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Interspecies Liminality on the Edge of Life: Human-Animal Companionship in *Madame* (1989) *Yaşamın Kıyısında Türler Arası Eşiklik: Hanım'da (1989) İnsan-Hayvan Yoldaşlığı*

Abstract

This article argues for liminality as a mutual, interspecies experience as well as a constituent of human-companion animal bond. Despite its potential for animal scholarship, research on interspecies liminality remain rather scarce. Drawing upon this research gap, the main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of liminality of human and feline protagonists in Halit Refiğ's film *Madame* [*Hanım*] (1989) through its analysis conducted in adherence with the coding principles of Grounded Theory. Experiences of liminality of the human and feline protagonists in the film are closely related to the status passages of the characters' lives. While the film narrates human liminality between living and dying at the end of Olcay's life, the feline character Hanım depicts liminality of the animal subject between person and property as well as spatial (non)belonging thereof due to her human companion Olcay's dying. Findings of the study indicate that, in addition to the category of liminal animals being a descriptor for animal populations in proximity to human settlements, liminality lens could be employed to understand life trajectories of individual animals, and to disclose potentialities for interspecies companionship and mutual survival in human-animal borderlands.

Öz

Bu makale, eşikliği türler arası müşterek bir deneyim ve insan-hayvan bağının kurucu bir unsuru olarak ele almaktadır. Hayvan çalışmaları için barındırdığı potansiyele rağmen, türler arası eşiklik üzerine yapılmış araştırmalar görece azdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı alanyazındaki bu eksiklikten hareketle Halit Refiğ'in *Hanım* [*Madame*] (1989) filmindeki insan ve kedi kahramanların eşiklik deneyimlerini, temellendirilmiş kuramın kodlama ilkelerini benimseyen inceleme aracılığıyla araştırmaktır. Filmdeki insan ve kedi baş karakterlerin eşiklik deneyimleri bu karakterlerin yaşamlarındaki geçişlerle yakından ilişkilidir. Film, Olcay karakteri üzerinden yaşam ve ölüm arasındaki eşikliği temsil ederken, Hanım karakteri ile hayvan öznenin kişi-nesne arasındaki belirsiz ve akışkan konumunu ve bununla ilişkili mekânsal aidiyetsizliği resmeder. Araştırma bulguları, eşiklik yaklaşımının liminal hayvan yerleşimciler gibi hayvan popülasyonlarını tanımlamaya ek olarak, tekil hayvanların yaşamlarını anlamak ve türler arası yoldaşlık ve birlikte hayatta kalma potansiyellerini açığa çıkarmak için kullanılabilceğine işaret etmektedir.

Keywords

Animal studies, end-of-life, interspecies, liminality, companion animal

Anahtar Kelimeler

Hayvan çalışmaları, yaşam sonu, türler arası, eşiklik, yoldaş hayvan

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Introduction: Human-Animal Companionship during Bereavement and End-of-Life

Human-companion animal relationship has been and continues to be formative to both parties involved. Humans and domestic animals have mutually shaped each other across histories in different locales (Zeder, 2012), characterized by a process of co-evolution and their resultant inseparability from one another, which Donna Haraway explains as “companion species” (Haraway, 2003). However, for Haraway, companion species do not describe a single entity, or refer to companion animals only (2008). The concept rather points at an ongoing ‘becoming with’, in which, Haraway states, “the partners [human and non-human] do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with: those are the mantras of companion species.” (p. 17). As a trained biologist, Haraway argues against the notion of species as fixed entities and emphasizes how scientific categories are social constructs. Such a lens allows us to see human as an interspecies entity (Tsing, 2012), that cannot be construed as an isolated category, a notion that characterizes humanist thought. One of the central critiques toward Humanism is that human is a relational entity (Calarco, 2019), that could neither be construed nor understood in isolation. To the opposite, relations are essential to the human experience. Similar to domestic animals being dependent on human supervision and care for survival, humans, too, are dependent upon domestic animals one form of which is companionship.

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Human-companion animal relationship is especially pronounced during status passages, that is, transitions between phases during a lifetime (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). One such status passage is bereavement processes following the death of an individual, within or outside the human-companion animal relationship. However, the literature on death and dying pertaining to human-companion animal relationship mostly revolves around the loss of a companion animal (Kemp et al., 2016; Reisbig et al., 2017; Riggs et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017), focusing on and centering the experiences of the human party in the relationship. One example on the role of companion animals in bereavement processes is experiencing widowhood following the loss of one’s partner (Thompson & Kim, 2023). Companion animals are discussed to support the well-being of the human companion during widowhood following the loss of a life partner (Akiyama et al., 1987; Bolin, 1987; Thompson & Kim, 2023). Companion animals are also found to be beneficial for the psychological well-being of the elderly in the therapeutic roles they play (Brickel, 1979), however not immediately after experiencing death of intimate partners in early phases of mourning, although they may help in bereavement processes in general (Lund et al., 1984). Another status passage at the end of life is one’s own dying. Companion animals are employed especially in institutional care facilities to accompany humans during the assisted dying of terminally ill patients to soothe the symptoms of depression and anxiety (Scagnetto et al., 2020), to increase overall morale (Chinner & Dalziel, 1991), and to provide palliative care (Engelman, 2013). To sum up, compared to the emphasis on the death of companion

animal, studies focusing on the death of the human caretaker, or the death of a human from the immediate support system of the human caretaker are lacking. Such deaths have an immediate impact on the companion animal, as they inevitably require the reorganization of care responsibilities.

