

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Ballad of Ali of Keshan (1964)

Atif Yılmaz

OVERVIEW

Director: Atif Yılmaz has directed 119 films, written 53 screenplays and produced 28 films. Atif Yılmaz completed his first film in 1951 and his last directorial effort in 2005. After the 1960 coup d'état, the economic, cultural, technical and aesthetic structure of Turkish cinema was affected. After 1960, "Social Realism" and "National Cinema" became dominant in Turkish cinema. Most of the films made by Atif Yılmaz in these years were based on local sources and national material. The genres in which Atif Yılmaz produced the most products during these years were social realism, detective-adventure and epic theater adaptation. The 1980s were a turning point for Atif Yılmaz as well as for Turkish society. After the 1980 coup d'état, Atif Yılmaz became the "director of women's films". In these films, female characters are presented as questioning subjects in search of identity. Supported by surreal and fantastical elements, these women-oriented works are considered to be pioneering works in the cinema of the period.

Film: Haldun Taner and Atif Yılmaz were the scriptwriters of the film, which was adapted from the musical play The Ballad of Ali of Keshan written by Haldun Taner and considered to be the first attempt at epic theater in Turkey. Epic theater is the projection of the political, economic and social changes that emerged after World War II on the theater stage. Epic theater is a stage that gives place to reason rather than emotion, makes the audience active with alienation techniques and prioritizes reasons instead of suggestion. Haldun Taner took some elements from Turkish theater such as meddah, idioms and proverbs, and the fact that it is written in both prose and verse to create the The Ballad of Ali of Keshan. As in the play, Yalçın Tura arranged the music and Duygu Sağıroğlu prepared the sets. This film was the first theater adaptation directed by Atif Yılmaz. The film, which aroused various debates at the time of its release, was met with great interest by the audience. This film won the Best Second Film, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Actress, Best Actor and Best Music awards at the 2nd Antalya Film Festival and 34th İzmir International Fair 1st Film Festival in 1965.

Background: In the 1960s, a new era began in Turkey with the new Constitution drafted after the military coup. In terms of Turkish Cinema, there was an increase in the number of films produced and a diversification and enrichment in terms of content and subject matter. In this context, The Ballad of Ali of Keshan, which is considered one of the most important works of epic theater and has been staged both in Turkey and in various countries around the world, was adapted to the cinema in 1964 and while it deals with the life and problems of the people of Sineklidağ, it gives sections from both the economic, political and social history of 1960s Turkey, such as squatting, rural-urban migration, gender order and class inequality. Sineklidağ is positioned at the center of both the play and the movie as a symbol of the country.

SYNOPSIS

The film consists of two main parts. The first part is the period of anarchy where misery, disgrace, and murder take place. The second part is the period of the peace regime established by Keşanlı Ali's release from prison and his election as mukhtar. In the short-lived first period, the feelings of molestation, squalor, and misery are stressed. The setting is the garbage dump in Sineklidağ, the surrounding shacks and latrines. This part particularly reveals the poverty of a family. The family's shack is torn down as they haven't paid tribute. The bullying that takes place in the neighborhood is highlighted through that family. However, in the main part of the film, the location is the square where the fountain and the coffee houses are located. This square is the public space of Sineklidağ. Mukhtar election, duels, celebrations, objections, and fights take place in this public space. In this part, hope, boasting, joy, celebration, blessing, hypocrisy, self-interest, sacrifice, and disappointment are at the forefront. A theatrical

atmosphere is created through the characters, the songs, dances, and characters' lines. In this film, the alienating elements of epic theatre draw attention. For example, in some scenes, the characters look directly into the camera and speak to the audience. In some scenes, the actors suddenly become narrators. This technique enables the audience to focus on what is being told. Furthermore, the scenes are presented independently. The flow of events is characterized by leaps. Another major alienating element of the play is how the songs are used. In the play, the way the songs are performed interrupt the main flow of events. Sometimes the characters sing the songs and sometimes the chorus sings them. In this part, concepts such as democracy, referendum, propaganda, bureaucratic practices, taxation, foreign debt, and law are addressed ironically with a critical approach. These concepts are undermined. The duel scenes in the film remind one of the Western films. However, the first duel, which takes place between Ali and Çakal Rüstem, can be regarded as a parody of these films with its happy ending. The film ends with Ali, the protagonist, sacrificing his own individual desire to save his people who deem him worthy of heroism. Keşanlı Ali, kills the enemy of the people of Sineklidağ and becomes a murderer and the legend finally comes true. On the other side, it should be noted that the Alevi and Kızılbaş discourse in the text and the character of the politician are not included in the film.

CHARACTERS

Keşanlı Ali: The hero of the legend in Sineklidağ, the ruffian who loves Zilha.
Zilha: Keşanlı Ali's lover and the girl who works in Şerif Ablâ's latrines.
Şerif Ablâ: The honorable woman in charge of the men's and women's restrooms in Sineklidağ.
İhya Onaran: An opportunist contractor on good terms with the state.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Keşanlı Ali

He is the protagonist of the film. Keşanlı Ali uses slang language. He has adopted the male-dominated discourse and acts accordingly that's why women are skimpy skirts for him.

