

TÜRKİYE AS A TRANSIT ROUTE OF MIGRATION: SEABURNERS TRANSİT BİR GÖÇ HATTI OLARAK TÜRKİYE: KUMUN TADI

Saygın Koray DOĞANER

Batman Üniversitesi, Batman/Türkiye

sayginkorayd@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7077-0551>

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Türkiye's position as a transit country and analyzes *Seaburners* (2014) through the themes of migration, in-betweenness, and waiting. In this context, it explores how transit migration is materialized along Türkiye's coastal and border zones. The aim is to reveal, through the film's staging and narrative strategies, how Türkiye's role as a passage country is constructed across spatial thresholds and everyday practices. The scope centers on transitional spaces such as the shoreline, the hut, and control points, as well as on long takes that render waiting permanent, the withdrawal of dialogue, the sound texture shaped by wind and waves, and the invisibility of migrant subjects. The method follows a qualitative, scene-based analysis in which camera placement, framing, editing rhythm, spatial composition, and sound design are examined according to their thematic density. The findings show that repetitive practices of inspection and documentation along the coast and in the town continually reproduce the border within daily life, that this external control turns into an inner sense of boundary within the characters, and that waiting evolves into the primary temporal mode of the transit experience. The silent presence of migrants highlights the fragility of identity and belonging, revealing the ethical and emotional weight of the transit route. In conclusion, the film moves beyond political discourse to convey the phenomenon of transit migration in Türkiye at the level of cinematic representation, exposing the border's spatial and human dimensions with striking clarity..

Keywords: Transit Migration, Migration Cinema, Border, Space in Cinema, Seaburners

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin geçiş ülkesi konumunu merkeze alarak *Kumun Tadı* filmini göç, aradalık ve bekleyiş temaları üzerinden ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma Türkiye'nin kıyı ve sınır kuşaklarında transit göçün nasıl somutlaştığını gösterir. Amaç, filmin sahne düzeni ve anlatım tercihleri aracılığıyla Türkiye'nin geçiş ülkesi işlevinin hangi mekânsal eşikler ve gündelik pratikler üzerinden kurulduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Kapsam, kıyı şeridi, kulübe ve kontrol noktaları gibi geçiş mekânları ile bekleyişi kalıcı hale getiren uzun planlar, konuşmaların geri çekilişi, rüzgâr ve dalga seslerinden oluşan işitsel doku ve göçmen öznelerin görünmezliği etrafında şekillenir. Yöntem, nitel bir yaklaşımla sahne temelli çözümlemeye dayanır ve kamera yerleşimi, kadraj, kurgu ritmi, mekân kullanımı ve ses düzeni tematik yoğunluklarına göre incelenir. Bulgular, kıyıda ve kasabada tekrarlanan kontrol ve belge pratiklerinin sınırı gündelik yaşam içinde sürekli yeniden ürettiğini, bu dışsal denetimin karakterlerin iç dünyasında bir sınır duygusuna dönüştüğünü ve bekleyişin transit deneyimin temel zaman kipine evrildiğini gösterir. Göçmenlerin sessiz varlığı, kimlik ve

aidiyetin kırılganlığını vurgulayarak transit hattın etik ve duygusal yükünü görünür kılar. Sonuç olarak film, politik söylemlerin ötesine geçerek Türkiye'deki transit göç olgusunu sahne düzeyinde aktararak, sınırın hem mekânsal hem insani boyutlarını açığa çıkarır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Transit Göç, Göçmen Sineması, Sınır, Sinemada Mekan, Kumun Tadı

1.INTRODUCTION

Türkiye has historically been a geography where different cultures, beliefs and communities have come together. The connection it has established between East and West represents not only a transit route but also an area of cultural and historical interaction. This unique position has enabled Türkiye to maintain its status as a country that has been both a destination and a source of migration, as well as a crossroads of migration routes, for centuries. As İçduygu (1996, p. 140) notes, Türkiye's multifaceted structure has been one of the fundamental factors shaping migration flows throughout history. Since ancient times, Anatolian lands have been defined as a transit route for people fleeing wars, seeking new homelands, or following trade routes. Similarly, Daniş (2004, pp. 225–226) emphasises that Türkiye has maintained this movement between east and west within a historical continuity.

Studies on transit migration worldwide demonstrate that the concept has gained increasing significance in international migration literature since the 1990s. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) defines transit migration as the missing link between points of departure and arrival, while Collyer (2007) conceptualises it through notions of waiting, uncertainty, and temporariness. Andersson (2014) and De Genova (2017) discuss the economic and bureaucratic dimensions of European border regimes shaping transit mobility; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis (2012) reveal how irregular migration becomes institutionalised across Europe. Kirişçi (2007) examines Türkiye's transformation in migration regimes, and İçduygu and Toktaş (2002) empirically analyse how irregular crossing networks operate in the Middle East. In the Türkiye context, recent research emphasises that transit migration acquires a complex, dynamic, and multilayered structure (Şişman & Balun, 2020). This evidence supports the view that transit migration is not merely a spatial passage, but a multidimensional social experience defined by waiting, fragility, and uncertainty.