Representation of Human-Companion Animal Relationship in Film

Not only empirical studies drawing upon the lived experiences of humans and companion animals, but also representations of human-animal companionship in film provide a fertile ground to interpret human-companion animal relationships. However, scholarly interest in the visual representation of animals was lacking until very recently despite the surging interest in documenting these animals via moving film and photography (Burt, 2001; McMahon, 2015). Mostly, the scholarly discussion on the employment of animals in media production revolves around the abuse or killing of these animals, dating back as early as the invention of moving image (Burt, 2001; Galt, 2015). Among the animals portrayed in cinema are cats, resulting in what Rosalind Galt names as “feline cinematicity” spanning from employment of cats within cinema to feline spectatorship, that is, cats consuming films produced (Galt, 2015). Some films portray the lives of cats through cats’ points of view (POV), such as “Private Life of a Cat” (1944) directed by Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren (Galt, 2015). It should be noted however that such attempts remain infrequent, and cinema remains very much anthropocentric in terms of storylines and a lack of explicit de-centering of human point of view to accommodate and put forth those of animals. The human-centric paradigm that deems animals exploitable and killable for the sake of the human narrative continues in Turkish cinema. Existing studies from Turkey on animal representation in film focus on the (ab)use and killing of animal actors in Turkish cinema (Güçlü, 2021; Gürbüz, 2020; Kemer, 2016), or their representation in Turkish video art (Johnson, 2022).

Despite, and perhaps due to, the maltreatment of animals in media production, portrayal of animals on screen is significant because it constitutes a medium through which empathy may be cultivated by increasing animal visibility (Drew, 2016; Henry, 2014; Okutan, 2023), as well as the potential to showcase animal agency, anthropomorphism as a potentiality, and more democratic forms of representation (McMahon, 2015). Despite its potentialities, the relationship between the human and the animal is asymmetrical. In the context of webcam viewing of animals in conservation sites, Kamphof (2013) describes a process of absence and presence, in which cameras are set in the absence of animals, and humans arrive after animals leave. Keeping technical equipment such as cables unobtrusive could be interpreted in a similar vein when working with companion animal actors, who may play with or chew on the technical equipment. All these describe ways in which animals shape production process, disclosing their agencies. It should also be noted here that the animal actor is often forced to

adapt to a new setup, and recognizing animal agency may simply mean to “not-see” (Pick, 2015b), as a means for animals resist the human gaze and to respect animal privacy in an era of unrestrained visibility and tracking.

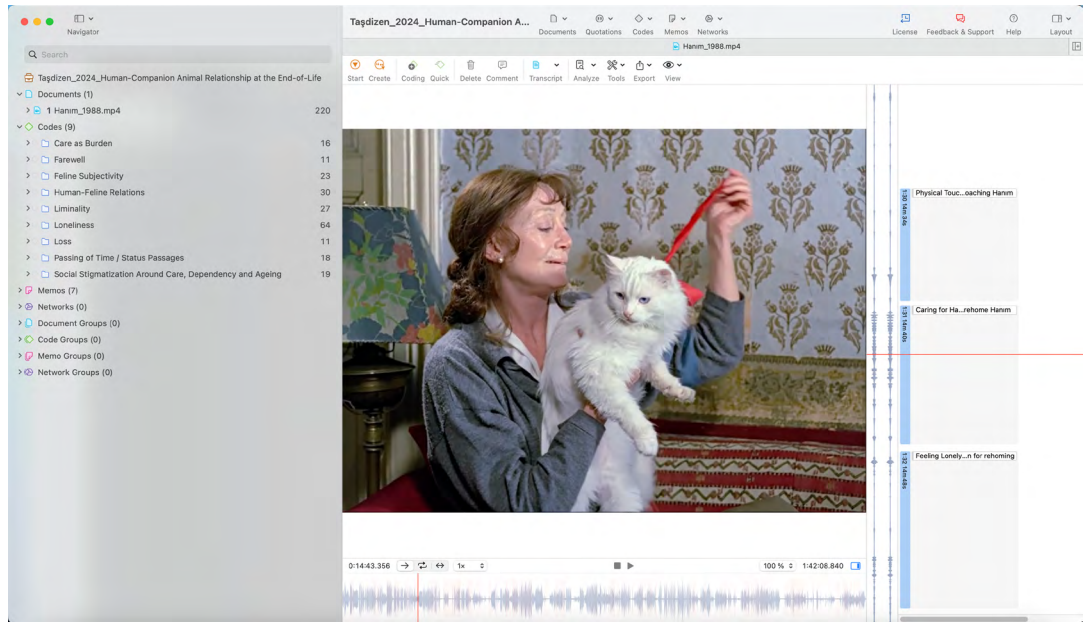
Films from Turkey or elsewhere that present interspecies relations between humans and companion animals during status passages of human lives such as bereavement or one’s own dying are rather sporadic. An example is the show *After Life* (Gervais, 2019), where a widowed man who lost his wife to cancer, experiences bereavement with his dog Brandy (Sahas, 2022). Although the human-cat companionship is not the focus of either of the films *A Man Called Ove* [*En Man Som Heter Ove*] (Holm, 2015) and (its American remake) *A Man Called Otto* (Forster, 2022), they explore the theme of widowhood at the end-of-life and of healing through the companionship of a cat. A recent documentary film from Turkey named *Kedi* (cat in Turkish) directed by Ceyda Torun (2016) is an example on the entanglement of human and feline lives in the context of Istanbul, portraying such interspecies relations as part of the fabric of Turkish society. However, the film fails to capture the complexities that these interspecies communities bring forth, such as care responsibilities and challenges thereof, made invisible by an aesthetic language which romanticizes Istanbul and its feline community members (Güçlü, 2020). This is precisely why the film *Madame* [*Hanım*] (Refiğ, 1989), in which the feline actress is given a titular role, (1989), is significant, as its subject matter shows how such difficulties are inherent in and constitutive of human-animal relationships. However, extant literature on animal representation in Turkish cinema does not include any analyses of the film *Madame* [*Hanım*], whose director is known for his critical stance on the use of animals on screen (Kemer, 2016). Therefore, the film deserves special scrutiny for its critical approach to the employment of animal actors in cinema, the centering of animal actors in the storyline, and the positive relation portrayed between human and animal characters. Inspired by the potential of interspecies liminality to cultivate and further human-animal bond, as well as the addressed gap in human-animal companionship at the end-of-life in surveyed literature, this article aims to answer the following research questions:

- How is human-companion animal relationship at the end of life represented in the film *Madame* [*Hanım*] (1989)?
- What are the shared and differing experiences of liminality across the human and the companion animal as portrayed in the film *Madame* [*Hanım*] (1989)?

