Le Portrait de la Sorcière comme “Bouc Emissaire”

Résumé
Dans les cultures primitives il n’est pas possible de distinguer nettement le “bien” et le “mal”. Mais il est inévitable de ne pas se choisir une victime. Les religions monothéistes ont mis en relation le Bien et le Dieu tout en situant le Mal dans le rôle de Satan. En ce qui concerne cette distinction, nous pouvons trouver les sources de la transformation de la femme “bouc émissaire” en une sorcière chez les hérétiques occidentaux. La définition de l’Hérétisme par la Papauté et les accusations ont déterminé la chasse aux sorcières au XVème siècle. Ainsi l’identité de la sorcière est promu en un code conventionnel. Le but de cet article est d’analyser l’impact entre ce code conventionnel et le code visuel proposé par l’art européen.

Mots- clés: bouc émissaire, mal, sorcellerie, femme, hérésie

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Özet

Anahtar kelimeler: günah keçisi, kötülük, cadılık, kadın, heretiklik

Abstract
In primitive cultures it may not be possible to discuss the distinction between the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Therefore a chosen victim would be necessary. The
monotheistic religions associate the concept of ‘good’ with God and describe ‘evil’ as an external concept; Devil. On this basis the distinction it is possible to trace the origins of women as ‘scapegoat’ and labelled as a ‘witch’ among European heretics. The definition of heresy and the accusations against the heretic sects by the Papacy were determined the reasons for the witch-hunts started in the 15th century. Thus the identity of witch became a conventional code. This text aims to analyse reflections between the conventional code and the visual code in European art.

Keywords: scapegoat, evil, witchcraft, woman, heresy

History is the form of communal memory favored at any particular time (O’Doherty 2010: 91). To describe the concept of ‘evil’ herein, one needs to trace back the externalization process of human beings’ fear and hope. Fear is evoked because of the limitations of human abilities or the sense of ‘not being able to’. It may not be possible to discuss the distinction between the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in primitive cultures, where fear is not conceptualized. However, the differentiation between these two begins, when faith is perceived as a system. Rituals are created by primitive people’s necessity of communication with the supernatural powers and this, in turn, introduces the mandatory roles (Messadié 1999: 35-36). One that intermediates between the supernatural powers and the community is either a ruler or a sorcerer. Meanwhile, a chosen victim would be necessary. Girard argues that the victim turns into a mythic creature in time, and has two intrinsic features, i.e. physical and moral monstrosity. The physical deformity of a victim, as Girard further explains, corresponds to a real human characteristic or an infirmity. The scars on Oedipus or Hephaestus’s lameness are considered as virtual as the features of a witch per se. Moral monstrosity, by contrast, actualizes the tendency of all persecutors to project the monstrous results onto some poor unfortunate, who by being infirm or a foreigner suggests a certain affinity to the monstrous (Girard, 2005:47-48). Besides, the more the faith of the persecutors on a victim’s guilt departs from rationalism, the more firm is their conviction.

Descriptions of evil

In a series of works tracing the history of the ‘Devil’, Russell associates the concept of ‘evil’ with metaphysical ‘inability’, physical ‘pain’ and moral ‘sin’. This concept corresponds to a destructive action in a triadic context of fear, pain and sin. The tension between good and evil is not only the fate of human beings, but also a role assigned to the divine power. It could be claimed that, co-existed with natural components, the destructive power of ‘beneficent’ God, the creator of the physical universe, is a repercussion of its ‘evil’ side. This paradoxical nature of God, therefore, has turned into a dualist approach based on the principle of dichotomy. By virtue of its closeness to the unconscious, myth is complex and ambiguous, and comprised of both good and evil (Russell 1999: 60-61). Seldom in myth is anything seen as wholly evil. Eventually,
The concept of good and evil are perceived as polarities, opposing absolutes. This conflict then leads a struggle, in which good and evil are only identified according to two measures, i.e. victory or defeat. As a result, this would mean that there is no ambiguity, rather the defeated is the evil.

