



## Cultural Identity and Media: Screening Practices of Marriage in Kyrgyz Media (The Case of “El Ukpasin” Films)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Cultural identity consists of cultural norms and values that distinguish a society of other societies. For this reason, the concept of cultural identity is related to the norms and values of the society in which the individual is. At the same time, the media performs an important function in the introduction of these norms and values in the broad mass. After Kyrgyzstan's independence, it entered into a new nation-building process different from the Soviet Union and supported this process through the media. In this respect Kyrgyz cinema has become one of the important media tools in the production of new values and norms of the independence period of Kyrgyzstan. The study focuses on cultural identity related values and norms media in general and cinema in particular. The semiotic method is used, which has been used since the 20th century, in order to determine the cultural elements in the film "El Ukpasin". With this method, it has been tried to analyze in which way the elements of cultural identity reflected in the forms and codes. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that elements of Kyrgyz cultural identity were used in all "El Ukpasin" film. It was found that Kyrgyz marriage patterns were widely used and criticisms of traditional marriage patterns were found.

**Key words:** Cultural Identity, Independence Period of Kyrgyzstan, Independence Period of Kyrgyz Cinema, El Ukpasin

### Kültürel Kimlik ve Medya: Kırğız Medyasında Evlenme Biçimi Gösterim Pratikleri (“El Ukpasin”Filmi Örneğinde)

#### Özet

Kültürel kimlik, bir toplumu diğer toplumlardan ayıran değerler bütünüdür. Toplumların kültürel kimlikleri o toplumu diğer toplumlardan ayıran unsurlardan biridir. Bu sebeple kültürel kimlik kavramı bireyin içinde bulunduğu toplumun norm ve değerlerine atıfta bulunurken medya, norm ve değerlerin geniş kitleye tanıtımında önemli bir işlevi yerine getirmektedir. Kırğızistan bağımsızlığının ardından Sovyetler Birliğinden farklı yeni bir ulus inşa sürecine girmiş, bu süreci medya aracılığıyla desteklemiştir. Kırğız sineması da bağımsızlık döneminin yeni değer ve normların üretiminde ve yayılımında önemli medya araçlarından biri olmuştur. Çalışmada medya genelinde sinema özelinde kültürel kimliğe ilişkin değer ve normların yansımaları biçimlerine yoğunlaşmıştır. “El Ukpasin”filminde sunulan kültürel unsurların açığa çıkarılması amaçlanmıştır. Bu amacı yerine getirmek için 20. yüzyıldan bu yana kullanılan göstergebilimsel bir metot çözümlene yöntemi olarak kullanılmıştır. Çözümlene sonucunda “El Ukpasin”filminde Kırğız kültürel kimliğine ait unsurların kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir Kırğız evlenme biçimlerinin geniş şekilde yer verildiği tespit edilen filmde geleneksel evlenme biçimlerinin eleştirilerine yer verildiği görülmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürel Kimlik, Bağımsızlık Dönemi Kırğızistan, Bağımsızlık Dönemi Kırğız Sineması, El Ukpasin.

#### 1. Introduction

Cultural identity is the concept associated with norms and values of individuals who share the same piece of land. Media is one factor in the formation of Cultural identity. Media takes shape according to society, the media can not be considered to be independent of cultural identity. The media have potential to influence the human being and society, at the same time media can shape cultural identity as well.

In order to determine the reflections of cultural identity on media the film “El Ukpasin” was analyzed which was released in 2017, in Kyrgyzstan. In vocabulary section of the study, Identity and Concept of cultural identity, cultural identity and media relations are presented. In the analysis section, the semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes is given. In the film which was analyzed by semiotic method,

the codes and indicators of cultural identity elements were analyzed through Barthes narrative codes.

In the film of "El Ukpasin", cultural identity related life style, ideal man and woman, drinking and eating, marriage codes and norms were identified. In the film, there is no criticism of the ideal man and woman eating and drinking in the codes and norms related to cultural identity, however there is a criticism about the traditional Kyrgyz culture's marriage practices depending on the changing life conditions and lifestyle. This also points to the process of formation of a new cultural identity, unlike traditional identity.