Methodology: Film Analysis Using CAQDAS

Similar to Charles S. Suchar’s systematic coding of photographs in adherence with Grounded Theory principles to disclose patterns in visual data (Suchar, 1997), I approach the audiovisual material *Madame* [*Hanım*] (1989) as my data corpus, that is, my unit of analysis (Rose, 2016),

Figure 1
Coding on ATLAS.ti (Version 24.0.1)



in which I seek meaningful patterns. To answer the above-mentioned research questions, I uploaded the film on computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS hereinafter) ATLAS.ti (Version 24.0.1) (Figure 1). Although mostly employed to analyze verbal data, working with CAQDAS allows a highly structured analysis of film material, an advantage in film analysis that has not been widely explored (Estrada et al., 2017). During my analysis process, working with CAQDAS has assisted my research process as a second brain, by enabling to mark, code, categorize and reflect on dialogues as well as scenes, to quickly recall codes and categories, to cluster them and, if necessary, to quickly edit the ongoing analysis, all of which are advantages in a systematic and efficient research process. The analysis I present in this article adheres to the strict coding guidelines of qualitative data analysis informed by Constructivist Grounded Theory principles (Charmaz, 2006). While coding the film, I paid special attention to breaking the script into as small sections as possible. The coding was done using gerunds, to keep the emphasis on verbal and non-verbal action such as spoken script as well as gestures (petting, touching, etc.) and feelings in line with Grounded Theory principles, while the scene is taken into the analysis as the context. Although significant in conveying affective responses on the part of the viewer, the visual language of the film such as its technical portrayal is not prioritized in the analysis. At the end of coding, a sum of 220 codes were created, which were then sorted and clustered through constant comparison method, resulting in 38 categories and 9 overarching concepts. In terms of their groundedness/

code frequency, these concepts are namely 1) Loneliness (64), 2) Human-Feline Relations (30), 3) Liminality (27), 4) Feline Subjectivity (23), 5) Stigmatization of Care, Dependency and Aging (19), 6) Passing of Time (17), 7) Care as Burden (16), 8) Farewell (11), and 9) Loss (11). While elevating coded actions to a rather abstract status, the emphasis on action slowly paved its way toward categories. In this article, codes, categories, and concepts which have analytic weight for the purpose of the discussion were selected, which later shaped the outline of the article. Memo writing accompanied the coding process to reflect on the interpretative process of the author.

I, as the analyst of the audiovisual material and the author of this article, have certain outsider qualities that need to be addressed for a quality evaluation of the article on the part of the reader. Firstly, I am a qualitative researcher with a background in design and science and technology studies (STS). The article presents *my* analysis of the film through the research questions I pose and method of analysis I utilize and may not resonate with others' analyses. Secondly, the interpretations I draw from this film come from a young, able-bodied human male, who has limited experience in living with a companion animal as well as finite understanding of the non-human animal standpoint (Horsthemke, 2018). The Turkish script is translated into English by the author, and Turkish originals are provided for the Turkish-speaking reader where necessary in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the scene discussed. Scenes are referenced in the endnotes with their timestamps for the reader, if needed.

Interspecies Liminality on the Edge of Life

In my interpretation of the film, I argue that liminality serves as the overarching theme that sets the tone and overall feeling of the film, juxtaposed with the story of Olcay and Hanım. Firstly, there is a temporal liminality, running across the storylines of and minute details constructed around different characters. Throughout the film, there are references to and yearning toward the old days of Istanbul and experiences of what Istanbul has become. The social codes pertaining to dating among the youth,¹ or their preference to consume rather than repair what is at hand,² is portrayed in a critical manner from the perspectives of Olcay and Necip, respectively. Such criticism toward the new generation is furthered in Olcay and Siranuş's remarks, who argue that the world has changed and there is no humanity left,³ a sentiment shared by both based on their observations on how others treat cats. Care for cats, Halil the butcher reminds Olcay, belongs to a generation of old, wooden houses,⁴ yet again acting as a nostalgic reminder of a past long gone. Therefore, in this changing world, certain characters, human or otherwise, exist in a liminal zone, and as liminal entities, they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt" (Turner, 1977, p. 95). Within this changing world, interspecies experiences of liminality between Olcay, who has come to the end of her life, and Hanım whose future remains unknown emerge and ground the formation of a human-animal

bond, during which care becomes a healing practice, where both human and the animal heal through one another. In what follows, I discuss human and animal experiences of liminality through the main characters of the film.

Human Liminality: Representation of Mental Health and End-of-Life

Olcay, the main human protagonist, is a woman in her 60s⁵ living in an old mansion in Istanbul with her companion cat Hanım.⁶ Olcay experiences social isolation and feelings of loneliness and is diagnosed with terminal uterine cancer which has progressed due to neglect. She experiences multiple status passages; bereavement processes for her late husband Kemal, and for her strained relationship with her daughter Ülkü as well as her own dying. Her end-of-life is characterized by liminalities between now and a past long gone, living and dying, the conscious and the subconscious. However, Olcay does not resist the idea of dying. On the contrary, she awaits her death to meet her late husband Kemal, who served as a captain in the Turkish navy and died during Dumlupınar accident in 1953. It is due to her own dying that Olcay seeks a caretaker for Hanım (Figure 2).

