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Prof. Dr. Emel Kefeli Armağanı  
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# From Patriarchal Structure to Revolutionary Equality: The Transformation of Gender Roles in Zunun Qadiri's Plays

Ataerkil Yapıdan Devrimsel Eşitliğe: Zunun Kadiri'nin  
Piyeslerinde Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Dönüşümü

**Ecem Gül İlek\***  
**Orhan Söylemez\*\***

## Abstract

Zunun Qadiri (1912–1989) was a prominent writer from East Turkistan who made significant contributions to Uyghur literary history. Over his fifty-year career, he produced numerous plays, stories, poems, and tales that helped shape modern Uyghur literature. This study focuses on four of Kadiri's plays “Gunçem” [Gunchem], “Gülnisa” [Gulnisa], “Toy” [Celebration] and “Uçraşkanda” [When We Meet] to examine the representation of social roles among Uyghur women and

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\* RA., Kastamonu University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Modern Turkic Languages and Literatures. Kastamonu-Türkiye./Arş. Gör., Kastamonu Üniversitesi Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi Modern Türk Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü. [ecemilek@kastamonu.edu.tr](mailto:ecemilek@kastamonu.edu.tr) ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1950-7931

\*\* Prof. Dr., Kastamonu University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Modern Turkic Languages and Literatures. Kastamonu-Türkiye/Prof. Dr., Kastamonu Üniversitesi Beşeri ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi Modern Türk Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı. [soylemezo@yahoo.com](mailto:soylemezo@yahoo.com) ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8382-3173

men. The analysis identifies several key issues, including the portrayal of female characters subjected to male violence, persistent gender inequalities, social and psychological struggles faced by both genders, and the disproportionate burden of family provision placed upon men. Kadiri's female characters generally fall into three archetypal categories: The "angelic woman" (innocent and self-sacrificing), the "demonic woman" (deceitful and self-serving), and the "ideal woman" (independent and resilient). In "Gunçem", "Gülnisa", and "Uçraşkanda" women are depicted as individuals oppressed by a patriarchal social order, leading constrained lives that often culminate in tragedy. In contrast, "Toy" presents women as achieving parity with men, reflecting the Chinese Communist Party's post-1950 propaganda emphasizing women's social rights and gender equality. Male characters, by comparison, are primarily portrayed as upholders and transmitters of patriarchal norms. Kadiri's critical realism draws attention to social injustices and contradictions. While his female characters oscillate between submission and the liberation struggle, his male figures predominantly embody the continuity of patriarchal structures. Within this framework, Kadiri's works serve as an important corpus for both literary and gender studies. Through his plays, the author provides a crucial perspective for understanding the historical transformation of gender relations within Uyghur society.

**Keywords:** *Zunun Kadiri, Uyghur theatre, women, men, gender*

## Öz

Zunun Kadiri, 1912-1989 yılları arasında Doğu Türkistan'da yaşamış ve Uyghur edebiyat tarihi içerisinde öne çıkmış bir yazardır. Elli yıllık yazın yaşamı içerisinde birçok piyes, hikâye, şiir ve masal kaleme almış ve Uyghur edebiyatının şekillenmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Yazdığı eserlerinde dönemin ideolojisi etrafında şekillenen Uyghur halkının toplumsal yaşamına dair önemli veriler sunmuş, kadın ve erkek rollerine ve bu rollerin değişimine eserlerinde sıklıkla değinmiştir. Bu çalışmada Zunun Kadiri'nin "Gunçem" [Goncam], "Gülnisa" [Gülnisa], "Toy" [Kutlama] ve "Uçraşkanda" [Karşılaşınca] piyesleri merkez alınarak Uyghur kadını ve erkeğinin toplumsal rollerine ilişkin incelemelerde bulunulmuştur. Bu incelemeler sonucunda erkek şiddetine maruz kalan kadın karakterler, cinsiyetler arası eşitsizlikler, kadınların ve erkeklerin sosyal ve bireysel sorunları, yalnızca erkeklerle yüklenen ev geçindirme sorumluluğu gibi birçok konu saptanmıştır. Kadiri'nin oyunlarında kadın karakterler genellikle üç farklı şekilde temsil edilmiştir: "melek kadın" (masum ve fedakâr), "şeytani kadın" (hilekâr ve çıkarıcı) ve "ideal kadın" (bağımsız ve güçlü). "Gunçem", "Gülnisa" ve "Uçraşkanda" piyeslerinde kadınlar, ataerki toplumun baskılarına maruz kalan, kısıtlanmış ve trajik bir sona sürüklenen bireyler olarak betimlenmiştir. Buna karşın "Toy" piyesinde, 1950'de Çin Komünist Partisi'nin kadınlara getirdiği sosyal haklar ve eşitlik propagandası çerçevesinde, kadınların erkeklerle eşit konuma yükseltilişi, ideolojik bir yeniden inşa süreci olarak betimlenir. Erkek karakterler ise genellikle ataerki yapının taşıyıcıları ve uygulayıcıları olarak yer almışlardır. Kadiri'nin eserlerinde eleştirel bir üslup kullanarak toplumsal sorunlara dikkat çektiği görülmektedir. Kadın ka-

rakterler, bazen boyun eğen, bazen ise özgürlük mücadelesi veren bireyler olarak resmedilirken, erkek karakterler ise çoğunlukla ataerkil düzenin bir parçası olarak sunulmuştur. Bu bağlamda Kadiri'nin oyunları, sadece edebî açıdan değil, toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları açısından da önemli bir kaynak niteliği taşımaktadır. Yazar, Uyghur toplumundaki cinsiyet rollerinin tarihsel süreçteki değişimini anlamak için tiyatro aracılığıyla önemli bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *Zunun Kadiri, Uyghur tiyatrosu, kadın, erkek, toplumsal cinsiyet*