In the twenty-first century, rapidly increasing wars, economic inequalities, and political instability have forced millions of people to migrate. In this process, Türkiye has been at the centre of migration routes to Europe due to its geopolitical position. İçduygu and Aksel (2012, p. 7) assess Türkiye's position as a multi-layered structure shaped by migration policies, while Deniz (2017, pp. 154–155) draws attention to the social and cultural transformations created by the country's role as a transit point. Tepealtı (2019, p. 132) interprets this mobility as one of the most prominent indicators of Türkiye's identity as a transit country. Thus, Türkiye becomes not only a country of asylum or emigration, but also a 'waiting area' where migration temporarily resides. This waiting period is often accompanied by uncertainty, legal limbo and emotional exhaustion.

The concept of transit migration began to be used in migration literature in the 1990s and is not yet fully defined in international law. This concept describes the temporary stops

between the country where migration begins and the destination and indicates that the migration process is not yet complete (Şirin Öner, 2018, p. 17). The uncertainty surrounding this concept stems both from the multifaceted nature of migration and from differences in the implementation of migration policies in different countries. Transit migration often represents an intermediate stage that has not yet reached its final destination. During this process, the individual does not fully belong to the country of origin nor is he or she part of the destination country. Consequently, the transit migrant is positioned in an existential space caught between two countries, where transience and uncertainty prevail. This situation involves not only a geographical transition but also a legal and psychological liminality. Although the migrant is within the borders of the transit country, they are often not included in that country's legal system, and their length of stay, legal status, or future remains uncertain. Transit migration is therefore a process that represents discontinuity, fragility and transience for both the migrant and the host country. The fact that the concept is not fully defined in international law leads to this temporary situation becoming a permanent uncertainty. While waiting to transit to their desired destination country, migrants are suspended between time, identity and space. This approach, emphasised by Şirin Öner, reveals that transit migration is not merely a form of movement but also one of the most complex stages of contemporary migration dynamics.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, political conflicts, economic crises, environmental disasters and social inequalities around the world have displaced millions of people and forced them to seek new places to live. Within this global movement, Türkiye has become an important transit point for migration routes, both due to its geographical location and its position at the centre of regional instability. The mass migration that intensified after the civil war in Syria, combined with migration flows from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and African countries, has profoundly affected Türkiye's social fabric and demographic structure. Türkiye is now not only a country that sends migrants or accepts refugees, but also a transit area where thousands of people from different regions wait for short or long periods of time. As this transition often lacks a definite direction, it is accompanied by uncertainty, lack of legal status and emotional exhaustion for migrants. Thus, migration represents not only a physical change of place, but also an existential experience caught between time and space.

One of the most striking aspects of this transition process is that migration is incomplete. Even though migrants have left their country of origin, they have not yet reached their destination country and are often waiting within the borders of a transit country. This wait is sometimes limited to a temporary period, but sometimes turns into an unplanned permanence. In migration literature, a transit country is an intermediate stop between the starting and ending points of migration. However, this stop is not always unique; migrants may pass through multiple transit countries, or a stop may become the destination country due to unavoidable circumstances. In this sense, transit migration is a flexible and constantly evolving process without clear boundaries.

As a general definition, we can say that the source country is the country where migration begins and individuals set out. The country of origin refers to the state of which the migrant is a citizen, while the destination country can be considered the final stop where migrants wish to arrive and settle. The transit country, on the other hand, can be described as

the passageway between the source country and the destination country, where migrants temporarily stop.

Relationships between the country of origin, transit region and destination country have led to the emergence of new concepts in migration studies in recent years. One such concept, transnationalism, describes the situation where migrants, despite adapting to the destination country, do not completely sever their ties with the country of origin. According to Barthram, Poros and Monforte (2017, p. 301), this situation demonstrates that migration is no longer a one-way movement but has become a continuous cycle of mutual interaction. Migration is no longer merely an act of 'departure'; it is a complex social phenomenon that also encompasses returns, connections, and multifaceted communication networks. This complex structure also leads to significant inconsistencies in the registration systems between countries. Tracking migrants' movements is often difficult because destination countries generally do not register individuals leaving the country, while source countries do not consider returning citizens as a new migration movement. This situation makes it difficult to track the multidimensional nature of migration numerically and creates significant discrepancies in data between countries. Different policies, different forms of implementation and variable migration regimes prevent comparative statistics from being evaluated holistically. Therefore, the dynamic nature of migration can be understood not only through geographical mobility but also through the flexibility of national systems and the nature of their policies.

