

## Nesli Çölgeçen (1955- )

### Biography

Nesli Çölgeçen was born in Manisa in 1955. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences, Press and Broadcasting High School at Ankara University in 1976. He started his career in documentary films working alongside the famous documentary director Süha Arın. The effects of shooting documentary films are evident in the films which he subsequently made. He has been directing films since 1979. He has directed some of the most successful films of Turkish cinema such as *Selamsız Bandosu* and *Züğürt Ağa*. He is one of the most important directors of Turkish cinema with his films and documentaries. His precise use of cinema techniques, the meticulousness of his selection of scenarios and the success of his selection of actors are the biggest factors in enabling his career to reach a different level. He teaches and lectures at various universities. Çölgeçen is one of the oldest of the doyens of Turkey's cinema and film industry, and he made only seven feature films and one television series over more than thirty years, but he also made many documentary films such as *Son Buluşma*(2008) ('Last Date'), *Ağustos Gazileri* (2006)('August Veterans'), *Mavi Düş*,(1998) (*Blue Dream*).

### Filmography

#### Fiction films

*Çalsın Sazlar* 2014  
*Denizden Gelen* 2009  
*Ah Be İstanbul* 2004 (television series)  
*Oyunbozan* 2000  
*İmdat İle Zarife* 1991  
*Selamsız Bandosu* 1987  
*Züğürt Ağa* 1985  
*Kardeşim Benim* 1983

#### Documentary films

*Zamanda Safranbolu* 2018 (Nesli Çölgeçen, Yalçın Yelence, Kemal Sevimli)  
*Son Buluşma* 2008  
*Ağustos Gazileri* 2006  
*Mavi Düş* 1998  
*Ballı Kayalar* 1994 (10 minutes)  
*Türkiye'nin Kalbi Ankara: 70 Yıllık Başkent* 1993  
*Ankara'yı Seviyorum* 1993  
*Anadolu'da Buluşma* 1989  
*Anadolu Şafağında* 1983  
*Sonsuz Barış* 1983  
*Savaşın Toprağı* 1983  
*Altın Çağ* 1983  
*Özgürlük Kıyıları* 1983  
*Tarih Boyunca Anadolu* 1982 / 2004 (30x8 Bölüm)  
*Mozaik* 1982  
*Sultan Ahmet Meydanı* 1982  
*Minyatürler* 1982  
*Çatı* 1980 (30 minutes)

## Achievements

### ***Kardeşim Benim*** (1983)

Sedat Simavi Foundation Cinema Award 21.  
Golden Orange Film Competition  
2nd Best Film Award  
Best Cinematographer Award

### ***Züğürt Ağa*** (1986)

Istanbul Film Festival Nejat Eczacıbaşı Foundation Best Turkish Film of the Year Award  
Antalya Film Festival  
- Best Screenplay Award  
- Best Music Award  
- Best Supporting Actress Award  
- Film Critics Best Film of the Year Award  
- Best Director Award  
- Best Actor Award  
Ministry of Culture Achievement Award

### ***Selamsız Bاندosu*** (1987)

Writers' Guild Best Turkish Film of the Year Award  
*Tercuman* Newspaper, Best Film of the Year Award and Best Director Award  
Ministry of Culture Achievement Award

### ***İmdat ile Zarife*** (1991)

10th International Canary Islands Ecology and Nature Films Festival Best Film Award  
Ministry of Culture Achievement Award

## Cinematography

In Çölgeçen's films, the influence of his documentary experience can be seen easily. The cinematography of his films is based on natural camera work as if it is real events which are being captured in real time. That is because establishing and wide angles shots are regularly used in his films. In Çölgeçen's films, we can watch the art and craft of cinematography together. He puts the characters in the centre of the frame and by doing so he relocates the relationships between the lead characters and others. In his films, tracking and dolly shots are rarely found; he usually preferred to use a stable camera.

## Themes

Because Nesli Çölgeçen has been producing films in different genres for more than thirty years, it is difficult to identify common themes in his films. In almost all of his films he focused on different topics, themes, characters and visual language. Even so, some main themes which he used more than other themes in his films can be explained.

**Outsiderness** In his films, Çölgeçen focuses on characters who can in some way be regarded as outsiders and the story is based on their outsiderness. In fact, most of his films depict the journey of these characters towards accepting their otherness because his characters are important people in their community in one way or another.

