

Humanities Institute
Nazlı Bayram, Ph.D.

Oh, Beautiful Istanbul 1981

Ömer Kavur

OVERVIEW

Oh, Beautiful Istanbul is Ömer Kavur's fourth feature-length film. Kavur has adapted the film's scenario from Füzûzan's story. The film relates the love between a sex worker and a truck driver to the context of class relations. While the film could have become an example of melodramatic genre because of what characters go through, their choices, and the unhappy ending, due to Ömer Kavur's approach and Füzûzan's emphatic perspective as a writer, the film is realistic and invites the audience to reflection with its main and sub themes. Themes like poverty, labor exploitation, moral values, and androcentric ideology weave a detailed context for the love story at the forefront of the narrative.

Cevahir and Kamil characters are believable with their conflicting qualities, their weaknesses and strengths. As Cevahir becomes more miserable day by day, Kamil starts to face the consequences of his choice in his psyche and he becomes an unhappy, angry male. This trajectory of the character is one of the main strengths of the scenario. Other characters in the film, such as Father Nuri, Cengiz, neighbors and others stay as stock characters but they serve to enrich the reality of the film world.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The most riveting aspect of the film is the acting performances of Müjde Ar and Kadir İnanır, and Kavur's direction of his actors. Both actors successfully portray the transformation of their characters. Their performances are equally great when they are in high-tension scenes such as having sex, being happy together or fighting with each other, and also in scenes where they are reckoning and having conflicts with themselves.

CHARACTERS

Cevahir	A sex worker at the end of her twenties.
Kamil	A truck-driver around thirty years old.
Father Nuri	A fifty years old truck driver.
Cengiz	A young thirty year old smuggler.

SYNOPSIS

Truck driver Kamil has sex with Cevahir in the brothel that he went together with his friends. They fall in love with each other. Kamil rents a place far away from his old neighborhood so that they can live together with Cevahir. Cevahir quits her job and moves in with Kamil. Kamil gets into debt so that he can manage the expenses of their home. Money problems and the fear of his friends recognizing Cevahir turns him into a sad, angry person. Cevahir waits by herself back at home for Kamil to return from his days long jobs and she is unhappy because Kamil does not share his troubles with her. Their relationship starts to deteriorate. Kamil's friends see Cevahir. Kamil has decided to marry Cevahir; he buys fabric for her wedding dress while he is away on the job. Thinking that their relationship is not going to work because of all the social and financial pressures and unaware of Kamil's intentions, Cevahir leaves.

SCENES

The well. In the village, they carry out a woman's dead body from a well. Among the onlookers is a small girl. An old woman lays atop the body and cries.

The new truck. Truck driver Kamil makes his delivery and returns to Istanbul. Company staff greet him with joy. The owner Halil has bought a new truck. He talks about expanding the business. He asks Kamil to drive the new truck. The other driver, Erol, gets jealous of this proposal and invites Kamil to a race. Kamil refuses: "The good driver doesn't wear out his truck."

The coffee house. Another company worker Father Nuri and Kamil go to a coffee house. One of the people there proposes to Kamil a job that pays more. Father Nuri intervenes and argues that what Kamil earns is enough for him. Kamil is tired and gets out of there.

The neighborhood. People on the way back home to the neighborhood greet Kamil. One of them asks Kamil to find a job for her son Erdoğan. It is obvious that everyone loves and respects him. He falls asleep as soon as he gets in bed.

The brothel. In the evening, a friend comes by to pick him up. Kamil is getting ready. Together they go to a tavern. The same proposal from before, the smuggling job that pays more is again offered to Kamil. Kamil refuses. After drinks, they go to a brothel. Kamil chooses Cevahir. They get into a room. Cevahir takes her gum out and sticks it under the windowpane, and after Kamil is finished she takes the gum back and pops it back into her mouth. She says "cheers mate" and leaves the room. Kamil is smitten with Cevahir.

The co-pilot. In the morning, the neighbor's son Erdoğan arrives. Kamil gets ready and they go out together. While they drink tea at the coffee house, the friend who proposes the smuggling job gifts Kamil a new radio for the new truck. Erdoğan starts his job as Kamil's co-pilot. They get in the truck together and leave for the warehouse to load the truck. Erdoğan is elated. There is going to be a few hours of delay to load the truck.