As seen in the case of Türkiye, migration processes have now become a multidimensional, cyclical pattern interwoven with temporary settlements and return movements, rather than a single-track flow with fixed directions. This cycle constantly forces both individuals' sense of belonging and countries' migration policies to be redefined. Melisa Önel's film *Seaburners* (2012) is one of the rare examples in Turkish cinema that explores the themes of migration, borders and transience through silence and uncertainty. Rejecting the classical narrative structure, the director places the viewer not directly in the events, but in an emotional atmosphere. On the surface, the film tells a simple story, but it brings together Türkiye's identity as a 'transit country' with a personal story of conscience. At the centre of the story is Hamit, who trades coal in a small town. Hamit's daily life is woven with the struggle to make a living on the one hand and the burden of being part of an illegal transport network on the other. Through this character, the director narrates the invisible transitions that continue in Türkiye's border regions, the silent presence of people on migration routes, and the inner emptiness created by transience.

Rather than directly showing migrants, the film makes visible the silence surrounding migration. The camera often remains static, and in long shots, we observe the character's pauses. These pauses are not merely inaction, but a space for internal questioning. Önel's cinematic language pushes words into the background, bringing sounds, breath, wind, and waiting to the fore. This silence becomes a method for narrating Türkiye's experience of migration. Here, migration becomes less a physical movement and more a search for direction within oneself.

The director uses the locations in the film not merely as a backdrop, but as elements that construct meaning. The town on the Black Sea coast reflects Türkiye's geopolitical position as both a static and fluid space. The sea, with its constantly repeating waves, becomes a metaphor for transition; each wave carries the meaning of both progress and retreat. This repetition symbolises the endless movement of migration and unattainable goals. Önel conveys the feeling of being at the border without showing the border itself.

Seaburners has an experimental structure in terms of form. Dialogue is kept to a minimum, and relationships between characters are defined not by words but by silences. These choices heighten the film's emotional intensity while inviting the viewer into a space of waiting. Önel's aim is to ensure that the viewer experiences migration not as news, but as a state of mind. In this sense, the film holds up an indirect mirror to Türkiye's migration policies; for what is narrated here are not merely bodies in motion, but the psychological and moral consequences of displacement.

Melisa Önel's film *Seaburners* is a remarkable work in contemporary Turkish cinema in that it removes uncertainty as a narrative choice and turns it into an aesthetic element of the plot. Rather than bringing the story to the fore, the director distances the viewer from the centre of events and directs their attention to the existential situations of the characters. This approach aligns with an aesthetic understanding that emphasises cinema's power to 'make one think without showing' rather than its direct function of 'telling a story.' In Önel's film, emotions are not explicitly expressed; instead, they are sensed through the continuity of the characters' existence, their silences, and their waiting. The director defines humans not as explainable psychological subjects, but within the ambiguous relationships they establish with their surroundings. Therefore, the film positions itself outside the classical dramatic structure, leaving the viewer with an open-ended field of meaning.

Seaburners differs formally from films on the theme of migration because Önel relates migration to the individual's process of inner transformation rather than representing it as a social or political phenomenon. The state of liminality in the film, together with Türkiye's geographical and cultural position, refers to the discontinuous nature of identity. The characters symbolise not belonging anywhere, losing direction, and trying to exist in silence. This liminality expresses not only being on a spatial border but also an existential state of transition. The director's camera language slows down the rhythm of this transition; long shots, static frames, and dialogue-free scenes suspend the flow of time, making the psychological dimension of migration visible.

In this respect, the film focuses not on the physical movement of migration, but on the emotional resonance it creates. This sensory approach removes cinema from being merely a means of representation and transforms it into a field of experience. Önel's narrative, built on silence, redefines the aesthetics of uncertainty; for here, silence is not a lack of communication, but a form of expression where meaning deepens. In *Seaburners*, silence becomes a metaphor for both the characters' inner worlds and Türkiye's identity as a 'transit country.' In this context, the film is neither simply a migration story nor a straightforward love story; transcending both themes, it renders visible the struggle to exist in the tension between rootlessness and the search for belonging.

Melisa Önel's cinematic language goes beyond story-centred narration to construct the aesthetic form of emotion. The director's choice of this silent and slow-paced structure pushes the political dimension of migration into the background, bringing to the fore the human aspects of waiting, uncertainty and transience. Thus, *Seaburners* becomes a unique example in Turkish cinema that addresses the concept of “being caught in between” not only as a thematic issue but also as a narrative strategy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The phenomenon of migration is approached in contemporary social sciences not merely as a movement of displacement, but as a multidimensional process where social, cultural, and psychological transformations intersect. In this context, migration becomes a transformative experience that reshapes both the individual and the collective identity. With globalisation, borders have become more flexible, and the geographies once seen as the absolute domain of nation-states have given way to transitory, multi-identity spaces (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). This change requires migration to be understood not only in terms of economic or political reasons, but also in direct relation to identity, belonging and the perception of space.