Hero: With his amulet around his neck, his jacket around his shoulders, his cap on his head and his rosary in his hand, Ali walks out of Üsküdar Prison with a haughty attitude. A few cars and many men and children from Sineklidağ come to meet him. The day he is released from the prison is very important for the people of Sineklidağ. They send a special welcoming group for the occasion. They wait excitedly and when they see him, they scream with joy. When Ali appears in front of the prison door, people begin to play darbuka and other instruments. Those waiting for Ali throw themselves at him and start singing. While leaving the prison, Ali's belongings are handed over by a guardian who refers to them as 'Mr. Ali's belongings.' His return to Sineklidağ from prison is quite a spectacle. Because Ali saved the people of Sineklidağ from the enemy. That's why Keşanlı Ali is welcomed like a hero in Sineklidağ.

Tyrant Ruffian: The four years he spends in prison is an important phase that shapes his view of life. Because he accepts that he committed the murder in Sineklidağ and chooses to be evil. He is released from prison in a festive atmosphere. He enters the mukhtar election in Sineklidağ at the request of the people. He wins the election with the tricks of his men. Ali decides that it is valuable and important to be strong rather than right and continues his life in this direction. He establishes a mukhtar system in Sineklidağ by spreading fear. Keşanlı Ali constantly emphasizes the importance of being a man in his discourses. The glorious legend is as important to Ali as being a man. Keşanlı Ali must keep this fictionalized epic alive no matter what.

Self-Sacrificing: At the end of the movie, Keşanlı Ali has to make a choice. He would either follow his individual desire or fulfill the would of the people he leads. In the end, Keşanlı Ali sacrifices his love for the people of Sineklidağ. In other words, when the people of Sineklidağ ask for Keşanlı Ali's help against the enemy from far away, he chooses a duel instead of being happy with Zilha. In the end, he becomes a murderer. For Keşanlı Ali, the epic must live on. What matters is neither Zilha nor himself.

Zilha

Zilha is the lover of the protagonist Keşanlı Ali. She is a young girl who lives alone without a mother, father or siblings in her hut and works in the latrines of Şerif Abla. In the play as in the movie, she is the character with the funniest pronunciation and the rudest speech, as she mispronounces words.

Lonely: She has no opportunity to talk about womanhood, individuality and love with anyone around her. When she receives the news of the murder of her uncle Çamur İhsan, she loses both her uncle and her love. After the murder, she is completely alone in Sineklidağ. When Ali confesses to Zilha that he did not commit the murder after his release from prison, only Zilha knows that the legend is a lie in Sineklidağ.

Dreamer: For her, Sineklidağ is a swamp. She envies the lives of famous, beautiful and rich women in the newspapers. According to her, she should also live in a rich neighborhood. She even has photos of artists on the mirror in her room. Zilha expresses these dreams with a song. Zilha is young and beautiful, waiting to be saved by a rich man. Zilha often sings this song. She wants the rich man she is waiting for to come at once.

Disappointed: One day, her life changes with the arrival of a luxury car, because when the rich contractor comes to Sinekli to buy laborers, he notices Zilha's resemblance to his daughter-in-law Nevvare, who left her son, and decides to take her into his house. Zilha thinks that she has been brought to the rich house to marry the rich Mr. Bülent. Nevvare is brought to her house by the lover she ran away with. That evening, Zilha and Mr. Bülent are supposedly getting married. She sees that Nevvare looks like her twin. And she understands everything. Zilha realizes she is being used and gets angry. As she leaves the house, she first sees Mr. Bülent and spits in his face. Then she leaves the house and walks away. At the end of the movie, when Keşanlı Ali chooses not her and her love but the people of Sineklidağ and the ballad, she is completely disappointed.

Şerif Abla

She is a mature woman who runs the men's and women's latrines in Sineklidağ. She is the only woman in Sineklidağ who is not subjected to the oppression of a derogatory nickname at the beginning of her name.

Respected: She is seen as the most respected and influential woman in Sineklidağ. When Ali is brought to the Sineklidağ by car after his release from prison, he immediately gets out of the car and kisses her hand out of respect. In short, she is a woman to be kissed and listened to in the neighborhood.

Brave: Şerif Abla acts fearlessly from the beginning to the end of the movie. During the plebiscite after Ali wins the election for mukhtar, she is the first one to challenge the concepts that Keşanlı Ali says. Then the others follow her. At the end of the film, when the enemy of the neighborhood arrives, she is the first to call out to Keşanlı Ali to protect them. She always takes the first step by acting with courage. She is the pioneer. She is the one to be followed.

Questioner: In fact, she is the only woman in Sineklidağ who knows legal concepts. The only woman in Sineklidağ who opposes/can oppose Keşanlı Ali's order by using the concept of democracy is Şerif Abla. Keşanlı Ali kidnaps Nevvare, whom he thinks is Zilha. Also, when he comes to Sineklidağ, he meets Zilha and realizes that the woman he kidnapped is not Zilha. Şerif Abla is also a woman whose word and reputation can be trusted. The honor of a woman, Nevvare, kidnapped from the city is entrusted to her.

İhya Onaran

He is a wealthy urban contractor. His name is also meaningful. He is a person who has made himself and his surroundings prosperous and can fix events and situations as he wishes. He is also on good terms with the state. He can get his constructions done without disruption or loss.

