

# NON REALIST TENDENCIES IN NEW TURKISH CINEMA

A Master's Thesis

by

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August 2016

To my family

NON REALIST TENDENCIES IN NEW TURKISH CINEMA

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

İCLAL CAN

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN  
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY ANKARA  
August 2016

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.



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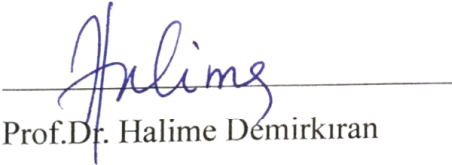
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## ABSTRACT

### NON REALIST TENDENCIES IN NEW TURKISH CINEMA

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M.A., in Media and Visual Studies

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The realist tendency which had been dominant in cinema became more apparent with Italian neorealism affecting other national cinemas to a large extent. With the changing and developing socio economic and cultural dynamics, realism gradually has stopped being a natural constituent of cinema and the rate of observing non realist films has started to increase in cinema. Along the same line, Turkish cinema was also impressed by the realist tendencies especially with the classic realist films in Yeşilçam period and with Yılmaz Güney's social realism. However, as for 80s in Turkish cinema, the non realist films have been observed with some films of Atıf Yılmaz, and especially by 2000s some prominent directors of new Turkish cinema such as Onur Ünlü, Semih Kaplanoğlu and Reha Erdem have dealt with those kinds of films. In this thesis, the mentioned directors are investigated within the context of how they conceive and construct their cinematic world, and in this regard, this thesis provides a close reading on their non realist tendencies which are discussed over some of their films in terms of their approaches as magical realism with Onur Ünlü, spiritual realism with Semih Kaplanoğlu and anthropocene realism with Reha Erdem.

Keywords: Anthropocene Realism, Magical Realism, Non realism, Realism,  
Spiritual Realism

## ÖZET

### YENİ TÜRKİYE SİNEMASINDA GERÇEK DIŐI YAKLAŐIMLAR

Can, İclal  
Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar  
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Sinemada hakim olan gerçekçilik eğilimi İtalyan yeni gerçekçiliđi ile birlikte yeni bir bakış açısı kazanmış ve bu yönelim ulusal sinemaları büyük oranda etkilemiştir.

Deđişen ve gelişen sosyo-ekonomik ve kültürel dinamiklerle birlikte ise gerçekçilik sinemanın doğal bir bileşeni olmaktan sıyrılmış ve sinemada ortaya konan gerçekçilik dışı örneklerin görülme oranı da artmıştır. Aynı şekilde Türkiye Sineması da gerek Yeşilçam döneminin ticari sinemasıyla gerekse Yılmaz Güney'in filmlerinde gördüğümüz toplumsal gerçekçilik anlayışıyla söz konusu eğilimin etkisi altında kalmış ve gerçekçi yönelim göstermiştir. Fakat 80'li yıllarda Atıf Yılmaz'ın birkaç filmiyle görünür kıldığı gerçekt dışılık Türkiye Sinemasında yer etmeye başlamış, özellikle 2000'lerde Yeni Türkiye Sinemasının öne çıkan isimlerinden Onur Ünlü, Semih Kaplanođlu ve Reha Erdem gibi diđer yönetmenler tarafından ele alınmıştır. Bu tez adı geçen üç yönetmenin sinemalarında filmsel dünyalarını nasıl tasarlayıp oluşturduklarının tartışıldığı yakın bir inceleme araştırmasıdır. Bu bağlamda, bazı filmlerinden yola çıkarak; Onur Ünlü'yü büyülü gerçekçilik, Semih Kaplanođlu'nu manevi gerçekçilik ve Reha Erdem'i antroposin gerçekçilik yaklaşımlarıyla birlikte ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Antroposin Gerçekçilik, Büyülü Gerçekçilik, Gerçekçilik,  
Gerçekdışılık, Manevi Gerçekçilik



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When we look at movements in art, we see that in different periods, various movements have appeared and become popular, and even some vanished while others reemerged. We can say that it is also true for cinema in many aspects. Every art movement in history is affected by the social, political, economic and cultural atmosphere of that era. The movements seen in cinema are also affected by these components. Among them, we can clearly see that the movements bearing realistic traces have been adapted into cinema quite quickly. Since the very beginning of film history, realism has become one of the most debated issues in cinema as in other fields of art. Starting from Lumière Brothers and George Méliès dichotomy, the realism has been discussed by many of the critics, theoreticians and directors.