## Introduction

Zunun Qadiri, who has an important place in the history of Uyghur literature and the author of the plays that constitute the subject of this study, was born in 1912 in Dörbilcin district of Tarbagatay province, located in the north of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Zunun Qadiri, whose childhood and adolescence were spent in poverty in Uyghur villages, came to Urumqi in 1937 and studied first in a secondary school for two years and then in the State Economic Technical Vocational High School for one year and learned the sciences of the period. During these three years, he met modern thinkers and joined the “New Culture Movement.” After graduating, he came to Gulca and started teaching in a primary school. After leaving there, he worked in the theater department of the Uyghur Association as both an artist and the director of the literature department since 1940. 1944 when the Three Districts Revolution began, he participated in the war, first as a war correspondent and then as an editor in the newspapers Kureesh and Alliance. In 1954, he moved to Urumqi and worked in the “Copywriting Department” of the Provincial Ministry of Culture. In 1957, he was elected president of the “Art and Literature Union” of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Due to the political events of the period, he was arrested in 1962 and sent to Aksu, where he was forced to work hard labor until 1979. After 1979, he worked as a writer at the Xinjiang Writers Association and died on September 24, 1989 in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Zunun Qadiri's literary life began in 1937 with the three-act play “Jahaletniñ Capasi” [The Plight of Ignorance]. In this play, based on real-life cases, the miserable life of the people and their increasing suffering due to ignorance were described. “Jahaletniñ Capasi” was performed on stages to mobilize the public on the path of knowledge and science and profoundly impacted the audience. Seeing the impact of this work on the public, Zunun Qadiri began his literary career with “Uçraşkanda” [When We Meet], he continued with many plays such as “Partizanlar Etriti” [Partisans Team], “Her İşniñ Yoli Bar” [Every Job Has a Way], “Gunçem” [Gunchem], “Gülnisa” [Gülnisa]. Among these works, which deal with the realities of the time, describe the life of the people, and have a predominant ideological content, especially the play “Gunçem” is considered the most successful example of Uyghur theater in those years (Sultan & Abdürehim, 2002: 56).

With the influence of the Communist Party of China on East Turkestan, a new page was opened in Zunun Qadiri's literary personality as of the 1950s. Zunun Qadiri played a pioneering role in this new period among other writers. In 1954, he wrote the play “Toy” [Celebration],

which expresses the new happy life of Uyghur farmers who developed under the guidance of the Communist Party and brought the new historical era to the audience. This drama tells the story of a farmer named Haşim, who sees the benefits of the communist system and gives up individual work and experiences with his family and those around him. The author aims to show the reader the old's evil and the new's goodness through Haşim. "Toy" won an award at the National Drama-Theater Performance in Beijing in 1955. It became the first work to receive an award after establishing the new China (Sultan & Abdürehim, 2002: 57).

During his fifty years of literary life, Zunun Qadiri wrote nearly ten theater and literary articles, more than twenty stories, and nearly thirty poems and tales, in which he touched upon many social issues. He translated Russian writer Maksim Gorky's Arxip Bowa and Lyunka [Grandfather Arkhip and Lenka], Tatar writer Adil Kutuy's Tapshurilmigan Xetler [Unsent Letters], and prominent figures of Xinjiang Kazakh literature such as Tanjarık's Gündipay [The Guardian] epics and stories (Zaman, 1995: 317). Zunun Qadiri has shaped today's Uyghur literature in storytelling and drama and has carried it far ahead. He was an important representative of storytelling and dramatization during his lifetime.

### **1. Shadows of Patriarchy in Society: Uyghur Women**

The Uyghur woman and her societal role can be traced in historical sources since the 7th century. The first information in written history begins with the Uyghur khans and their actions. As a result of the politics, they conducted with China during their reign, the Uyghur khans chose their wives from within China and especially married Chinese princesses.<sup>1</sup> The marriage of the khans with the Chinese spread among the people at that time, and this situation also affected the lives of Uyghur women. Uyghur men, interested in Chinese women's beautiful clothing and well-groomed appearance, began to prefer Chinese women over Uyghur women over time.

The Uyghur woman, who led a nomadic life, generally had the same workload as men and showed warrior characteristics. However, from Böğü Khan onwards, the kings mostly spent time in and around the palace brought about a life that could be called settled. With a sedentary life, the Uyghur woman lost her warrior characteristics and limited her social role to domestic chores, as was the case worldwide. With both the influence of settled life and the influence of Chinese women on them, Uyghur women changed their lifestyles and began to adopt Chinese-style clothing and lifestyle.