Scoundrel: İhya Onaran does not hesitate to use his money power for his immoral and evil purposes. He takes advantage of the poverty and desperation of poor people. He can deceive a woman, Zilha, in order to cure his son. İhya Onaran can play with that woman's emotions and future without blinking an eye. On the other side, when he comes to Sineklidağ to find construction workers, he has to bribe them. He doesn't object to this because he is used to the concept of bribery. At first he gets along well with Ali in Sineklidağ. However, he forcibly takes Zilha, whom Ali loves, to his house. Keşanlı Ali then becomes hostile to him. İhya Onaran does all the evil he can. He does not refrain from causing material and moral harm to Keşanlı Ali at a moment's notice. İhya Onaran even wants to hire a hit man to eliminate him.

Brutal: İhya Onaran is also a cruel person. Keşanlı Ali first wants to cause financial damage to İhya Onaran after he takes his beloved woman, Zilha, to the city. He cannot succeed. Then Keşanlı Ali threatens İhya Onaran with death. Thereupon, İhya Onaran calls Keşanlı Ali's enemy, Sipsi Selim, from Sineklidağ, to his office. Sipsi Selim is against the order established by Keşanlı Ali. A plan is made to eliminate Keşanlı Ali. Ali's arch-enemy, Manyak Cafer, is assigned for this job. He makes plans to make the people of Sineklidağ turn against each other. He takes advantage of the lack of money of the people of Sineklidağ, their marginalization by the state, and the conflict of interest among them.

Opportunistic: İhya Onaran is self-interested businessman. He comes to Sineklidağ to find laborers to work in his construction site. He takes Zilha, whom he sees resembles his runaway daughter-in-law Nevvare, away without telling the truth. Because his son Bülent is suffering from psychological illness and faints all the time. On the doctor's advice, he brings Zilha to his house by force so that his son can get rid of his mental illness. Zilha is someone who can be used. When it comes to his own family, everything and every means is acceptable to him. Not only Zilha, but anyone in need of money and power is an object that can be used according to İhya Onaran. His interest is the most important one. For that reason people of Sineklidağ, who live in the slums, the other side of the city, unprotected by the law, must serve İhya Onaran.

THEMES

Slum Life: After 1950, with the effect of mechanization in the countryside and the rapid increase in population, migration from the village to the city, which is home to job opportunities, led to the problem of squatting in big cities. People who could not find the opportunity to solve the problem of settlement and housing in the urban society, formed houses, neighborhoods and regions called "slums" in order to meet these needs outside the legal conditions. The resulting squatter community has gained a distinct structure and appearance in terms of social, economic and cultural aspects within the urban social structure. The people in this movie also came from various places with their Laz, Thracian, Pomak, Kurdish identities and established Sineklidağ on the outskirts of the city. There are sharpeners, porters, domestic servants, latrine operators, buskers, shoe shiners, coffeemakers, as well as bullies, laborers and even murderers. All of them have created a common culture with their own unwritten laws. Slum dwellers have a code of honor and must abide by it. Poverty and crime are the sine qua non of this slum. Committing murder is considered almost heroic by the people here. The main reason for this is that in this illegal neighborhood, these people, who are not protected by the law, have to create a hero and protector from among themselves. Sineklidağ has its own unique culture of life. The city is very far away from this neighborhood. This distance is not only tangible and physical. Only when the people of Sineklidağ are needed, then the state and the city accept them as interlocutors. In other words, when there are elections or construction works, the people of Sineklidağ are recognized. The relationship between people of Sineklidağ and urbanites and state is based on self-interest. Sineklidağ is a neighborhood built against the law. This is even stated in the song "The state deals with us." In Sineklidağ, everything is and should be solved within the neighborhood. The city and Sineklidağ are very different in terms of living standards and quality. Those who live in the city are rich. They have servants in their homes. Moreover, their relationship with the state is good. Wearing revealing clothes, attracting attention and dressing up are identified with dishonor. In the city, a woman can leave her husband and run away with a man. Moreover, this woman can then return home. This is not a problem for an urban and rich man. Living conditions here are difficult. Here Hobbes' statement that "man is the wolf to man" is embodied. In Sineklidağ, there is an idea of being a squatter community, of unity. However, this idea of unity can be disrupted from time to time due to conflict of interest.

Gender Roles: Patriarchal social codes are valid here. Especially in their speeches, the codes of patriarchal social order draw attention. Men and women in the neighborhood have internalized that they live in this order. According to men, women here are “skimpy skirt”. Women do not question this order. Gossiping is common among women. For instance, women gossip among themselves that Çakal Rüstem goes to Zilha’s shanty at nights. Also, wearing low-cut clothes attract attention and it is not welcome. It is even equated with dishonor. For example, when Zilha comes to visit the neighborhood from the city, she is dressed in low-cut clothes and walks coquettishly. So according to people of Sineklidağ she is a dishonest woman. A woman who wears cleavage has “gone astray” according to the men and women in the neighborhood. “She is called a hussy.” In order to annoy or upset a man, one would curse or say a bad word to his mother or the woman he loves. On the other hand, when there are celebrations and festivities in the neighborhood, men and women are together. They also dance together. But in Sineklidağ , in the time before Ali’s release from prison, women are the most oppressed. Because women are molested. There is no mechanism to prevent this.

