wives or lovers.

The woman as being evil, or as being tempted by evil, may well be the most ancient of ideas. Just as Eve was tempted by the Devil, women in the blues also come together with the Snake, which represents the woman's lover:

Blacksnake blues killin' me, mm, mm,
 Blacksnake crawlin' in my room,...
 Somebody give me these blacksnake blues.

(Robert Pete Williams, "Black Snake Blues (II)," 1961)

The metaphor of the black snake also appears as an image in race record advertisements. Advertisements seem to be a rich source of information about how people are perceived and the directions in which they are pushed. The advertisement for Blind Lemon Jefferson's album, "Black Snake Moan No.2", in 1929, shows an African American man in his bed threatened by two big black snakes, while through an open window the audience also sees a well dressed couple taking a walk. While the man is literally asleep, the couple is able to come together, but as soon as he recognizes this infidelity, the couple become as dangerous as the snakes (Titon 252).

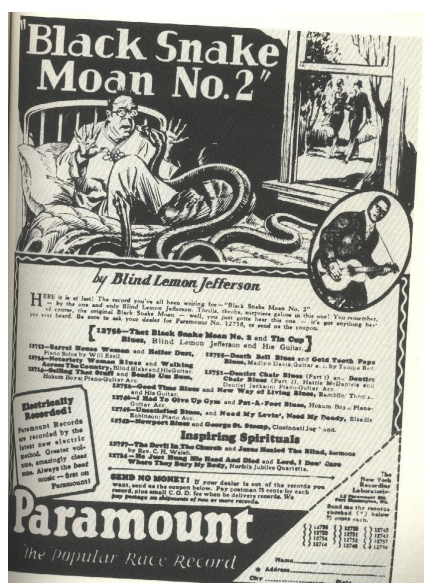


Fig.1. Advertisement for "race record"

By way of further illustration of the snake, we can find a large one untwining itself from a tree and a terrified woman in Blind Blake's "Rumblin and Ramblin' Boa Blues" in 1928. Titon explains that "the snake stands for the penis, while the forest is, of course, rich in suggestion. The ad copy remarks on the size of the snake and calls attention to Blakes "trusty" guitar" (Titon 253).



Fig 2. Advertisement for "race record".

Animal metaphors often express the theme of abject love. The male who loves a woman who is generally mean and unfaithful is usually presented as a dog. In this way the bluesman displays his pitiful state to the audience. In some blues lyrics, man becomes a begging and wretched dog:

Baby, baby, please throw this old dog a bone.

(Clarence Edwards, "Please Throw this Dog a Bone," 1959)

You got me way down here,

In a rollin' fog,

An' treat me like a dog.

(Guitar Welch, "Baby, Please Don't Go," 1935)

I so long for wrong, baby, been your dog,

I so long for wrong, baby, been your dog,

'Fore I do it again, baby, I sleep in a hollow log.

(Percy Strickland, "I Won't Be Yo' Lowdown Dog No Mo," 1959)

But the sting of the ant and the snout of a hog grubbing hungrily for food are also significant. Harry Oster says that, " 'Rootin' is a common metaphor for fornication" (64).

Well, you know I'm a little crawlin' ant, baby, gonna crawl up on your hand,

Well, when I sting you baby, well you won't let me be.

(Roosevelt Charles, "I Wish I Was an Ant," 1960)

Now looka here, little girl, you cought me rootin' when I was young,

Told me I was the man you love,

Now come to find out you in love with some one else,

I'm a prowlin' ground hog, an' I prowl the whole night long;

I'm gonna keep on rootin', baby, until the day I die.

(Roosevelt Charles, "I'm a Prowlin' Ground Hog," 1960)

Sexual images often appear in the form of cooking and baking and simply fruit. For example, a jelly roll is a pastry twisted into a roll, something which implies a comparison with the motions of sexual intercourse. Women have the jelly roll and are those who can cook, but the evil woman has the sweetest jelly roll, as it says in Butch Cage's song "Women in Hell got Sweet Jelly Roll":

Roll your belly like you roll your dough.
 Jelly roll, jelly roll, rollin' in a can,
 Lookin' for a woman ain't got no man,
 Wild about jelly, crazy about sweet jelly roll,
 If you taste good jelly, it satisfy your weary soul....
 Ain't been to hell, but I been tol',
 Women in hell got sweet jelly roll.

Reason why grandpa like grandma so,
 Same sweet jelly she had a hundred years ago.

(Butch Cage and Willie B. Thomas, "Jelly Roll," 1960)

There are also other examples of the jelly roll:

Well, now I can tell by the way she rolls her dough,
 She can bake them biscuits once mo'.

(Smoky Baby, "Biscuit Bakin Woman," 1960)

Roll me, mama, like you roll roll yo' dough,
 Oh, I want you to roll me, roll me over slow.

(Hogman Maxey, "Rock Me, Mama," 1954)

Fruit represents the female sex organ, whereas the picking of fruit is the sex act itself. The fear of the man was that other men could also take or taste the fruit of his beloved:

Well you've got fruits on your tree, mama, an' lemons on your shelf,
 I know lovin' well, baby, you can't-a squeeze' em by yourself.

Please let me be your lemon squeezer, Lord until my love come down,

Now let me be your lemon squeezer, baby until my love come down.

Lord, I saw the peach orchard, the fig bush too,

Don't nobody gather fruit, baby, only like I do.

(Otis Webster, "Fruits on Your Tree," 1960)

Peach orchard mama, you swore nobody'd pick your fruit but me

Peach orchard mama, you swore nobody'd pick your fruit but me

I found three kids men shakin' down your peach tree.

(Blind Lemon Jefferson, "Peach Orchard Mama," 1929)

I wonder if my sweet lovin' baby still waits for me (still waits for me),

I wonder if my sweet lovin' baby still waits for me (still waits for me),

Maybe someone else stole the juicy peaches off my tree (right off my tree).

(Lloyd Garret, "Dallas Blues," 1912)

As the bluesman who finds out about her infidelity by counting the missing fruits, he has another way to detect her infidelity. Indeed, man thought to discover infidelity by searching and analyzing improprieties:

Tell me woman where have you been last night

'Cause your shoes are unbuckled, and your skirt don't fit you right.

(Tom Dickson, "Labor Blues," 1928)

You can always tell when your gal is treating you mean,

Dog- gone my soul! Lawdy, Lawd!

You can always tell when your gal is treating you mean,

Yo' meals ain' reg'lar, yo house nevah clean.

(Eddie Green "Blind Man Blues," 1923)

Another logical proof for her infidelity is his woman's lack of interest in sexual intercourse. Here the singer is desperately trying to get a sexual response from his lover, but, failing, he finally attributes her behavior to infidelity:

I feel so lonesome, you can hear me when I moan

And I feel so lonesome, you can hear me when I moan

Who's been driving my Terraplane for you when I've been gone?

(Robert Johnson, "Terraplane Blues," 1936)

Harry Oster goes on to say that possessing an automobile is of special importance to Negroes; barred by social and economic barriers from satisfying jobs and from living in decent housing, the Negro male loves big automobiles. As Oster notes, "Driving his old Buick or Cadillac he is swift, powerful, graceful, manly, and irresistible; he finds a partial substitute for gratifications of comfort, importance, and power" (64). Thus, a rival lover can be depicted as another driver at the wheel, or a fickle woman is a cheap, decrepit car, whereas a desirable lover is a smooth chauffeur.

You had a good little car, too many drivers at your wheel...

Whoa, some folks say she's a Cadillac, oh say she must be a T-Model
Ford,...

Oh she got a shape all right, man, she just don't carry no heavy load.

(Hogman Maxey, "Drinkin Blues," 1959)

Wants you to be my chauffeur,...

Yes, I want you to drive me,

I want you to drive me roun' town,

Well, I drive so easy, I can't turn him down.

(Charles Henderson, "Wants You to Be My Chauffeur," 1960)

However, the train is the most fascinating vehicle for the bluesman. The train represents the freedom to leave or to escape. Not only African American men, but also women use the train to leave a dull life and problems behind. “Furthermore,” says Oster, “the train stirs his imagination with its mournful moody whistle, the furious burst of steam it emits, and the clatter of its wheels on the tracks” (Oster, 45). Indeed the “mournful moody whistle” underlines the bluesman’s depressive state. Consequently, we can find lyrics where the male chooses to commit suicide under the wheels of a train, or we can find tragic scenes where the train carries off his woman. Sometimes, the man is not only unable to prevent the woman from going, but he is also unable even to buy a ticket to follow her:

I’m gonna lay my head, baby, on some lonesome railroad line,...

