

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Easy Emine 1975

Ömer Kavur

OVERVIEW

Adapted to cinema from a short story of Refik Halik Karay by Ömer Kavur, *Easy Emine* (Yatık Emine) is an important and brave film with respect to its handling of religious belief, morals and virtues of people from rural geographies, the male gaze, conscience and human rights.

Its scenario has been blocked by censorship a few times. Despite the changes to the text, the censorship committee prohibited the shooting of the film. Then the help of Turgut Özakman is asked for who is an experienced writer. That is how, after several rewrites, changes imposed by the censorship committee being implemented, with the addition of scenes and characters better suited to a feature length, the film can finally be completed. During its run in theaters, the film is censored once more and some scenes are cut (Esen, 2014).

Easy Emine is a period film. The story is set in the Ottoman Empire's last period, toward the end of the 19th century, just after the Constitutional Monarchy was declared.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Telling a story set in a historical period, the film is very successful in creating an atmospheric impression of reality. The film offers striking pictures with its cinematography by Renato Falt and it's also one of the best cinematic examples to come out of Turkey in terms of directing art and actors. *Easy Emine* is the first feature length film by Ömer Kamur and it can be considered as a prelude to his future films both theoretically and artistically.

CHARACTERS

Emine	A young woman exiled for being an alleged sex worker. In her twenties.
Server	A young man exiled for being a proponent of constitutional monarchy. In his thirties.
Kumandan	A lieutenant responsible for the military units as well as public order. In his twenties.

SYNOPSIS

After being kidnapped by a man in her village with the promise of marriage, Emine is raped and abandoned. Because she cannot go back to her home, she is forced to become a sex worker. State officials exile her to a town. When the townspeople learn the reason behind Emine's arrival, they shun her believing that she would corrupt their morality and seduce their menfolk. No one employs her, no one takes her in their homes. The political exile Server who tries to help Emine is forcibly involved in a fight and gets punished. Worn down by hunger and cold, Emine dies.

PLOT

Between soldiers. Emine walks toward the town between two soldiers.

Exile. While the commander writes a letter to his mother, an officer brings the official letter from the district governor. The letter informs that "easy Emine from indecent stock" is exiled to the township the commander is in charge of. They bring Emine to the commander's office. Sternly, the commander asks her name. When Emine starts talking, he cuts her short and he orders her to be sent to the holding cell.

The holding cell. They bring Emine to the room with two more women in it. One of them asks her if she is hungry. Emine is hungry but the other woman does not approve of giving bread to her.

The news quickly spreads. In a pharmacy, the commander and three state officials drink and talk about politics. One of them brings the subject to Emine. The shop owner Dimitri eavesdrops. In the coffeehouse, he tells the townsfolk about what he heard. Some of them loudly express their disapproval of Emine's exile to their town.

The fear of women. Around the water fountain, the women gossip about Emine. They are scared that she will turn the heads of their husbands.

Worried councilors. The councilors of the municipality visit the district government. They tell him their grievance about Emine's exile to their town. The governor tells them that they cannot go against the orders of the vice governor's office and that he hopes that Emine will come to learn being virtuous in this town.

The first lynching attempt. The women in the jail that Emine shares her room with beat Emine when they learn that she has been sent to the town as an exile for being a sex worker. The warden takes Emine out of the room.

A warm meal. The district governor sends Emine to Tahir's house, one of the public servants working for him. When they pass them by, the neighborhood housewives see Emine and start gossiping. Tahir's wife greets Emine by saying: "Welcome". Emine is hungry because the women in jail had prevented her eating. She eats at the same table with Tahir's family.

What kind of a person is she? Emine washes the dishes. Tahir's wife and her child go to a neighbor's house for coffee. The women of the neighborhood ask about Emine and say that they want to see her: "We should learn some womanly wiles from her". Tahir's wife says that Emine is a wretched person and brings the women home. During this, the youth of the town start following Tahir and ask degrading questions about Emine. Tahir gets rid of them. Back at home, when the women start touching Emine's hair, her kerchief, Tahir's wife sends her to another room.

Tahir's intention. While Emine lays down the table for dinner, Tahir and her young son watch her. At night, Emine brushes her hair in the mirror in her room.

Meeting with the Commander. Emine washes laundry beside the creek. Other women had also come down there to wash. They talk about Emine. On the way back home, she runs into the commander on his horse.

The second lynching attempt. On his way back home, the youth of the town once again start trailing Tahir and making insinuating remarks. Tahir accuses them of moral corruption and turns his back to them. At home, his wife asks him to sit in the garden since she has women guests at home. Hoping to see Emine, Tahir is happy to comply. Emine is hanging laundry in the garden. Tahir approaches her and first, harrasses her by touching and when she tries to get away, he attempts to rape her. Tahir's wife sees all of this. The wife and all the neighbors beat Emine and throw her out. Tahir calls the military police. With the commander's order, two policemen take Emine to a hospital. They arrive at the hospital late at night. The nurse gives Emine the bed of a woman who has recently died.