Values: Honor, religion, allegiance, chivalry, mercy, sacrifice, nationalism, legend, self-interest draw attention as the main concepts to which Sineklidağ people attach importance. For example, as a result of the murder of Çamur İhsan, who was molesting women and girls, the neighborhood people is at peace. The main reason why Ali is released from prison as a hero and welcomed with festivities is that he saves the honor of Sineklidağ people. Keşanlı Ali tries to sanctify his heroism with religious motifs by saying ‘Do I serve the life given by Allah?’ against his enemy who is engaged in a blood feud. Just like when he is late to speak after the election and says ‘I was at Friday prayers, that’s why I was a little late’. Valor and sacrifice are the main elements that the people of Sineklidağ expect from the hero they create. On the night when Keşanlı Ali reunites with his loved one Zilha, he has to engage in a duel with Manyak Cafer after people call his name. In brief, Ali has to sacrifice his life and his love because it is the people of Sineklidağ who grants him this heroism and leadership, and Ali is valued, respected, and powerful thanks to them. Individual desires should be sacrificed for Sineklidağ . When the interests of Sineklidağ and the hero it creates are at stake, chivalry gives way to deceit and deception. This is also the reason why Keşanlı Ali’s men hide marijuana in Çakal Rüstem’s coffee house before the mukhtar elections are held. When the public and public interest are concerned, the values can be reversed. Nationalism and national ideal are also at the forefront. For example, the basis for Ali’s election as mukhtar is built on the premise that ‘Ali, like every honest Turkish youth’ is eligible for election. However, Teke Kazım, a deserter, cannot even be a candidate for being mukhtar.

Appearance vs Reality: One of the biggest characteristics of the people in Sineklidağ is pretending. And pretending is well received here. The main character, Keşanlı Ali, admits to the murder he did not commit and he pretends to be a murderer. After he gets out of prison, he is welcomed as a hero in the neighborhood. By pretending to be a murderer, Keşanlı Ali becomes the headman and authority in Sineklidağ. On the other hand, after the election, Keşanlı Ali states that he has established order in accordance with the law. But if the law is as Keşanlı Ali wants, it is accepted. The opposite is not possible. The law is consulted before an election to eliminate rivals, the mukhtar election is won by fraud and the people are forced to vote yes in a referendum. On the other hand, having heard Keşanlı Ali’s reputation before the mukhtar election, a reporter from *Hadise* newspaper comes to Keşanlı Ali’s coffee place to conduct an interview with him. One of the first questions he asks is ‘Why do you have a limp?’ Keşanlı Ali first answers this question by saying ‘I fell from a mulberry tree.’ He then collects himself and says with a serious expression ‘It happened during a ruthless fight’. He must answer like a hero. He fell out of the tree, but he should not say that. Another example of pretending is the duel between Çakal Rüstem and Keşanlı Ali because the two of them meet in the square where the coffeehouses are. They walk towards each other like heroes in a duel, say a sentence to each other and go to their coffeehouses. Çakal Rüstem says ‘Welcome, get well soon’ and Keşanlı Ali says ‘Thank you, brother Çakal Rüstem’. When they go their coffee places, they talk about this duel from their own perspectives. Çakal Rüstem says that he didn’t want to deal with Keşanlı Ali. And for Keşanlı Ali, Çakal Rüstem has apologized to him. The leader must be strong in Sineklidağ. Lying and pretending are permissible. For example, the people of Sineklidağ are surprised when they read Keşanlı Ali’s program after the elections. They ask questions about his program. But in the end they pretend to be convinced. Because they are in need of Keşanlı Ali. On the other hand, Zilha, forcibly taken to the city by the rich contractor, pretends to be an urban woman.

Her clothes, speech and movements have become like a rich urban woman. But when she goes to Sineklidağ, Zilha's speech and movements do not change. İhya Onaran tells Zilha that he will marry her off to his son in order to keep her at home. But this marriage is also a pretense. Because Zilha is a woman to be used during Mr. Bülent's treatment. For this reason, a fake wedding ceremony is organized at home to make Zilha believe the fake marriage.

Prison Life: Prison has its own culture and order. To be respected in prison, one must be guilty and strong. It is respectable to be ruthless and fearless. These are also the basic characteristics of a criminal. Keşanlı Ali goes to prison for a murder he did not commit. Keşanlı Ali cannot convince anyone that he did not commit the murder. When the prisoners and his ward mates come to Keşanlı Ali, he does not want to lie at first. Moreover, the prisoners first make fun of Keşanlı Ali. There are criminals who have committed various crimes in prison. Keşanlı Ali's name is first and foremost "mama's boy". But in order to live comfortably in prison, it is necessary to lie and spread fear. Keşanlı Ali realizes this. One day while playing backgammon, a criminal first cheats Keşanlı Ali and he breaks a backgammon on his head. Keşanlı Ali decided to change his behaviors in the prison. Then Keşanlı Ali admits the crime he didn't commit and even he then broke a chair on the warden's head. He spent ten days in solitary confinement. But when he returns to his ward, he is now a respectable criminal. He has proven his courage. Everyone in the ward bowed down to him. In short, Keşanlı Ali has become the leader of the ward. Many journalists even come to interview Ali. The journalists want to hear from Ali himself how he committed the murder. And Ali told them all about the murder he didn't commit. Ali told a story he had made up in his head, both to the journalists and to those in prison. In short, it is imperative to obey the order of the prison. Otherwise it is not possible to live there. While Keşanlı Ali was a coward at first, he was later accepted as a respectable criminal because he played the game according to the rules.