Mourning, according to van Gennep, is a transitional state, which starts with the state of separation with the deceased and ends with reincorporation of the mourning survivor into society. The duration of mourning depends on the mourner's closeness to the deceased (1960,

Figure 2

Olcay climbs up a hill carrying Hanım in a cage. (0:02:17-0:02:57)



p. 148). Building upon van Gennep, Glaser and Strauss formulate status passages, emphasizing 1) the centrality of the passage to the person experiencing it, and 2) the duration of the passage (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). However, passages may not follow a regular and a foreseeable trajectory (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Strauss, 1968), as noted by Strauss himself (Strauss, 1969, p. 100) and a person may go through a multitude of status passages simultaneously. Individual-specific trajectories of a status passage such as mourning could be argued to be impacted by the preparedness (or the lack thereof) of the subject. Caruth explains that trauma occurs not because of the encounter with an external threat, but because of the subject's not being ready to face this threatening encounter, which becomes a "missed encounter with one's survival" (Caruth, 2001, p. 23). Caruth then calls for a notion of trauma as a history of survival. For Olcay, the loss of her late husband Kemal, too, could be interpreted as an experience that was neither expected,⁷ nor prepared for, despite of which, Olcay partially survives due to her bond with Hanim. Olcay is depicted as wandering at and conversing with the walls of her mansion which are covered with black and white photographs of herself, her late husband, and their estranged daughter Ülkü (Figure 3), with whom Olcay has a strained relationship. When Ülkü visits Olcay, it is noteworthy that the two do not hug and kiss.⁸ The only physical interaction between Olcay and Ülkü is when Ülkü touches the shoulder of her mother, when she is recommending Olcay to sell the mansion and help her in building a business⁹ (Figure 4).

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Olcay's interactions with others remain limited. Conversations are often short, with Olcay avoiding giving any answers about herself. As a piano teacher, Olcay has one remaining student, Canan, with whom she regularly spends time. Although the relationship between the two is professional, the relationship is rather like a companionship in nature for Olcay. In a dialogue with Ülkü, Olcay says: "Canan is the only student I have left. She's like a companion for me. At least I have someone knocking on my door."¹⁰

Figure 3

Olcay looking at and talking to an old photograph of her late husband Kemal. (0:20:58 - 0:21:39)

**Figure 4**

Olcay looks at her daughter Ülkü's hand touching her shoulder. (0:57:36-0:57:57)



Amid social isolation and feelings of loss, Olcay often hallucinates of Kemal, during which she shares her thoughts on issues that are most dear to her. Hallucinations of loved ones who are lost, whether they be partners or companion animals such as cats (Conan & Sacks, 2024), are quite common among bereaved populations (Dewi Rees, 1971; Love, 2024). In the film, Olcay's ongoing conversations with photographs as well as hallucinations of her late husband Kemal act as a reminder that Olcay yearns for and still mourns the past, which is intertwined with her own dying. Despite her diagnosis, Olcay does not inform anyone of her condition including her daughter Ülkü.¹¹ In her doctor's appointment, she explains why she does not inform anyone of her medical condition:

*No, I didn't disclose anything to anyone. People have enough on their plate. Why should I disturb their peace when there is nothing that can be done? Why should people see me as a burden when they are caught in despair? Why should they think that they should get rid of me as soon as possible without openly admitting it? Just give me my painkillers, doctor. I'm afraid I won't be able to stand the pain. That's all.*¹²

Above-mentioned remark discloses “self-perceived burden” felt by Olcay, that is, the care recipient's perception that they become a burden to others (caregivers) through their dependence (Cousineau et al., 2003). This is also manifested in Olcay's evasive responses. Sensing Müzeyyen does not want to adopt Hanım, Olcay leaves Müzeyyen's home, without drinking her coffee (Figure 5). Olcay also feels a certain discontent with the way she looks. In separate occasions, when Siranuş and Agah sense that Olcay is not looking well, Olcay evades their questions by using old age as an excuse for her looks.¹³ She checks herself in the mirror before answering the door (Figure 6) and admits feeling smelly and old (Figure 7). Her lack of

Figure 5

Olcay leaves Müzeyyen's flat before finishing her coffee. (0:06:42-0:07:03)



Figure 6

Olcay checks herself in the mirror before answering the door. (1:02:16-1:02:21)





Figure 7
Olcay admits feeling miserable during a hallucination. (1:26:26-1:26:46)

self-confidence, her desire to die and meet her late husband, and her inability to reach out for help, all point at an underlying mental health problem.

The bereavement in Olcay's life (of her husband, and of her daughter), but also not being able to visit loved ones as frequently as she wishes, such as her grandson (**Figure 8**), leaves Hanım as Olcay's only attachment (**Figure 9**). It is in this context that Olcay develops an intimate relationship with Hanım, who becomes a central concern in Olcay's final days, following her diagnosis with terminal cancer. Throughout the film, Olcay seeks someone that will take care of Hanım after her death. In the next section, I introduce Olcay and Hanım's relationship at the end of Olcay's life, and how the film portrays feline subjectivity and lack thereof through Hanım and Siranuş's cats.