The cultural identity of the countries is also affected by the effects of media and globalization. In this process, Kyrgyz cultural identity was also affected. With the disappearance of boundaries, cultures and societies have become close to each other, and traditions from past to present have been criticized by the new generation. From this point of view, the film is the cinematographic

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narrative of how the new generation questions marriage practices in the past generation.

In Kyrgyz culture, traditional marriage takes place in two different ways. One of them is *ala kachu*, the other is *kuda /beshik*. It is seen that both traditional marriages are criticized in the film. In the film "Ala Kachu" way of marriage shown as it carries the criminal aspect. This situation is manifested by codes and norms for the discourse of abandoning the traditional form of marriage. In modern life, it is pointed out that such a form of marriage is unacceptable. In the film, the message is given that past generations made mistakes by using traditional marriage "Bel Kuda"/"Beshik Kuda" should not be continued in these days.

The heroes of the film married in a modern way. The two adults who first met and then decided to marry described the way in which they marry in modern life. According to the film, this should be the way of marriage that suits modern life.

In the film, it has been cinematographically explained that the need to abandon the old form of marriage through criticisms of traditional marriage, instead adopting the modern form of marriage is more compatible with the modern way of life. This narrative aims to abandon traditional marriage in Kyrgyz social life.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. The Concept of Identity and Cultural Identity

When approaching the concept of identity from a sociological point of view, it is seen that individuals find meaning as a sense of self, their commitment to the group (Peek, 2005: 217). These meanings are closely related to the individual's self-formation. Therefore, the definition is related to the self-positioning of the person in society (Weinreich, 2005: 26). While the position of the individual in society is influenced by the culture in which he/she is living, this influence brings along the direct interaction between identity and culture.

The concept is analyzed in different ways in social science in accordance with the meaning imposed to individuals by identity. In general, however, the concept of identity is divided into three as personal identity, psychosocial identity and cultural identity. The study is based on the concept of cultural identity.

Cultural identity is a set of values composed of cultural norms and values that distinguish a society from other societies. The cultural identities of societies are one of the factors that differentiate that society from other societies. For this reason, the concept of cultural identity refers to the norms and values of the individual society (Güleç, 1992: 11).

Humans are social being, that's why they interact and communicate with other people and societies. It develops behavioral patterns in accordance with common needs in society. While common beliefs, attitudes and norms form culture of society by its members, individuals also shapes his identity around this culture, and all these plays a key role in formation of cultural identity (Nurin, 1994: 63).

In this respect, cultural identity is closely related to the same behavior patterns of people living in the same society as they are born and live in the same cultural environment (Güneş, 2007: 201)

The most important function of cultural identity in this context is to provide the perception of the individual's similarities and communities (Aydın, 1999: 15). The formation of cultural identity is closely related to the time period. In this regard, cultural identity is a carrier of the conditions of time. Experienced word social lifestyles lead to the formation of cultural identity. For this reason, cultural identity also interacts with the socio-cultural field (İlhan, 2013: 234).

Another factor in the formation of cultural identity is the media factor. The media describes the norms and behaviors that exist in society in the form of us and other. By this way, the individual can predict which behavior is good and which behavior is bad. Especially in totalitarian regimes, cultural identity is being witnessed through the media. By this way, the individual can adopt the personality, exemplary behavior values and norms desired by the ruling power.

But in the post modern world in which we live, post modern identity definitions have changed because of the continuous differentiation of social structure. It should be noted that, due to the continuous change and complexity of social life, individuals lose their eigenvalues and lead a life without identity, especially due to the development of new communication tools. This approach is based on the view that the individual lacks position at any time and place (Karaduman, 2007: 50).

### 2.2. Relationship Between Cultural Identity and Media

The media has a great influence on the masses thanks to the power it has. Both individuals and societies can be affected by media. Convergences with the messages it offers to its audience with the wide spreading power of the media are among the most effective tools that have the power to create values. Affected by the conditions of the society, it is possible to reflect the cultural values of the society.