‘Cause the ole freight train comin’, satisfy my worried min’.

(Butch Cage, “Heart-Archin Blues,”1961)

Will you tell me where my easy rider gone,

...

‘Cause that train carry my baby so far from home.

(Butch Cage, “Easy Rider,”1961)

I couldn’ buy me no ticket, baby, I walked back through the do’,

My baby left town an’ she ain’t comin back no mo’.

(Butch Cage, “Heart-Achin’ Blues,”1961)

One of the bestselling blues records of any period was “How Long, How Long Blues” by Leroy Carr. This race record’s advertisement depicts an African American man

sitting with a lowered head at the train station. We can easily guess before reading the text that he is waiting for the beautiful, plain faced woman who is pictured on the horizon. The text gives the audience further information by introducing the feeling of blues: “Every lovin’ man knows what it means to have his sweetie go away and leave him all alone. He gets to feelin’ blue wondering how long he’ll have to wait for her to come back ” (qtd. in Titon 86). The lyrics are as follows:

Here I stood at the station watch my baby leavin’ town

Blue and disgusted nowhere could peace be found

For how long how how long baby how long

Now I can hear the whistle blowin’ but I cannot see no train

And it’s deep down in my heart baby there lies an achin’ pain

For how long how how long baby how long.

(Leroy Carr, “How Long, How Long Blues,” 1930)



Fig. 3. Advertisement for “race record”.

In a similar way, arabesk music is also closely linked to a transportation vehicle: the *dolmuş*. The *dolmuş* culture refers to the privately owned and overcrowded taxis that

connect the city centre, like Istanbul and Ankara, proper to the outlying squatter's houses. The *dolmuş* driver himself lives in those slums and, while working he listens to arabesk music and makes the passenger share his experience, too. The driver is surrounded the whole day by the moody sound of arabesk, and the passengers are exposed to it while on their short trips to work and on back. In contrast to the bluesman, who finds prestige in owning a car, or who uses the train to escape his problems, the *dolmuş* atmosphere is gloomy and depressing. Both the passengers and the drivers were so influenced by this gloomy music that the Turkish government banned playing of arabesk music in the *dolmuş* taxis in 2003.

Returning to the blues, in the following lyrics we can find a woman who leaves her lover. Although his heart says that she still loves him, his mind says that she has left him behind:

It was a great long engine, an' a little small engineer,
It took my woman away along, an' it left me standin' here.

But if I just had listened unto my second min',
I don't believe I'd been here wringing my hands an' crying.

(Hermann E. Johnson, "C.C Rider," 1926)

But indeed there have to be reasons why the woman leaves her lover behind. In some blues lyrics the man complains of the woman leaving him because he has grown old. Sometimes he faces his age:

You find you a young man, you like better than you do me.

(Robert Pete Williams, "Teasin' Blues," 1961)

I done got so ugly, I don't even know myself.

(Robert Pete Williams, "Ugly Face Blues," 1960)

It seems that the bluesman is afraid of being unsatisfactory, old and without money, because in that way he becomes powerless and loses control over his woman. To regain his power the blues singer begins with a universal condemnation of all women, and then tells his audience of a personal incident or “personal memory, which is intended as proof of the universal condemnation” (White 4):

I wouldn't want a black woman tell ya the reason why
 Black woman's evil do things on the sly
 You look for your supper to be good and hot
 She never put a neck bone in your pot
 She's on the road again.

I went to my window, my window was propped
 I went to my door, my door was locked
 I stepped right back, I shook my head
 A big black nigger in my foldin' bed.

I shot through the window, I broke his leg
 I never seen a little nigger run so fast
 She's on the road again.

(Memphis Jug Band, “On the Road Again,” 1928)

However, the content of blues lyrics about infidelity differs, depending on which sex they are addressed to. Most songs about unfaithful women are accusatory in tone, whereas the songs addressed to men take the form of advice. When blues songs are for the male audience, the blues singer shares his own experience and tells about his life as an example in hopes that other men will learn from it:

Tell you this, men
 Ain't gonna tell you nothin' else
 Tell you this, men
 Ain't gonna tell you nothin' else
 Man's a fool if he thinks
 He's got a whole woman by hisself

(Blind Willie Reynolds, "Married Man Blues," 1930)

I really
 Don't believe
 No woman in the whole round world do right:
 Act like an angel in the daytime,
 Mess by the ditch at night.

(Blind Willie McTell, "Searching the Desert for the Blues," 1932)

An African - American man from the lower class struggles considerably to establish a healthy identity, for "he is not only a black man in a white man's world, but he is a male in this matrifocally oriented group. And of these, the latter is his greatest burden" (Abrahams 31). Family life was dominated by the mother; and there was seldom a male figure; if the partners married, those marriages were not longstanding. Even the law encouraged temporary relationships. It made women with children financially independent and "it has insisted that in order to get money, a man should not be living with the woman. The law then seems to foster the male-female dichotomy" (30) For Abrahams, "Women, then, are not only the dispenser of love and care but also of discipline and authority" (31).

However, significant in this regard is the absolute distrust by both sexes of each other. Young girls, who are brought up by their mothers, are taught at a very early age to distrust men, and the men learn later on to say the same thing about women, too. Matthew B. White says in *The Blues Ain't but a Woman Want to Be a Man': Male Control in Early Twentieth Century Blues Music*:

Regardless of whether the bluesman made his case about female infidelity from a specific incident and then developed a universal stereotype, or operated in the other direction, two things are clear: these male-addressed songs about infidelity were intended as teaching tools, tales warning other men about the unscrupulous and unfaithful nature of women; and, these songs fostered a universalized mistrust of all women. (5)

Evidence of this can be seen in this lyric:

Said a woman and a dollar
 About the same
 Said a woman and a dollar
 About the same
 Dollar go from hand to hand and
 A woman go from man to man.

(Arthur Petties, "Out on Sante Fe Blues," 1930)

In some songs, if the bluesman himself is being unfaithful, he seems to see no problem with that. Indeed he presents a lot of excuses such as the distance from the lover or his lover's infidelity itself. Alternatively, the bluesman advises other men to commit adultery in order to take revenge:

If you got one old woman
 You better get five or six

So if that one happens to leave you

It won't leave you in an awful fix.

(Texan Buddy Boy, "Awful Fix," 1927)

Although the woman is always depicted as evil because of leaving her partner, the bluesman never allows her to explain her actions. The woman may also live through a dilemma, yet she can never justify herself; she is simply voiceless compared to the bluesman who sings his songs and accuses her. But when a woman is a blues woman herself she can better explain her situation, as in the following lyrics by Ma Rainey:

Train's at the station, I heard the whistle blow,

Train's at the station, I heard the whistle blow,

I done bought my ticket but I don't know where I'll go.

(Ma Rainey, "Travelling Blues," 1920)

As Duval puts it, the woman asks herself whether "to stay or to go, to find a new life and love or to endure the humiliation of remaining faithful to an unfaithful man. Frustration, despair, alienation-- how could one escape the feelings that wrenched the soul and spirit?" (3).

There is another type of evil woman who causes the bluesman a lot of trouble and sorrow. The Gold – digger women are those types of women with a wanton desire for money. Love, trust and family are not important for them: "nothing was sacred to the gold digger, not even the bonds of matrimony" (White 6). These women are tricky and do not hesitate to use every means at their disposal to empty a man's pockets:

Brownskin gal is deceitful, till gets you all worn down

Brownskin gal is deceitful, till gets you all worn down

When she get all your pocket change, then she drive you from your town

(Herman E. Johnson, "The Deceitful Brownskin," 1927)

Well, you been takin', takin' all my money in my clothes,
 Well, you been takin', takin' all my money in my clothes,
 Well an' you told all your friends that you gon' do somethin' awful.

(Clarence Edwards, "You Don't Love Me, Baby," 1960)

Like the unfaithful wife or lover image, the gold digger image was also applied to all women. Indeed, trickery and greed were thought to be natural traits common to women. Men who had no money were not accepted by the gold diggers:

When I left her house she followed me to the door,
 When I left her house she followed me to the door,
 You ain't got no money, man, I would rather see you go,
 Man, I'd rather see you –, I'd rather see you go.