In addition to these discussions, the concept of evil is associated with the demonic cults in primitive cultures. These demons are regarded as ‘evil forces’, which are liable for natural disasters, such as epidemic diseases, storms, floods or drought. To avoid these disasters, what is there is ‘witchcraft’, again related to the mystical powers with one distinction though: they are the ‘good’ forces in charge. Furthermore, the evolution of witchcraft as a remedy to daily problems is a sign of a new ambivalence and separation. Whereas there are witchcraft practises used as a healing, treatment or a supplement essential to the growth of crops, other emerging witchcraft practises do the opposite. As far as the conflict between good and evil concerned, the concept of witchcraft is identified with a new dichotomy, more appropriately white and black magic. White magic is canonized for its power to protect life and properties and to increase productivity. Contrary to white magic practised notably by ruling class and also ordinary people (Ünal, 2004:42), black magic sometimes caused big debates among the ruling class. Besides, the practitioners of black magic were punished because of their affinity to the demonic forces. The first code of King Hammurabi of Babylon prescribes death penalty for black magic, and the second code states that an alleged practitioner of black magic shall be subjected to an ‘ordeal by water’. Another similar penalty procedure was used to justify whether witches are powered by these demonic forces or not.

Moreover, the monotheistic religions associate the concept of ‘good’ with the Creator of the Universe and describe ‘evil’ as an external concept. As mentioned in the Old Testament, Judaism deviates from the notion that both good and evil were co-existed in Jehovah, and then inclines to perceive ‘evil’ as an external element. On the other hand, this external force is personalized in Christianity. Considering the role of Jesus Christ as a Messiah, this force must be the ‘Devil’. Therefore, the existence of demons and the symbol of evil, namely the Devil, their roles and how they would be penalized in the second coming of Jesus Christ became the main questions of the Era of the Church Fathers. One of the early Christian theologians, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) draws attention to the influence of the Devil, i.e the fallen angel, and demons on human beings and argues that witchcraft practises must be seen as collaboration between these demons. St. Augustine of Hippo further mentions the agreement between the Devil and these demons and thereby is considered an idea architect, who set the stage for witch-hunts to be commenced a thousand year later after his death.
The concept of heresy as a form of evil

Influenced by the Aristotle’s views, the scholastic theologians of the Medieval Age had a firm belief on the discussions of St. Augustine of Hippo. These theologians propose that there is no such thing as a white magic, and all witchcraft practitioners recognize the Devil as a partner to God. This hypothesis is also coherent with the definition of heresy, which would mean that a witch has a heretic soul. Because witchcraft is identified as a demonic practise, this also attributes a ‘malevolent’ aspect to females.

In various cultures, witchcraft is a tradition generally associated with women (Akın, 2011:159). It is also interesting to note that some of the emblematic people established the principles of Christianity frankly accused women for their affinity to the evil. To give an example, the early Christian theologian Tertullian describes Eve as ‘the Devil’s gateway’. Similarly, the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas claims that women are more capable of and talented in demonic practises than men. These anti-women perceptions can also be traced in the Bible, but not in the quotes of Jesus Christ. The words of a Christian missionary Saul of Tarsus may support these views as follows, “women are to be subject in everything to their husbands as slaves are to be to their lords” (The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians, 5: 22; The Letter of Paul to the Colossians, 3:18-22).