The technological developments in the means of communication brought the societies of many different cultures closer together. Again, thanks to communication technologies, the rate of spreading of cultures to other societies also increased (Özçağlayan, 1998: 4).

In this respect, the development of technology and the media has the potential to change and transform cultural practices (Yagli, 2015: 272). Individuals learn how to behave in situations, in the process teaching individuals of existing norms and values defined as socialization in general. Individuals can find their roles, status and behaviors required by their status, their expectations from society or other individuals in the media (Arslan, 2006: 6).

Today, the individual learns the social norms and behaviors in daily life rather than the family. In this respect, the individual begins to perceive the world through the media from an early age, the guide is the media (Cereci, 1996: 48).

The media (Kocadaş, 2006: 5), which has developed the life experience of individuals in daily life and changes in their social life, is able to formulate the cultural identity of the individual with these changes due to their ability to descend into all layers of society (İlhan, 2013: 234). Modern life style, globalization, changes in the thought system can change the traditions that lasts for generations.

Media is the most important tool for publicizing changing traditions. The analyzed film in this research criticizes the tradition that has lasted for generations. In the film where Kyrgyz culture meets the observer of marriage patterns, it is the characterization of the difficulties of the application of traditional forms of marriage to the modern life.

### 3. Purpose and Method of Research

This study aims to reveal the media presentation forms of cultural identities in El Ukpas's film. For this purpose, the film was analyzed by a semiotic method used since the 20th century.

In this context, Barthes (Parsa and Parsa, 2004: 57), who see all the phenomena in the environment as narrative structure, was analyzed on the model of interpretation.

According to Barthes, meaning is realized in two planes. The first plane of meaning gives the meaning within the indicator. Barthes called it a denotation plane (Parsa and Parsa, 2004: 57). The flat meaning refers to the first level of meaning and visual meaning (Yengin, 2012: 16). The second plane of Barthes's interpretive model is the connotation plane. In this plane, subjectivity comes to the fore because of cultural relations and cultural values. The invasive meaning works at the subjective level because of its commitment to culture (Parsa and Parsa, 2004: 58). These subjective values consist of cultural, socio-cultural values and ideological ideas (Yengin, 2012: 16).

"El Ukpasın! "

**Description of a film**

**Original name of film:** El Ukpasın!

**Producer:**

**Year of production:** 2017

**Duration:** 99''

**Film Director:** Suyun OTKEYEV

**Cameraman:** Otkur Joldoshev

**Music:** Marat Ashyrov

**Sound:** Dmitriy Sharshenov

**The story of film**

Parents gave a word years ago to each other to marry their children, Dastan who studies in Korea and Jamila who is interested in martial arts. Although families want children to marry, children do not like each other, they do not want to marry. Families try to bring children together, but they cannot be successful. Jamila is kidnapped by a group of people. Dastan goes to great lengths to save Jamila. Finally Jamila is saved. Dastan and Jamila become closer to each other.

#### 3.1. Summary of the film

"El Ukpasın" Semiotic Analysis of Film

The film of El Ukpas consists of the cinematographic narrative of two different heroes from the Kyrgyz tradition of Bel kuda. In this respect, the story is fictionalized by a cinematographic narrative based on the articulation of main characters, events and side characters. In the film, mostly cultural identity elements are found.

Two different Kyrgyz cultures are mentioned in the film. The first of these cultures is traditional Kyrgyz culture. The elements of this culture in the film are coded in the discourse practices of the families of Jamila and Dastan. Another Kyrgyz culture shown in the film is the cultural values of modern life. It is possible to see the

values and norms of this culture from the narrative practices and behavior patterns of Jamila and Dastan.

The film consists of two separate cultural values and two separate worlds. On the one hand, the families of Jamila and Dastan reflect the traditional Kyrgyz culture, on the other hand there are two young people (Dastan and Jamila) who have adapted to the modern life and have adopted different lifestyles.

The codes and indicators that constitute the cinematographic narrative of the film are analyzed through the elements of Kyrgyz culture reflected on the film. In the film, the codes and indicators of cultural values are analyzed by semiotic method.