(Herman E. Johnson, "Po' Boy," 1961)

I went early this mornin', I knocked on the door,
 I heard my baby say, "Who is there?"
 "You know this ole gamblin chile, baby, I been gamblin' all night long."
 She says, "Don't come in here, daddy, less'n you got some money."

(Roosevelt Charles, "I'm a Gamblin' Man," 1960)

Sexual relationships, according to the bluesman, were often on a cash basis, too. Although there is no direct demand by the woman, we can find the bluesman offering her money:

Shake, shake, woman, I'm gonna buy you a diamond ring,
 Shake, shake, woman, I'm gonna buy you a diamond ring,

If you don't shake, darlin', I ain't gonna buy you a doggone thing.

(Robert Pete Williams, "Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor," 1995)

You hear that rumblin', you hear that rumblin', a deep down in the groun', oh
Lord,

Now it musta be the devil, you know, turnin' my women roun',

Now stack o' 'dollars, stack o' dollars, just as high as I am tall, oh Lord,

Now stack o' dollars, stack o' dollars, just as high as I am tall, oh Lord,

Now you be my baby, mama, you can have them all.

(Clarence Edwards, "Stack o' Dollars," 1960)

Thus, the bluesman accepts the idea that exchanging love for money is a natural trait of all women. Therefore he could not actually accuse the gold – digger woman for her money – mindedness. Instead "what the bluesman found so objectionable was the gold digger's lack of deference to male authority" (White 6). That is, if the man provided her with money and gifts, he expected her to be faithful, respectful, and subordinate:

I work all day for you until the sun go down

I work all day long for you, from sun-up until the sun go down,

An' you take all my money and drink it up, and come home and want to fuss
and clown.

I worked for you so many times, when I was really too sick to go

I worked for you, baby when your man was slippin' in my backdoor,

I can see for myself, so take your backdoor man,

I won't be your fool no more.

I worked for you, baby, when snow was above my knees,

I worked for you, baby, when ice and snow was on the ground,

Trying to make you happy, an' you chasing every man in town.

(Lonnie Johnson, "I Ain't Gonna Be Your Fool," 1938)

But if a bluesman finds a woman who spends all her money on him, there is no problem.

In fact he does not hesitate to boast in order to make other men envy him:

I can ask her for a nickel

She give me ten and a dime

Don't you wish you had a woman

To treat you just like mine?

(Bill Wilber, "My Babe My Babe," 1935)

Another type of women who are represented as evil are those who have power, especially that of voodoo. Some women depicted in blues lyrics have powers like those of witches, which underline the bluesmen's idea of the wicked and evil woman figure. At this point bluesmen are afraid, because she gets control over men through voodoo. It is not her evilness but her power that frightens men.

My gal

Got a mojo

She won't let me see

Said my baby got a mojo

She won't let me see;

One morning 'bout four o'clock

She eased that thing on me.

(Blind Boy Fuller, "Mojo Hiding Woman," 1937)

A mojo is explained by Matthew B. White as a small velvet bag which contained a variety of "charms, herbs, etc. which would ensure the possessor some magical wish" (11). In several lyrics we can find men trying to seek out and destroy the magical power of the

woman:

My mama

She got a mojo

Believe she tryin' to keep it hid

Papa Samue's got somethin' to find that mojo with.

(Blind Willie McTell, "Talking to Myself," 1930)

My rider got somethin' she's tryin o keep it hid

My rider got somethin' she try o keep it hid

Lord I got somethin' to find that somethin with.

(Charley Patton, "Down the Dirt Road Blues," 1929)

As a result, man punishes her by threatening her with violence if she chooses to disobey him:

'F I send for my baby and she don't come

'F I send for my baby and she don't come

All the doctors in Hot Springs sure can't help her none.

And if she gets unruly things she don't wan' do

Take my 32-20, now, and cut her half in two.

(Robert Johnson, "32-20 Blues," 1936)

According to Roger D. Abrahams, the reasons of violence against women are deep – rooted. Usually men grew up in a matrifocal system and received little guidance from male persons. Even if there were some figures during the boys' childhood there was too much "tutelage" by the mothers. "Yet when most reached puberty, they will ultimately be rejected as men by the women in the matriarchy, and enter a period of terrific anxiety and rootlessness around the beginning of adolescence" (31). That is why some African

American men try to gain some masculine power by being violent.

In “Mississippi”, King Solomon Hill suspects his wife of infidelity and threatens her even with death:

Honey, you been gone all day
 that you make whoopee all night (twice)
 I’m gona take my razor and cut your late hours
 you wouldn't think I been serving you right.
 Undertaker’s been here and gone I give him your height and size (twice)
 You’ll be making whoopee with the Devil in hell tomorrow night.
 Baby, next time you go out carry your black suit along
 Mama, next time you go out carry your black suit along
 Coffin gonna be your presen’ hell gonna be your brand new home.

(King Solomon Hill, “Mississippi,” 1932)

As can be seen in the lyrics, one of the most evil “others” is the woman. Indeed it is the lack of control of man over his woman which depresses him (the theme of control will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter). The evil female leaves her lover, but the bluesman does not ask why, or, she finds another lover and he does not accuse the other man; the woman is the guilty party. However, frustrating experiences lead to musical and poetical expression. As Harry Oster tells:

In essence the blues form makes use of many of the same devices as poetry. Abstract states of mind like a sad mood are presented through concrete images; inanimate objects and non-human creatures following blind instincts are given personalities and values so that man can literally communicate (usually futilely) with the forces which dominate his life.

(76)

That is why the bluesman finds a kind of relief while singing about his problem. Melville Herskovits points to the "...therapeutic value of bringing a repressed thought into the open" (4), which is something that was commonly achieved in song. Charles Keil, in *Urban Blues*, says:

A bluesman in the country or the first time coming to grips with the city life sings primarily to ease his worried mind, to get things out of his system, to feel better; it is of secondary importance whether or not others are present and deriving similar satisfactions from his music. (76)

Moreover, the blues helps the Negro men, as Oliver points out when he notes that the blues brings, "satisfaction and comfort both to the singer and to his companion" (qtd. in Ottenheimer 1). Indeed the same artistic expression works out for arabesk lyrics, too, which will be discussed carefully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III: THE PRESENTATION OF WOMAN IN ARABESK LYRICS

Pain gives of its healing power

Where we least expect it.

Martin Heidegger, “The Thinker as Poet”

Unlike the bluesman, who uses cooking, baking and fruit to describe his “woman”, the arabesk man chooses to represent his woman with the image of the rose. The rose is accepted as the queen of all flowers, and we can see in the poems of Nedim, one of the great lyric poets of the Tulip Age, that he introduced the rose to represent his lover. This tradition continues in arabesk music, where the beauty and delicateness of a rose is attributed to the beloved woman:

Ne oldu gülüm ne oldu yavrum

Gözlerin yasla dolmuş ne oldu ömrüm?

(Orhan Gencebay, “Ne Oldu Gülüm,” 1987)

[What’s happened my Rose, what’s happened my little one?

Your eyes are full of tears, what’s happened, my life?] *

Dedim güzel adın nedir

Dedi namıma gül denir.

(İbrahim Tatlıses “Dedi Ki Nişanlıyam,” 2004)

[I asked her: “Beauty what is your name?”

She answered they call me Rose.]

* Except where otherwise noted, all translations from Turkish to English are by the author.

In another form, the rose not only describes the external appearance of the lover. We can find her smelling like the rose, too. The smell of the rose reminds the arabesk singer of his beloved. The idea of the flower's scent is a powerful image, such that, eventually, when the woman is not responding to his love, she appears to him like an odorless flower:

Ne sevdim diyorsun nede sevemiyorsun

Kokmayan bir çiçek gibisin

(Orhan Gencebay, "Sevecekmiş Gibisin," 1984)

[You won't say you love me and you won't say you don't.

You're like a flower without any scent.]

The most apparent color is the red rose, which symbolizes not only passionate love, but also the red cheek, lips or heart of the lover. In the following lyrics, we see the use of a blood – red flower that stands for both the rose and his love for her. That the flower bleeds means that the man is crying bloody tears:

Sen gideli alev oldu bu yürek

Bir gün sana bir gün bana yanıyor

Sol yanağımda kan kırmızı bir çiçek

Bir gün sana bir gün bana kanıyor

(Ferdi Tayfur, "Bir gün sana bir gün bana," 2006)

[This heart of mine is burning since you are left

It burns one day for you and the next day for me

On my left cheek there is a blood-red flower

It bleeds one day for you and the next day for me.]