Love? Kamil leaves the truck to Erdoğan and goes to the brothel. He asks for Cevahir. When they get into the room, they ask each other's names. When Cevahir learns that Kamil is a truck driver, she says that it was a truck driver who first brought her to Istanbul. They start to have sex. This time Cevahir does not act like a sex worker. Instead she is like someone who makes love to his lover. Kamil asks her: "Shall I come back for you again?". Cevahir answers: "Only if you don't forget."

Truck drivers. With his new assistant Erdoğan Kemal drives toward Mardin with a truck loaded with goods. On a stop he talks with other truck drivers. They are all either on their way back or on the way to make their deliveries.

Blouse. They arrive at Mardin and leave the truck at the company that ordered the goods. Kamil buys a woman's blouse from the shops. They eat and return to the hotel. Erdoğan asks who the blouse is for, Kamil lies. Late at night, Kemal and Cevahir are thinking of each other. Cevahir remembers the day she escaped from the village and got on a truck.

Day off. When Kamil gets back to Istanbul, he immediately goes off to see Cevahir. He gives her the blouse he bought. He asks to take her out someday. The next day Cevahir takes a day off and they get together, see a movie, and have drinks. Kamil talks about being a truck driver, the roads that he travelled on. At night they go to Kamil's home. At the early morning hours, while Kamil is still asleep, Cevahir silently leaves.

Bringing love home. Kamil goes to the brothel in the evening. Cevahir acts like she has never seen him before, as if he is just another man. It seems like she is trying to remind Kamil that she is a sex worker. They go to the room. Cevahir continues to act in the same way. Kamil gets angry and slaps Cevahir. She starts to cry. Kamil caresses her face and calms her down: "This is going to be hard here, what are we going to do?". They decide to get together in Cevahir's house from now on.

Home. At night Kamil waits for Cevahir to get off work. Together they go to Cevahir's house where she lives with two other sex workers. At some point they hear one of the women being verbally abused by a man. The man is insulting the woman, saying: "A whore's word means nothing!".

New home. Kamil asks his neighbor and Erdoğan's mother Nimet to find him a house. The women get excited thinking that Kamil is about to get married. Kamil has to haul cargo to Mardin again. Back home from the road, Kamil goes to see the house Nimet found. He likes it and promptly moves there. The owner of the house also thinks that Kamil is married.

Permanent. Cevahir is having breakfast with her roommate. Kamil arrives. Cevahir is surprised. Kamil tells Cevahir that he has come to take her home permanently. While Cevahir is changing clothes in her room, her roommate Nazlıcan enters with a few clothes of her own. She thinks that what Cevahir is wearing is inappropriate and she lends her a plain blouse which covers up her body. They move Cevahir's belongings to the new home. The owners help them.

First day in the new house. Kamil has gone to the company. Cevahir wakes up early. Steps out to the balcony. She watches the garden at the back of the house. She finds a kitten, pets it. While Cevahir is busy with chores Kamil returns. They drink tea together. Cevahir has hung curtains over the windows. She asks: "It looks beautiful doesn't it?". Cevahir gets lonely while Kamil is on the road so she asks for a television set to keep busy.

Picnic. By a brook they have put down a cover and food. Kamil washes his truck. They drink raki together.

The guest. Kamil goes on the road again. The house owner and her daughter visit Cevahir. While they drink tea, the owner woman tells Cevahir that they like her and asks her when they are going to have a baby.

Tension. Kamil is back home with a television set. Erdoğan arrives. They eat and watch TV. After Erdoğan leaves the two of them start talking about electric bills, debts and how they can barely make ends meet. Kamil is angry. He misunderstands Cevahir and accuses her of getting bored with living like this, waiting for Kamil while he is away. They argue. Cevahir asks him when he is going to marry her. Kamil says: "Wait".

The search. Kamil goes to the coffeehouse. Since they have not seen him for a while, everyone greets him warmly. Kamil tells Cengiz that he accepts the smuggling job he offered. Father Nuri notices what is going on and warns Kamil not to do business with Cengiz.

Boredom. Cevahir is bored of sitting at home all day, of Kamil being away for days and of having to wait for him. But she tries not to reveal her feelings.

Contraband. Kamil goes to the shop where he will get the contraband. The shop owner calls him to the back. They load two packages into the back. On the road back Kamil is on edge. He takes it out on Erdoğan.

Workplace homicide. During a stop, another truck driver approaches and tells that Father Nuri had an accident and he is in hospital. Kamil and Erdoğan quickly get back on the road to the hospital. Father Nuri dies. Kamil is devastated.