In today's societies, borders are no longer merely geographical lines but emerge as social spaces where identities are constructed and negotiations are conducted. Etienne Balibar (2004) emphasises that borders today are not limited to the outer peripheries of nation-states but are reproduced everywhere and embedded within social life. According to Balibar, the meaning of borders today is not merely a physical barrier but a tool of power that classifies individuals and regulates identities. In this context, the migrant subject is the person who experiences both the material and symbolic effects of the border most intensely.

This approach finds its spatial and emotional counterpart in the film *Seaburners*. In the film, the border ceases to be a visible line and becomes a transitional space felt within the characters' inner worlds. The sea, sand and wind appear as natural elements representing the abstraction and permeability of the border. Thus, Melisa Önel suggests that the border is not a physical but a psychological space of experience.

The migrant subject's constant state of “being in between” is one of the most important topics of discussion in contemporary cultural theory. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) explains this situation with the concept of “in-between” in his work *The Location of Culture*. According to Bhabha, cultural identity is not a fixed structure; rather, it is shaped in a process of transition that oscillates between two identities, two cultures, or two affiliations. Therefore, the migrant belongs neither entirely to the place they came from nor to the place they arrived at. This in-between-ness signifies a continuous process of reconstruction and keeps the individual's identity constantly variable.

Türkiye's geopolitical position is a concrete manifestation of this theoretical framework. The country carries an ‘in-between’ identity, serving as a gateway to Europe on the one hand and a transitional area carrying the cultural heritage of the East on the other (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012). This situation places Türkiye in a complex position as a source,

destination, and transit country at the centre of migration movements. Melisa Önel's film *Seaburners* reflects precisely this state of in-between-ness.

In migration literature, the concept of transit refers to an incomplete stage of the migration process. Şirin Öner (2018) defines transit migration as a temporary stop between the country of origin and the destination country. During this process, the migrant does not fully belong to the country of origin nor has he or she reached the destination country. They exist in a state of waiting, transience and uncertainty. In this sense, the transit country is seen not only as a geographical crossing point but also as an area where identity, belonging and law are suspended. The film *Seaburners* makes this feeling of incompleteness visible. The characters in the film are constantly on the move but never arrive anywhere. This situation represents the 'unfinished' nature of transit migration at an individual level. The emotional boundaries of migration, as much as its physical boundaries, are shown to be part of an insurmountable cycle.

In the age of globalisation, migration is no longer a one-way movement. Migrants maintain their ties between their country of origin and their destination country, experiencing multiple forms of belonging. Bartram, Poros and Monforte (2017, p. 301) define this situation with the concept of 'transnationalism'. This approach demonstrates that migrants interact with both the place they come from and the place they go to, and therefore identity can no longer be confined to a fixed geography. This theoretical perspective is embodied in the character of Hamit in *Seaburners*. Hamit has become alienated from the society he lives in due to economic necessity and has become an 'other' in his own country. This situation reveals that migration is not merely a geographical change of place, but also a form of internal alienation. Önel's camera conveys this alienation not through words, but through moments of silence and pause.

3. METHOD

This study was designed using a qualitative approach and conducted based on film analysis. The primary aim of the research is to reveal how migration, liminality, and the concept of a transit country are represented through cinematic signs in the film *Seaburners*. Accordingly, the methodological framework is based on a scene-based analysis approach. Priority in the analysis was given to the film's formal structure and narrative strategies, with content interpretations linked to concepts defined within the theoretical framework.

The film is a sample selected in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research methods. *Seaburners* was selected as the object of study in this work because it presents a unique narrative that conveys Türkiye's position as a transit country not through direct political discourse but through the language of film. During the analysis process, the film's narrative structure, scene transitions, camera movements, use of space, sound design, characters' physical positions, and gaze directions were evaluated separately. These elements were related to the visual and auditory representations of the concepts of migration and waiting in cinema.

In the analysis process, scenes were classified according to their thematic intensity rather than the temporal progression of the film. First, scenes set on the seashore were considered as examples representing the invisibility of the border and the continuity of transience. Subsequently, the sections where the characters remain silent were evaluated as narrative elements reflecting the psychological dimension of waiting. Finally, the static shots and long takes in the film were interpreted as aesthetic choices that slow down the rhythm of migration and suspend the flow of time. This method aims to evaluate both visual and auditory codes together in film analysis. The study did not involve quantitative measurement or numerical data analysis; instead, it focused on the ways in which scenes produce meaning. In this respect, the research adopts a qualitative content analysis approach that relates film analysis to social theory.

