

Lynch (1970) Bilge OLGAÇ

Overview

Lynch, with the subtitle *Arap Kadir*, can be considered one of the best films of Bilge Olgaç. *Lynch* was adapted from Kerim Korcan's novel of the same name. It was the film in which Olgaç gained visibility as a director when it competed with Yılmaz Güney's *Hope* and Halit Refiğ's *I gave my heart to a Turk* at the 1970 Adana Film Festival and won third place, and Olgaç herself received the best director award. It is one of the rare movies which takes place entirely in a prison except for one scene; it also takes place between men except for a female character who appears in one scene.

The film is considered to have been the source of inspiration for *Tatar Ramadan*, which later achieved great success and gained an important place in Turkish cinema history. Olgaç succeeded in creating a deeply drawn character and in criticizing the system in the film. It was shot using a realistic approach and was censored at the time because of its widespread swearing and slang. This film can be regarded as a transition from Olgaç's early period when she made avant-garde male films to her second period when she was more concerned with social issues.

Cinematic Narration

In *Lynch*, Olgaç did not lean towards the dominant film language of the period but tried to develop a narrative and style of her own. The film starts with the setting up of the actual set and makes it clear to the audience that it is a film which must be watched from the very beginning. The actors on the set of the film which Olgaç is to direct are talking among themselves as the film starts, then a voice is heard: 'Which lens will we use in this shot, Bilge?' Olgaç replies 'It will be the 50mm'. After this opening scene, which was designed to create an effect of alienation, the film itself begins with a prison corridor shot with a Dutch angle.

The opening credits for the film last for about 18 minutes. After it has started, the shots freeze and the names are superimposed over style photographs. It can be argued that this is a highly innovative approach; the audience is immediately thrown out of the film once again with the freeze-frames and the names written over the important moments of the film. From this opening, it is immediately understood that the film is taking a different line from the dominant style and narrative of the period.

The film breaks the continuity editing many times. Some moments are repeated twice whereas others are left unfinished. In addition, the way in which the character Arap Kadir's personal problems and hallucinations are shot gives an opportunity to the director to explore other possible expressions in the film.

Characters

Arap Kadir Kadir is the main character of the film. We follow his story from his village to the prison and then to a lynching.
Şevket The prison governor.
Rüştü The chief prison guard.
Selim A political prisoner.
Bayraklılı Fethi Bey The agha of the prison who teaches Kadir about life in the prison and is sent to another prison after handing over his duties to Kadir.

Summary

Arap Kadir has been sentenced to imprisonment after shooting someone while helping a friend to kidnap a girl in their village. A very different environment awaits him in prison. He attracts the attention of Fethi Bey, the agha of the prison, by his honesty and his upright attitude. He agrees to hurt

someone for him in exchange for a pita and hot tea. During his sentence, he maintains his loyalty and Fethi makes him his right hand man and teaches him the subtleties of being the agha. Fethi is then transferred to another prison and the job of being agha of the prison is left to Kadir. But Kadir is a different type of agha. He introduces some new regulations; he prohibits gambling for example. But it is not only the aghas in the prison who can make money from gambling, the prison guards can also make money from gambling and from protection payments. All those who have lost this source of income start to stand against Kadir. The chief prison guard Rüştü has him confined to his cell without any justification when his income from gambling is cut. Kadir fights this injustice by finding an escape route and he runs away. After hiding outside, he cannot stand hunger and fatigue and takes refuge in a village. He falls in love with the daughter of the *muhtar* who is the only woman in the film, while he is staying in her house. The *muhtar*, however, hands him in to the police and Kadir is returned to prison. Confined to his cell again, he is not even allowed to go to the toilet this time. The prison governor comes to his cell but Kadir stabs him when the governor insults him. Kadir manages to prove that he was provoked into committing the crime with help of a political prisoner named Selim, and he is given only a light punishment. Eventually, Kadir, back in prison again, is on the receiving end of trouble from the other prisoners. Throwing him into a 'luxury' single cell and isolating him on the pretext of protecting him from the other prisoners is exactly what the guards want. After nine months in solitary confinement, Kadir goes to the administrative section on the pretext of going to the infirmary, he stabs Rüştü, the chief guard. The guards provoke the prisoners into beating Kadir up. He survives, but has been seriously injured. He is supposed to be kept in the cell until his wounds heal, but as he passes through the courtyard on the way to the ward, he is lynched by the other prisoners.