What is so often forgotten in the discussion of metaphors in arabesk, which go back to the Ottoman times, is the eternal love between the nightingale and the rose, who are unable to come together. The nightingale, the male, is in a cage and can express his love for the rose, the female, only by singing to her. In these lyrics, the silence of the nightingale and the decay of the roses symbolize bad luck in love:

Bülbül sustu, güller soldu şansıma

Ellerin koynunda yâri var iken

Ayrılıklar düştü benim şansıma

(Müslüm Gürses, “Şansıma,” 1995)

[The nightingale has stopped singing, the roses have faded,

As luck would have it

While strangers clasp lovers to their bosom

Separation is my lot, as luck would have it.]

Koştuğum her şafak bir yalnızlık sesi

Bütün bülbüller bahçemden uçar gider.

(Ferdi Tayfur, “Bulamazsın Dediler”, 2006)

[I am running towards daybreak, to the sound of loneliness

All the nightingales are flying away from my garden.]

We can find the arabesk man as a loving person in both film and music lyrics. He is neither a fighter nor a hero, but he is a person who tries to be an honorable man establishing an honorable family. However this “holy” thought seems to be impossible,

for love is represented parallel to pain. Martin Stokes says that “the fate of the protagonist is to love, and this love is the cause for self-destruction. The focus of arabesk drama is not the actual conclusion but the progressive state of the protagonist’s decline, a state which is metaphorically represented by the social and peripherality of the lover”(156).

In numerous lyrics we can see that the arabesk singer is deeply in love with his woman. After comparing his beloved to the rose, he goes on to describe himself as a *Mecnun* following the tragic love story of Leyla and Mecnun, a popular Arabian legend rewritten by the Turkish poet Fuzûlî in the sixteenth century. There are various versions of this love story, but, in this case, it is better to refer to the film version of the story, filmed in the 1980s with Orhan Gencebay as the protagonist. When Leyla and Mecnun fall in love with each other, they are separated by their families. Leyla is married to another man, which causes Mecnun to cast himself into the desert. Although people who meet Mecnun advise him to forget Leyla, he becomes more alienated and loses his mind. When Leyla finally finds him, he does not recognize her anymore. He is not concerned with the Leyla of flesh and blood; he lives and loves the “idea” of Leyla. In the following lyrics, it is clear that only “Leyla” can help the arabesk man end his pain; he is literally yearning for his beloved:

Gece gündüz arıyorum

Uçan kuştan soruyorum

Aşkın ile ateş oldum

Su ver leylam yanıyorum

(İbrahim Tatlıses, “Su Ver Leylam,”2003)

[I am searching day and night

Asking the flying birds

I'm on fire with your love

Give me water, Leyla, I'm burning.]

However, in arabesk even Leyla herself turns out to be an evil person. The arabesk man stresses emphatically the evil disposition of the woman even if she is "Leyla":

Suyun sesiydi, gülün rengiydi

Aşkı yüreğimde herşeyin üstündeydi

Ellere kandı, kalbimi yaktı

Ben mecnundum benim leylam olmadı

(İbrahim Tatlıses, "Bende İnsanım,"2004)

[She was the sound of water, the color of the rose

Her love was the most important for my soul.

She believed in strangers, she destroyed my heart

I was Mecnun, but she never was my Leyla.]

The arabesk man like the *Mecnun* character, knows that his lover "Leyla" will bring bad luck to him. He is aware that she will cause pain and sorrow:

Nerede nerede

Gönlümün Leyla'sı nerde

Nerede nerede

Belalım nerde

(Orhan Gencebay, "Nerede,"1976)

[Where where

Where is the Leyla of my soul

Where where

Where is my misfortune?]

Although he is aware that she is the cause of his madness, he still looks to her for consolation. In the following lyrics, however, it is not clear whether the arabesk man is begging his woman or God. However, in the Turkish language, being a *Mecnun* has the same meaning as being crazy.

Bir teselli ver

Yarattığın mecnuna

Sevenin halinden sevenler anlar

Gel gör şu halimi

Bir teselli ver

(Orhan Gencebay, "Bir Teselli Ver,"1968)

Martin Stokes translates this as:

Console the lover,

Whom you have driven crazy.

Only lovers do understand the lover's state.

Come and see my pitiful state,

Console me.

(Stokes, "Console Me," 235)

In Turkish culture, it is an unwritten law that men do not cry. In particular, people from the rural areas are strictly tied to the traditional idea of the strong man and delicate woman. Stokes says that "for males, weeping is acknowledged but can only take place in solitude and private space" (147). With arabesk music men are able to express their emotions, and, in particular, "the gloomy facial expressions in the iconography of film posters and cassette box covers and the obsessive reference to tears in arabesk lyrics thus

make clear, socially constructed, statements about the nature of the inner and private self' (Stokes, 147). Although mistreated by society and politics, it is very strange for men in arabesk music to cry, for the most part, because of women.

Nevertheless, quite differently from the Bluesman, who universalizes his problem and generalizes all women, the arabesk singer does not hesitate to address his lover directly in order to inform her that he is crying, and that she is the reason for his emotional state:

Sen ağlatansın ben ağlayan

Evvel demiştim heves değilsin

Beni hayata sensin bağlayan

(Orhan Gencebay, "Sen Hayatsın Ben Ömür,"1974)

:

[You are the one who makes me cry

I told you before that you are not a passing desire

You are the one who binds me to life.]

Almost in all arabesk films we can see that the arabesk man is reduced to his lowest level, as he cannot protect his own honor while trying to assert the gap between "image and reality, isolated self and society, 'Turkish' honour and 'modern' morality, the rural and the urban" (Stokes 145). Unfortunately this gap is unbridgeable, forcing the arabesk man to cry for his lover.

In the following lyric, however, the woman is causing him so much pain that the arabesk man does not find any comfort even in his sleep. Moreover, when he tries to solve the meaning of his dreams, he cries again:

Her gece teklifsiz rüyama girer

Uykumu bölmenin zevkine erer

Önüme bir yığın bilmece serer

Ağlaya ağlaya çözer dururum

(Orhan Gencebay, “Çoban Kızı,”1994)

[Every night she enters my dreams without invitation

She is delighted to disturb my sleep

Spreads a bunch of riddles

That I am solving by crying.]

It is apparent that the arabesk man has a problem with women in general. He is not only deserted by one, but by many women. Indeed, it always easier for him to accuse the women than to search for the real reason within himself for their desertion:

Geri dönmez artık, giden sevgililer

Her ümit ufkunda ağlıyor gözler

Bitmeyen çilenin, derdin sarhoşuyum

Kahredip geçiyor, en güzel günler.

(Orhan Gencebay, “Kaderimin Oyunu,”1968)

Martin Stokes translates this as,

The loved ones that have gone will not return now.

On every horizon of hope, eyes are weeping.

I am a drunkard of endless affliction and torment.

The most beautiful days pass by in torment.

(Stokes 243)

It is extremely important to recognize that the arabesk man not only hopes that she will return one day, but that he also wonders why she did not care for him for such a long time.

From this, it seems that the arabesk man is used to the idea of the standard Turkish woman figure who is a housemaid, a cook and a caring mother for both her children and her partner. In the documentary film, “Woman of Islam, Veiling and Seclusion”, the filmmaker Farheen Pasha Umar travels across the Muslim world and mentions that Turkish women are the most hard-working women among Muslim populations. The Turkish woman’s dedication to the house and family can be the reason why the arabesk man is still expecting a kind of sympathy and care from her, even if his lover has left him:

Bir gün merak edip bulmadın beni

Bir gün arayıpta sormadın beni

Sormadın beni ne hallerdeyim

Ah bir gittin dönmedin bir daha geri

Bu nasıl sevgi ah öldürdü beni

(İbrahim Tatlıses, “Sormadın Beni,”1996)

[You never wondered and searched for me

You never called me and asked for me

You never asked about my condition

Ah you just went away and never came back

What kind of love is this, it is killing me.]