In *Züğürt Ağa*, we see the transformation of a rural landowner into lower-class citizen of a big city. With his naïve personality and somehow inability to keep up with the transformation of the new capitalist society, that sphere of power bestowed upon him by his paternal grandfather belonging to him is thrown out. In the new system, he even settles inferior to his own marabas.

In *Selamsız Bاندosu*, we watch how a local mayor is humiliated by the government on front of the townspeople by ignoring his efforts to establish an official local band. All of their efforts and their transformation into outsiders are set against the background of the political and economic circumstances of the period in which the films were produced.

In *Kardeşim Benim* It is the subject of the life of an actor whose talents are accepted by everyone, but who have difficulty in keeping up with the changing system and who have fallen out of diameter with his personal problems, who cannot fill the space he has given himself and are stuck in daily routines.

**Zeitgeist and irreversibility** In his films, time and according to time society, are changing and this change is irreversible. Characters try to find solutions to these social changes but despite all their efforts, the irreversibility of the changes is highlighted.

In *Züğürt Ağa*, the principal character tries to resist change in order to protect his power but each time he is defeated. The changing world of Züğürt Ağa is based on the differences between those who can keep pace with change and those who cannot. The tension between these two groups shows another thematic tendency, starting with the character of Behram, who calls Ağa his blood brother after he arrives in Istanbul. Behram proudly tells Ağa how he became successful: "Work, work, work non-stop. Believe me, bro, this Istanbul is not easy. Every house here has my mortar, my bricks. There is sweat. But what happened? I made my two sons into men. One has a furniture store and the other is an AEG dealer; their lives were saved". The transition between the classes is measured by the ability to keep up. Keeping up with the system is a state of success which can only be achieved by working hard. When the ağa offers to go into partnership with his blood brother by saying "Now it's my turn", Behram replies, "Well, a partnership is trouble. It even splits brother from brother". "So what can I do? At least give me some advice; who is there other than you?" asks Züğürt Ağa. Behram says "Well, what should I say? This job wouldn't make any sense either. Istanbul is a different world. Everyone has the same answer – every man for himself". In this new world, everyone is striving for themselves. Behram has won his 'struggle with life' and the struggle he won has given him a hierarchical superiority over Züğürt Ağa. In this new power relationship, Züğürt Ağa is the weak link despite all his claims of brotherhood, and in fact he is a burden on the other's back. When Ağa realises that his blood brother sees him as a burden, he immediately moves out. He says "We weren't going to be a burden for a lifetime, blood brother" to Behram, who replies "Is that okay?" Everyone for himself, so Ağa says "Don't worry about me, blood brother", and expresses his disappointment. Unwritten social contracts based on sacred and sublime solidarity, such as blood brotherhood, are no longer valid among those who keep up with the change. These concepts are important for those like Züğürt Ağa who still wears feudalism as if it is a pair of boots. He experiences the difficulty of not keeping up when he realises that he cannot shout 'Tomaatooooos', saying, "I won't disturb the whole country", but the other villagers have already learned to cheat: "Put the good ones at the front and the ones with bruises behind them", but Züğürt Ağa finds the damaged ones and throws them away instead of putting them at the back of the stall, behind the good ones. He wants to sell the remainder and make some money so that he can burn the shabby van. But no matter how hard he tries, life always knocks him down.

In *Kardeşim Benim*, Özcan resists the power relations in the film industry but he fails to find a solution. In fact, the character dies slowly, just like his profession. As if we see a piece of his life throughout the film, we witness him dying slowly. He is like Yeşilçam, which is about to take its place in the stage of history, and slowly dying.

**Hope** Although characters in his films are defeated many times in their efforts to resist change, at the end of the films there is always hope.

*Züğürt Ağa* finds his talent for cooking traditional food and he makes money from it. At the end of the film, even though he has lost all the power that he had, he can still find a very brave new way to survive the changes. In many of Çölgeçen's films, he placed hope in the foreground, made his characters migrate to a different city or country, did not discourage them from having dreams or striving for what they believe, and thereby constantly refreshed their hopes.