Within the Uyghur Khaganate, women took part in the state administration just like men. The Taryat Inscription found in Northern Mongolia during this period is one of the most important evidence showing the place of Uyghur women in the state administration. In the inscription, it is written that Moyun Çor, who won the struggle, was given the title of Tengride Bolmış El-etmiş Bilge Kagan and his wife El-Bilge Katun by the people (Tekin, 1982: 801). This inscription is of great importance for the history of Uyghur women. According to Çandarlıoğlu, "the wives of the rulers, called khatuns, would sit to the left of the ruler at reception ceremonies, banquets and feasts, listen to discussions on political and administrative matters, express their opinions, and even participate in war assemblies" (1977: 64). Again, the decrees prepared in that period were signed not only by the khan but also jointly by the khan and the khatun.

The Uyghur travelogue, written by the Chinese envoy Wang Yen-Te in the late 10th century, contains much information about the social life of the Uyghurs at that time. Wang Yen-Te gave the following information about Uyghur women in his travelogue:

They manufacture sable fur pelts, Po-tieh (cotton weaving), and Hsiu-wen hua-jui pu (dress embroidered with floral motifs). According to their customs, most of them ride horses and shoot arrows. Women wear Yu-mao (calpac, hat) on their heads. (İzgi, 1989: 57-58)

The Uyghur people began to accept Islam in masses under the leadership of Satuk Buğra Khan, the ruler of the Kara-Khanid Khanate in the 10th century. With the acceptance of Islam, as in other societies, changes occurred in the social structure of the Uyghurs. There are various views of researchers on this subject. Some researchers argue that women, in particular Turkish women, had the same rights in the eyes of society after the acceptance of Islam. According to these researchers, Turkish women maintained their rights after adopting Islam because they already had them (Can, 2008, cited in Ağçoban, 2016: 17). According to other researchers, with the adoption of Islam, women entered a male-dominated society type. They were relegated to the second plan, confined to the home, subjected to strict dress practices, and their legal rights were restricted (Ağçoban, 2016: 17). Following the Uyghurs' acceptance of Islam, this situation mainly was the case for women.

After the adoption of Islam, veiling gradually became a habit among the Uyghurs. The religiously privileged feudal class in Uyghur society strongly encouraged women to cover their faces in order to subordinate them to themselves. It even used repressive means such as foot whipping for women who went out on the streets without covering their faces (Hebibulla, 2019: 104). Another projection of Islam on Uyghur society is polygamy. The religious permission to marry more than one woman under the name of "husband's right" has pushed women to the social background. The saying "Ayal cinis Ademniñ sol kovrigisidin apiride bolğan. (The female gender was created from Adam's left rib)", which is mentioned in the hadiths and frequently used among Uyghurs, is another issue that disrupts the principle of equality between men and women. With the origin and adoption of this saying in the society, sayings such as "Ayalniñ çeçi uzun, ekli kalte. (The woman's hair is long, her mind is short.)" and "Er ayalniñ ket hudasi. (The husband is the wife's housekeeper.)" were also derived. Uyghur women were sacrificed to such reactionary etiquette rules (Hebibulla, 2019: 150).

Uyghur women are also in second place compared to men in inheritance. In the presence of society, both men and women are entitled to inheritance, but women receive half the share compared to men. This again coincides with the rules of the Qur'an. The Qur'an also states that the man's share should be twice as much as the woman's share (Nisa-11)<sup>2</sup>. The equal share for women only applies if the deceased person has no male children.

Another social problem faced by Uyghur women is that they are subjected to constant surveillance and pressure under the name of protecting honor and chastity. Young women refrain from going anywhere alone, interacting with the opposite sex, and being alone with them for fear that their morals will be compromised. It is also frowned upon by society for women to see and spend time with the person they are going to marry before the marriage. Young people who are getting married conduct these meetings in the strictest secrecy. If they are discovered,

society denigrates women as shameless and immoral (Hebibulla, 2019: 143). In addition, there are various social traditions on women's virginity. Virginity control is one of the many practices of patriarchal mentality and a way of controlling women's sexuality by men. In Uyghur society, it is a disaster in the eyes of families if the woman to be married is not a virgin. The customs practiced after the virginity of the married woman is checked are described by Katanov as follows:

If the girl's virginity is good, it is good for both families. However, if the bride is not a virgin, the groom beats her, and after forcing her to confess, he sends her back to her father's house the same night with a man and a woman from the girl's side and a man and a woman from the groom's side. (...) Those who come with the bride say, "It seems that a mouse has eaten your daughter," and hand her over to her parents. (2004: 33)

On the wedding night, aunties are waiting outside the door to announce to friends and relatives whether the girl is a virgin or not. Aunties use various items for this practice, which are highly valued by the community and have symbolic meanings. For example, after the woman's defloration, the aunties take the soiled sheet from the groom and celebrate it by showing it to the guests waiting outside the wedding house. If the woman is not a virgin, the following practice is followed in some regions: A large piece of bread is taken by the in-laws, and a hole is made in the center of it. Then, this bread is shown to the girl's family. After seeing this, the family beats the girl and asks her who took her virginity. When they find the culprit, they force her to cover all the groom's expenses (Katanov, 2004: 36-37).

In 1950, when the Communist Party of China came to power, Mao Zedong implemented the new communist system, and the "New Marriage Law" was adopted. With this law, Chinese women and women living within China -Uyghur women are also included in this category- were granted social equality. The marriage age was raised to 20 for men and 18 for women, monogamy was introduced, and consanguineous marriages were banned. In addition, men and women were allowed to use their surnames, widows were allowed to marry, and the concept of concubinage was banned.