However, for the arabesk man there is still a type of woman who is worse than the woman who leaves him alone. While the arabesk man accepts his fate of desertion by a woman, he never forgives a lying woman. For when a woman comes back and apologizes she has the chance to be forgiven, but the arabesk man cannot trust those who have lied to him. A lie means that she is deceitful and uncontrollable at the same time. An arabesk man is powerless against a lying woman, for he can be easily fooled by her:

Bir zamanlar ben de aşkın sihrine kapılmışım
 Bir vefasızın beni sevdiğini sanmışım
 Terk edip de gitti beni ellerim boş kalmışım
 Yalnızlığın böylesini ben ömrümce tatmamışım
 Anladım ki bu aşkta ben aldanmışım.

(Orhan Gencebay, “Ben Sevdim De Ne Oldu,”1967)

[Once I was captured by her love charm
 I thought an unfaithful one was in love with me
 When she left me, I was alone
 I never had tasted such loneliness before
 I realized that she lied to me.]

It is the lie of a woman which transforms the sensible and pitiful arabesk lover into a furious man. Indeed, it is not only the bluesman who becomes angry when he realizes that he cannot control his woman.

Barışmam yalancısın,
 Yüreğimde sancısın,
 Artık sen yabancısın,
 Barışmam...

(İbrahim Tatlıses, “Barışmam,”2004)

[I am not going to reconcile, you are a liar
 You are an agony in my heart
 You are a stranger
 I am not going to reconcile...]

It is a very common thought that nothing can expunge the shame of a woman's lie.

Commonly, the arabesk man is completely ruined when he recognizes that the woman is not as pure as the image he had created in his mind. In the following lyrics we see that the relationship is described as a green forest and one naked tree is her lie, which is left from the forest of their love:

Rüzgâr kadar

Çıplak duran

Koyu yeşil

Bu ormandan

Bize kalan

Bir yalanmış

Hiçbir yere

Sığmayan

(Müslüm Gürses, "Sebahat Abla,"2006)

[It stands naked

As the wind

What is left us from the

Deep green forest

It was a lie

That couldn't fit

anywhere.]

This song, "Sebahat Abla", was especially written for Müslüm Gürses by the Turkish poet Murathan Mungan and represents a very important development. In 2004, Müslüm Gürses covered one of the most popular songs of the rock singer Teoman. Gürses sang Teoman's song "Paramparça" with the original lyrics and was as successful as the rock artist.

Interestingly, while arabesk was thought by the higher society to be a product of the country's socio – economic illnesses, Murathan Mungan, a popular poet and writer, in contrast to other intelligentsia, liked to listen to arabesk and believed in Müslüm Gürses. That was why Mungan did not hesitate to write most of the lyrics, and work as an advisor on Gürses' album *Aşk Tesadüfleri Sever* in 2006. With these songs, Gürses created a kind of “sophisticated arabesk”, in which also the sophisticated levels of Turkish society at once became interested.

The “country socio-economic illness”, however, according to the higher society, was mostly people of the working class. Also Orhan Gencebay, the father of arabesk music, tries to define the meaning of poverty:

I have addressed all people in my country: In the 70s, 61% of the people in the villages, 18% of the people who worked in the factories and 12% of the public servants listened to arabesk music. The capitalist group mostly belonged to the remaining 8%. So 91% of the Turkish republic listened to us. And most of them were poverty stricken, but not all of them. We were all wretched, and wretched does not always mean poverty. I think that the mind is distinct, the soul is distinct. A person doesn't need any money to be a philosopher. (Hakan 39, my translation, but the arithmetic is not mine)

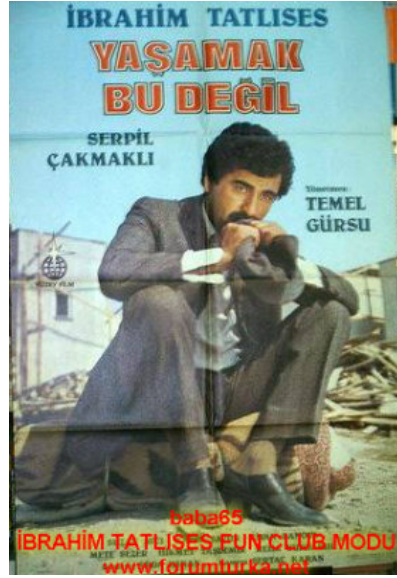


Fig. 4. Advertisement for an arabesk film.

While trying to explain that poverty does not always concern money, but that people who have a corrupted soul are also poor, Orhan Gencebay points to a very common theme in arabesk films and lyrics. Fig. 4 shows an arabesk film advertisement depicting İbrahim Tatlıses, a well – known arabesk singer, as a poverty – stricken man. In this film ‘Yaşamak Bu Değil’ the audience can easily understand the main message, which is that he has no material goods but he has an honorable character and therefore he is not poor.

That is why, again, like the Gold Digger Woman in blues lyrics, arabesk men have problems with women who are concerned with money. But the arabesk singer does not have a lot of time to philosophize about the meaning of money, for we can see that the woman does not hesitate to leave him for a person who can promise her a better life

standard: Aşkınla gönlümde bir hayat vardı
Sadece bağlılık yeminin kaldı
Başkası ne verdi yerimi aldı?
Sevdiğim biri var diyemedin mi?

(Ferdi Tayfur, “Sevdiğim Biri Var,”2006)

[My soul came alive with your love
 Now there is only your oath of devotion
 What does he promise you, to take my place?
 Couldn't you tell him that you love somebody else?]

While money can beguile woman for infidelity, the arabesk man, like the bluesman, analyzes improprieties to try to discover any infidelity on the part of the woman. Indeed we can see that also the arabesk men fears to lose control over his woman:

Açık konuş benle doğruyu söyle
 Nedir bu tavırlar bu gidiş böyle
 Bir yanlışlık yaptım demedin amma
 Şeytana uydun mu aklım takıldı

(Orhan Gencebay, "Aklım Takıldı,"1994)

[Speak openly to me, say the truth
 What is this for a tone what is this for a manner?
 I didn't say you did something wrong but
 Did you yield to any temptation?]

It seems that the woman controls the arabesk man more than otherwise. She has an immense influence over him; even her glance is enough to hurt his heart. But also arabesk films underline the powerlessness of men over the women. With well – known actresses, both the protagonist of the film and the male audience become outsiders:

The remote erotic image, often played by the actresses who are well known outside the context of the film from photographs in newspapers and pornographic magazines, thus manipulates and finally excludes not only the

protagonist of the ‘imaginary’ drama, but also the male viewer himself. (Stokes 145)

Çek alaylı bakışını gözlerimden
 Çek sihirli bakışını üzerimden
 Beni bilirsin çok duyguluyumdur
 Kanar yüreğim derinden

(Ferdî Tayfur, “Ben Sadece,”1994)

[Don’t look at me with a mocking glance
 Stop this enchanting glance
 You know how sensitive I am
 My soul is bleeding deeply.]

The basic difference between the bluesman and the arabesk singer is that the arabesk man is definitely a romantic sufferer. In both blues and arabesk lyrics, we can find the depiction of the woman as a liar, a deceiver, and a deserter. While the bluesman threatens the woman with violence, the arabesk man is violent only to himself by getting drunk. Martin Stokes says that, “In arabesk lyrics, the emphasis is upon alcohol as a refuge and consolation; its consumption an act of simultaneous self – gratification and self – destruction” (Stokes 148):

Ben her gece sarhoşum derdimden böyle
 Aşk yolunda berduşum kaderim böyle
 Felek benim yazımı kışa çevirdi
 Fırtınaya kapılmış aşığım böyle.
 İçki nedir bilmezdim

Şimdi bir ayyaş oldum

Kederle ızdırapla ben

Arkadaş oldum.

(İbrahim Tatlıses, “Sarhoş,” 2003)

[My grief makes me get drunk every night

I am a vagabond in the way of love

Faith has turned my summer to a winter

I am a loving person caught in a storm

I never knew what alcohol was

Now I am a drunkard

I made a friend to me of

Sorrow and affliction.]

All arabesk singers in their songs try to put an end to their suffering by getting drunk.

Indeed, alcohol is often portrayed in both song lyrics and films as causing the protagonists' decline:

Neden saçların beyazlamış arkadaş

Sana da benim gibi çektiren mi var

Görüyorum ki her gün meyhanedesin

Yaşamaya küstürüp içtiren mi var

(İbrahim Tatlıses, “Neden Saçların Beyazlamış,” 2004)

Why has your hair become so white my friend?