#### 3.2. Lifestyle Code and Indicators

Dastan and Jamila, who are expected to marry by their families years ago, do not want to get married. This was shown by young people's actions and interactions through codes and indicators to the audience.

Life codes analyzed through clothing of actors, Jamila's interest in martial arts, having Dastan's education abroad, meeting at the airport etc. are the indicators of non-traditional culture.

The main reason why Dastan and Jamila do not want to marry is their career plans. Career planning is one of the main indicators of modern life. However, the families of Dastan and Jamila married at a young age, soon after they had children and dictated their children.

As we have seen, two different cultural codes are made of film narratives, the first of which is the ideas and actions of Jamila and Dastan about modern life, while the other is that the families of Jamila and Dastan have early marriages according to the traditional Kyrgyz culture and having children at yearly ages.

**Figure 1. Jamila**



**Figure 2: Dastan**



#### 3.3. Ideal Man and Woman Code and Indicators

Ideal man and ideal woman codes explained by Jamila and Dastan's expression how they should be.

According to this, when Jamila's expression and behavior are analyzed, she is doing male sports such as martial arts and have plans for career.. Jamila doesn't know how to make up and cook. This situation is criticized by Dastan as if she acts not like girl. As it is seen, the ideal women's indicators are that the woman does her makeup, she is not interested in martial arts, and she cooks well.

It is possible to see the ideal girl description in Dastan's words. Dastan tells to his father about the ideal woman with reference to Kyrgyz proverb, noting that Jamila has a masculine character.

Winter like winter and girl like girl is beautiful. Dastan's words shows us that woman should make up her face, dress like a girl.

Dastan is educated man with a good-looking romantic character, city and metrosexual far away from martial art. However, according to Jamila the ideal man should not have such a character.

In the film; The ideal male and woman definitions of Kyrgyz culture were made. According to it, ideal woman associated with make-up, dress, in contrast the ideal man should protect woman and must fight for her. In fact, it turned out that Dastan was interested in martial arts and Jamila fell in love with the ideal man.

### 3.4. Code and Indicators for Eating and Drinking

The culture of eating and drinking is one of the characteristics that distinguishes society from other societies. In the film, it is seen that indicators and codes related to this culture are included. In the film; families who come together for various reasons eat food. These indicators, which are located in a few scenes, contain information about Kyrgyz food culture. Families are invited to each other's homes and they are invited to the birthdays.

In Kyrgyz, a table called "Dastarkon" is being prepared. And this table has traditional dishes such as borsok, shorpo etc.

**Figure 3.** Kyrgyz Food Culture Impression Practice



### 3.5. Marriage Code and Indicators

Family is one of the greatest cultural values of society. The continuation of a society takes place with the establishment of the family. The formation of the family is one of the characteristics that distinguishes one society from the other. The majority of the scenes in the film consist of marriage codes for the formation of family. It is possible to collect these codes and indicators under two main roofs. The first is traditional marriage practices based on the traditions of the Kyrgyz and their traditions. In this film, while demonstrations of both marriage practices were given, traditional marriage practices were criticized.

#### 3.5.1. Ala Kachu (Kidnapping)

One of Kyrgyz traditional marriage methods is "Ala Kachu" tradition. The man kidnaps his girlfriend with friends and then brings them home. Later, the girl sit in a place called "Koshogo". The man's relatives are trying to persuade the girl and the oldest member of the family lies in front of the girl, so that the girl cannot leave the room. Respect for the elderly is very important in Kyrgyz culture. For this reason, the kidnapped girl does not leave the house on the elderly. In the film, there are codes for the traditional marriage methods. These codes are "Koshogo",

the lying of oldest person in front of the girl and neighbor visits. In addition, Dastan's mother and father are married to this method in a few scenes are discursive. The kidnapping tradition is a crime, and it is against the law. This is a critique of the traditional form of marriages. It is emphasized that people should not be married to someone they do not like.