It is known that divorce was occasionally practiced in ancient Uyghur society. Women often had no say in this practice, which men usually carried out. It was seen that the union between husband and wife ended when the man said: "I put" or "Talak/Bosh Ol" (Ulusoy & Celil, 2005: 21). Following the "New Marriage Law," women's right to divorce was also secured. It was stated that the state and judicial bodies would mediate in case of failure to reach a divorce agreement. Uyghur researchers have argued that granting women the right to divorce has shaken family ties. According to them, there was a noticeable increase in divorces after this law (Qarluq, 2005: 39).

The communist system that began with the Mao era and the accompanying gender regulations ended with the reform period that began in the 1980s. Since the ideologically driven and "top-down" social changes of the 1950s prevented the development of self-awareness, they could not be sustained in subsequent processes (Lin, 2003: 88). The 1980 Chinese economic reform reopened the social gap between men and women. After the end of the communist system and the expansion of private enterprises, women were laid off more than men, forced to retire at a younger age, and underemployed (Lin, 2003: 88). This has increased gender inequality by



socially privileging men. In the last 50 years, there have been advances in women's lives within China, especially in the gender field, but there have also been setbacks (Lin, 2003: 90). Women are assumed to have a long way to go in achieving full equality with men.

Based on the sources, a general evaluation of Uyghur women can be made as follows: Uyghur women are raised within a strict framework in which they are often admonished to care for their homes and families. They usually marry at a very young age - between 14-18<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, they give birth to children shortly after their marriage. They are not expected to work after marriage but to raise their children and care for their homes. According to Cappelletti, the Uyghur woman, idealized by her environment, is a shy being skilled in singing and dancing, chosen to pass on moral and religious rules to future generations (2020: 148).<sup>4</sup> In his plays, Zunun Qadiri has treated Uyghur women in various aspects and presented them to the reader. In "Gül'nisa", "Gunçem" and "Uçraşkanda" he portrayed women as the other gender exploited within the patriarchal order, and in the play "Toy" he portrayed women as the ideal gender that was brought to an equal position with men after 1950 with the communist system.

In Zunun Qadiri's play "Gunçem" [Gunchem], the problems women face in Uyghur society are discussed in a patriarchal environment. The play is centered around four female characters: Gunçem, Zorihan, Şervan, and Patemhan. The main character, Gunçem, is a 17-year-old, intelligent, hardworking girl. After the death of her father, she lives with her mother, Zorihan, in their village house. However, Gunçem is dragged to a tragic end due to the pressures of the men around her and society's prejudices against women. Gunçem tries to get rid of Seyit, whom she married under the coercion of her family and community, and decides to elope with her lover Nurum. However, the escape attempt fails, and Gunçem is imprisoned again in Ömer Şanyu's house and is subjected to physical and psychological violence. Eventually, as a result of the violence, she loses her life and breathes her last in Nurum's arms. Nurum takes her revenge by setting fire to Ömer Şanyu's property. The character of Gunçem represents the social and individual oppression and tragedy of Uyghur women. Gunçem's mother, Zorihan, another female character in the play, is a woman who has lost her husband and is devoted to her traditions. She feels incomplete because of society's understanding that women exist only through a man. Zorihan opposes her daughter's relationship with Nurum, focusing on the judgments of society rather than her daughter's happiness. Her death due to illness is a turning point in the tragedy of Gunçem's life and dramatically affects the course of events.

Şervan is Ömer Şanyu's 38-year-old wife and the villainous character of the play. Drawing attention to her stance against the patriarchal structure, Şervan is depicted as a self-confident, intelligent, and wealthy woman. However, she goes against social norms by cheating on her husband. In this respect, she is a figure suitable for Berna Moran's "Femme fatale" type. Şervan draws the image of a strong woman with statements such as "It is the woman who makes the man a man" by opposing the relegation of women to the second plan in the patriarchal society. The last female character in the play is Patemhan, who is more of a supporting character. Patemhan is Ömer Şanyu's maid and stands out as a compassionate figure with her support for Gunçem. After Zorihan's death, she fulfills Gunçem's need for motherhood to some extent and symbolizes the angelic woman type. The female characters in the play are depicted as completely good or downright evil. The characters do not experience any emotional or personality change in the

play. These women, who are pushed into the background with the influence of the patriarchal structure, are sometimes devalued in the eyes of society and sometimes lose their lives without reaching the happiness of their dreams. In “Gunçem”, Qadiri presents the problems women face in a patriarchal order to the reader with tragic fiction.

“Gülnisa”, like “Gunçem”, features a female-centered narrative and bears excellent similarities in terms of both fictional structure and characters. The play’s main characters include 17-year-old Gülnisa, who has faced heavy responsibilities and pain, her cruel stepmother Ayhan, and her cheerful friend Tuhan. Due to the loss of her mother at an early age, Gülnisa is forced to assume the domestic roles attributed to women. Her father, Samsaq, has left the burden on Gülnisa’s shoulders because her second wife, Ayhan, does not fulfill these roles. Moreover, Gülnisa is subjected to both physical and verbal violence by her stepmother, Ayhan. Seeing the solution in marriage, Gülnisa hopes to marry her lover Polat as soon as possible and get rid of the cruelty she suffers. After completing the marriage preparations, Polat sends his family to Gülnisa’s house. However, Ayhan rejects the proposal as he plans to marry Gülnisa to his brother Qadir. Polat and Gülnisa decide to elope, but Gülnisa is caught by her father, Samsaq, and Qadir while trying to escape. In the fight that ensues, Qadir stabs Gülnisa to death. Gülnisa’s death reflects the tragic fate of a woman who is forced into marriage.