Are you suffering like me because of someone?

I see that you are at the bar every night

Is there someone who makes you offend life by getting drunk?

But, sometimes, even alcohol does not help him to forget the evil woman:

Yolum düşer meyhaneler üstüne

İçtikçe aklıma sevgilim gelir.

(Orhan Gencebay, “Acı Gerçekler,”1995)

I end up in the meyhane

The more I drink the more my lover comes to my mind.

(Stokes, 149)

A lot of women representations in both blues and arabesk music are represented as evil beings who determine men’s happiness or ruin. In the arabesk version, she is compared to the most delicate flower, the rose, and the angels. The arabesk man is seriously in love, singing with the tongue of the nightingale and going crazy like the Arabian Romeo, Mecnun. However, the woman does not deserve man’s devotion because she emerges in guises such as the liar, the deceiver, the Gold Digger and as an unreliable person who does not hesitate for a second to leave the man for someone else. The arabesk man is shocked and cannot believe her malice; he naively waits for her, begs her to come back, and tries to forget her by getting drunk. The arabesk man is a miserable person compared to the bluesman, who simply curses his woman, forgets her and shares his unlucky experience with the audience.

The arabesk man also finds some comfort by singing about his evil woman and bad relationship. However, in the end, his only intent is to be happy with his woman; he has no other wish than to be with her:

Allahım neydi günahım

Günahım neydi Allahım

Dualarımda yalvarmışım

Onla olmağı isyanım

(İbrahim Tatlıses, "Allahım Neydi Günahım," 1996)

[Oh God, what was my sin

What was my sin, oh God?

I have prayed in my prayers

My only wish was to be with her.]

CHAPTER IV: THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BLUES AND ARABESK LYRICS

I would rather be buried in some cypress grove
Than to have some woman/ Lord that I can't control.

(Skip James, "Cypress Grove Lyrics," 1964)

Unquestionably, as can be seen from the examinations of both lyrics in blues and arabesk songs, men have a problem with their women. The man is looking for clues for as to the woman's infidelity, he accuses her of leaving him, and he is frustrated that she is not subordinate although he gives her money, gifts and his love.

Moreover, there is still the main question about why men choose to sing about these women, even though they are surrounded by various other painful experiences such as poverty, injustice and criminality.

Indeed, after the abolition of slavery, the blues gave expression not only to the African American men's sufferings, but also to their relations with women as free men. For the first time, African American people were able to choose their partners and to establish a family. Similarly, those men from the far – flung villages in Turkey, who used to get married to a girl approved of by their fathers, became, after their migration to the big cities, suddenly free to fall in love. The only dilemma was that men always forgot that women enjoyed the same independence.

One approach to the depiction of woman in blues and arabesk lyrics is that those songs accusing women were actually protest songs against the well – off and powerful society, the so – called "other". Talking of the blues, Jeff Todd Titon in his book, *Early Downhome Blues*, argues that "the songs offer an unwitting allegory in which deception

in love signifies treachery in race relations” (188). He goes on to say that perhaps “the boast and bluffs of the singer are sublimations of racial hostility” (188). Richard Wright notes in his foreword to *Blues Fell This Morning* that “a submerged theme of guilt, psychological in nature, seems to run through [blues songs],” and he goes on to ask, “Could this guilt have stemmed from the burden of renounced rebellious impulses?” (qtd. in Oliver 9). Oliver himself observes that, in the blues lyrics which are about lost love, the singer

has found, consciously or subconsciously, a vehicle of protest. Neither the blues singer nor his listener is likely to be aware of the function of the songs as a sublimation of frustrated desires. But they sublimate hostility and canalize aggressive instincts against a mythical common enemy, the ‘cheater’. (258)

In addition, viewed as an artist, both blues and arabesk singers play a positive role, and they offer their listeners a representation of life. James Baldwin’s account, in *The Struggle*, of the novelist as artist serves to indicate the positive function of the blues singer in the black community:

You [the artist] are compelled...into dealing with whatever it is that hurts you...You must find some way of using this to connect you with everyone else alive...You must understand that your pain is trivial except insofar as you can use it to connect with other people’s pain; and insofar as you can do that with your pain, you can be released from it. And hopefully it works the other way around, too; insofar as I can tell you what it is like to suffer, perhaps I can help you to suffer less. (qtd. in Tilton 189)

Indeed, a lot of artists and academicians do not deny the healing power of singing. Robert Switzer says that, “Doubtless it is part of the captivating mystery of the blues experience

that it feels good to sing the blues, and to listen; that one is feeling bad, but somehow feeling good about it” (1). Arabesk has the same function; it is a music style which keeps painful details alive; it is a personal experience universalized for the audience.

However, ironically, listening to and singing about pain gives a kind of relief and makes the person feel better. Switzer quotes Ma Rainey’s song, “Ya Do”: “It’s a no – name blues, but’ll take away your pains. Taken away, but none gone; suffering is not forgotten” (1). It is a more astonishing fact that the arabesk singer, as with the blues singer, does not accuse or protest against politics and society, but rather his fate and his women. Furthermore, arabesk listeners are also unconscious or even numb to physical pain. The concerts of the famous arabesk singer, Müslüm Gürses, were especially known to be a place where listeners would cut their bodies with razor blades while listening to the music. But whether physical or emotional, men’s deepest wound is always that which is caused by woman.

Moreover, there is still another reason why men depict women as evil: the wish of a man to control his woman. It is interesting that neither blues men nor the arabesk men, either consciously or unconsciously, sing about their mothers or their wives. For the arabesk men, both the wife and the mother figure do not form an irritating concept. While the mother is as good – hearted as a holy being, the wife is also stereotypically considered as a caring person and automatically set up into the mother category. The evil feminine figure appears explicitly when a man is in love with a woman who is unapproachable. This is why the most popular theme in arabesk films is about the poor man who adores the daughter of a rich businessman. Usually the rich girl scorns the pure love of the arabesk man until she realizes that she has done wrong and it is too late. Alternatively, the rich girl is interested in the arabesk man, but is unable to convince her fierce father to let her marry her beloved. Another unreachable female figure is the girl left behind in the village, while

the arabesk man struggles to bring together some money for a marriage. Whichever is the case, it is an unalterable play of fate that, in the end, a rich girl pops out from somewhere to perplex the protagonists' mind who actually in the beginning was only thinking about his girl in the village.

Similarly, the bluesman seldom sings about his wife and almost never about his mother. Although we can find a lot of words like 'mama' and 'papa' they do not stand for the literal meaning. As an example, Angela Davis explains this absence with suggestion that the "direct allusions to marriage may be the different words mainstream and African American cultures use to signify "male spouse" (6). Indeed, we can find a lot of examples of the woman addressing the lover as "daddy":

Oh, daddy, look what you doin', look what you doin'
 Oh, daddy, you with your foolin', think what you're losin'
 All the little love I gave you
 Is goin' to make you feel so awfully blue
 When you miss me and long to kiss me
 You'll curse the day that you ever quit me
 Oh, daddy, think when you're all alone
 You'll get so lonely just wait and see
 But there will be someone else makin' love to me.

(E. Herbert, "Oh Daddy Blues," 1921)

Also the woman is called "mama", while we can find her lover being called "papa":

I'm a one hour mama
 So no one minute papa
 Ain't the kind of man for me
 Set your alarm clock papa

One hour, that's proper

Then love me like I like to be.

(Ida Cox, "One Hour Mama," 1939)

Not only bluesmen, but also blues women refused to sing about their mothers. Whether married or unmarried, most heterosexual couples had children, but the blues woman did not choose to sing about her children, too. Davis notes that Daphne Duval Harrison lists in her book, *Black Pearls*, the following themes, which were sang by women blues singers:

advice to other women, alcohol, betrayal or abandonment, broken or failed love affairs, death, departure, dilemma of staying with man or returning to family, disease and afflictions, erotica, hell, homosexuality, infidelity, injustice, jail and serving time, loss of lover, love, men, mistreatment, murder, other woman, poverty, promiscuity, sadness, sex, suicide, supernatural, trains, traveling, unfaithfulness, vengeance, weariness, depression and disillusionment, weight loss (6).