A smiling man. When Emine wakes up in the morning, Server is looking at her with a smile on his face. He has brought soup to her. Server is also in exile. He has been helping around the hospital. Server tells Emine that he would help her whenever she needs it.

Making acquaintances with Server. A few days have passed, Emine has recovered her strength, she has cleaned and tidied up her room. Server comes in again with a tray of food. Passing by the room, the doctor sees them and stops by. Server uses this opportunity to ask the doctor to find Emine a job. The doctor accepts. When Server sees that Emine does not give any response to this, he starts to imitate a bear in order to cheer Emine up.

Dimitri's shop. The district governor, the doctor, the commander and the notables of the town are in Dimitri's shop having a conversation when the subject comes to the wedding of the baker's son, then to Emine and Server. The commander is disturbed by this subject and leaves.,

Jealousy. The commander goes to the hospital. In a rage, he goes to Emine's room saying: "Where is that tramp?". When he sees that Server is not with Emine, he is both surprised and happy. Saying that he cannot stay at the hospital, he leaves. He orders someone to find a house for Emine and says that he will personally pay the rent.

Falling into disrepute. The sergeant arrives to take Emine to the house the commander rented for her. Upon seeing this, Server asks the chief physician for help. The chief physician knows that Emine is not really a sex worker but tells Server that he cannot help because of her bad reputation. Server and Emine are both upset.

A hovel. The sergeant takes Emine to a run-down house far away from the town center. In order to make a living, Emine goes door to door, asking women for work. They all close the doors on her.

The bride's bathhouse. The baker's son will have a wedding soon. Her mother-in-law takes the bride to the (Turkish) bathhouse. She gathers the women around her, takes her bride's loincloth down and shows her body to everyone.

Crazy İsmail. When Emine cannot find any employment, he goes to a petition-writer to send a petition to the commander. The first two writers send her off. When Crazy İsmail hears Emine's story, he writes her petition without asking for any money. Emine takes the petition to the commander. The commander orders his allocated ratio of bread to be given to Emine. Then he goes to the district governor and offers a position for Emine in the hospital. Fearful of the city governor's and the townspeople's reactions, he refuses. The sergeant takes Emine to the bakery and relates the commander's order. Reluctantly, the baker allows Emine to take bread.

Rational Server. On her way back home, Emine sits underneath a tree and eats her bread. Passing through there, Server sees Emine and approaches. He asks after her, asks if she needs anything. When Emine answers: "Thanks to God!" Server protests, he says that giving thanks has no earthly use.

The house becomes home. Server hires a horse drawn carriage and brings Emine blankets, duvets and a stove for her home. He is invited to the baker's son's wedding. He says that he will bring back food in the evening, and leaves.

The wedding. Women and men are celebrating in separate rooms. The district governor sends the sergeant and forces the commander to attend the wedding. While they eat and drink, Server leaves the wedding silently. With food he took from the wedding, he goes to Emine. Emine makes him coffee.

The gossip gets uglier. Rıza, one of the young people of the town, is spying on Emine's house. In the coffee house, he tells people that Server brings Emine's home furniture, that he visits her frequently. The district governor asks the commander to put a stop to this situation and forbid Server from seeing Emine.

Indecent proposal. His housemate asks Server to take him along while he goes to Emine. Server gets angry and threatens his friend with a knife in hand.

Commander confides in his mother. In the letter that he writes to his mother, the commander tells that the only person who is good towards Emine is Server and that he is the only one who agrees with him. But now he has to punish Server.

Provocation. Rıza is sitting at the coffee house with the baker's newly wedded son. When he sees Server, he runs outside. In order to provoke Server into a fight he slaps him, he knocks his food basket off his hands. When he calls Emine "bitch", Server cannot hold back anymore and he punches Rıza.

Server is sent away. The commander reluctantly sends Server to the quarry as a watchman in order to punish him. Server is worried about Emine's situation. The commander says: "Don't worry, no one can harm a hair on her head".

Opportunist. Server's friend approaches Emine and says to her: "If you indulge me I'll take care of you". Emine fends him off.