Ayhan, the other important female character of the play, draws attention with his violence, intrigue, and manipulation. Rejecting the domestic roles assigned to him, Ayhan both disrupts domestic peace and negatively affects his environment with his quarrelsome and manipulative nature. Ayhan elaborates his plans to marry Gülnisa to his brother Qadir for her welfare, but Qadir’s carelessness disrupts this plan. Gülnisa’s death causes Ayhan to lose everything she has. At the end of the play, Ayhan is also killed by his brother due to Qadir’s delusions, and the play ends. “Gülnisa” deals with the role assigned to women by the patriarchal social structure, women’s lack of individual independence, and the consequences, leading to individual tragedies. While women struggle for survival and emancipation, they are tragically cut off from life due to the persecution and oppression they suffer.

In Zunun Qadiri’s play “Toy”, the author deals with the changing roles of men and women and the social position of women after the communist revolution. Compared to Qadiri’s other plays, this text deals with women’s identity most liberally. When it was written, it had the function of propagandizing the revolution. The main female characters of the play, Hayrunnisa and Tunisa, represent the old and new typologies of women. Hayrunnisa, 18 years old and an active cooperative member, is the ideal female model of the new order. Her hard work, independence, and egalitarian attitude reflect the freedom and determination that the new system attributes to women. In this period, when women gained the right to marry of their own choice, Hayrunnisa and her lover Abdülkerim decided to marry with mutual understanding and shared the wedding expenses equally. This situation emphasizes the innovation brought to women’s roles in the marriage process and the transformation in social stereotypes. Moreover, Hayrunnisa’s selection as the first winner due to her cooperative efforts is a symbolic achievement that reflects gender equality in social production.

Tunisa is 45 years old and represents the traditional woman model. Although she is aware of the social rights brought by the new system, she has difficulty adapting these rights to



daily life. She feels obliged to submit to her husband, Haşim's oppressive and condescending attitude. However, in the later parts of the play, Haşim's views change with the influence of their son Abdülkerim and other individuals around him. The author points out that this change may improve Tunisa's quality of life. However, it is impossible to say that Tunisa is free since the domestic order still depends on Haşim's behavior.

The play reflects the effects of the communist order that began in China in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong on Uyghurs. In particular, the formalization of gender equality with the "New Marriage Law" of 1950 forms the bare ground of the work. Zunun Qadiri reflects the gradual replacement of the traditional patriarchal order with an egalitarian system, with the character of Hayrunnisa in a way that the woman is on the winning side. "Toy" [Celebration] is an important work of its period in introducing the modernizing world to the Uyghur people and adopting the new social structure.

Zunun Qadiri's "Uçraşkanda" was written in 1941 in two acts and four scenes, but the second act was lost during the Cultural Revolution. Today, only one act of the play survives, and it has important implications for the roles of men and women and the social effects of war. The play is a political propaganda praising the communist system against fascism. In this context, women and the female body were used as a central tool in propaganda. The play tells the story of Peycan, a Japanese soldier who sees the color of the ideology he has adopted and crosses over to the other side. His wife, Hanım (the only female character in the play), is an important figure in this transformation process.

Hanım and Peycan separated in the third month of their marriage because Peycan went to war. Hanım is first seen on stage in front of a brothel with Yincan, a rogue soldier. Hanım, who comes from a wealthy family, was sold to this brothel due to the hardships of the war, but she remained faithful to her love for her husband and did not have a relationship with anyone.

Yincan tries to deceive Hanım with various promises to be with him but fails to convince her. Then, he manages to lure her to him by lying that he will take her to her husband, Peycan, and ensure their reunion. Hanım enters the brothel to collect her belongings, believing that she will go to her husband, while his wife Peycan comes in front of the brothel and learns that one of the women there is praised for her beauty. Seeing his wife leaving the brothel, Peycan kills her without questioning her based on his sense of honor. However, he later realizes that his wife is innocent, and the real blame lies with those who forced her into this situation. With regret after killing his wife, Peycan stops fighting for Japan and decides to join the Chinese partisans. The surviving part of the play ends with this event.

"Uçraşkanda" powerfully reflects the violence and injustices women face under wartime conditions, focusing on phenomena such as the economic hardships of war forcing women into prostitution and the proliferation of sexual violence. Female characters are often presented as victims of society's morality and meet a tragic end. The oppression and violence experienced by women are presented from a perspective that criticizes the perception of women in the world of men. However, the missing parts of the text limit the possibility of knowing what other changes in thought the author intended to convey through the character of Hanım.