*Selamsız Bando* Even as the mayor chases the insentient train in tears, after a while the band starts to play a dance tune, and while the people are waiting for him, the formal almost military line-up is replaced by people dancing. The people get rid of the tension created by trying to put on borrowed uniforms to show themselves to be smart and start to have fun on their own just by being themselves. In this way, their worries seem to have been lightened.

*Kardeşim Benim* hope emerges with the opposite neighbors who are constantly peeping at Can Öz's house. The audience looks for ulterior motives as the old couple sitting at the opposite door observe Can Öz's house throughout the film. It is as if the neighbors are disturbed by the person entering the

house and the chaotic life of the character. However, at the end of the film, it is understood that while Can Öz is unhappy with the roles that came to him and is now desperate about his abilities, the opposite neighbors actually observe Can Öz to get his signature. They are actually admired him.

**Central/rural tension** In Çölgeçen's films, especially in *Züğürt Ağa* and *Selamsız Bandosu*, one of the main themes is the tension between a greedy and arrogant centre and innocent rural people who try to accommodate themselves to the situations in which they find themselves

*Züğürt Ağa* the central rural tension is highlighted with migration and urbanization which are another theme of the movie. Migration was one of the important problems of the period, and the problems which the migrants had to face in the life of the big city are depicted by the experiences of Züğürt Ağa after he arrives in Istanbul. The city is depicted here as a place where every man is out for himself and where the sacred and lofty values of the countryside mean nothing any more, and everyone who comes afterwards is seen as a parasite. For this reason, after the Ağa arrives in Istanbul, the residents of the old maraba sitting in the coffee house will say, "The one who broke the rope should come here" referring to the arrival of Ağa. The places where those who come from Haraptar settle and live are the slums of the city. Streets of single-storey houses and places with an unregulated infrastructure. In other words, the film shows the worst places where urbanization is experienced. The difference in the level of urbanization between the places where Ağa tries to sell tomatoes, lemons and balloons and where he lived before is striking.

In *Selamsız Bandosu* the main theme of the film is created through the tension between the provinces and the centre. The countryside is represented in the film as a boy trying to show himself to his father. The personal nature of the institutional functioning, such as the sarcastic inability of the council to convene and make decisions, makes the movie childish at the institutional level. The mayor taking his formal seat wearing his grocer's apron is shown as a funny situation which lightens the weight of the institution. The town council members are again excluded from the institution because of their ignorance of the musical instruments used in a marching band at official ceremonies ... in the town of Selamsız. The difference and tension between the centre and the remote small town, in addition to the council scenes, are perceived by the audience with the scene of children waiting for the train to get the newspaper bundle at the beginning of the film. Even news from the centre hits the town second-hand – they have to read yesterday's news thrown at them from a passing train. This remoteness of the town, far from the city, desolate, forgotten and waiting for the state to see it and help its people take the film out of time. It is not a story which belongs to the past or to a specific geography. It is a story of anywhere out of the centre, adaptable to any space and time. Balancing the childlike local life, the grown-up centre does not show itself, it is so remote as to be invisible, but its longed-for presence creates an object of desire. It takes its place in the narrative as a structure which creates excess by its very absence. Its lack is what has made the provinces provincial. And the centre is inaccessible, like the disappearing train which the mayor couldn't catch up with, as he runs behind it in tears on the same railway tracks.

## Characters

As explained above, because Çölgeçen produced many different kinds of film it is hard to define his common character types. However, it can be claimed that some particular characters type can be found in his films.

**Naïve power** In *Kardeşim Benim*, *Selamsız Bandosu* and *Züğürt Ağa*, the principal characters are powerful to some extent but their naïve nature prevents them from using their power efficiently.

*Züğürt Ağa* is the landowner of his village but he is too innocent and somehow childlike to be the leader of the village. He therefore has to sell his village and migrate to the big city, İstanbul. Again here, however, he is too naïve to adjust himself to liberal attitudes of the modern city. Züğürt Ağa is a character who feels deeply surprised and disoriented by the socio-economic and historical processes which have radically changed and destabilized his familiar world. This is different from the Ağa characters represented in Turkish cinema in the early days. Emotional, moral, graceful sometimes childish, he is a character who places great importance on his honor. With these very features, Ağa the landlord cannot do his job properly. He is a landlord who is fond of his children, likes to listen to the books which his son reads at night, and does not dare to even look at Kiraz, even though he likes her, because it would besmirch his honor. He is a character who can be easily manipulated, and it is

precisely this characteristic which makes him vulnerable to Kekeç Salman's dishonesty. These features of the Aga encouraged the villagers to rob and cheat him.