Rage. Back from the trip, Kamil goes directly to the company. He gives the news of Father Nuri's death. He gets angry because all the company owner cares about are the products in Father Nuri's truck but he does not say a word and goes to drink with Cengiz and his other old friends. After a while Erdoğan forces him to leave and takes him home. Kamil passes out without changing his clothes.

Keeping it in. In the morning, Cevahir wakes Kamil up. She has prepared breakfast. She asks Kamil to share his troubles with her. Kamil snaps at Cevahir.

Waiting. Kamil comes home late again. Cevahir has waited for him to have dinner. Kamil leaves some money for Cevahir to pay back their debts.

Old friends. Looking at display windows in the city, Cevahir chances upon her old housemates and work friends. They sit at a tea garden and chat. Her friends corner Cevahir about why they have not got engaged yet. One of them argues that Kamil would never marry her and that he has been lying to Cevahir.

Dreams. Kamil and Erdoğan are on the road. During a road stop Kamil talks about his dreams of buying a truck.

Old customers. Kamil is back from the road. Cengiz and another friend come to Kamil's home under the pretext of getting the contraband that Kamil brought from the southeast. Cevahir is the one who opens the door. Kamil loses his temper, turns them away and then gets angry at Cevahir for opening the door. He takes the packages to the coffeehouse. He gets into a fight with Cengiz and the others.

"How did I get into this trouble?" When Kamil comes back home, Cevahir greets him warmly. Both of them are dejected. They drink and sing together.

White satin. Kamil is away at work again. Sitting at home, Cevahir remembers her childhood, the dead body of her mother being lifted out of a well. In Mardin, Kamil buys white satin textile for Cevahir's wedding gown. At home, Cevahir leaves the gifts Kamil gave her on their bed. She takes the food she cooked to the house owner and tells them that she is going to visit a friend and that she will be staying

the night. She leaves home and walks around the crowded streets of İstanbul. She stops at Galata Bridge and looks down at the sea. She remembers her childhood and mother's death again. Kamil and Erdoğan on the road back to İstanbul.

THEMES

Exploitation. Even though *Oh, Beautiful Istanbul* seems like a love story, one of the main themes of the film revolves around the relationship between workers and their employees. The owner of the logistics company carelessly allows his long time employee Father Nuri to drive an old truck that constantly breaks down. Despite Kamil's insistent warnings, the company does not give a new truck to Father Nuri and with that old truck he has an accident and dies. In order to make speedy deliveries, the employer turns a blind eye to sleep deprived and tired drivers driving for long hours. Kamil is one of those who drive for too long and make quick deliveries which is why he is appreciated by the owner. A new truck is purchased for Kamil so that he can make deliveries even quicker. On top of that, for all the hard and dangerous jobs that Kamil does, he cannot even lead a comfortable life, he has to constantly borrow money to cover even the basic necessities of life. One of the causes that erodes his relationship with Cevahir is the steep cost of living.

Violation. Behaviours which do not conform to laws or moral principles are violations. While the sanctions against violating laws are determined by legislation, consequences of violating moral principles differ from being ostracized to lynching according to the structure of specific societies. Traditional, patriarchal societies tend to restrict and control the lives of individuals, especially the lives of women, through broadly comprehensive concepts such as honor and morality. Male dominant ideology plainly reveals itself in moral principles. Forms of interpersonal relationships such as a love, sexual intercourse and marriage are also influenced by discourses constructed through this ideology. Characters of *Oh, Beautiful Istanbul*, Cevahir and Kamil, lead a relationship that violates the patriarchal society's moral principles and measures. Patriarchal ideology cannot accept marriage with a sex worker or having a relationship out of marriage. According to this ideology, a woman appropriate for marriage should be a "clean", "honorable" woman who has not been together with other men. Kamil violates this rule and falls in love with a woman who is not considered "clean" and "honorable" by dominant norms. Throughout their relationship, he is constantly scared of being seen and recognized by Cevahir's friends or people from his old neighborhood. Cevahir notices Kamil's fear. She is also scared of being seen by Kamil's acquaintances or her old occupation being found out by their new neighbors. She knows that such an encounter would harm their relationship. Out of nowhere, Kamil's friends from his old neighborhood decide to pay a visit. The dreaded encounter comes to pass. Kamil gets angry and shouts at Cevahir for opening the door. Then Cevahir tries to hurt Kamil back for being reprimanded by saying to him: "Your friends saw me? They saw the hooker you hid in your home, they even knew". Which is why Kamil goes to the coffeehouse and starts shouting at Cengiz. Cengiz asks Kamil why he got so furious: "Is it because we saw our sister-in-law?". Kamil fights with his old friends.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Cevahir A sex worker at the end of her twenties, Cevahir is a highly confident, realist woman. As shown in the first scene of the film, and later a few times more, her mother has committed suicide by jumping into a well. The removal of her mother's dead body from the well which she witnessed as a child is an event that she remembers at her darkest moments. The trauma of being witness to this event, her disappointment over her relationship with Kamil and the heartbreak of not being able to overcome societal pressures makes her vulnerable; even though it is not openly shown, at the end of the film it seems that she is forced to make the same choices as her mother.