In Zunun Qadiri's theater works, female characters are divided into three basic types. The first type is women, called "angelic" because of their pure, innocent, sacrificial, and ascetic characteristics. Gülnisa, Gunçem, and Hanım represent this group. These types overlap with the characteristics of the female characters described by Berna Moran<sup>5</sup> as "victim type," and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar<sup>6</sup> as "angel in the house". The second type is the so-called "devil woman" who is associated with deceit, lies, intrigue, murder and arrogance. With these characteristics, Ayhan and Şervan correspond to Moran's "deadly woman" and Gilbert and Gubar's "monster" type. The third type, the "ideal woman," is represented by the character Hayrunnisa. Hayrunnisa is constructed as an independent, well-mannered, hardworking, and strong individual and is the most idealized female character in Zunun Qadiri's plays. The female characters other than Hayrunnisa are subjected to the oppression and restrictions of the patriarchal order in the plays. With no economic freedom, social life, or special skills, these women were dominated by men (father, father-in-law, or husband) and physically or verbally humiliated. In particular, "Gunçem", "Gülnisa", and "Uçraşkanda" a traditional viewpoint emphasizes that men and women are not equal. In contrast, in the play "Toy", which deals with the effects of the communist movement that began in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the equality of men and women is often stated.

The social position of women in Uyghur society has changed throughout history. The Uyghur woman, who had significant power and authority in the early periods of history, was reduced to motherhood and companionship with the narrowing of social roles over time. The female characters in Zunun Qadiri's works reflect the different stages of this change. With the communist revolution in 1949, women regained social power and authority but lost these gains again as the revolution's impact waned. Although there is no clear information about the social position of Uyghur women today, it aims to address this issue more comprehensively with more precise research on the Uyghur people.

## 2. Ideal Gender Representation of Society: Uyghur Men

Studies on the concept of gender have centered around women and femininity, especially with the emergence of feminism, and academic circles have primarily focused on these issues. The concept of men and masculinity, generally excluded from gender studies, became an independent field of study with Connell's *Masculinities*, published in 1995 (Horzum, 2018: 76). Connell states that four main developments influenced the formation of the masculinity order: cultural changes, the establishment of overseas empires, the transformation of urban life by commercial capitalism, and the European civil war (Connell, 2019: 318-323). As a result of these developments, masculinity became a stable social order, especially in Europe and North America.

From the 1800s onwards, masculinity began to acquire oppressive patterns, and feminist movements, the impact of capitalism and power relations, were decisive in this process. After World War I, fascism tried to re-establish male supremacy in response to feminist movements for gender equality. With modernization, gender roles transformed, and business people and bureaucrats replaced the holders of money and office. Connell states that this change affected forms of masculinity and that the domestic patriarchal structure was reshaped by the ability to earn money (2019: 334).

Gender identities are shaped based on an individual's biological sex and are influenced by factors such as culture, religion, and ideology. Social stereotypes play an important role in shaping these identities. While feminist approaches have challenged male privilege, gender studies have primarily focused on feminist studies, with less attention paid to men's social roles and the inequalities they face. The social roles attributed to women and men and the historical accumulation of these roles have generally been shaped by a distinction based on biological sex.

Throughout history, Uyghurs have adopted a patriarchal lifestyle, and this structure was further strengthened with the adoption of Islam. Uyghur men were generally considered independent, aggressive, and strong, while women were assigned more domestic roles. Before the Mao era, the patriarchal structure in Uyghur society remained distinctly patriarchal, and male children were valued more in the family. This situation also impacted education and social roles, with men receiving more education while women were mostly limited to housework. During the Mao era, men and women started to work in the same jobs, which was intended to create an environment of equality, but men received more recognition and pay.

The social roles attributed to Uyghur men are also reflected in literary works. Providing for the household, protecting the family, and maintaining social prestige stand out among these roles. However, it is seen that men characterize women more as tools, consider doing domestic chores as a task associated with women, and avoid doing these chores. Significant inequalities exist between men and women in education and the social sphere. The responsibilities imposed on men and the social effects of these responsibilities are portrayed through various events and characters in Zunun Qadiri's plays.

In the play "Gunçem", the roles imposed on men by the patriarchal social structure and the effects of these roles on gender relations are discussed through four male characters: Nurum, Ömer Şanyu, Seyit, and Meşrep. Nurum is a hardworking and modest young man who is cared for by Gunçem's mother, Zorihan, after his mother's death. He plans to marry Gunçem but cannot realize his dream due to financial difficulties. Nurum's difficulties reveal how society's responsibilities to men, such as earning a living and organizing a wedding, reduce the individual's quality of life. These responsibilities lead Nurum to jobs she does not want to do, forcing her to work at Ömer Şanyu's farm. However, in this process, Nurum had to struggle with both economic and social difficulties, eventually losing the woman he loved and being dragged to a tragic end in pursuit of revenge.

Ömer Şanyu, the play's villain, is a wealthy and oppressive farmer. He stands out as a typical patriarchal character with his patriarchal and sexist discourses, his desire for polygamy, and his efforts to control women through materialism and power. Ömer Şanyu, who sees a woman as a slave of man and an incomplete being, represents the patriarchal structure of Uyghur society. Moran's observations that men are active and women are passive in patriarchal societies (2021: 260) are embodied in Ömer Şanyu's discourse and behavior. The character objectifies women in line with social norms and manipulates Gunçem's life with his material and moral power, leading to tragic consequences.

Seyit is the 17-year-old son of Ömer Şanyu and Şervan. Seyit, who grew up with the oppressive and hegemonic masculinity patterns of society, was forced to marry someone he did not love by the decisions of his family. His marriage to Gunçem reflects society's view

of women and the definition of women's moral position through men. Gunçem's elopement with Nurum is perceived as a threat to Seyit's masculinity, and this situation legitimizes the violence against Gunçem. Laloğlu's findings on the relationship between violence and masculinity and the use of violence as a means of proving masculinity and power (2018: 393) are seen in Seyit's behavior. Seyit inflicted violence on the woman in order to prove his masculinity in line with social pressures, and this situation prepared the sad end of Gunçem.