Another important dimension of the method is that it treats the film not merely as a text but as a field of experience. The sensory and emotional relationship established by the viewer with the film is seen as part of the interpretation process. Within this framework, the viewer's position is evaluated not only as an observer but as a subject involved in the narrative. Thus, the silence, emptiness, and slow rhythm in the film are treated not only as an aesthetic choice but also as a way of reproducing the emotional atmosphere of migration. This study aims to offer an original reading of the representation of migration in cinema by evaluating the film *Seaburners* in terms of its formal elements, narrative language, and thematic depth. This method was developed to reveal both the concretisation of theoretical concepts at the scene level and how Türkiye's identity as a transit country is reflected in visual narrative.

Balibar's (2004) observation that the border is reproduced in all areas of social relations finds a strong counterpart in the film. The ticket office scenes are among the most concrete examples of this reproduction. A civil servant's question, a missing document, or a stamped passport re-establishes the presence of the border. The people waiting in line in front of the character appear sometimes as a silent crowd, sometimes as a frantic crush. These moments show how the border redefines relationships between individuals. Everyone is in the same space but is restricted at different levels at the same time. Some pass easily, some wait for hours, and some never pass at all.

4. SEABURNERS

Melisa Önel's film *Seaburners* opens not directly with the characters, but with a prologue scene. In cinema, the prologue is often used as an introductory section independent of the film's narrative, preparing the audience more for the theme and emotion than the plot. In Önel's film, this prologue does not belong to a specific historical time or place. The cloud-covered sky, the sound of the wind carried by the storm, and the rough waves evoke a timeless loneliness. A body washed up on the shore forms the starting point of the narrative. The identity of this body is not revealed, but this being lying motionless on the sand establishes a meaningful connection with the film's title. The term “*Seaburners*” here

symbolises the transition between life and death, the fine line between human existence and non-existence. With this scene, the director suggests to the viewer that the film's world is more of a sensory experience than reality.

The prologue also carries an important clue about the overall structure of the film. This short section is not just a beginning, but also the first representation of the theme of transition at the heart of the narrative. The body washed ashore symbolises a point where movement ends, but meaning begins. With this scene, the director implies that migration is not only about living bodies, but also about lost bodies. Thus, the prologue foreshadows the feelings of silence, waiting, and transience that will be present throughout the film. Following this introduction, the film moves on to its narrative centred around the characters Hamit and Denise. Hamit is a man who makes a living transporting coal but is also involved in illegal migration routes. His story is a reflection of the invisible transitions taking place in Türkiye's border regions. While the director presents Hamit's daily life as an ordinary work routine, he actually questions the ethical and human limits of this routine. Hamit trades with his coal truck on the one hand, and uses this truck to transport migrants on the other. This duality shows that the character is both part of the system and a representative of its contradictions.

Following the opening sequence, the film shifts to a narrative centred around the characters Hamit and Denise. Hamit is a man who earns his living transporting coal, but who is also involved in illegal migration routes. His story is a reflection of the invisible transitions taking place in Türkiye. While the director presents Hamit's daily life as an ordinary work routine, he actually questions the ethical and human limits of this routine. Hamit trades with his coal truck on the one hand, and uses this truck to transport migrants on the other. This duality shows that the character is both part of the system and representative of its contradictions.

Denise, on the other hand, is a foreigner coming into this world from outside. She appears in the film as a botanist who has come to Türkiye as part of a research project. Her interest in nature creates an important contrast in the overall atmosphere of the film. In contrast to Hamit's dark, sinister world, the plants Denise is interested in symbolise the fragility and continuity of life. This contrast is one of the fundamental axes that define the relationship between the two characters. The bond between them develops in the form of both an emotional and existential togetherness. However, this relationship, like the film's overall atmosphere, does not rest on a permanent foundation.

As the film progresses, the narrative deepens with the dark atmosphere surrounding Hamit becoming apparent. The viewer realises that Ali, the coal merchant, is also a middleman involved in human trafficking. Alongside Hamit, a young and inexperienced character named Fehmi also finds himself caught up in this illegal scheme. Fehmi has taken on the responsibility for the migrants, but this responsibility is far too heavy for him to bear. He does not know what to do and constantly asks Hamit for guidance. Each time, the answer is the same: Ali is the decision-maker. This repetition brings to the fore not only the hierarchy between the characters but also the question of who bears the moral responsibility.

The migrants appear in the film as an invisible crowd. Their presence is not directly shown; rather, it is felt as a silence that heightens the tension. Fehmi struggles to keep these

people hidden in a secret place, his fear and inexperience evident on his face. His helplessness reveals the limits of his role as a small cog in the system. Hamit, on the other hand, becomes increasingly withdrawn in the face of this situation. What he initially saw as merely a way to earn money, transporting people, gradually becomes a heavy burden on his conscience. His silence conveys an inner turmoil that comes from being aware of his complicity.