Story

The background to the story Arab Kadir agrees to help a friend from his village to kidnap a girl. During the kidnap, events get out of control and Kadir shoots someone and is sentenced to prison. He is the son of a poor family and after he is sent to prison, they stop helping him and he is completely alone. The agha of the prison is Fethi Bey and the prison governor Şevket is newly appointed, having previously been a chief commissioner of police. He wants to prove himself by establishing his control because nobody believes that someone from the police can do the job. For this reason, he becomes the puppet of the head guard who has been there for years and who has ruled the prison. The head guard is someone who can arrange situations by manipulating the prisoners in accordance with his own interests. At the beginning of the film, he tells the newly appointed governor about the prisoners one by one and by this device, the audience is introduced to the characters.

The friendship with Fethi Bey Kadir attracts the attention of the prison's agha, Fethi Bey, by his rebellious but brazen attitude. He shows a rebellious stance to Fethi, who forces him to listen to Fethi's music: "It is impossible for you to get out of the ward so you can stop listening to my music". Kadir resents Fethi's domination and refuses to pay tribute to him, but he develops a secret admiration for him. Even though Fethi oscillates between crushing him and using him, he eventually decides to test Kadir's loyalty. One day, in one of the other wards, Kadir slashes an elderly prisoner who was trying to rebel against Fethi. He does this in exchange for Fethi sending hot pita and tea to the cell with a walnut-sized lump of butter. A political prisoner named Selim describes this situation as follows: Kadir is responsible for only one of the ten crippled steps he will take from now on. His surroundings determine the other nine. He was thinking about a cup of tea when he took that one step and ended up scalding himself. Kadir is put into solitary confinement.

Kadir becomes the new agha of the prison Fethi surrenders his position of lordship to Kadir. He tells him about the intricacies of being the prison Agha. He explains that cows should be prevented from revolting – by cows, he means the prison officers. He tells Kadir that you can manage them by establishing a balance between carrot and stick, a balance between violence and vanity. He also tells him about ways to punish someone. He says that punishment should be used when it is deserved. But Kadir becomes a very different agha from Fethi: he sides with the oppressed, he prohibits gambling and he bans the taking and giving of protection money and bribes. He challenges the prison administrators who exercise psychological control over the prisoners.

Cell again The head guard Rüştü, whose income has been cut off because of Kadir's new regulations decides that he has to do something about Kadir. It is not difficult for him to convince the new governor, who is already concerned about maintaining his own authority, to return Kadir to his cell, so

even though Kadir has done nothing wrong, he is thrown into the isolation cell again. Even though he comes close to going insane in the cell, he still does not ask for mercy. Kadir confronts his own fears here. His biggest fear is having to cooperate with the administration and asking them for mercy. He has hallucinations. One night, Kadir manages to escape between the loose bars of the cell while the guard is masturbating and the governor is entertaining a woman. Kadir's escape effort, the masturbating guard and the governor's sex scene, which are shown as parallel images, are particularly strong scenes.

Escape After escaping from the prison, Kadir hides for a whole day but cannot endure the hunger and fatigue and he takes shelter in the house of the *muhtar* (headman) of one of the surrounding villages. He meets the daughter of the house (Fatma Karanfil) and they strike up a relationship. She is the only woman in the film. The *muhtar* betrays Kadir to the police and although Kadir is aware this, he remains in the *muhtar's* house because he is hungry and tired of running away. Perhaps he understands that the cell which is outside is worse than the cell which is inside. In the morning, the police arrive and take him away and as he is led away, he tells the *muhtar* "I knew that I was not in the mountains which hide Çakırcalı".

Returned to the Cell Kadir is thrown back into the cell. This time he is also not allowed even to go to the toilet, and even the smallest humanitarian conditions are taken away. Defying the situation at the cost of burning himself, Kadir sets the mattress in his cell on fire and the guards restore his right to go to the toilet. The governor comes to his cell and insults Kadir, who stabs him. Kadir's claim that the governor had insulted him is confirmed by the political prisoner Selim, and Kadir receives only a light punishment.

The ward and isolation again Kadir eventually returns to the ward but he gets into trouble with the other prisoners. He is put into a 'luxury' single ward and isolated on the pretext of protecting him from other prisoners, which is exactly what the guards want. After nine months in solitary confinement, Kadir, on the pretext of going to the infirmary, goes instead to the administrative section and stabs the head guard Rüştü. The guards provoke the prisoners into beating Kadir up. He survives the beating but is seriously injured. He is kept in the cell until his wounds heal and is then to be returned to the ward.

The lynching Kadir is aware of what could happen to him on his way to the ward as he passes through the courtyard. Those who want to protect their own interests instead of justice join forces to kill him, but even at the last moment, even though he understands what will happen to him, Kadir does not deviate from the way he knows is right.