For many years, realist tendency had been a dominant trend and accepted as one of the objectives to be attained in cinema. In general terms, one of the realist theorists Siegfried Kracauer says that there is cinema to reflect the reality while Andre Bazin states that the raw material of cinema is not reality, but it can only be a representation of reality. According to Bazin, rather than the reality of expression and subject, the main reality is the reality of space, and he states (1967: 108) that "the cinematographic image can be emptied of all reality save one—the reality of space."

Moreover, film critics and theorists have long provided their intellectual support to the practice of Bazin's realist filmmaking. Today, the discussions are still ongoing over the relation between realism and cinema. Despite the variations in film history, we can assert the claim that realism has been the dominant tendency in cinema throughout the world from its earliest days. Most of the movements and schools were constructed on realism and they aimed to display the conditions of life by reflecting them as they were. After World War II, with the movement of Italian Neorealism, films mostly addressed the difficult economic and moral conditions of post-World War II Italy, and then the realist dominance increased. Moreover, neorealism became a sign of social progress and cultural change in Italy, and its impact was enormous on other national cinemas as well.

In the following years, the evolving realist tendency kept its domination and picked the criticisms of some film theorists and filmmakers. With the termination of the world war, new social and cultural dynamics arose. Considering this situation, we might state that realist tendency started to lose its effectiveness and dominance. Therefore, contrary to what we have witnessed in the national cinema manifestos or schools, realism has no longer been seen as an indispensable notion or requirement in national cinemas. Thus, there have been some other tendencies in non realist line, and to define some of those tendencies is one of the main aims of this study.

Accordingly, Turkish cinema was inevitably affected by those developments all along. As of the first years of Turkish cinema, films were generally being made in realist line. Furthermore, the conventional and realist cinema has dominated the film industry for decades as in the Yeşilçam period during which commercial films were

produced. On the other hand, a new cinematic sensibility in Turkey began to flourish especially in 1980's after Yeşilçam film industry had collapsed. In addition, starting with the films of Atif Yılmaz in 80's, we have started to observe the examples of non-realist films of Turkish cinema. Following those periods, the 90's witnessed how the cinema had been becoming independent especially with the self-funded films. To be more precise:

In the mid-1990s, some independent filmmakers who were producing self-financed films with tiny budgets began to produce personal films with a very particular cinematic language. These filmmakers did not care too much about the traditional Turkish Yeşilçam practices and they had a selective perspective. However, they still continued to make films in the realist way and they began to develop a minimalistic hybrid style, mixing documentary realism and feature film (Daldal, 2010:103).

The perception of realism in this period has been constructed with the ordinariness of daily lives. The acts of everyday life that we had not witnessed in cinema until then are now seen more frequently in new realist films. For example; we are watching the characters in their daily routines while they are reading, cooking, eating brushing teeth etc.

However, especially after 2000s we started to encounter the films being out of the realist line. These films are counted as neither conventional films nor genres.

Furthermore, some films directed by specific directors such as Onur Ünlü, Semih Kaplanoğlu and Reha Erdem, which do not hold a place in traditional cinema, have attracted my attention in the beginning of this study. In order to define their approaches to realism, I decided to examine some of those films by comparing them with the previous movements. The main motivation behind this thesis research is to analyze in detail these three prominent directors of 2000's in Turkish cinema with

their approaches to reality in their films. In doing so, this study aims to provide an understanding, specifically, of how those three directors conceive and construct a world by making their films in non realist line, and what are their approaches to reality in their films.