The director establishes the moral tension surrounding human trafficking not through open conflict or sharp dialogue, but through the intensity of the atmosphere. The sound of the wind, the dark night scenes, and the weariness on the characters' faces convey what is left unsaid in the story. The camera often remains static, leaving the viewer space to think and feel. This silence, caught between Hamit's gaze, Fehmi's nervous movements, and Ali's unseen authority, is the most important element defining the film's spirit. These sections not only advance the plot but also signal a deep fracture in the characters' inner worlds. The presence of the migrants ceases to be an external threat and becomes a turning point where Hamit confronts his own moral boundaries. The film does not present this confrontation directly, but instead leaves the viewer alone with the silence. This silence is the result of both the character's internal reckoning and the director's conscious choice. In a world where everything is discussed, *Seaburners* narrates through silence. Hamit's silence becomes the language of conscience. The director thus renders the fine line between crime, responsibility, and humanity visible in a simple yet unsettling manner.

4.1 The Spatial Structure of the Film: Boundary, Transition, Stasis, Liminality

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The narrative world of the film *Seaburners* demonstrates that the border is not merely a geographical line, but also a space for spiritual experience. The film constructs the setting not as a backdrop, but as an entity where meaning is produced. The sea, sand and wind are the most prominent elements in the story. These elements reveal the characters' relationships with both the outside world and their inner worlds. As the film opens with the waves of the sea, it gives the viewer no sense of direction. The camera seeks neither a beginning nor an end. It is as if everything flows within a cycle. This cyclical nature represents the endless movement of migration and the nature of transience turning into permanence.

The prologue establishes the film's spatial map of meaning. A stormy sea, a grey sky, and a corpse washed up on the sand... This scene blurs the boundary between life and death, movement and stillness. With this image, the director alludes both to the film's title and the essence of the narrative. The lifeless body on the sand becomes a silent representation of the countless people lost on migration routes. It is also the starting point of Hamit's story. Because this image reminds him of the human and moral limits of the order he finds himself in.

As the film progresses, the uncanny nature of the setting becomes more apparent. The town on the Black Sea coast is neither a fully-fledged settlement nor merely a transit point. This dual structure is felt in every scene. The camera often shows the outskirts of the town, its empty spaces, the paths lit by lanterns, and the silent shacks where the migrants stay. These areas are neither the complete opposite of movement nor of stillness. The director establishes

the setting within stillness, but this stillness carries an invisible movement. The constant crashing of the waves on the shore, the migrants' unattainable goals, Hamit's internalised sense of hopelessness, and the country's transient identity are all brought to mind.

The sense of control that prevails throughout the film is felt not only as an external form of pressure but also as an internal tension ingrained in the characters' existence. Gendarmerie checks show that the space is kept under control for security purposes, while also revealing that individuals' areas of freedom are invisibly restricted. Over time, this invisible boundary takes root not only in the external world but also in the characters' inner worlds. Hamit's silence is both a form of resistance and a silent expression of helplessness in this oppressive environment. As he remains silent, he withdraws into himself, his inner silence turning into a kind of waiting. This waiting carries neither true hope nor the possibility of escape. Hamit is now a figure alienated even in his own country. Even his relationship with Denise cannot eliminate this alienation. The closeness between them is surrounded by invisible distances brought about by belonging to different worlds. The atmosphere in the film therefore carries not only a personal unease, but also a sense of social stagnation and persistent discontent.

In the film, the border is not visible as a line drawn on a map, yet its presence is indirectly felt in every scene. The light from the torch piercing the darkness of the rural landscape signifies both a spatial and psychological transition. Although this light provides temporary illumination, it never achieves complete clarity. This same uncertainty echoes within the characters' inner worlds. Throughout the film, the weight of an invisible yet inevitable border is felt. This border is not merely a geographical obstacle; it is like an internal wall woven with people's hopes, fears, and pasts. Hamit's silence echoes within this space. For him, waiting has ceased to be a temporary state and has become a permanent part of his existence. He has now lost his way even in his own country and has become a stranger in the geography he inhabits. The seaside town is not a harbour for him, but is shown as a repeated confinement, like a wave constantly crashing against the same point. This confinement becomes even more apparent in the brief but meaningful dialogues Hamit has with Fehmi.

Fehmi, with the innocent curiosity of youth, turns to Hamit and asks, 'Why did you come back, brother?' This question touches not only on Hamit's past but also on the desire to emigrate that is felt throughout the film. Hamit replies with a mocking smile, 'I felt like it.' This answer appears indifferent on the surface, but beneath it lies the fatigue of a failed escape and a life to which one is forced to return. Fehmi's mind is still set on leaving. 'Hamit, how do those who leave manage to stay? They say if you marry one of them, you can stay,' he says. This sentence shows how fragile the reality of migration is in a world where hope is based on rumours. Hamit repeats, 'What do they say?' with a smile, then asks, 'Are you going too? Shall I tell your brother Ali? That you're going to take the boat and run away?' both frightening and testing Fehmi. Fehmi immediately retreats and defends himself, saying, 'No, brother, nothing like that.'