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Figure 8

Olcay hugs and pets Hanım as she talks to her daughter Ülkü, to whom she admits that she misses her grandson. (0:54:35-0:56:04)



Figure 9

Olcay pets Hanım, who, she realizes, remains her only attachment. (0:59:55-1:00:17)



Animal Liminality: Representation of Feline Subjectivity or Lack Thereof

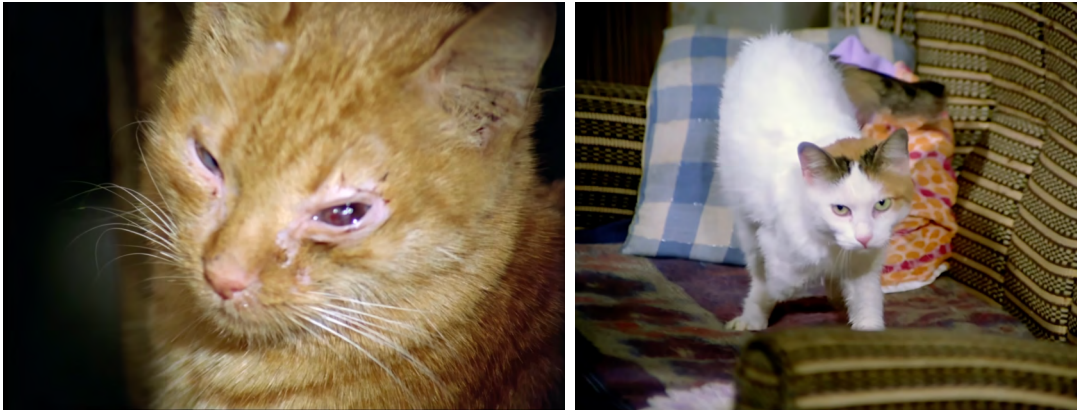
Secondly, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, is the liminality experienced by the animal protagonist Hanım. Although originally used to describe the human condition, liminality could be utilized to explain animals as well (Fox & Ray, 2019; Wischermann & Howell, 2018). Domestic animals, in their life trajectories, may move between different categories (Coppinger & Coppinger, 2016, p. 154; Wischermann & Howell, 2018, p. 8), as illustrated in the film through Hanım's liminal position pertaining to her personhood, which manifests itself spatially. Albeit useful, liminality in this article is not a descriptive category for animal populations in urban environments (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011). After Howell (2019), the liminality I describe here refers to a specific phase of an individual animal, whose personhood and social status are at stake. When applied to individual animals, liminality lens highlights how animals move between different categories such as cherished companion animal and a property deemed disposable, during which personhood is flexible and in flux (Shir-Vertesh, 2012), and that such transitions in the lives of animals between different categories may be conceptualized as a status passage (Wischermann & Howell, 2018).

Throughout the film, Hanım is constructed as a non-human animal subject, whose life history including routines, and likely personal preferences thereof require consideration. First and foremost, such subjectivity is attributed by Hanım's immediate caretaker Olcay. Conceiving Hanım as a member of her family,¹⁴ Olcay often feels the need to describe and thus defend Hanım. For instance, during her visit to Müzeyyen and İnci, the latter whom Olcay trusts and wishes to hand over Hanım's care responsibilities, Müzeyyen repeatedly discourages İnci from interacting with Hanım, telling the cat will bite or scratch. In Hanım's defense, Olcay describes her as "docile" [*uysal*],¹⁵ and explains that she could differentiate those who love her, including İnci because they played together multiple times and therefore won't bite or scratch her.¹⁶ Attributing Hanım certain character traits such as being docile, as well as knowing how to interact with whom, is in sharp contrast to Müzeyyen's attitude, for whom Hanım is merely a feral cat. In their dialogue, both Olcay and Siranuş describe Hanım as a cat that is used to living separate from other cats, and would face difficulty in adapting to Siranuş's house, which might make Hanım unhappy. Siranuş asks: "But as I said, there is one thing, how shall I put it, your Hanım is used to living alone, like a princess. I wonder, wouldn't she be unhappy in this crowd?"¹⁷

Having lived with Olcay in a spacious mansion for years, Hanım has become a docile, princess-like creature, who would not be comfortable with living alongside dozens of other cats, a shared concern of Olcay and Siranuş made explicit in Siranuş's question. Therefore, Hanım is portrayed as an individual, with needs and desires peculiar to herself, a "subject-of-a-life" (Regan, 1983, p. 243). It is regarded by Siranuş that Hanım would desire a spacious

Figure 10

Olcay gazes at Siranuş's cats who show visible signs of illness and disability. (0:32:48-0:32:53)



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environment without other cats, for this is what she is now used to. Similar to treating Hanım as a subject-of-a-life, Siranuş introduces the cats that were abandoned by their previous owners with their individual names: “Tekir, Huysuz Virjin, Samur, these are the forgotten ones.”¹⁸ Although Siranuş centers other cats along with Hanım through calling them by their names, a sharp distinction is drawn between Hanım and other cats through Olcay’s gaze, where the viewer is shown how Olcay sees Siranuş’s cats: sick and/or with visible signs of disability living in an overcrowded space (Figure 10). Olcay’s human gaze animalizes cats other than Hanım, with their individual characteristics removed from sight, and Siranuş’s cats defined by their illnesses, disabilities and disparaged living conditions.



Figure 11

Hanım in a cage with a red ribbon around her neck. (0:11:03-0:11:06)

It is in this context that Olcay ties a red ribbon around Hanım's neck (**Figure 11**) to distinguish her from other cats such as those living with Siranuş, or from street cats in general. Tying ribbons around companion cats' necks is a tradition dating back to Early Republican Period, during which Istanbul Municipality systematically caught and killed cats on the streets¹⁹ including those companion animals who may be found on the streets. Companion humans of cats who lead a somewhat mobile life in the city tied ribbons and beads around their cats' necks to distinguish them specifically from street cats, to protect their companion animals from being killed.