*Latif Şahin* In *Selamsız Bando*, Latif Şahin is the local mayor of a village and again he is too honest, childlike and a dreamer even though all the power is his hands. Latif is a dreamer: he believes that the country's President will stop in Selamsız and as soon as he stops, he will be very affected by the bad condition of the town and make moves to change it; and that after the President, the prime minister and the deputies will visit the town too. This is an extremely unrealistic fantasy, but as someone far from the rationality required by his position, he is unaware of it. This dreamy mood often makes him childish.

*Can Öz* Again in *Kardeşim Benim*, Can Öz is too naïve to survive in the film industry. Through these naïve characters, Çölgeçen depicts the wild and vicious misuse of power by presenting these contrasts. He is a character who grew up in a troubled family. As we understand from the flashbacks in the film, his mother left the house when Can was very young. It is understandable that he has not had any relationship or communication with his father for years. Loneliness is the mood he has been in since childhood. He is a talented comedy actor. But he didn't even give himself the value he deserved. His talents were wasted with his alcohol addiction and disorderly life.

**Vigilant characters** In almost all of Çölgeçen's film, there is at least one shrewd character who is used to balance the naivety of the main character. These vigilant characters use the main characters' naivety for their own ends to gain advantages.

Kekeç Salman in *Züğürt Ağa* uses Züğürt Ağa for his own benefit and in the city he becomes more powerful than Ağa. Kekeç Salman represents the idea of a capitalist society lifting people from poverty and giving them access to the upper classes by their own efforts. It is the fluid identity between classes which is the motto of capitalism. Kekeç Salman agrees for his sister Kiraz to marry Abdo Aga, the elderly father of Züğürt Ağa; he even negotiates with Abdo Aga for Kiraz by saying, "Tell me how much you want?" the old Aga says, "By God, you know, it is just property. Jewels like Kiraz are rare in the world, so the bride price should also be appropriate to her beauty". His sister simply represents capital for him. The old Aga says, "I will buy Kiraz. I will provide a wedding worthy of the Kiraz's glory". And he says, "Forget the glory and fame now. Tell me what you are going to give me". Money and profit are the most important values for him because he understands that in the new order, money is valid, not honor. After the death of Abdo Aga before he was able to consummate the marriage, Kekeç Salman is rational enough to tell Züğürt Ağa, "Your father died without touching his wife. Well, if you want, take the girl, we'll get along with the bride price". With this rationality and pragmatic approach to the bride price, he establishes his own company in Istanbul and becomes the Aga of Istanbul. He is more of an Aga than the Aga with his own rational ethics in Istanbul. This rational ethic leads him to go as far as offering a job to the Aga, his former employer.

*Tahir Ağa* In *Selamsız Bando*, one villager uses the mayor Latif Şahin in many different ways to gain advantages for himself. He is Latif's rival and his predecessor as mayor and is one of the town's notables. He is called the aga because he has land and animals. He likes to show off but it is obvious that he is inferior and ostentatious in many matters. The roots of Tahir Ağa's opposition and unwilling attitude to try for the change which the band is hoped to bring bear traces of village folklore. One of the features of Turkish village folklore is that a man like Tahir Ağa is small-minded, cunning and calculating. His success in putting his own interests above all else and presenting these interests as the general interest, as well as thinking that this is not understood by others at all, puts him into tragicomic situations in the film. In order to underline this situation, there is a man who he embraced but who started to speak about him behind his back. Tahir can also be read as a sign of the dominant political tendency of the period. To depict this situation, a cow that he loves is put up as the prize in the raffle organized to find the money to establish a band, but his grudging acceptance of the enthusiastic reaction of the townsfolk is an example of his true character. This is not a well-intentioned gesture by a man who cares about what people think, but a calculated investment for future elections. It shows that he can use situations which he does not want for his own benefit. The public reaction against the idea of establishing a band makes the audience perceive the traditional attitude which is closed to innovations, and the dominant political structure of the period. A Süleyman Demirel hat is added to his costume as a visual element to support this image.



**Nesli ölgeen**