What goes on in the bakery. The baker tells Rıza that his newly wedded son cannot have sexual intercourse with his wife and asks him for help. Just then Emine comes in to buy bread. The baker does not give her anything. Emine goes to the commander to complain but he is away on an inspection and is not coming back for ten, fifteen days. Emine goes to petition-writer Crazy İsmail and tells him about the situation. İsmail gets angry and they go to the bakery together. He gives money to the baker and asks for bread. The baker does not give the bread and while they argue, Emine takes the bread and runs; the workers of the baker catch her. İsmail intervenes and saves Emine. Soon Rıza arrives and tells the baker that he has the solution for his son Ali. He would take Ali to Emine so that he gains experience.

The new bride. Rıza tells his idea to Ali but Ali, fearful of falling into more disgrace, refuses. During this, Ali's wife who brings food to the table flirts with Rıza with her eyes.

Nothing to hold on. Emine goes to the bakery but gets cold feet. She goes to Crazy İsmail to ask for help. İsmail sees her coming, enters into his shop and closes the door. He is also against Emine now.

Plunder. A few women smash the objects in Emine's house, they break the windows and take some stuff away. Emine comes back home, she has nothing left. Cold and hungry, she is worn down.

Riza's disappointment. Ali and Riza meet up in the coffee house. Ali has prepared a basket of food so that Emine warms to him. When they enter, they see Emine on the floor and think that she is sleeping. When Riza turns her body over, they realize that she is dead. Riza says: "The bitch is dead. She has found just the day to die" and starts touching and kissing Emine. Ali forces Riza off Emine's body. They leave her corpse just like that and leave.

THEMES

Lynching. We are familiar with this concept. Although it may seem like an event belonging to the 20th century and before, we also witness lynching today. Lynching is when a person or a community who is presumed to be guilty according to a society's values is subjected to violence and killed by society without any judicial process. There are two kinds of lynching in *Easy Emine*. The first one goes like this: Emine is sent to prison where she stays in the same room with two convicted women. When these women learn the reason why Emine was sent to this town, they attempt to beat her. Emine is sent to a district government official, Tahir's house when no place can be found for her to stay. There, she helps around the house. Yet Tahir attempts to rape Emine. Tahir's wife and a few neighborhood women assume that Emine is the guilty one and beat her. Emine is wounded. This is the second lynching in the film. In both events, there is physical violence. Yet the greatest lynching in the film occurs when Emine is humiliated, marginalized, and condemned to hunger, cold and sickness unto death. The story of the film is the story of this lynching.

Hypocrisy. The film depicts the community of the town as a community of people who are all hypocrites. This is surely not just a quality particular to this town. When people cannot live according to their real emotions, ideas and desires, they hide these emotions, ideas and desires in order to avoid being cast out from their society. Yet the real problem arises when they hide behind the humiliation and condemnation of other people. The people of this town behave just like this. In order to maintain their power which comes from their social positions and duties, they use religious values to belittle and accuse people who are weaker than themselves like Emine and Server. They put enormous emphasis on being respectable and they act as if they are so. Without listening to Emine's truth, they accuse her of being unvirtuous and condemn her to hunger. Emine is merely trying to survive; she wants to find some work and have something to eat. The men in town try to disgrace Emine so that they can justify raping her. The women, scared that Emine will steal their husbands, humiliate her but they also want to learn the ways of behaving coquettishly from her. The consequence of

"The place where people talk too much about being honorable is the place where you find too many dishonorable people". The film puts across this idea in a powerful way.

Exile. Being exiled is being sent, by force, to a place which is foreign, far away from the places where one lives or grew up, usually someplace where it is harder to make a living. Refik Halid Karay, the author of the story on which the film has been based, has also been punished with exile during a certain period of his life. The exiled ones become strangers. This form of punishment tries to make the person lonely by separating them from the place where they feel safe, where there are people who support and help them thrive. There are two exiles in the film: Server, who is punished for being a supporter of constitutional monarchy is exiled to the town for political reasons. On the other hand Emine is exiled for being a sex worker, for being "corrupt" according to the values of society. Both are people who are considered not of themselves by the townspeople.

Woman as body. One of the main attitudes toward women in a patriarchal society is reducing women into bodies and social roles. Instead of a being who has identity, personality, mind, intellect and rights, women are perceived as female bodies. Which is why women's bodies are considered as objects that have to be hidden or displayed, directly related to concepts such as chastity, cleanliness, morality, sublimity or impurity. Men derive their power to use women according to their ends and desires from the dominant ideology that reproduces these attitudes endlessly. In *Easy Emine*, with the exception of Server, the commander and Crazy Ismail, there are lots of moments and scenes that depicts how men consider women as mere bodies. The most striking one among them is the scene where Riza attempts to rape Emine's dead body. As if to go out with one last striking image, the film ends with this scene. One of the district governor's officials, Tahir's attempted rape in the garden, other government officials and shopkeepers who talk about Emine's body in hushed and lustful tones or who label her or as a scarlet woman while they look out for a chance to have sex with her, or at least dream about it, demonstrate that they all reduce Emine into a body.