Power: Being strong is important in Sineklidağ. Because a powerful person is respected, authoritative and feared. For example, while Keşanlı Ali is in prison, Çakal Rüstem has established a tyrannical order with his men. When Keşanlı Ali comes to the neighborhood after his release from prison, Çakal Rüstem is very disturbed. Because his order is disrupted. His power is taken away. A power struggle begins between Keşanlı Ali and Çakal Rüstem. This power struggle can be disproportionate and unfair. Every means is permissible here to gain power. For instance, Keşanlı Ali's men prepare conspiracy for Çakal Rüstem and he is eliminated from mukhtar election. The balance of power can change at any moment. It is necessary to keep up with it. And it is good to side with the strong. In order to live in Sineklidağ, one must be on the side of the strong. For this reason, Teke Kazım and Çakal Rüstem, the rivals of Keşanlı Ali, who wins the mukhtar election, take part in his administration. Thus, they are also on the side of the powerful. No one can touch them. It is essential that these people, who are not protected by the law, should be on the side of the powerful. The strong one has to be tough and rude and strict at the same time. Because then the wicked can be deterred. The wicked can be intimidated. That's why Keşanlı Ali establishes a tyrannical rule after he becomes mukhtar. After Ali from Keşanlı accepts to be a candidate for mukhtar, the people rejoice and sing the following song: "Now we have a chief, we will get rid of every trouble." When the people of Sineklidağ tell Keşanlı Ali that they are going to demolish our houses, Keşanlı Ali tells them that Keşanlı Ali tells them "They will not demolish" and reassures the people. Even the police in Sineklidağ admires Keşanlı Ali as the authority in Sineklidağ and asks for his help to disperse the crowd. When Keşanlı Ali becomes the mukhtar, the city contractor İhya Onaran comes to his coffee house to hire laborers to work in his constructions. İhya Onaran obeys the order established by Keşanlı Ali without making a sound. Because he needs laborers and he can only get those laborers with the word of Keşanlı Ali. For this reason, İhya Onaran does not say anything even if he bribes him or spends a long time in his cafe.

Economic Situation: The professions of the people living in Sineklidağ are portage, housekeeper, maid, shoe shiner, knife sharpener, taxi driver and laborer. There are also those who steal among them. There are also women who have gone astray due to their poor economic situation. Some of the children seen in the movie play instruments and sing or sell newspapers instead of going to school. In Sineklidağ, children have to provide income for the household. Everyone pays tribute in order to live in the neighborhood. The city is a symbol of wealth and ostentation. White luxury car, big house, luxury furniture, piano, quality clothes, jewelry. All these things are where there is wealth. Many of those in the city are employers. They find their workers from the slums. In this sense, the city is the exploiter and the

slum dwellers are the exploited. Income inequality exists between the city and the slum. This is one of the most severe points of criticism in the film. Even the country cannot plan its budget and be self-sufficient without outside help. Ihya Onaran easily gets away from Keşanlı Ali's sabotage against him. Because there is widespread unemployment in the country. This plays into his hands. It is also seen that the bureaucracy is run by bribery. This is one of the other main points criticized.

Love: Love is between the protagonists Zilha and Keşanlı Ali. It is only at the end of the movie that this feeling really exists and is conveyed to the audience. Because from the beginning of the movie, Zilha and Keşanlı Ali are hostile towards each other. Zilha is especially distant towards Keşanlı Ali because he killed her uncle. She does not want to show her feelings. Keşanlı Ali also does not show his feelings for Zilha in public. However, when they are alone, Keşanlı Ali, out of love for Zilha, tells her the truth about the murder. Keşanlı Ali is overcome with emotion and reveals his secret to Zilha. However, he does not do what Zilha asks him to do. He does not and cannot confess the secret to everyone. Because Keşanlı Ali's pride of manhood and his loyalty to the neighborhood trump his personal feelings. In Sinekliadağ where neighborhood pressure exists, there are values that outweigh love. Like masculinity, courage and power. For this reason, Keşanlı Ali and Zilha refrain from revealing their love for each other even to themselves. When Zilha realizes the truth behind her being taken to the city, her love outweighs. When Keşanlı Ali gets the news that Zilha will marry someone else, he cannot hide his love for her. Just when they are about to be happy, another obstacle comes in their way. This obstacle is Manyak Cafer. He comes from Syria to kill Keşanlı Ali. Manyak Cafer dies in a duel with Keşanlı Ali. Despite all Zilha's efforts, Keşanlı Ali confronts Manyak Cafer. Cafer dies. Keşanlı Ali is forced to make a choice. Either love or the epic and he chose the legend. He sacrifices his love for the epic to continue.

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of criticism does the movie *The Ballad of Ali of Keshan* bring about 1960s Turkey?
2. How is this film positioned within the cinema concept of the period in Turkey?
3. What does the fact that this film is adapted from a theater text add to the film? What is the effect on the audience?
4. What are the similarities and differences between the theater text and this film?