Meşrep, the last male character of the play, is the son of Patemhan, the housekeeper of the house, and is a character who does not conform to the oppressive masculinity norms of society. At the beginning of the play, he submits to the manipulations of Şervan, the lady of the house. However, under the influence of his mother, Patemhan, he changes sides, does the right thing, helps Nurum and Gunçem. Meşrep's passivity contrasts with the representation of dominance and power that society expects from men.

The roles of the male characters in the play "Gunçem" within the patriarchal social structure and their relationships with women reveal gender inequalities and the destructive effects of these inequalities on individuals. Qadiri's work dramatizes the effects of patriarchal values on individuals in Uyghur society and offers a critical view of the social structure of the period.

"Gülnisa," another play by the author, represents the reflections of gender roles in the patriarchal social structure. The play's male characters, Polat, Samsaq, and Qadir, appear with different characteristics and roles before the reader. Polat is Gülnisa's 20-year-old lover and a brave, hardworking, and loving young man. As he tries to save Gülnisa from her oppressive family and marry her, the social rituals he encounters make this process difficult. In Uyghur society, marriage involves a series of rituals in which men manage the whole process. Polat attempts to ask Gülnisa's family for her hand in marriage by tradition but is prevented by his stepmother Ayhan. In the end, Polat and Gülnisa decide to elope to another city, but this plan ends when Ayhan's brother Qadir kills Gülnisa. Although Polat wants revenge, he fails, and the play ends tragically, as in the author's other works.

Samsaq, Gülnisa's father, is a weak and powerless figure who does not fit the typical father profile in the plays. He is helpless due to his poverty and dependence on his wife. Samsaq, who had to maintain his marriage due to social pressures and status concerns, could not defend his daughter's rights and did not attempt revenge even after her death. This contradicts the "protective father" role expected of men in patriarchal societies. Samsaq's character is criticized to the extent that he does not conform to social norms and is belittled by his wife and society for his weakness.

Qadir is the villainous male character of the play. A drinker, gambler, and cruel figure, Qadir plots evil against Gülnisa with the guidance of his older sister Ayhan. Ayhan tries to force his brother Qadir to marry Gülnisa, but these efforts result in Gülnisa's murder. Although Qadir's actions represent individual evil deeds, he usually acts under Ayhan's influence throughout the play. After Gülnisa's death, Qadir loses his sanity due to Polat's desire for revenge and his guilt. He ends his life in a cycle of paranoia and violence by killing his sister.

The roles expected of men in patriarchal societies shaped the social identities of the male characters in the play "Gülnisa". When duties such as being strong, providing for the family,

and protecting women were not fulfilled, masculinity was questioned, and social pressures guided the actions of these characters. The stories of Polat, Samsaq, and Qadir reveal the pressure of the patriarchal order on men and the destructive consequences of this pressure on women. Gülnisa's fate parallels other female characters who are victims of the patriarchal order. This play critically analyzes masculinity, social roles, and the patriarchal structure. Most male characters acted within the framework of the norms imposed by this structure, resulting in both individual and social tragedies. In this context, the play critiques gender roles and patriarchy.

Zunun Qadiri's play "Toy" features male characters representing different social roles to praise the communist revolution and criticize the traditional order. One of these characters is Haşım, the play's reactionary character who defends the patriarchal order. Haşım, a middle-class farmer, argues that men are the house's pillars and that women should obey men. He often belittles his wife, Tunisa and states that she, as a woman, is a subordinate gender. For example, in a scene discussing equality between men and women, Haşım states that modern ideas such as communism have led women to new concepts "such as assemblies and cooperatives" and that the consequences of this situation are uncertain (Qadiri, 1992: 397). Furthermore, Haşım's defense of marriage at a young age and his desire to marry his son off to his aunt's daughter reinforce his traditional views. However, at the end of the play, Haşım changes under the influence of modern social roles that came with the communist revolution and adapts to new values.

Abdülkerim, who represents the modern face of the play, is the 22-year-old son of Haşım and Tunisa. Abdülkerim works as an agricultural engineer at the cooperative, supports the new system, and advocates social change. Abdülkerim, who advocates equality between men and women, establishes a relationship with his girlfriend, Hayrunnisa, based on shared responsibilities. For example, sharing the wedding expenses among themselves so as not to burden their families reflects the new social order's understanding of individual responsibility. Hayrunnisa and Abdülkerim's relationship also shows that modern individual choices and freedoms have replaced traditional notions of dating and marriage. Abdülkerim plays an important role in transforming his father, Haşım, and this process carries a symbolic message that society can adapt to the communist revolution.

The other male characters of the play, Turdahun and his son Niyaz, represent the negative aspects of the traditional order. Turdahun, a wealthy farmer, tries to block the progress of the cooperative and aims to maintain traditional landlordism. However, at the end of the play, he fails. Niyaz is portrayed as a naive but antipathic character. Expressing his feelings for Hayrunnisa in a drunken state, Niyaz plans to win her by force. Because of these behaviors, he is ostracized from society, and at the end of the play, his plans come to naught along with his father.