Not only the men, the women in the film also reproduce the dominant ideology's discourses. For instance, while they gossip about her, they describe Emine as scrawny, witchlike. In order to understand

what kind of a person she is, they touch her body. Not just Emine, but all the women appear to be reduced to bodies. The woman who takes her daughter-in-law to a bathhouse gathers other women around her to make them gaze at her and she lowers her loincloth so that they can have a look at her breasts.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Emine A young woman in her twenties who is exiled and outcast because she is allegedly a sex worker. Emine is a skinny, delicate woman because she is undernourished. Yet she tries to make money and work as a cleaning woman. She is a victim of society's moral norms and hypocrisy.

Victim. Emine is a "sullied" woman in the eyes of society because she has been kidnapped and raped by the village head's son. Men need her to be a potential impure object of desire so that they can satiate their desires. If her rights, her innocence were ever recognized, they would never be able to take advantage of her. That is why she is insulated, cast out and abandoned to hunger. Emine is the victim of the patriarchal society and an ideology feeding on religion and traditional values.

Server A young man who has been exiled for being a supporter of constitutional monarchy. Server is a person who reads, who thinks, who is rational and just. These qualities make him mutinous in the eyes of society.

Rational. Server questions traditional values. When Emine says to him that the bad things that happened to her are a part of her destiny and that she is thankful for finding bread and shelter, Server rejects her. The talk between them clearly shows that Server is someone who thinks and questions:

Server: "What did you gain by being thankful until now? You already have a bad reputation. These people won't show you mercy, they won't employ you, they won't bring you into the fold and they'll attempt to crush you every time they have an opportunity... Do you think they would believe you? They exile you to this corner of hell and they never think how you'll survive."

Emine: "My fate is surely sealed Server."

Server: "What happened to you has nothing to do with fate. It was maybe you or maybe others who wanted to be like this."

In a sense, Server refuses religious concepts such as fate or destiny. He claims that what happens to people is either because of their own choices or because of society's impositions. Instead of religious dogma, he defends rationality.

Just. Constitutional monarchy was based on the idea of restricting the Ottoman ruler's power by a parliament in order to secure peoples' legal rights. Server's support of constitutional monarchy means that he wants a judicial system in the Ottoman government secured by reforms and constitution. Server is just in his political views and in his personality. That is why in contrast to all others, he tries to help Emine instead of judging and blaming her.

The commander. A lieutenant in his twenties responsible for the military units located in the town and the surrounding area, as well as public order in the town. The commander is an emotional character with good intentions who is unable to take initiative. He is mostly quiet and does not engage too much with the townsfolk. Because he is from İstanbul, he is not from the town and he is reluctant to express his ideas and his emotions.

Unable to take initiative. Emine's exile forces him to deal a couple of times with her shelter and food problems. He orders the bread allocated to him to be given to Emine but he doesn't follow up if that order is carried out. Even though he is against them, he acquiesces to the district governor's requests. He does not defend what should be done.

While he leaves for the quarry to fulfill his punishment, Server is worried about Emine's situation. The commander says: "Don't worry, they can't touch even a single hair on her head" yet he is unable to protect her and care about her as Server did.

Emotional. In his letter to his mother, he talks about missing İstanbul. He writes about the town: "I have to be rigid as a rock. Because here, even compassion is considered a weakness." He is scared to fall into contempt by the townsfolk if he cannot act according to his role.

The district governor, the chief physician and the pharmacist talk about Emine and Server during a conversation. He is disturbed by what is being talked about Emine as well as her relationship with Server. He has taken a fancy to Emine and he gets jealous. Driven by his emotions, his male-dominant discourse is revealed: He goes to the hospital, shouting: "Where is that tramp?" and barges into Emine's room. He supposes that Server is with Emine. He orders someone to find a suitable house for Emine and says that he will pay the rent himself.

Conscientious. The commander orders his allocated ration of bread to be given to Emine. Then he goes to the district governor and offers to employ Emine in the hospital. He tries to help but he is also unable to take a tough stance against the district governor. He does not oppose him when the district governor says: "Is it worth disturbing our peace of mind for a hussy?". In the letter to his mother, he writes about how he is the only one who treats her right is Server and he is the only one who agrees with him. Yet he has to punish Server.

References

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Emine used to laugh when she was a child. Server is able to make her laugh again.



The commander sees Emine for the first time. Cold, distant.



Emine is worn out by hunger.



The locker room talk everywhere in town is similar. The subject inevitably comes to Emine.



The shopkeepers gossip about Emine.



Server is gone too. Emine is left alone and desperate.



Ali tries to save Emine's dead body from Rıza.