Themes

Criticism of the system It can be said that the main theme of the film is criticism of the system. The prison is like a micro-scale representation of the system. It is like a place chosen just to show the badness of the system in a more brutal way, as if an order established by the unwanted in society is intended to reflect the general order. Corruption starts with the initial power. Although the governor is a faint-hearted and cowardly man, he has a huge ego. There are many who think that he cannot govern the prison because he has come from the police service. He begins to introduce incomprehensible changes just to demonstrate his power. But through his personal weaknesses, he becomes a puppet in the hands of the chief guard. He is not aware that he is being ruled by the guard but continues to think that he is making all the decisions himself. The entire motivation of the guard is his own interests. In fact, the whole huge prison is run in the interests of the chief guard. Neither the governor, nor the prosecutor, nor the inmates realize that they are being used as his puppets. The corruption of the system is reflected in the relationships of interest. The arbitrary practices in the prison and the imprisonment of innocent man in solitary confinement are indicators of this decay. The corruption in the prison pushes individuals into crime. Those who come there to serve their sentence find themselves becoming part of another crime. The system uses a lynch culture to deal with problems which it cannot solve.

Power relations The main source of the conflict in the film is the change of hand in control of the power relations. The whole issue starts with Kadir poking a stick in the spinning wheel which already exists in the prison and then, when he becomes one of the powers in the prison, he tries to challenge all the injustices and change the established order. The whole problem stems from here. Nobody, including the victims of the power relations, is in favour of the change to this order. To prove himself

capable, the governor defends the order and the existing power relations to preserve the interests of the chief guard, but Kadir asks for his death in order to change the power relations and achieve justice and righteousness. These power relations are the cause of the corrupt system.

Truthfulness What is underlined in the film is honesty, and two characters represent this theme. In addition to Kadir, the political convict Selim underlines the theme of truth by his ability to analyse events correctly and to be right – but in favour of the oppressed. Kadir wants to stay in contact with him and takes the necessary actions to stay in the same ward as him, but manipulated by the chief guard, the governor will not allow this, so Kadir is deprived of the only option which could save him. Kadir, who finds the truth using his instincts and humanity, and Selim, who seeks the truth with his mind and his intellectual knowledge, are the representations of truth in the film. The system does not allow them to come together.

Character Analysis

Arap Kadir is the main character around whom the film revolves. The contradiction between his character and the existing order and power relations constitutes the film's main conflict. He ended up in prison because he shot someone while helping a friend. But the prison he is sent to functions like a separate crime machine, which is why he gets involved in various crimes there too.

Strength Kadir is a strong character. We can understand this by the way he dares to do the right thing at the risk of death. He is strong enough to challenge both the prison agha Fethi and the prison administration. It is even possible to see his strength in his determination to change the order, prohibit gambling and stop collecting tribute money. All the solitary confinements, injustices and incentives to crime cannot deter him. Even when he goes to his death at the end of the film, he does not hesitate to show the guards his teeth. Because of his strength, he never takes a step back from the way he knows to be right.

Rebellion. Kadir is a rebel. He challenges what he sees to be wrong at the cost of his life. We can see his rebellious attitude in his stubbornness towards Fethi Bey. He does not hesitate to challenge Fethi, before whom everyone else trembles, believing that he is right. His biggest nightmare during all his cell punishments is that he might give up his rebellion against the administration. His strength comes from his rebellion. But he has great respect for the political criminal Selim. He does not go back on his word, and sometimes he even begs Selim for help. His rebellion is only against the corruption within the system.

Truth and Fairness Kadir does not deviate from his path even when he knows it will lead towards his death. Truthfulness and fairness are his motivation for all his actions. Despite Kadir's determination to maintain justice and righteousness, he does not hesitate to show his power by rebelling. His desire to be just and right results in his lynching and murder by a corrupt order.

Şevket is the newly appointed prison governor. Because his career did not start in the prison service, he tries to suppress his insecurities by using excessive force.