This brief exchange clearly highlights the difference in the life experiences of the two characters. Fehmi carries the hopeful excitement of someone who has not yet set out. Hamit,

on the other hand, has already seen the dead end at the end of that road. Hamit remains silent for a moment and then sighs wearily, "You think it's easy, don't you? If it were easy, I would have stayed." This sentence is one of the most powerful internal conflicts in the film. It summarises the difficulty of migration, the weight of what has been lost, and the shame of returning. This scene brings together the characters' personal histories and the symbolic meaning of Türkiye's position as a transit country. Fehmi wants to leave but lacks the courage. Hamit left but was forced to return. Both are in limbo. Their conversation shows that the border exists not only in the outside world but also within the human soul. Therefore, the invisible border in the film becomes more of a state of mind than a geographical issue. Through these dialogues, *Seaburners* makes the internal structure of migration more visible than its physical aspects.

4.2. The Position and Identity Construction of the Migrant Female Character

The representation of female characters in the film is built upon silence, distance and invisibility. These women, each alien in different ways, exist beyond the boundaries of both society and space. The film does not directly narrate the women's stories. By centring their silence, it establishes a profound connection between identity, belonging and invisibility.

The character Denise is one of the most striking links in the chain of invisibility. Denise, who comes from a foreign country to conduct botanical research, becomes part of the town through her relationship with Hamit. However, like the other characters, she does not belong to this geography. Their meetings by the sea carry a sense of temporary refuge rather than physical closeness. For Hamit, Denise is a brief escape. Yet this relationship does not erase the feeling of rootlessness. The bond between them is like two strangers meeting in the same loneliness. Conversations are sparse, glances are long, and silences are heavy. The director frames this relationship not as a love story but as an emotional reflection of liminality.

The film's other female characters exist almost entirely in silence. A migrant woman and her daughter try to live in a temporary shelter. The little girl wants to go outside and look at the animals, but her mother constantly warns her. This distance stems not only from fear but also from invisibility as a form of defence. When the girl goes outside, she feels both the allure and the danger of the world around her. The desire to burn passports and personal belongings in the film shows how identity is erased through physical documents. The little girl's attempt to protect her album is an effort to hold on to the last traces of memory and belonging. However, the eventual burning of the album represents a moment when the past is completely erased.

The black woman in the film is also a powerful example of the silence of migrants. She has no dialogue. She only appears briefly through her presence. This speechlessness becomes the most obvious expression of exclusion. The director presents this silence not as a deficiency but as a form of resistance. The women's silence becomes central to the meaning. This silence is a symbol of lives that are ignored.

No direct connection is established between Denise and the immigrant women, but the film brings them together on the same plane. One represents the modern world, the other is an invisible figure struggling to survive. Neither belongs anywhere. One came voluntarily, the other was forced to come. This contrast deepens the representations of women. The female body becomes a space where both boundaries and belonging become blurred.

Seaburners does not define its female characters in the classical sense. Their identities are shaped by silence, distance, and transience. An invisible link is established between Denise's scientific curiosity and the migrant women's survival instinct. Each tries to exist in her own way, but none of their voices are fully heard. This silence is both the common destiny of the women in the film and the basis of their identity construction. The film thus reveals the meaning of liminality, belonginglessness, and invisibility through the language of film, using female characters.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The film depicts the border not as a linear line but as an order reproduced within social relations. The shore, the hut, the ticket office, the darkness scanned by a torch, and the queues of people waiting all point to the invisible re-establishment of the border in everyday practices, an approach that aligns with Balibar's views on the social immanence of the border (2004). This external control gradually permeates the characters' inner worlds. Hamit's silence and Fehmi's indecision clearly show that the geographical border has become an internal border. The body washed up on the shore in the prologue represents a threshold suspended between life and death and forms the visual precursor of liminality. Daily actions repeated with a cyclical wave rhythm show how the temporary becomes permanent. This reveals that migration is not merely a physical movement but also an existential experience intensified by waiting (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). At the end of the film, the sea and waves reappear. The narrative seems to have returned to where it began, but this time there are more bodies washing up on the shore. Whether these dead bodies belong to the migrants and Hamit remains a question in the viewer's mind.

Long shots and static frames slow down the classical dramatic pace and convey the state of transit to the viewer as an experience. The prolongation of time delays the movement towards the goal and carries the waiting into the film's narrative. This choice of rhythm is in line with cultural theory regarding the identity-forming nature of liminality, because liminality is a transition in progress rather than a fixed arrival (Bhabha, 1994). *Seaburners* suspends this state of transition temporally, thus allowing the viewer to sense both the characters' inner waiting and the incessantly postponed aspect of migration.