In parallel with the notion of ‘true faith’ monopolized by the Church, Christianity is recognized as a historical period during which the concept of heresy and who should be regarded as heretic were identified. It might, therefore, be important to trace the story of heresy shaped by the interests of the Church to understand the evolution of witches. The First Council of Nicaea in 325 decided against the Arians overwhelmingly and condemned Arianism as heresy. Indeed, the beliefs of the Arians on the Holy Trinity are presumably the starting point of a separation in the Christian world. The idea of Arianism lies on the premise that Jesus Christ is not the son of God the Father, but an ordinary man, born of Mary. The Arians, hence, insist on the distinction between God the Father and God the Son and place Jesus Christ into an inferior position. Apart from this main controversy discussed in the First Council of Nicaea, Gnosticism and Manichaeism were recognized as the evil faiths emerged in the early Christian period. Based on a dualistic approach, these religious systems associate ‘good’ with God, who is hidden and distant from the material world. The symbol of ‘evil’, on the other hand, is the Devil, who is the creator and the lord of this world. Besides, influenced by the doctrines of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity, Manichaeism was seen as a threat because of its predominance in the community. In his autobiography, Confessions, the Church Father St. Augustine of Hippo explains his dedication to Manichaeism, i.e. the religion of Light, lasted for nine years. However, later he denied the doctrines of Manichaeism in his other works such as De Manichaeis and De Heresibus, which became the guidebooks of the Church on heresy.
It is possible to trace the origins of women as ‘scapegoat’ and labelled as a ‘witch’ among the early European heretics. For the first time in 1022, a small heretical sect was burned at the stake in Orléans. They were condemned because of their beliefs on the Devil in the form of an Ethiopian (i.e. Ethiopians represent the real evil because of their black skin colour), the rejection of all church sacraments, e.g. cross, bread, wine, and the denial of the doctrines of the virgin birth and the resurrection (Martin, 2009:44). Similar with the accusations of Pagans towards the early Christians, they were blamed for child sacrifice, organizing night rituals and witchcraft practises. This accused heretic sect was the pioneer of Catharism, but the witches’ turn had not come yet.

**Heretical Christian groups in the late Middle Ages and Cathars**

From a historical perspective, these first European heretic sects could be associated with the Bogomils founded in the territories of today’s Bulgaria and the Paulicians, one of the first heretic sects flourished in the Anatolian region. There is not sufficient information about the origins of the Paulicians, named after St. Paul of Samasata, Bishop of Antioch, who recognized Jesus Christ not as a divine Logos, but as an ordinary man. On the contrary, the Bogomils enjoyed a wide-spread dominance. They are both known as the supporters of a dualistic world-view as seen in the other ‘evil’ religions of the Early Christian period. These two religious sects rejected the material items in worship and sacraments and more importantly, did not use the Christian cross. They believed that God the Father has two sons, namely the Devil and Jesus Christ. The Devil is the creator of the material world, and the Church is the collaborator of the Devil. Even defending his beliefs against the Komnenos dynasty for nearly fifty years, the leader of this movement and medicine Basileios was burned at the stake. These heretic beliefs, after all, were existed in different forms until the 19th century.

After long-standing disputes, the formal separation between the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Papacy took place in 1054. The rejection of the heretic groups with detentions occurred at the same period. Beyond the predictions of the Catholic Church, however, a new heretic sect was ready to break this silence. Appeared in Languedoc, the Cathars thrived in many territories of Europe, mainly in France and Germany. Their traditions were mostly derived from the beliefs of the Bogomils and they identified themselves as ‘Good Christians’ observing the doctrines of the Bible. Furthermore, the Cathars dismissed the Church as ‘the Church of Satan’ and rejected it both as an institution and a place of worship. It is possible summarize the dualistic doctrine of Catharism as ‘the soul is not belonged to, but the flesh is imprisoned in the material world’.

In the early 13th century, Languedoc was a peaceful and flourished region for the Cathars, the Jews and the other Christian sects. Meanwhile, Pope Innocent VIII
proclaimed a crusade to suppress the Cathars. They were tried to persuade and invited to repent of their sins by the ambassadors of the Pope. Besides, there were theological duels between the ambassadors of the Cathars and the Catholics, during which the Cathars’ heresy was treated equal to treason and they were tried to assimilate. Returning from the land of the Cathars empty-handed, the Pope initiated a massacre under the name of Albigensian Crusade. The Inquisition came into existence in 1231 to ‘root out the weeds’ and legitimized the battle with Catharism, which became the most influential heresy of the Europe.

The Cathars were massacred by the Papacy because of their dualistic doctrines existing almost 200 years and, were accused for sexual heresy, child sacrifice, Sabbath rituals and witchcraft; the same allegations made towards the Jews before. On this basis, the definition of heresy and the accusations against the heretic sects by the Papacy were determined the reasons for the witch-hunts started in the 15th century. The conclusions of the trials proceeded against these heretic sects were all similar. In other words, the Pope, the representative of the spiritual world, seized the property of these sects declared as ‘heretic’. Witchcraft was one of the accusations against the European heretics, such as the Bogomils, the Cathars or the Waldensians, and this situation, in turn, cancelled the legitimacy of white magic. Therefore, the practises of a witch chosen as ‘scapegoat’ would be seen as black magic without question.