Certainly, we do not find a specifically theme about husband, mother or children. Indeed blues women represented an independence from male domestic orthodoxy. Although blues women did not rejected motherhood, they did prefer to sing about the so called other realities of life; both men and women in blues and arabesk songs preferred to sing about love. Love was definitely the domain where men did not enjoy a stable sense of control. However, when defining love, there was quite a difference between the European-derived American popular culture and the post-slavery, African American culture. The European perspective on love was mostly a romantic image that idealized marriage as a fulfillment of happiness, whereas African American people, before Abolition at least, were treated as commodities unable to choose their partners. Davis observes that,

the incorporation of personal relationships into the blues has its own historical meanings and social and political resonances. Love was not represented as an idealized realm to which unfulfilled dreams of happiness were relegated. The historical African – American vision of individual sexual love linked it inextricably with possibilities of social freedom in the economic and political realms. The lack of freedom during slavery involved, among other things, a prohibition of freely chosen, enduring family relationships (5).

More or less analogous to European-derived American culture, the Turkish culture of both village and city believed in the romantic idea of bliss in marriage. Even if a man and woman married without any emotional attachment to each other, it was believed that there was a kind of miraculous deed in nuptials. However, unfortunately, Turkish families also hold in esteem the ancient idea that there has to be equality between those who want to marry. This is a similar approach to the English idiom that “birds of a feather flock together”, meaning that those who are rich should not marry people from the poor population and vice versa, but which applies also to age, education and the physical shape.

This situation ultimately proclaims the arabesk man as an outsider because he is a migrant from the village, poor and uneducated. Therefore, the subject of love causes him a lot of pain and sorrow. Moreover, due to the Islamic cultural background, the arabesk man, in contrast to the bluesman, is usually unable to experience a sexual relationship with the woman he falls in love in with. This is why we can find the arabesk man suffering because of a woman whom he has seen for only a very short time. Unable to flirt or chat with her, the arabesk man starts persistently to think about her and to

imagine a kind of love story, although he may well never come across her again. That is why:

the female co-star of the arabesk film is both the perfect symbol and the reality of the aspirations and fears of the urban migrant. Sex provides an idiom of integration and fulfillment. The soft – pornographic character of many arabesk films emphasizes the gap between the viewer and the erotic image on screen in such a way that the viewer's identification with the *gariban* outsider of the film narrative is doubly reinforced. (Stokes, 144)

In contrast, the bluesman flirts with the female, achieves her love, begins and ends a relationship, and then, feeling blue, sings about her. What they have in common is that they both sing to ease their miserable state.

Basically, this act of singing is an attempt to have control over an uncomfortable situation. Matthew B. White points out that the “bluesman reduces what is often a complex drama to the bare essentials (or what the bluesman believes to be the bare essentials)” (7). In this way, he summarizes his problem which he can then see and analyze in a much better way. He goes further and also stereotypes the woman to be able to control her. Indeed, the main problem is not her being unfaithful or leaving him; it is the fact that she is uncontrollable, that frustrates the bluesman. However, by squeezing her in into a stereotypical category, he does assert a kind of control. It is easier for him to understand a stereotyped woman.

Another way in which the bluesman asserts power over the woman is by generalizing his ideas. When he puts her into a stereotype, he believes he knows her traits and nature, which in turn do not only represent his woman but all women. The bluesman describes the reasons for and the results of the personal acts of evil by one woman, and then he expands his condemnation to all women. While universalizing his own lack of

control, the bluesman feels a kind of relief in being able to share his inability with other men. In this way, the bluesman shifts responsibility onto the other listeners.

Many bluesmen and arabesk men try to rationalize about why they are unable to control their women. The most common idea is that she is someone who deviates from the general norms of patriarchy. This is when a woman acts unnaturally, according to the man:

What do you want with a woman she won't do nothin' you say?

What do you want with rooster when he don' crow for days?

(Blind Willie McTell, "Love Changin' Blues,"1929)

In these lyrics, the woman is compared to a rooster that fails to crow. Usually, a rooster's only work is to crow appropriately; when it fails, it is useless. Similarly, a woman has to be subservient to the male and, if not, she is condemned to be good for nothing.

Similarly Orhan Gencebay sings in "Tövbe", about a woman who acts unnaturally and who, as a result, loses the male protagonist love:

Gördün mü yaptığımı

Yalnız kaldığımı

Pişmiş aşı soğuk su

Nasıl da kattığımı

(Orhan Gencebay, "Tövbe,"1988)

[Did you recognize what you have done

You are left alone

And how you threw cold water

into the cooked food?]

The woman's guilt is that she threw cold water into the hot meal. This is unusual and means the same as the idiom "to upset the apple – cart": disrupting carefully made plans. Surely, in this understanding, the woman must have done something which, in the end, has made her be on her own. In fact, whether the woman has acted in a right or wrong way, if her action is unpleasant to the male, she is unnatural and therefore uncontrollable.

An extensively approved norm of both blues and arabesk men is that of religion. Men are very fond of religious rules that seem to work out only in the men's benefit. When analyzing blues and arabesk lyrics, it can be seen that the woman is usually depicted as an evil being or someone who is yielding and easily tempted to do some evil. The oldest understanding of evil among the African people, even before Christianity, was that of the trickster figure. In fact, the common characteristic is that the trickster deity breaks the rules of the gods or nature in the form of tricks or thievery. Tricksters are either cunning or foolish or both; they are often very funny even when considered sacred or performing important cultural tasks.

Among these trickster figures is Eshu – Elegbara. He is a West African trickster figure, a god of high metaphysical content, deceit, humor and lawlessness, and whose sexuality arouses curiosity. But Eshu – Elegbara is not only the god of communication and spiritual language; he is the gatekeeper between the realms of men and the gods. That is why Eshu – Elegbara also plays a crucial part in literary critic Henry Louis Gates's theory in the *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates uses Eshu – Elegbara to establish a model for African – American textual analysis. Indeed, Esu becomes a very important figure because, according to Gates, "Signifyin(g) is the figure of the double-voiced, epitomized by Esu's [divine trickster figure in black culture] depictions in sculpture as possessing two mouths" (xxv). Esu is represented as the Signifying Monkey who is a very crafty monkey. In one tale, Gates tells that, through the manipulation of language, the monkey manages to

trick both the lion and the elephant into doing what he wants. Signifyin(g) (or signifyin'), according to Gates, is an African-American rhetorical device featuring indirect communication or persuasion and the creating of new meanings for old words and signs. Signifying in everyday practice means in this case to tell people what you think about them or their actions in an indirect way.

The absolute evil represented in both the Christian and Islamic religions, however, is the devil. Both bluesmen and arabesk men constantly signify the woman as evil. It is a very ancient idea that Eve the woman was first tempted by the devil and then, in turn, she beguiled the man, Adam. Whether cunning or beguiling, the woman seems to carry all evil attributes. The bluesman, however, used biblical authority to justify his patriarchal dominance:

Well the old people tell me baby, but I never did know

The Good Book declares you've got the reap just what you sow.

(Skip James, "Cypress Grove Lyrics," 1964)

Blues music is very close to gospel music; and, indeed, many blues musicians started out singing gospel and then made the transition to blues. Stephen T. Asma points out that, "In the African American community there is often the perception that blues music is profane, while gospel is sacred and closer to God" (1). Consequently, it is ironic that the bluesman tries to justify himself with religion in a music that is thought to be the devil's music.

Asma goes on to quote the cultural historian Michael Bane, who describes the ongoing quarrel between secular and sacred music forms in his book, *White Boy Singin' the Blues*, like this:

The blues especially were the opposite side of sacred – blues singers went directly to hell, did not pass go, did not collect anything. You could sing gospel or the blues, but never both. The blues belonged to the Devil, with

his high-rollin' ways . . . and if you sang his music, the door to the Lord's house was shut to you. That's how it was in 1905 and that's how it is today.
(qtd. in Asma 1)

As a result, we can find the bluesman mixing religious norms with his desire for control and violence:

Now looka here mama let me tell you this
If you want to get crooked I'm gonna give you my fist
You might read from Revelation
Back to the Genessee
If you get crooked southern can belongs to me
Ain't no need you bringing your jive to me.
'Cause your southern is mine...