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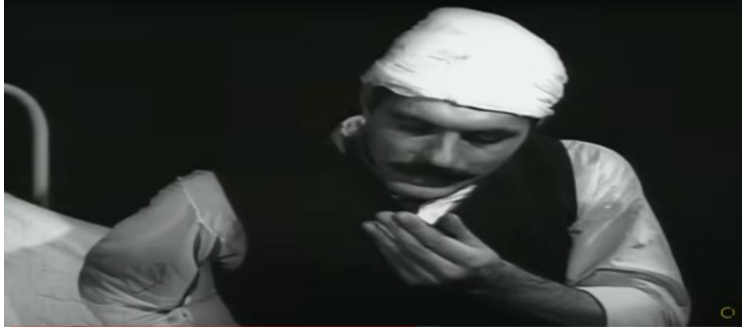
SCENES

1. **Slum Life:** Misery and Disgrace

The ruffians that appeared in Ali's absence exact a tribute from people who build shacks. The shacks of those who do not pay a tribute are torn down. The poor living conditions of women, men, and children are shown. Women have to fight against molestation. There is both material and moral poverty. Whatever they have is barely enough to build a shack. There is no law and institution that protect these people. The only thing they can do is to curse and wait for Keşanlı Ali's release from prison. Keşanlı Ali means salvation for them. The silhouette of the city appearing in the distance behind the shanty town is vaguely visible.

2. **Ali's prison life**

Keşanlı Ali was imprisoned for the murder of Çamur İhsan. He didn't acknowledge that he committed the murder and the people in the prison didn't respect him. They broke the backgammon case on his head while playing. He stayed in the infirmary. After this instance, Ali decided to change his behaviors in the prison. He first acknowledged that he committed the murder. He then broke a chair on the warden's head. He was put in solitary confinement for that. After all of these, he returned to the ward and was respected by everyone in the ward. He says, 'In this world, you are ridiculed if you are an honorable man, but you are respected if you are a tyrant, murderer'.



3. **Keşanlı Ali is Released from the Prison with Fanfare**

Met with a welcoming party accompanied by musical instruments and songs, Keşanlı Ali is then brought to Sineklidağ with the convoy of these greeters. The crowd even wants to walk up to him and touch him. Ali's men try to prevent people from touching him. Music plays and the crowd consisting of women, men, and children cheer for him. Their guards form a barricade between them and the crowd. Sipsi Selim, who gets angry because of the crowd's interest and Keşanlı Ali's attitude, 'Look at this, they welcome him as if he is a prime minister'.



4. **The Law in Sineklidağ Asks for Keşanlı Ali's Help**

The crowd waiting for Keşanlı Ali's arrival in Sineklidağ doesn't want to disperse after welcoming him. They compete with each other to be by his side and touch him. Despite the baton in his hand, his official uniform and despite the fact that he represents the law, the police officer cannot control and disperse the crowd. So, the police officer asks for Keşanlı Ali's help. The crowd disperses when Keşanlı Ali shouts 'Disperse'.

ELECTION

5. The First Duel: Çakal Rüstem and Keşanlı Ali

Before the mukhtar election in the neighborhood, Çakal Rüstem and Keşanlı Ali meet in the square. Everyone scatters when they see Keşanlı Ali and Çakal Rüstem. Women and children flee to their homes. Men close the doors and windows of their shops. The square is filled with fear and silence. They walk toward each other accompanied by a thrilling music. They stand face to face. Their full confrontation is also shown with the camera from below filming them and their faces above the waist. Çakal says 'welcome, get well soon' and Ali says 'thank you, brother Rüstem'. They then go on their own separate ways to their coffee places. When they go their coffee places, they talk about this duel from their own perspectives. Çakal says that he didn't want to deal with Ali. And for Keşanlı Ali, Çakal Rüstem has apologized to him. The duel doesn't end badly as expected. This is a scene that parodies a duel.

6. Where There is Peace, There is Union: Propaganda Before the Mukhtar Election

After Keşanlı Ali's men put marijuana in the coffee house of his rival Çakal Rüstem and he is taken away by the police, Keşanlı Ali goes to his coffee house among applauses. Ali stands on a higher ground in the middle of the coffee house and addresses the crowd. He says: 'Dear people of Sineklidağ, venerable voters, valuable citizens. When the applause breaks out, he tells people to 'shut up'. Then he smiles and calls out to people around him: 'Dear citizens, Sineklidağ is at an impasse. They are going to tear down our roofs. Why? Could there be peace when there is fighting everyday, when there is no union?' He takes a matchbox out of his pocket, points at the matches, and says: 'When ten hundred thousand matchsticks come together, break them if you can'. When he finishes his speech, people around him are also affected by this discourse and his propaganda and begin to cheer loudly, saying 'Where there is union there is peace'.

7. Şerif Abla Questions the Concept of Democracy

Şerif Abla, who is the first person Keşanlı Ali stops by when he comes to the neighborhood, takes her place in the front row among those who listen to Ali's program in the square after he is elected mukhtar. While Keşanlı Ali reads the articles of the program, Şerif Abla is also the first one who raises her voice against the peace regime of Keşanlı Ali. She is a woman who is familiar with the concept of democracy. And she does not flinch from raising her voice. As soon as she hears about these articles, she asks Keşanlı Ali 'So, you said we had democracy? Instead of Keşanlı Ali, one of his men, İzmirli Nuri responds to Şerif Abla, saying 'that was until the election was over'. Upon hearing this response, Şerif Abla makes a hand gesture indicating her surprise, sadness, and disappointment and leaves the square. In this way, this woman, who is an authority figure, publicly shows that she does not trust Keşanlı Ali's peace regime and is not convinced by his program.