Hamit's position within illegal transportation creates a tension between economic necessity and moral unease. A brief dialogue with Fehmi reveals that the desire to leave is experienced as a youthful hope and that returning has left a silent rift. The line, 'If it were easy, I would have stayed,' intensely summarises the fatigue that the reality of transit creates in the individual. This finding is consistent with the theoretical argument that the border is re-established not only externally but also within the subject (Balibar, 2004). In the film, this

internal border becomes visible in Hamit's silence, his repetitive work, and the cyclical order he is part of and wants to escape. In the silent sequences of the film, the wind, waves, engine noise and breathing sounds produce meaning. Silence functions not as a void in the narrative but as an intensifying space. As suggested by the sensory cinema approach, the burden of the unseen is entrusted to the auditory texture and approaches representational ethics (Marks, 2000). The fact that migrants are mostly heard as an invisible crowd produces an ethical closeness in the absence of speech.

The film establishes indicators that convey Türkiye as a transit geography without referring to current political texts. The coast and the town function like a doorway, control is continuous, and waiting becomes a social rhythm. This representation is consistent with observations in the literature regarding Türkiye's multidimensional transit position and suggests the national-scale manifestations of liminality (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012; Şirin Öner, 2018). In this context, *Seaburners* transforms Türkiye's temporary yet enduring role within migration flows into a universal experience through individual stories.

Fehmi's desire to leave and Hamit's state of having returned show that transnational movement is not a one-way flow, but is fuelled by rumours, hopes, and fragile strategies. This movement, oscillating between departure and return, points to a relational ground that does not fix identity to a single place and is parallel to conceptual explanations (Bartram, Poros & Monforte, 2017). The film embodies this movement with its characters who are constantly on the move but belong nowhere.

5. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the film prompts reflection not through a discourse conveying data on transit migration, but through the language of cinema. In this context, three main conclusions can be highlighted. Firstly, the film constructs the border not merely as a geographical line, but as a state of mind reproduced in the individual's daily life. Secondly, by slowing down time and bringing silence to the fore, waiting has been transformed into an experience, making the state of being in transit visually apparent. Thirdly, the silence of the female characters represents the fragility of identity and belonging, revealing the emotional dimension of migration.

In line with the general framework of the study, the film first removes the border from being a linear line and transforms it into a state that is reproduced in daily practices and seeps into the subject. The shore, the hut, and the checkpoints are not merely decorations but structures that make the social immanence of the border visible. In the prologue, the body washed up on the shore is the most intense symbol of this internalised border and establishes the sensory counterpart of unfinished migration. This observation shows that the film constructs the border not only as a geographical phenomenon but also as an individual and psychological experience.

Continuing the narrative's spatial construction, the film uses time and sound strategies to turn waiting into an experience. Long shots and the withdrawal of speech make the liminality felt in the viewer's body. Silence produces intuition rather than explanation and

provides an ethical closeness to invisible crowds. This aesthetic choice carries the internalised border experience emphasised in the previous finding into a temporal sensation and reinforces the endlessness of the transit state. Thus, the film transforms the boundaries of space into the flow of time and makes the viewer experience the endlessly postponed nature of migration.

Following the experiences of borders and waiting, the representations of women in the film are constructed through silence, distance, and invisibility, moving beyond the word-centred narrative. Denise and the migrant women are different faces of the same liminality. The burning of the passport and album embodies the fragility of identity and memory on stage. The absence of dialogue takes on meaning as the resistance of experiences that are difficult to represent. In this sense, female silence in the film is positioned not only as invisibility but also as a form of sensory resistance against the internalisation of the border. Thus, *Seaburners* brings together the themes of liminality, waiting, and identity, making Türkiye's transitional geography visible at a cinematic level of perception and establishing an aesthetic parallel with the discussions of transit countries in the literature. This analysis shows that the film not only narrates migration but also transforms silence, waiting, and invisibility into cinematic language. *Seaburners* reconstructs social memory through individual stories and conveys Türkiye's identity as a transit country as an emotional experience. Thus, the film develops a unique cinematic language that focuses on the human dimension of migration, beyond political discourse.

The contribution of this study to the literature can be summarised on three levels. It explains the visual and conceptual representation of transit migration in cinema using a conceptual language. It demonstrates, through scene analyses, how the internalisation of the border and the aesthetics of waiting are established in the Turkish context. It renders visible the construction of identity through silence in female subjects. The limitations of the study include its focus on a single film and the lack of a comparative corpus. Future research could conduct comparative readings with films from different periods and directors and examine the perceptual effects of migration films in audience reception studies.

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