Strong. Her attitude in the brothel, her choice to leave her job and change her lifestyle completely in order to be with Kamil, and in the end leaving behind Kamil and maybe her life, shows that she is a strong, confident character who can make her own choices.

Realist. After having an emotional and passionate sexual experience, Kamil comes back again but Cevahir realistically discerns that love between them would be hard and could have dire consequences so she behaves as if Kamil is just like any other men in order to push him away. Being a sex worker, she is painfully aware that having a relationship under the oppressive male gaze and society's moral values would be hard.

Vulnerable. Kamil's social anxieties that he cannot overcome and his inability to share his troubles isolates Cevahir, wears down her strong impulses and results in her giving up her life just like her mother.

Kâmil A truck driver in his early thirties. He transports goods to cities south and southeast of Istanbul. He is an honest, open-minded man adored by everyone yet also a traditional male who is not shy about violence against women.

Honest. Kamil works a difficult job without complaining or paying heed to lack of sleep and being tired. A couple of times he refuses to make some easy money by smuggling contraband from the southeast cities he travels to. As debts mount and his relationship with Cevahir deteriorates, reluctantly he starts to smuggle electronic goods.

Open-minded. Kamil is open-minded enough to fall in love with a sex worker in a brothel, dream about a life with her, and do anything he can to make that dream come true.

Angry. He is also scared that his friends and people from the neighborhood would learn that Cevahir has been a sex worker. This fear and the increasing cost of living turns him into an angry person.

Traditional. For all his open-mindedness, he is also representative of the patriarchal society so much so that he beats Cevahir, shouts and derides her. First he strikes the woman he loves in the brothel where Cevahir reminds him that she is a sex worker. Later, as Kemal becomes more and more angry, distressed, and unhappy, he shouts and scolds Cevahir when she approaches him and asks about his troubles or when she opens the door to his neighborhood friends who come to visit. Kamil's reluctance to officially get married with Cevahir despite living together for a long while and using the hardships of making a living and his debts as an excuse show that he cannot overcome the moral perspective of a patriarchal society.

Father Nuri A truck driver in his fifties. A character who does not complain about the hardships and exploitation he has to endure to make a living out of fear of losing his job, and who does not approve of making money through easy and illegal ways.

Compromiser. Against Kamil's persistence warnings, the company does not give Father Nuri a newer truck. When Kamil talks about this problem, he ends the discussion saying that he can continue to work with his old truck, that he is able to deal with the problem.

Honest. When Cengiz tells Kamil that he would easily make much more money by smuggling goods, Father Nuri intervenes and tries to prevent Kamil from getting involved with an illegal job saying that "What he makes is enough for him". Kamil's debts have mounted. Before a job, he tells Cengiz that he would like to do the smuggling job. Nuri Baba notices this and warns Kamil saying "Don't get involved with Cengiz, he is no good for you".

Cengiz In his early thirties, Cengiz is an old friend of Kamil from the neighborhood who makes a living by smuggling goods. While the others labor in difficult conditions, Cengiz is after making much more money with less effort. He is a selfish character who exploits other people's weaknesses.

Selfish. Noticing that Kamil is pressed for money, he tries to persuade him since he found someone else who can deliver contraband. He doesn't care one bit about the possibility of Kamil being caught.

Hearing the rumors about Kamil getting married, he goes to his house under the pretense of checking on the contraband. His real goal is to see who Kamil lives with. During his fight with Kamil in the coffeehouse, he implies that he knows Cevahir. He also doesn't care how Kamil, his old friend, would be affected by this implication. To make him more angry, he says: "We saw our sister-in-law..."



Kamil and his neighborhood friends go to the brothel after drinks.



Cevahir and Kâmil. The beginning of a love affair.



Kamil and Erdoğan in a lengthy drive. Cevahir is in Kamil's thoughts.



Cevahir thinks about Kamil.



First meeting out in the open.



They drink and sing at home. Both of them are on the verge of a decision.



Cevahir's choice.