In this way, Olcay hopes to underline Hanım's extant companion animal status and her proximity to and relationship with a human caregiver, as a facilitator of Hanım's adoption into a household. What seems to be an innocent gesture discloses how Hanım is granted subjectivity at the expense of Siranuş's cats, who are regarded as 'less than'. Only through her underlined difference and physical separation from those cats who may not be as hygienic, healthy and abled as her, Hanım is deemed worthy of a new house. Although Hanım is constructed as a subject with a life history, character attributes, and personal preferences, the exaggerated size of the ribbon presents Hanım as a cherished gift, reducing her to a mere commodity to be given as a gift. Although reducing Hanım to a gift is a strategic act taken by Olcay in an attempt to rehome her, the ribbon does not facilitate Hanım's adoption and is later untied by Olcay feeling helpless: "The ribbon didn't work either. No one wanted you. I'm dying, Hanım. What will you do after I'm gone?"²⁰

Although Olcay and Siranuş approach Hanım and cats in general as subjects who cannot be abandoned on the street, presumably due to their dependency on human supervision and care, albeit not explicitly so stated in the film, the film portrays certain characters who reduce Hanım, or cats in general, to object status, or withdraw an animal's subjectivity by reducing it to a representative of its wider species, all members of whom are expected to carry the same characteristics. This approach differs from Olcay's strategic presentation of Hanım with a red ribbon in a cage in an attempt to rehome her. In the film, the audience is reminded of the human violence against liminal cats through the example of 12-year-old "Cat Strangler" [*Kedi boğan*] who kills cats and ridicules and threatens Siranuş,²¹ as well as passer-by men who harass Olcay and Hanım. A particular scene is telling in this regard, which illustrates the human threat posed to Hanım and liminal animals in general, who are easily reduced to mere commodities (**Figure 12** and **Figure 13**).

Upon learning that Siranuş's cats were killed by the Municipality through poisoning after her move to San Francisco to be with her son Bedros, Olcay feels devastated. Sitting on a bench by the Bosphorus, she talks to Hanım in her cage, telling her that there is no humanity left. Soon, they catch the attention of three men passing by who approach to harass Olcay. Mockingly, they ask if Hanım is for sale for her fur. Witnessing this harassment is Olcay's friend Necip, who interferes to chase the men away. Necip sits down to talk with Olcay,

Figure 12

Passer-by men harass Olcay and Hanım. (1:19:29-1:23:28)

**Figure 13**

Olcay's face after Necip invalidates her feelings over Siranuş's cats being killed by the municipality and starts cussing at cats. (1:22:57-1:23:00)



who starts crying while explaining the cull of Siranuş's cats. Necip, seemingly confused over Olcay's emotions, belittles Olcay's feelings and cusses at cats: "The streets are full of cats. Useless animals. I've always disliked these ungrateful creatures." Having had a long day of animal killing and ridicule, Olcay stands up for herself and for the cats: "I don't like you either Necip Kaptan", and leaves with Hanım.

Rehoming Hanım is challenging not only due to an abundance of cats on the streets as stated by Halil and Necip,²² or because Hanım is used to living alone as told by Siranuş,²³ but also because streets pose a threat to cats' survival as the scene illustrates. As a result, streets are eliminated by Olcay as an option for Hanım's future life. Olcay, as a woman in her 60s in the late 1980s, must have witnessed the intensified mass cull during Early Republican Era orchestrated by Istanbul Municipality, or the cat fur market (Obuz, 2022, p. 181). The period, marked by violent human control over non-human animals to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases, such as rabies and malaria for the purpose of public health governance (Evered & Evered, 2012; Karaosman, 2015), witnessed the problematization of Istanbul's street cats as an undesirable health menace and a barrier to modernisation. Municipal workers and citizens, often motivated by monetary incentives,²⁴ captured cats on the streets to be killed using sacks, gloves, cat traps, lasso ropes,²⁵ resulting in calls for "scientific" and "humane" methods of killing by the intelligentsia. Presumable memory of extant human violence against cats and dogs which still prevails as the film illustrates in passers-by harassing Olcay and Hanım grounds Olcay's distrust of streets and negates them as a viable option. This underpins Olcay's quest for someone trustworthy, who knows Hanım and loves animals in general such as İnci and Siranuş in the face of above-mentioned attempts in which animals are denied their right to live, due to centering of human norms or profits (killing cats for their fur). These scenes showcase how companion

Figure 14

Ülkü scruffs Hanım, removes her from the living room and closes the door. (0:56:39-0:56:46)

**Figure 15**

Ülkü scruffs Hanım and removes her from the mansion. (1:36:53-1:37:02)



animal lives hang by a thread, for they depend on their human caregivers for survival, not only for sustenance and shelter, but also for protection against being sold or killed.

Hanım also experiences spatial liminality stemming from a peculiar notion of modernity where rescue animals do not belong inside the apartment and thus to modern lifestyle. Siranuş receives ongoing complaints from her neighbors in the building because of living with and taking care of numerous cats in her apartment. Both Müzeyyen and Ülkü approach Hanım as a feral cat who would not know how to interact with a human and/or who does not belong to the human household. To exemplify, Müzeyyen kindly rejects to take care of Hanım, and Ülkü removes Hanım from the spaces she is in, first from the living-room²⁶ and later from the mansion.²⁷ While removing Hanım from the spaces she is in, Ülkü repeatedly scruffs Hanım, considered a form of abuse due to the stress and loss of control it causes in adult cats (International Cat Care) (Figure 14 and Figure 15).

By doing so, they approach Hanım not as an individual animal with a history of living with humans, but merely part of an animal species who is regarded as feral and thus “uncivil”, over whom human dominance must be exerted. Hanım is reduced to a mere member of a taxonomic species, with her individuality being denied, a representational strategy also characteristically employed within wildlife documentaries (Mills, 2015). With the physical removal of and the rejection to adopt a perceived-to-be-feral animal, the humanist logic of human vs animal is portrayed to prevail through its spatial manifestation.