*Malleus Maleficarum: Witchcraft as new heresy*

In the 14th century, the Papacy and the Monarch of the Continental Europe were in the need of a more powerful enemy, namely the Devil and its collaborators. This need emerged from the desire of the Catholic Church to obtain political power and wealth. Indeed, the Catholic Church claimed itself as the heir of the Roman Paganism, the founder of the universal moral principles. This need required them to materialize the ‘non-physical’ sin existed in the identity of a heretic, into a physical reality by means of a witch. It is also be interesting to note that, the trials proceeded against witches covered new accusations compared with the ones against the heretics. These were witchcraft, transforming into animals and flying at night (Martin, 2009: 48). Therefore, they were primarily accused for their collaboration with the Devil. It is also important to make a distinction between witches and the Jews, people with leprosy, traditional sorcerers and the other heretic sects. Akın suggests that their only common point is to be a part of a long chain rejected by the Christian society (Akin, 2011:157).

Written by two Dominican inquisitors and clergymen, *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of the Witches) became the guidebook on the witch-hunts lasted for 300 years throughout Europe. Step-by-step, this book describes witches from the point of Scholasticism. It could be argued that witches were also perceived as the creation of Scholastic thoughts.
The Portrait of ‘The ‘Scapegoat Woman’ As Witch

The book portrays witches as heretics and focuses on their interaction with human beings, animals and the universe. Furthermore, it takes an in-depth look at how witches forced people to refrain from sexual intercourse or reproduction and even how they damaged men’s sexual organs. Being able to transform human beings into animals, witches were also told to kill foetuses or new-born babies and sacrifice them to the Devil. These practises were the explicit signs of a new monstrous creature. Moreover, their collaboration with the Devil was associated with their ever-lasting lust. Above all, the evil was assigned a sex and witches started to spread their disclosed heresy not to men, but to women (Eco, 2009:208). The suspects were easily forced to confess the accusations ‘already’ assembled in Malleus Maleficarum, under torture or threat of torture. Each confession was accepted as a testimony with evidence, which turned a ‘suspect into a real witch’ as already set forth in the declaration of Pope Innocent VIII.

Similar with the discussions in Malleus Maleficarum, the origins of the characterization of witches as woman are derived from the Mesopotamian civilizations, which associated evil with females. In this particular context, it is important to mention a female demon of the night called Lilitu, who seduces men in their sleep, harms women to prevent pregnancy and attacks children. Lilitu is the ancestor of Lamia in ancient Greek mythology, known as a female child-eating demon. In Jewish mythology, on the other side, this female demon is recognized as the ancestor of Lilith, who supposedly was created before Eve. The common feature of these female evil characters is reversing the meaning assigned to the Cult of the Mother-Goddess entirely. The warden of wealth and reproduction, i.e. the feminine power, was transformed into an ‘evil symbol’ which damages men’s sexual organs, and appeals to lustful sexual desire and unrestrained pleasure. According to Jewish folklore, Lilith is known as the first created woman and was demonized because of her rebellion against Adam and God. Furthermore, she allegedly was not created from Adam, yet the first woman created by God. Lilith was insisted on being sexually dominant, and eventually decided to leave Adam because of his physical force. Leaving Adam alone in the Garden of Eden, Lilith mated with the demons and produced many other demon children. God commanded her to come back, yet Lilith did not obey the command of God, and her children were killed as a punishment. There was no other way for her rather than to become an enemy of pregnant women and children, and eventually she made her choice on the evil’s side.