**Figure 4.** Jamila is sitting in Koshogo



#### 3.5.2. Bel Kuda and Beshik Kuda

Another of Kyrgyz traditional marriage methods is "Bel Kuda" and "Beshik Kuda". Close friends promise each other to marry their children before their children are born. This is called "Bel Kuda". However, if the parents contracted children in their infancy, it is called "Beshik kuda". In this case, girls wear earrings to make engagement. the film, this marriage is given to Bel Kuda. The families of Jamila and Dastan were brought to the audience during a family gathering and were presented to the audience with promises such as making promises and earrings.

When Jamila and Dastan make their first step into the youth, families introduce young people to fulfill their promises, but young people do not like each other and take a stand against this tradition. Despite all the wishes of the families, the family will not be married and eventually they have to give up this situation.

**Figure 5.** Bel Kuda scene (Jamila ve Dastan)



#### 3.5.3. Code and Indicators for Marrying Jamila and Dastan

Dastan and Jamila soon begin to feel something for each other. He realizes that Jamila Dastan is the ideal man. And in the end they decide to get married. This form of marriage will take place in the form of marriage before the acquaintance before the modern lifestyle exists. These indicators are presented with codes such as holding hands with the audience. As we have seen, young people in the film did not marry any of the marriages that existed in

Kyrgyz traditional culture. This is the exaltation of modern marriages and the critique of traditional marriages.

Dastan's family made a mistake in Jamila, we do not have to maintain this error is the most important emphasis of these criticisms.

#### 4. Result

In the study, semiotic analysis method was applied to determine the elements of cultural identity. In this context, the film is categorized as codes and indicators for lifestyle, ideal codes for man and woman, codes and indicators for eating and drinking, and codes and indicators for marriage.

In the film, it is seen that codes and indicators for lifestyle refer to modern life. In this context, in the past Kyrgyz culture at a young age marriage and having a child in a modern time has left the career planning.

Ideally, thoughts and behavioral patterns are complementary to cultural identity. In the film, the ideal male and the ideal woman were drawn. According to this woman should do makeup, make nice food, dress up like a woman, while men should take on the task of protecting her.

In the film one of the cultural practices is codes oriented to eating and drinking. In the film, frequently shows the "lepeshka" (bread) and "Dastarkon" tablecloth which are specialities for Kyrgyz culture.

Most of the part of the film consist of family codes associated with marriage. These are the traditional Kyrgyz marriages, the ala kachu, bel kuda and modern marriage practices. However, the film is largely a critique of traditional marriages. The critique says that Ala kachu has the element of crime and the marriage of Jamila and Dastan against the traditional marriage type of Bel Kuda. The cinematographic narrative shows traditional way of marriage does not fit to the modern life style, by pointing frequently the mistake did by the families.

Jamila and Dastan finally decide to marry. However, this decision is not a decision taken by traditional methods. Jamila and Dastan in accordance with the modern lifestyle of each other before they know each other and then decided to marry.

While cultural identities are reflected in the film, it is the expression that traditional Kyrgyz marriage practices are not in accordance with modern life. A discourse has been produced that these forms of marriage are both illegal and will cause problems for future generations.

It is experiencing a modern human identity crisis in a modernizing and globalizing world. In a world whose markets are unified national boundaries, national culture, which constitutes the cultural identity of each country, affects the traditions and myths. The conflict in the middle of representatives of a more traditional old generation with young people consuming popular culture products is a result of this.

In the film " El Ukpasin", it reflects the cultural identity gathered around common ideals in a common geography. It is a normal phenomenon that the transformation of the waist tradition, which reflects the cultural identity, is not accepted by the present youth. Because cultural identity is not absolute and constant. Therefore, cultural identity changes and transforms with socialization.

The fact that the main heroes in the film maktad "El Ukpasin" follow each other in instagram emphasizes once again how great the role of social media in our daily life is. Her father said: kimin Formerly our instances without parents, our parents were going to marry whom iyor. It refers to the decisive power of tradition.

However, in spite of all these desperations of the parents, the future of Jamilia and Dastan's feelings for each other awakens. It also gives hope that these traditions will benefit someone.

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