Conclusion

The film, despite the titular role given to a feline actor, as well as Halit Refiğ’s self-aware stance on the use of animals in film production, cannot evade human centricity completely.

Firstly, despite their shared liminality, the film's portrayal utilizes a human-centric lens in the sense that it depicts Olcay's point of view (POV), and not Hanım's, as the film does not present any attempt to illustrate how Hanım experiences this liminality. The film is mostly shot from an objective perspective, that is, the audience watches the film as an outside observer, while certain scenes mimic the subjective perspective of Olcay such as Olcay's hallucinations of Kemal. However, the film does not attempt to portray subjective feline experience through Hanım's POV, or her sensory experience in general. Yet, it should be noted here that technical investigations to capture feline POV does not guarantee an escape from anthropocentrism. In the case of *Kedi* (Torun, 2016), the leveling of camera to cats' height fails to present feline subjectivity and ultimately ends up presenting animals as "cute" (Güçlü, 2020). Apart from the conventional human-centric lens in *Madame*, human-animal bond is constructed as a substitute for lack of interhuman sociality as experienced by Olcay, and the emotional labor thereof is presented as a requirement of being a good human being, as emphasized in Olcay and Siranuş's remarks, disclosing an anthropocentric logic. In addition, Hanım is portrayed as a radically passive being, whose communicative capacities remain out of sight. Following Olcay's death, Hanım sits alone on the stairs inside the mansion (Figure 16). After Hanım is removed from inside the mansion to the garden, the audience is reminded that without a caretaker, Hanım is vulnerable, cold, and wet in the rain (Figure 17), needing to be rescued. Hanım is portrayed as an animal incapable of pursuing her own basic interests such as searching for food, hiding from the rain, or simply meowing. It is as if Hanım simply submits in despair. Such a portrayal denies Hanım's capacity and will for survival and erases her agency. In that sense, Hanım fits very well to the definition of "cinematic animal", a specific entity that is bred through film with an explicit focus on animal vulnerability (Pick, 2015a). Hanım's very body becomes the centre of such vulnerability, almost isolated from extant conditions, as if such vulnerability would cease to exist if Hanım were simply to disappear.

Dependent on human caregivers for sustenance and survival, vulnerability of domestic animals cannot be ignored. However, representation of animal vulnerability, characterized by the incapacity for *attempting* to survive, without critical commentary on extant conditions, may unwillingly and inevitably problematize the animal themselves. The problem is that this is a partial and misleading representation, denying animal's agency to communicate and/or escape this vulnerable state, and portraying the animal merely as a highly dependent recipient of care.²⁸ It is not that animals lack communicative capacities, but simply that humanist thought and its notion of "Man as the measure of all things" (Braidotti, 2013) still prevail. Animals, and the wider non-human natural world, do possess communicative capacities, yet their voice has been suppressed by human supremacist, anthropocentric dominance (Willett, 2014). Animals are often portrayed as "mute" needing humans to be their "voice", despite the peculiar languages and shared cultures diverse animal groups form (Meijer, 2019). Animals, then, could be understood as subaltern entities (Perlo, 2022) due to their powerlessness in a

Figure 16. Hanım inside the mansion after Olcay's death. (1:35:11-1:35:12)



Figure 17. Hanım hides from the rain near the mansion, after Ülkü abandons her outside the mansion following Olcay's death. (1:40:11-1:40:17)



human-dominated world, their moral invisibility and absence from politics, and epistemic injustice in the sense that animals do not have access to human language (Fricker, 2007).

An approach that is critical of human-centric frameworks and is attentive to other ways of being in the world is urgently needed. One approach to de-center the human-centric frameworks and to allow the animal agency to come forth and be heard is through the act of listening with care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). However, as the film beautifully narrates, care can never be taken for granted, exemplified by the dying of the immediate caregiver. Olcay and many other caregivers of companion animals such as street cats and dogs depend disproportionately on themselves as well as their trusted personal networks in reorchestrating care responsibilities. Such a reliance on oneself and one's own network stems from a collective distrust and suspicion of other humans and municipal bodies and their care practices or lack thereof. Although this may catalyze the formation of close-knit communities, it has repercussions for those who lack such access to and support of other like-minded individuals. Lack of personal networks, especially for those individuals such as Olcay who experience social isolation and loneliness, or for whom the foundation of human-animal relationship is based on "mutual rescue" (Birke & Gruen, 2022), have implications for the companion animals of these individuals like Hanım.

My analysis of the film *Madame* (1989) demonstrates that experiences of liminality transgress species membership, forming the basis for human-animal bond and interspecies solidarity. Aside from being a useful descriptor for animal populations in proximity to human settlements, liminality lens holds potential at the individual animal level. Such an approach takes into consideration the life trajectory and multiple status passages of the animal in question, and emphasizes shared vulnerabilities across species divide. Human-animal boundaries still hold yet they become almost indistinct due to mutual experiences and the potential for interspecies

intersubjective relationality (Taşdizen et al., 2024). Viewing liminality through this lens also provides insights into human and animal membership or lack thereof, and the ways in which these manifest socially and spatially. The case of Istanbul illustrates how humans, caregiver or otherwise, have an immediate impact on the liminality of animals elongated across a spectrum of furthering marginalization through violent displacement and extending invitation for social belonging through human care. While street dogs are systematically and illegally displaced from their neighborhoods to the margins of the city (Yıldırım, 2021), citizens materially carve out care zones in the city for street cats (Taşdizen, 2020, 2021). Not only the liminality of the domestic animal depends very much on humans, but also the liminality of caregiver humans through mourning and/or dying processes is eased through care, battling the experience of social isolation and feelings of loneliness and loss as depicted by the film. This brings forth care's potential as a healing practice in a broken world by challenging the notion of care as burden. Interspecies experiences of liminality, then, should not be regarded merely as mutual vulnerability and passivity, but as a foundation for interspecies companionship and solidarity, in which human and animal companions attend to and heal one another through a commitment to surviving together despite all the odds.