Interestingly enough, considering the economic and social conditions, the most unproductive period of the 14th century Medieval Europe corresponds to the commencement of the witch-hunts. Marked as ‘The Age Calamitous’, this period introduced many unexpected situations, such as epidemic diseases, especially plague, harsh climate conditions and crop failures. In Malleus Maleficarum, men are described mentally and morally more vulnerable than women, while women, who monopolised the witchcraft
practises, are seen as the main reasons of these disasters. In this particular context, it could be argued that witchcraft is way to explain this social turbulence by assigning it a religious identity (Akın, 2011:153). In the early periods of the witch-hunts, the victims were chosen from the old women with physical impairment. However, it should bear in mind that the stereotype of witches was changed during the witch trials. More properly, the well-known sage women were transformed first into a woman sorcerer and then into a witch, the collaborator of the Devil.

Since the Archaic period, ‘evil’ has been symbolized with an icon in the form of both human and animal with physical deformity. This icon has been survived until today. Similarly, a witch is recognized as an old shrewish woman with a big nose and sunken red eyes. She is claimed to have flown on her broom to spread her evil practises and her crow always accompanies her by standing on her shoulders. A witch generally lives alone in the hidden and dark places of the forests, where nobody has the courage to visit. In spite of her abnormal appearance, she is a part of this nature, can speak with animals and recognizes poisonous plants. Besides, witches are claimed to have a special affinity to goats. Girard (2005:67) points out that if a witch has a pet (e.g. cat, dog or bird), then she is believed to be look alike to her pet, and the pet is seen a temporary material reality or a disguise of evil. Most of these scapegoats were the old and healer sages, who treated the inhabitants of the European villages. In addition to the supernatural powers of these women treating both humans and animals, there was a common perception that the one who knows healing, should also know how to damage. It was possible to see some young and beautiful women, a few men and even some children chosen as scapegoats. In Malleus Maleficarum, it is stated that witches hold a mark of the Devil on their bodies. Therefore, in the course of the witchcraft trials, these marks were searched on the suspects in order to justify their collaboration with the Devil. As an example, these witches were thoroughly examined to see whether they have pronged feet or a raised bump on their forehead, which could be considered as a horn. This symbol would be the proof for their collaboration with the Devil, because a horn is one of the main marks attributed to the Devil. A standard inquisition procedure consists of shaving all body hair of the accused witches and pricking their skins with needles or pins (Haught, 1999:54). If the stripping of the body did not work, the authorities would begin to torture. The tortures, on the other hand, consist of removing nails from fingers or toes, putting red-hot irons on their breasts. The sexual organs of witches were of particular interest for the torturers. The bodies of witches were placed upon racks or spiked wheels, and hence every tortured victim was forced to make a confession, and then their punishment was executed. These punishment procedures should not be overlooked because of their similarity with the tortures applied to the Christian male and female saints by the Pagans. Contrary to the Cathars, who were tried to persuade
and invited to repent their sins, the women accused of witchcraft were tortured until they made a confession.

Witch image as a visual code

As already mentioned, this anti-women stance was first described by St. Augustine of Hippo, developed in the course of the Scholastic period and reached to its peak with the Malleus Maleficarum. This stance then became a conventional code existed in the identity of a witch. Further, taking its ground on literature, the stereotype of a witch was turned into a visual code with a more inferior position compared to human beings during the witch-hunts from 15th to 17th centuries. Following the tradition of ‘books for the illiterate’ commenced by Pope Gregory the Great, the Catholic and the Protestant Churches distributed one-page announcements with the question of ‘who is witch’ and depicted her profile on them. As a result of these hand-outs and some other denouncements, thousands of women were massacred. Similarly done for the people living in the far distant countries under European colonial rule, one of the methods to iconize witches is to relate their physical and moral monstrosity to the ‘othered’. During the witch-hunts took place from the Medieval Age to the Baroque, some dichotomies such as beauty-ugliness and good-evil were identified according to the dominant aesthetic principles. In the history of heresies in Europe, disfiguration, physical deformity were not related to the notion of the ‘othering’ until the image of witch came into existence. On the other side, physical ugliness and moral evil were associated with the image of Jews in the Medieval Age. Flourished with the Renaissance art, the prefiguration of witches was recognized as a Jewish image created during the late medieval period and maintained in the Renaissance art. The Jews were transformed into an ugly and evil image because of their affinity to the Devil and also became the grotesque symbol of the absolute evil with their cone-shaped pointed hats, rude behaviours and particularly for their depicted faces with a physical deformity.