8. Keşanlı Ali Reads the Mukhtar Program to the People of Sineklidağ from a Toilet Paper Roll

After returning to Sineklidağ, Keşanlı Ali begins to compete with his rival Çakal Rüstem for mukhtar position. After the conspiracy that Keşanlı Ali's men prepare for Çakal Rüstem, Keşanlı Ali effortlessly wins the election. His other rival Teke Kazım cannot run as a candidate since he is a deserter. After his election victory, Keşanlı Ali stands on a cart in the square and reads aloud and in a serious manner his program, written on toilet roll paper by one of his men, İstidacı Derviş. People listen to him very carefully. In this program, he says that the peace regime is now established and he lists the principles to be followed in collecting tributes in this regime. The program also emphasizes that all this will be in proportion to mercy. When some women and men ask questions about how these will be implemented, some other women and men, instead of Keşanlı Ali, give answers that approve of the order and want it to be approved, saying 'that's the way it will be'.

9. Forced Referandum

When Keşanlı Ali finishes reading the mukhtar program, he turns to the crowd and says 'I will now have a referandum, friends'. 'Those who accept this program as it is without objection?', some raise their hands and some hesitate. Then Keşanlı Ali says 'I guess it wasn't heard well' and takes out a gun from his waist, fires it. At this point, everyone in the square raises their hands and Keşanlı Ali says 'unanimously accepted'. The popular vote was forced by force of arms. He smiles and says 'thank you for your kindness, friends' and puts his gun in his pocket. Applause breaks out. People gather around Keşanlı Ali.

ZILHA'S DILEMNA

10. Zilha Rebels against Fate

Zilha stands in front of the mirror in her shack where there are photographs of local and foreign artists. She envies the life of these artists. She looks at herself in the mirror. She wants to put lipstick on and be like the women in the photographs. She also murmurs this song in front of the mirror: 'Enough of fate's cruelty, is this how my life will pass, I'm a wilting rose in the swamp, I'm hungry for life and love, please come and get me'. Zilha sings this song many times. This song is proof that she wants to get out of Sineklidağ as soon as possible. Zilha rebels against her life, her fate. She even follows the news of high society in the newspapers. She is interested in the lives of rich women. On the one hand Zilha is sick of the neighborhood she lives in and on the other hand she is waiting for salvation. Shortly, Zilha is sad but hopeful about the future.

11. Keşanlı Ali Reveals the Secret of the Legend to Zilha

After becoming mukhtar, Keşanlı Ali goes to Zilha's shack one night. Zilha is singing the lyrics 'I'm hungry for life and love / save me from this cesspool'. Ali coughs and makes himself known. When Zilha doesn't react to him, he comes to her. Ali gets very close to her and puts his face on her shoulder and says 'I'll tell you a secret'. He says 'I didn't shoot your uncle' and tells her what happened in detail. He then looks down and says 'the epic emerged from this lie.' 'A man is a man, does a man swallow his words?' he says to Zilha as a reason for not confessing this lie to everyone. Zilha tells him, 'Would a man show off with someone else's murder?' So, Ali confesses to Zilha that the epic is based on a lie. He does that out of his love for her. However, this fact cannot be confessed to everyone. The epic must go on at all costs.



12. The Luxury White Car Arrives to Sineklidağ: The Symbol of Bad Series of Events

Contractor İhya Onaran comes to the shanty town after the mukhtar election. His aim is to find laborers to work in his constructions. For this end, he goes to Keşanlı Ali's coffee house. Before going there, he stops by Zilha's shack and sees the resemblance between her and his runaway daughter-in-law. When he goes to Ali's coffee place, he has to deal with bureaucratic procedures to hire the laborers. He gets the job done by giving many documents and bribes. Then he comes back in his car with the doctor and his son. They take Zilha away by force. When Zilha goes to the city, learns etiquette and her hair and clothes are changed, she comes back to the neighborhood in the same car. Every time this car arrives, children surround and run around it. Children welcome this car with joy and excitement. This car carries people coming from the city to the shanty town. It is a physical symbol showing the connection between the city and the shanty town. Zilha comes to visit the neighborhood from the city looking like an urban woman. with her cut hair, low-cut dress, fur, jewelry, and toy dog. But her way of speaking shows that she is Zilha from the shanty town. The children chant 'ya ya ya sha sha Zilha sister long live'. As Zilha walks in front of the shacks, women who see her pass the news around. Women go to the windows to see her. They start talking about her among themselves. 'What's done is done,' says one woman who sees Zilha. Another woman who goes up to the window says, 'Like mother like daughter, her mother was like that too.' For the women in the neighborhood, Zilha, who is dressed in low-cut clothes and walks coquettishly, is a dishonest woman. Zilha doesn't respond to any of them. She proudly makes her way to the square. Despite what they say, she enjoys being watched.



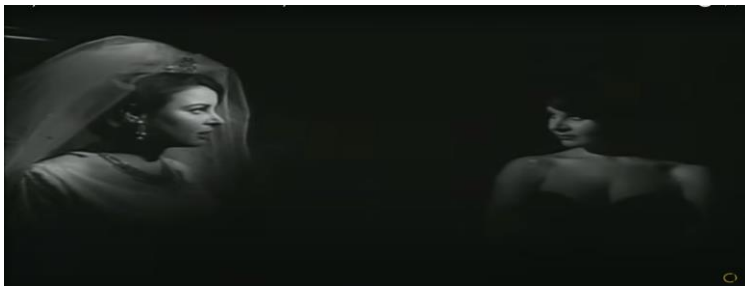
14. Zilha's Fake Wedding with İhya Onaran's Son