- 1 (0:37:34-0:38:54)
- 2 (0:08:40-0:09:40)
- 3 (0:36:23-0:36:25) (1:20:33-1:20:35) (1:28:22-1:28:29)
- 4 Halil: "It will be difficult to find [a home for Hanım] Mrs. Olcay. Streets are full of kittens in the neighborhood. No one pays attention to them anymore. That belongs to a time of wooden mansions." [Bulman biraz zor olacak Olcay Hanım. Mahallenin sokakları kedi yavrusundan geçilmiyor. Artık kimsenin gözünün kedi medi gördüğü yok. O tahta evler zamanydı.] (0:10:56-0:11:06)
- 5 Although the film does not explicitly state Olcay's age, a rough calculation could be made based on the Dumlupınar accident in 1953, during which Olcay lost her husband Kemal, the captain of the ship, in their early years of the marriage when Ülkü was 2 years old. The film is set to take place in late 1980s.
- 6 Madame or Lady in colloquial Turkish.
- 7 Kemal dies when their daughter Ülkü was 2 years old.
- 8 (0:53:30-0:53:49)
- 9 (0:57:36-0:57:57)
- 10 "Zaten Canan da kalan tek öğrencim. Benim için can yoldaşı gibi bir şey. Kapımı çalan biri var hiç olmazsa." (0:54:21-0:54:29)
- 11 (0:19:42-0:20:51) and (0:42:26-0:42:48)
- 12 "Hayır, kimseye bir şey açmadım. Herkesin derdi kendine yeter. Elden gelecek bir şey yokken neden insanların huzurunu kaçırayım? Neden insanlar çaresizliğe düşünce beni bir yük gibi görsünler? Açıkça itiraf etmeden bir an önce de gitse de kurtulsak diye düşünsünler? Siz bana ağrı kesici ilaçlarımı verin doktor. Ağrılara dayanamayacağım diye korkuyorum. Hepsi bu." (0:17:18-0:17:48)
- 13 (0:31:18-0:31:27) and (1:07:53-1:08:04)
- 14 (0:17:02-0:17:14)
- 15 (0:04:04-0:04:10)
- 16 (0:04:46-0:04:54)

- 17 “Lakin dediğim gibi bir şey var ki, nasıl desem, senin Hanım yalnız yaşamaya alışmıştır, prensesler gibi. Acaba diyorum, bu kalabalıkta mutsuz olmaz mı?” (0:35:24-0:35:40)
- 18 “Şu Tekir. Şu Huysuz Virjin. Şu da Samur. İşte bunlar unutulardan.” (0:36:14-0:36:22)
- 19 Kedi ve Köpeklerin İmhası. Belediye Daha Fenni Bir Usul Temin Edecek. [The Extermination of Cats and Dogs. The Municipality will ensure a more scientific method.]. (25 August 1938). *Akşam*, p. 4.
- 20 “Kurdele de bir işe yaramadı. Seni kimse istemedi. Ben ölüyorum Hanım. Benden sonra sen ne yapacaksın?” (0:14:40-0:14:57)
- 21 (0:33:36-0:34:06)
- 22 Halil: “It will be difficult to find [a home for Hanım] Mrs. Olcay. Streets are full of kittens in the neighborhood. No one pays attention to them anymore. That belongs to a time of wooden mansions.” [Bulman biraz zor olacak Olcay Hanım. Mahallenin sokakları kedi yavrusundan geçilmiyor. Artık kimsenin gözünün kedi medi gördüğü yok. O tahta evler zamanydı.] (0:10:56-0:11:06); Necip: “The streets are full of cats. Useless animals. I’ve always disliked these ungrateful creatures.” [Sokaklar kedi dolu. Bir işe yaramaz hayvanlar. Ben zaten oldum olası hiç hoşlanmam bu nankör mahluklardan.] (1:22:49-1:22:50)
- 23 (0:35:24-0:35:40)
- 24 Belediye Bir Kedi Getirene Beş Kuruş Veriyor. [The municipality gives five kuruş to those who bring a cat.] (26 July 1937). *Akşam*, p. 1; Serseri Kedilerin İmhasına Başlandı. Dün Birçok Kimseler 5 Kuruş Mukabilinde Kedi Teslim Ettiler. [The extermination of rascal cats has begun. Yesterday, many people handed in cats in exchange for 5 kuruş.] (23 July 1937). *Akşam*, p. 3.
- 25 20 Kediye Sokağın Ortasına Bırakmış! “Taşımaktan bıktım Belediyeyi nerede bulacağım” Diyor! [He left 20 cats in the middle of the street! “I’m tired of carrying, where will I find the municipality,” he says!]. (24 July 1937). *Akşam*, p. 3; Hayvanları Koruma Cemiyeti. Aylık Toplantısını Yaptı ve Bazı Kararlar Verdi [Animal Protection Society. Held its monthly meeting and made some decisions]. (8 May 1941). *Akşam*, p. 5; Kedi Kapanları. Hayvanları Himaye Cemiyeti Bu Kapanlardan Getirtecek [Cat Traps. The Society for the Protection of Animals will have these traps delivered]. (13 January 1935). *Akşam*, p. 3.
- 26 (0:56:35-0:56:36)
- 27 (1:36:55-1:36:59)
- 28 From a critical disability lens, I am wary of problematizing neither dependence nor vulnerability, but underline the problematic representation of the domesticated through mere dependency and vulnerability due to its erasure of animal agency.

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