Following the advent of printing, the distributed texts legitimized the identity and execution of witches throughout Europe, and then their text based identity was placed in the memories as an image thanks to the prominent artists of this period. Witches, who were previously described by the German Dominican clergymen, were turned into a visual image by the Northern Renaissance painters. Therefore, it is possible to count the engravings on the text written about witches by Ulrich Molitor, two years later than Malleus Maleficarum, as the first examples of this category. Although Molitor proposes that the practises associated with witches are only fictional accounts, he believes that even those women are not witches, they are guilty because their practises derive their origins from the Devil. The illustrations of the stereotype of witches elaborated in Malleus Maleficarum could be seen in the paintings of Hans Baldung, an artist of Albrecht Dürer’s studio. The witches of all ages depicted by Baldung are lustful women
with physical deformity and who cast spells.

It could therefore be claimed that the painter follows a ‘visual code expressing a more inferior status compared to human beings’. ‘The Four Witches’ by Dürer, on the other hand, remains faithful to the dominant principles of Renaissance Art rather than of Malleus Maleficarum. To identify these four women with normal physical appearance and gestures as a witch, it is necessary to see the image of Devil decentred in the painting. The viewers, who cannot identify the Devil hidden by the painter, may suppose this work depicting a mythological scene. At this point, it would also be useful to refer to ‘The Witch of Endor’ by J. Cornelisz as another interesting example.

Cornelisz depicts a story, which had not been represented within the context of iconographic tradition until that time. His painting tells the story of a witch mentioned in the Old Testament, and so contributes to the evolution of the image of witches by referring to the Bible.

In the 17th century, coherent with the interior scenes of the Dutch Golden Age, the paintings depict witches generally in their homes. The Flemish painters illustrate many witchcraft practises, such as from the preparation of Sabbath rituals to transforming into an animal, by means of crowds reminding the tavern scenes of that period. In addition to this, the familiar scenes of the 17th century Northern European paintings can be observed in these works. These are the women reading a book or pulling off her socks and some other objects such as blazing candles, red slippers and an hourglass. These painting are also influenced by the symbolic representation of this period, however the visual codes are used in different forms in parallel with their contents. For instance, known as the common imagery of Vanitas themes, skull is used with white lily, which is the common attribute of Mary in Christian art (Fig. 5). In this way, a new visual code has been created. This code draws attention to ‘lust’, which is recognized as one of the seven deadly sins representing the death of innocence and one of the main reasons for the collaboration between witches and the Devil. The pictures of the books illustrating the executions of witches not only were the revelation of these occurrences, but also contributed to influence the historical period by spreading fear around. The paintings showing the tortures experienced by witches remind the scenes of the Christian female martyrs, because these women are tortured in both cases. There is one distinction though: a female saint is tortured because she is already surrendered to death, and hence does not represent with physical deformity. On the other hand, a witch is particularly condemned to suffer from ugliness because of her denial. Furthermore, while female saints are blessed, witches lose their human characteristics and are transformed into a monster.
Instead of a conclusion

The Catholic and Protestant authorities identified and iconized each other as ‘Anti-Christ’ and did not compromise with each other. Their only common point was the explicit definition of witch and the persecution procedures. Even though the Christian tradition makes a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, the most essential common feature of this incomplete human (woman as a heroine or a witch) has been the obligation for suffering since the existence of Lilith. The communal memory has been created by the tradition, which recognizes the first woman not as Lilith, but as Eve, who tasted and made Adam taste the forbidden fruit, and assigns women the role of scapegoat. The identity of witch that was represented with stereotypes can be considered as the victim of a mentality not being able to agree on the “being human”. On the other side, men to whom the ‘woman as incomplete human’ is unable to spread her evil, has implicated another mentality to women in order to create ‘other’ in themselves. The witch is also ‘other’ for women!

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Notes

1. There are various disciplines, particularly sociology and psychology, propose different scientific approaches to the origin of ‘evil’, however they are not included here for the purposes of this paper.