Zilha is brought to the wealthy household so that İhya Onaran's son Bülent can forget his wife Nevvare, who ran away from home. İhya Onaran does this at the suggestion of a psychologist. Zilha takes lessons from the Madame and learns etiquette. She is asked to resemble Nevvare with her hair, clothes, and looks. In this way, Mr. Bülent will be cured of his psychological illness. Before the fake wedding, Zilha waits in her wedding dress and cries. Instead of the man she loves, she will marry the wealthy Mr. Bülent. This doesn't make her happy. Madame sees her in this state. She says to Zilha 'remember our lessons'. And Zilha says the following words: 'In society, you marry the richest, not the one you love.' The difference between the socialites living in the city and Sineklidağ is seen in relations such as marriage, love, and self-interest. Sineklidağ is a place marginalized by the city. Marginalized people live there. One of the main differences between the city and the shanty town is women's understanding of marriage



15. The Encounter Between Zilha and Nevvare, Who Looks Like Her Twin

Nevvare is brought to her house by the lover she ran away with. That evening, Zilha and Mr. Bülent are supposedly getting married. Nevvare enters the house and goes to the bedroom. There she meets Zilha. Zilha throws her veil towards her and leaves the room. She sees that Nevvare looks like her twin. And she understands everything. The reason why Zilha is asked to change is for the treatment of Mr. Bülent. Zilha realizes she is being used and gets angry. As she leaves the house, she first sees Mr. Bülent and spits in his face. Then she goes to the doctor. She calls him 'you senile Pavlov's dog' and hits him on the leg. Finally, she slaps İhya Onaran and calls him a 'scoundrel'. Then she leaves the house and walks away. The socialites present there applaud Zilha's actions and laugh at the same time.



16. Ali Loses the Woman He Loves to a Rich Urbanite: Shooting a Bullet to an Enemy City

However, the fact that Zilha looks like an urban woman and prefers to have relationship like an urban woman drives Keşanlı Ali crazy. After Zilha gets into the white luxury car and leaves, Ali picks up his pistol and shoots several times towards the city. His anger is actually directed at Zilha. But it is the rich contractor living in the city who is responsible for Zilha's change and her distancing herself from him. The city is across the shanty town and is located on higher ground. The city has a vague silhouette because it is hard to reach. In short, the city is the cause of evil, of being captured. Keşanlı Ali shoots bullets towards the city in order to be less angry and sad.



17. Keşanlı Ali's Revenge

Keşanlı Ali wants to take revenge on İhya Onaran, who took Zilha away from Sinekliadağ and turned her into an urban socialite. Ali comes to his coffee house. Then he reveals to his men the plan he has made for İhya Onaran. He tells them, 'I'm going to withdraw all my laborers and sabotage him. If I don't make him regret it, no one should call me the glorious Keşanlı Ali'. Against this move, İhya Onaran uses his close relations with the state and goes to the undersecretary. He extends the delivery date of the construction by two months. Keşanlı Ali then threatens him with death. Then İhya Onaran makes a plan to eliminate Keşanlı Ali. He calls Sipsi Selim from the neighborhood and orders Manyak Cafer from Syria to come and kill Ali. The rich urban contractor who is on good terms with the state and the hero from the shanty town challenge each other. When Ali cannot harm the contractor financially, he threatens to kill him. The contractor then plans to eliminate Ali. Just like finding laborers, the contractor has no difficulty in finding a killer.

18. The Second Duel in Sinekliadağ: Keşanlı Ali and Manyak Cafer

After his first duel with Çakal Rüstem in the square, Keşanlı Ali has his second and final duel with Manyak Cafer. Cafer comes to the neighborhood from Syria upon the call of the contractor İhya Onaran. He is paid to kill Ali. Manyak Cafer arrives and sets fire to Ali's coffee house. Then he uses abusive and insulting language to get Ali to come out. He swears especially against Zilha. People come and gather there. First Şerif Abla, then the others call out towards the house, 'Ali'. Manyak Cafer shouts at Ali 'come out and save your subjects if you are a man'. Ali says 'my subjects are waiting for me, I can't stay'. Zilha says, 'Forget it, aren't you scared, he will kill you'. Ali says, 'I'm scared, but there's an epic, you can't turn the epic into a lie. 'And he starts a duel with Manyak Cafer. The duel is accompanied by the people's chants of 'come on Ali'. Ali's gun jams. A gunshot is heard. It is dark and at first it is not clear who is shot. Cafer's body falls to the ground and Ali is the victor at the end of the duel.

19. Manyak Cafer is Killed and Ali Chooses Sinekliadağ

Zilha runs away from the high society and comes to the neighborhood and Ali follows her. They go to her house above Ali's coffee house. They embrace each other. Two women from the neighborhood who arrive one after the other don't let them to be alone. Just as Ali sends the women away, the voice of Manyak Cafer is heard outside. Zilha tells Ali not to go. Ali answers her: 'Unfortunately, my impossible fate is calling me, people die and epics live. 'Ali finally says to Zilha: 'You can say that was his last word and it will go down in history'. Ali's gun jams. The child Hidayet shouts at him 'Ali is our father'. Ali shoots Cafer. Zilha cries out. Zilha goes and hugs him, calling him my Ali. People gather around them. They say, 'Our father Ali. Mothers don't give birth to such brave men'. Men, women, and children say this together, slowly and sadly. The police arrive. Ali surrenders proudly, saying 'Let my life be sacrificed for Sinekliadağ '.