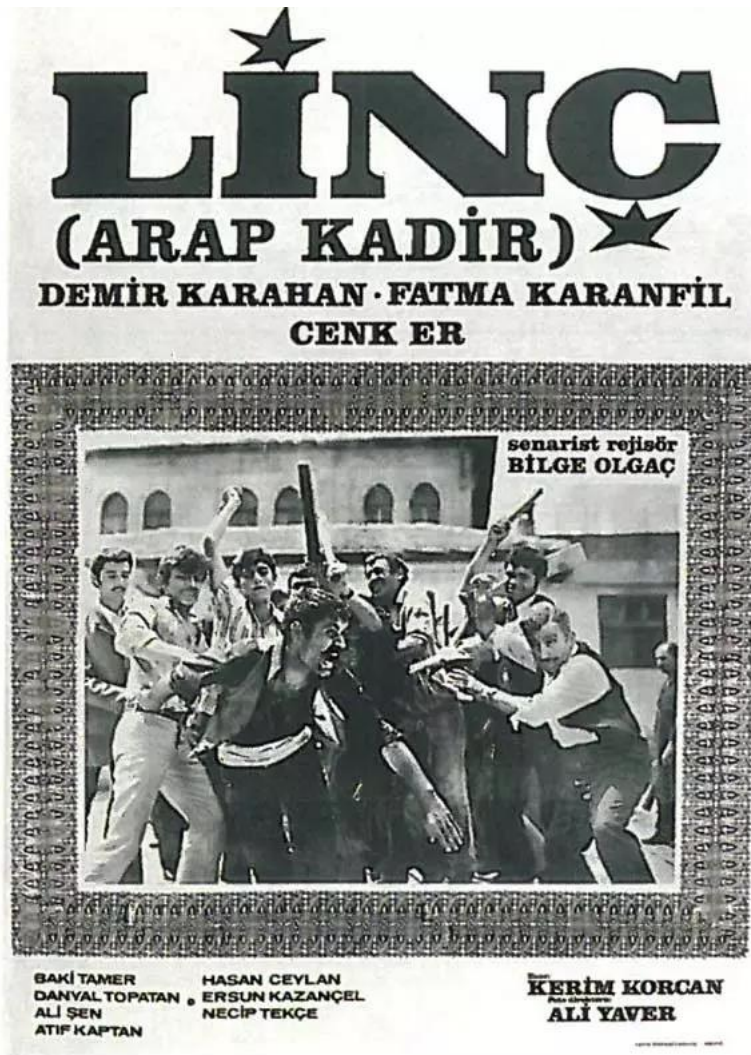
Weak He is actually a weak man who hides behind his title and rank. He tries to hide the weaknesses in his personality by using his title and position in power relations. We can understand this most from his tension and fear when he encounters the prisoners, and because of this he avoids meeting prisoners. This makes him the puppet of the chief guard, and his preparedness to act on the chief guard's word is another weakness. He displays a naive weakness which is directly contrary to the cunning of the chief guard.

Many complexes The basis of the contradiction in his actions is the complex circumstances in which he lives. Greater power has been given to him than he can cope with and he is actually crushed under this power because of his weak character. Moreover, since he came from the police service, he is not taken very seriously by those whom he has to manage. In order to suppress the complexes caused by all this weakness, he introduces irregular practices into the prison administration under the influence of the chief guard. These complexes turn into a weakness which is used by the chief guard.

The chief guard Rüştü has been the chief guard in the same prison for many years and has established his own order within the prison. In fact, he is the secret hand which runs the prison.

Self-interest His self-interest is his basic principle in managing the prison. Fairness, justice and the prisoners are all secondary to that. He is capable of rejecting any principle for the sake of his own benefit. The reason why he has to deal with Kadir is that Kadir's new practices will harm his own interests. No more prison gambling and no extortion from prisoners cuts off the money which the guards can accrue. In addition, Kadir's rebellious attitude interrupts the climate of fear which the guards maintain in order to control the prisoners. Kadir's main conflict is therefore with the chief guard and the corruption which he represents.

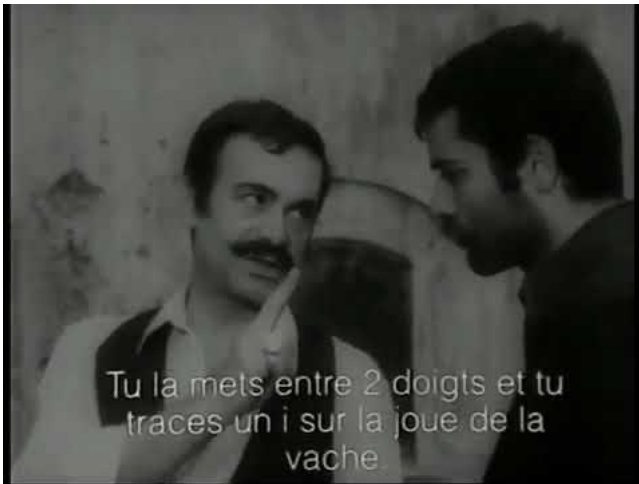
Cunning He is vicious but displays a cunning attitude while he is doing all of this; he never gets his own hands dirty but directs the governor to act according to his 'requests'. In fact, the main source of the conflict with Kadir is his determination to preserve his interests. This shows how cunning he is; he never gets his hands dirty and despite being behind all the dirty work, he remains invisible.



The poster for the film



The prison governor and the uniformed chief guard



Bayraklılı Fethi Bey and Arap Kadir