(Blind Willie McTell, "Southern Can is Mine," 1931)

In contrast to the bluesman, who justifies his behavior and finds support in biblical verses, the woman in arabesk songs is so evil that she makes the arabesk man confuse even the rules of dogma. In the following lyrics, the *Kible* is in the direction of Mecca, Medina is the city in Saudi Arabia where Muhammad was first accepted as the supreme prophet of Allah, and the *Kaaba* is a place in Mecca which has to be visited in order to complete the *Haj*, which means a pilgrimage. Altogether they comprise the most important symbols in Islam. However, the arabesk man does not hesitate to choose his woman's love over the holy symbols of his religion:

Kalp gözünden aldım onmaz darbeyi
O gün bu gün şaşırıyorum kibleyi
Bilemiyorum Medineyi Kabeyi
Yar gönlünü Hac eyledim giderim.

(Orhan Gencebay, "Giderim," 1987)

[I am hurt incurably by love
 Since then I mistake the Kiblah
 I don't know Medina from the Kaaba
 I performed the Haj to visit my lover's heart.]

Another inconsistency between gospel and blues music is that gospel follows closely the European concept of the dual self. According to this religious concept, the human being exists in the form of an immortal soul and the corruptible, evil body. In contrast to gospel spirituals, blues music often centers on sexual bravado. In the following song, however (sung by Cox Taylor – a blues woman who describes herself as an evil person who loves the devil), is an ultimate proof for the bluesman, who has already told his audience about the evil woman:

They call me Flamin' Mamie, cause I'm the hottest gal in town.
 When it comes to lovin'
 I'm a human oven
 And I know how to melt 'em down.
 Every time I shimmy,
 Every time I shake
 I can do more damage than a San Francisco quake.
 Yes, I love my way to hell
 I love the devil and I love him well.
 Little devils runnin' up and down the wall,
 Sayin' do somethin' caddy, before she loves us all.

(Koko Taylor, "Flamin' Mamie," 1985)

You've had your chance and proved unfaithful

So now I'm gonna be real mean and hateful

I used to be your sweet mama, sweet papa

But now I'm just as sour as can be.

(Bessie Smith, "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama", 1925)

So both blues and arabesk lyrics contain the depiction of woman as an evil being in order to obtain control over uncontrollable situations created by the woman.

Of course, such lyrics are protest songs, and they are sung in order to gain some relief and healing from the problems. However, those points only serve the man for the problem of his unstable control over the "other". The man does not object to supporting his ideas of superiority over the woman by justifying himself according to social and religious norms which are based on a patriarchal orthodoxy. There is no doubt that his major nightmare is a woman that he is unable to control. He would even rather be dead and buried than to have a woman he cannot control.

CONCLUSION: THE PHOENIX EFFECT OF BLUES AND ARABESK MUSIC

“Here cease more questions. Thou art inclined to sleep.’ Tis a good
dullness, And give it way. I know thou canst not choose. [Miranda sleeps]”

(Shakespeare, The Tempest 1.2, 13)

The example of Prospero’s daughter Miranda’s female passivity recalls the female figure in blues and arabesk lyrics, too. The women in both blues and arabesk lyrics are condemned to voicelessness. The man depicts the woman according to his prevailing mood. The female is like Miranda: a puppet, turning from angel, to a flower or a fruit. However, as soon as the man loses control over his woman, she turns for him into an evil being. Man puts her into the shape of his wishes. As Leininger says in her analysis, “It’s Prospero’s needs – the Prosperos of the world – not Miranda’s, which are being served here” (qtd. in Ruth 348).

However, we shouldn’t forget that there are also women singing the blues. Unlike the male country blues singer, who moved alone, following the migrant work circuit, women turned singing the blues into a professional career by working in steady jobs. Especially some great women singers like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, Alberta Hunter transferred blues to popular culture with their recordings. But although blues women sing about the same topics as men, there is still a difference. Harrision says that blues women “provided new slants” (13). She also says that women “dealt openly with the issues that were of particular concern to black women in the urban setting—freedom

from social and religious constraints, sexual and economic independence, alcoholism and drugs” (13). Indeed while most men used to sing blues in order to express their feelings, blues women used to sing to earn a stable income. Similarly arabesk women sing their songs for money and also glamour. The arabesk lyrics are written by male composers and songs by women in particular do not give any clue as to which gender the accusations or messages are addressed. The lover is always represented by the “o” which stands both for ‘he’ and ‘she’. Therefore both male and female listeners can identify themselves with songs by arabesk women. Without doubt the representations of men in blues and arabesk lyrics written by women, as well as matriarchal influences, would be another interesting theme for further studies.

While women singer are impartial, male singer point directly to the evil cause. Indeed, it is an astonishing fact that, although the blues and arabesk have hugely different backgrounds and cultures, they choose to depict the female as the “other”. The African American man could have chosen the European-American man as his “other”, while the arabesk man could have chosen the well-off city dwellers as his “other”. But injustice and poverty already surrounded both blues and arabesk artists and were a daily reality. The evil female, however, does not only represent the male singer’s absolute enemy but also his “other” as lover. We can find this in the lyrics as an expression of a love— hate relationship. Indeed in all song types analyzed, such as those dealing with unfaithful, deserting, and gold digging women, we can see that both blues and arabesk men are in love with their women. Especially the arabesk man openly shows his depression, because he still loves the woman who has betrayed him. So as a result a man has to love his “other” in order to create his real “other”. The “other” represents a person who is worth singing about, and who affects the singer immensely. The song is therefore not a kind of damnation but a way to ease his pain.

As mentioned earlier, the background and culture of blues and arabesk music differs significantly. The blues has an occidental background whereas arabesk is thought to be oriental. Blues music was formed by several transformations, from field hollers and work songs to the gospel; and it was influenced by “Scottish ballads, Methodist and Baptist hymns, Western traditions of instrumental accompaniment, and popular American music of the vaudeville stage” (Calliope Film Resources). As I have mentioned in chapter one, Arabesk music is generally accepted as having been created through the influences of popular Egyptian film music and the temporary gap in Turkish music radio channels, which caused the population to listen to the Arab music channel. It is a fact that the Turkish population was already familiar with arabesk instruments and recognized many similarities with Arabic culture. One specific similarity is the Islamic background which includes Islamic architecture, literature and music, as well as some social ideals such as establishing an honorable family, being an honest worker, and sacrificing oneself by obeying the head of the family which were common in Islamic-oriented communities. Therefore, themes like crimes of honor, the unreachable lover or the suffering caused by powerlessness in Egyptian film and music were transferred easily to Turkish film and music. However it is not only the geographic location that designates these populations as Oriental; for early Europeans, Oriental meant exoticism, romance and intrigue, which we can find plenty of in arabesk film. Edward Said himself defines being Oriental in his book *Orientalism*:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely

imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.

(2)

Although Turkish citizens were familiar with some arabesk elements there were still some Turkish critics who like the early Europeans used to describe the “otherness” of the Arab and Egypt influences on Turkish music by calling it “Easternness”. Stokes explains that:

Indeed, for many of its critics, arabesk expresses a negative and essentially ‘eastern’ aspect of the Turkish psyche about which something has to be done if the Turks are to be saved from themselves. Arabeskçi have of course used this discourse of Easternness to their own advantage, explaining (to me amongst others) that the popularity of arabesk owes its existence to the fact that the Turks are inextricably and essentially an ‘eastern’ people, and therefore much given to melancholic introspection and emotion (duygu). (98)

The analysis here, however, concerns not only the depiction of woman in blues and arabesk lyrics, but also man’s most basic fear: being unable to control his woman. His accusation is a kind of apology to conceal his inner conflict; he may still love her, but he cannot tolerate her unmanageable actions. He universalizes his problem by sharing it with his companions, and he wants his listener to agree with him that he is a victim. He does not want to see himself as the only one who is deceived and left alone. By sharing his experience, he tries to throw the blame of his personal problems on others. His negative emotional experience with women not only warns and teaches other men, but also helps him to feel relieved. While generalizing his problem, he becomes cleared of blame and

declares all other men innocent too. In this way, man immerses himself in pain and becomes satisfied. By 'satisfied', I mean that he is literally pleased with himself, his decisions and actions. This is the reason why blues and arabesk became so popular; they allow men to regain their power over woman. Being at the lowest emotional level, man comes up like the phoenix, the legendary Arabian bird which periodically burns itself to death and emerges from the ashes anew. This means that singing and listening to either the blues or arabesk music helps men to recover their power.

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