As a result, "Toy" emphasizes that the traditional patriarchal order has changed with modern social roles. Through his characters, Qadiri defends the equality of men and women and the importance of modern values. Haşım's transformation and the equality-based relationship between Abdülkerim and Hayrunnisa show that the author reflects the positive effects of the new order on society. However, as in the case of Haşım and Tunisa, it is also clearly stated that some domestic roles have not entirely changed.

"Uçraşkanda" was written by Zunun Qadiri in 1941. The male characters, Peycan and Yincan, in the play, carry rich elements that can be analyzed from a gender perspective.

Although there is no information about the ages or personal characteristics of these characters at the beginning of the play, inferences can be made based on the plot and their behaviors.

Peycan, the main male character of the play, is a soldier serving in the Japanese army and married to a woman named Hanım before joining the war. Peycan, who expresses his love for his wife at every opportunity, often says he misses her during the war. However, Hanım is sold to a brothel to supply Japanese soldiers after Peycan goes to war. Brothels are institutions that objectify women, relegate them to a subordinate position, and are used to serve men. It is ironic that during long periods of war, states support these institutions to provide relief for male soldiers.

One day, as Peycan passes by the brothel, he sees his wife Hanım leaving and kills her without questioning her in order to “restore his honor.” Honor is a concept often shaped through the female body in patriarchal societies. Through traditions, men are taught the responsibility of protecting this concept from an early age (Sakallı-Uğurlu & Akbaş, 2013: 78). However, Peycan regrets when it is revealed that Hanım was held against her will and was protecting herself. When Wan Bin, a Chinese prisoner of war, tells her that the Japanese army similarly treats many women, Peycan questions all the values he believes in, switches sides, and joins the Chinese partisans.

Yincan, the other male character in the play, is seen beside Hanım in the brothel. Although he knows that Hanım is married and in love with her husband, Yincan tries to get her with a selfish and materialistic attitude. However, after she rejects him, he offers to help her and says he wants to take her to her husband. Although Yincan’s subsequent fate is unknown due to the missing two curtains, it can be interpreted that he is a dishonest and uncaring character.

Male characters in Zunun Qadiri’s works can be categorized according to thematic roles. “Variable” characters like Peycan restructure their personality traits, while “heroic” characters like Nurum and Polat stand out with their benevolent and hardworking characteristics. On the other hand, “villainous” characters like Yincan and Qadir have destructive effects on protagonists. In addition, “supporting” characters such as Meşrep remain in the plot’s background.

It is seen that the male characters in Zunun Qadiri’s plays generally act within gender stereotypes. However, the character of Abdülkerim stands out as a figure who has internalized gender equality by going beyond these stereotypes. In Qadiri’s works, it is seen that Uyghur society assigns active roles to men and passive roles to women. In this context, new studies on Uyghur literature may pave the way for a more in-depth analysis of gender roles.

## **Conclusion**

Zunun Qadiri’s plays provide an important source for understanding Uyghur society’s historical, cultural, and social structure. In particular, examining the social roles between men and women and discussing these roles in the process of change, ranging from the traditional patriarchal structure to the effects of the modern communist order, shed light on the social structure of the period. Qadiri’s “Gunçem” [Gunchem], “Gülnisa” [Gülnisa], “Toy” [Celebration], and “Uçraşkanda” [When We Meet] while dramatizing the oppressive effects of the patriarchal social order on women, his works such as also reveal the social and individual resistance of women. In these plays, women are depicted as characters who



are forced to submit to the sexist norms of patriarchal society and are subjected to violence and discrimination. In the plays “Gunçem” and “Gülnisa”, the tragic endings of the female characters strongly emphasize the limiting effect of traditional norms on women. In contrast, the play “Toy” depicts an ideal society in which women are liberated by the communist system and achieve a social position equal to that of men. However, it is seen that these gains were lost with the post-1980 reform period, and gender inequality has increased again.

The male characters in Qadiri’s works are shaped as carriers and representatives of the patriarchal order. These characters reflect the oppressive effects of gender norms on men and reveal the conflicts that individuals experience in adapting to social roles. In particular, the difficulties of men’s economic responsibilities reflected in their individual lives and the social structure in which women are treated in a more passive position are critically addressed in Qadiri’s works.

The treatment of gender inequality in Zunun Qadiri’s plays offers periodic criticism and reveals the transformation of the roles of men and women in Uyghur society in the historical process. In this context, Qadiri’s works are a reference source that deserves to be analyzed in terms of literary history and gender studies. Future studies can offer new perspectives on the evolution of gender structures in Uyghur society by addressing the effects and reflections of these works on social transformation processes more comprehensively.

## Endnotes

- 1 Five of the thirteen Uyghur khans married Chinese women and became their chief wives (Ahmetbeyoğlu, a. Uyghur. İstanbul University Open and Distance Education Faculty, History Undergraduate Program, Lecture Note).
- 2 <https://kuran.diyanet.gov.tr/tefsir/Nisâ-suresi/504/11-12-ayet-tefsiri> (Date of Access: 17.12.2024)
- 3 N.F. Katanov, during his trip to East Turkestan in the 1850s, stated that the girls born in Turfan and Toksun were married at 10 and gave birth at 13 (2004: 29).
- 4 Women’s prowess in music and dance can be attributed to the fact that they were not given any other opportunity to socialize in society.
- 5 For detailed information, see Moran, 2021.
- 6 For detailed information, see Gilbert, S. & Gubart, S. 2000.

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