The methodology of this thesis is a basic close reading as well as a research of related dynamics, such as realism and non realism in cinema, and within the scope of this, by providing a brief history of magical realism, spiritual realism and anthropocene realism both in the world and in the new Turkish cinema context with literary review and analysis of the mentioned three directors. Undoubtedly those non realist tendencies have been also observed in contemporary international cinema such films as *Lobster* (by Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015), *Still Life* (by Uberto Pasolini, 2013), *Ricky* (by François Ozon, 2009), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (by Wes Anderson, 2001) etc.; however, I drew a frame for my study including three of those non realist tendencies and their pioneers in New Turkish Cinema.

Within this framework, the second chapter in the study offers a literary review of the relation between cinema and realism from a historical perspective. As a dominant tendency, realism has become the central issue of many discussions in cinema; therefore, the discussions about reality, aesthetic use and the functions of cinema have started and critics have argued these claims throughout the film history. After looking at Lumière and Méliès dichotomy, I will discuss the world cinema from the point of realism. In addition, as for the analysis of post war era, neorealism and its effects on other national cinemas will be dealt. Similarly, the historical development in Turkish cinema and its approaches to realism will be examined. After

summarizing what has been stated above, I will mention the criticisms against the classic realism in the world. In that vein, especially the non realist films in the last periods of Turkish cinema will be discussed.

When ‘realism’ is taken as the core term, it is possible to add various adjectives into this notion in order to indicate different kind of approaches or qualifications of this core and central idea. However, it has been a complex issue to categorize realism terminologically. As a result, the studies which made comparisons between realism and the related terms have been carried out and many critics have discussed the differences between them. Since there are no clear cut distinctions between realism and its related movements like naturalism, they are closely linked and sometimes used interchangeably. On the other hand, the movements and definitions for describing the opposite of realism as anti realism and verisimilitude were not enough for analyzing the films in my study thoroughly. Therefore, by describing those tendencies broadly as non realist, I decided to examine in detail and proposed some notions corresponding new concepts. As Bazin states, “there is not one, but several realisms. Each era looks for its own, the technique and the aesthetic that will capture, retain and render best what one wants from reality” (1948: 41).

As regards to the mentioned directors and their approaches, the third chapter deals closely with the director Onur Ünlü, who will be examined within the frame of magical realism which is actually a literature term. In this part of the study, after looking at theoretical scope of magical realism in art and literature, I will discuss how it is reflected in cinema. Later on, with his ironic black humor films, Onur Ünlü’s work is going to be studied. One of the films of the director especially



suitable for the term magical realism, *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* (Thou Gild'st the Even, 2013), will be examined in terms of the features of magical realism as a mode.

In the fourth chapter, with his transcendental approaches to cinema Semih Kaplanoğlu is going to be viewed under spiritual realism, especially with his trilogy: *Yumurta* (Egg, 2007), *Süt* (Milk, 2008) and *Bal* (Honey, 2010). While doing this, I will compare him with the pioneer directors from the world cinema such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Robert Bresson and Ingmar Bergman, who are associated with spiritual realism and transcendentalism in their films. To this respect, it is supposed to reveal that Semih Kaplanoğlu's treatment of spiritual realism is separated from others because of the different cultural and social codes between their societies and religions by discussing the relation between religion and cinema and its progress in Turkish cinema.

In the fifth chapter, firstly the cinema of Reha Erdem will be studied with the main features that separate it from conventional cinema. It is possible to say that being set in an unspecified time and unspecified space, and use of sound and music are the distinguished features of his cinema. Later on, with the themes especially of his last three films *Kosmos* (2010), *Jin* (2013) and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* (Singing Women, 2014), it would not be wrong to say that he is mostly discussing ecology, nature and feminism in apocalyptic atmospheres. These notions can be dealt with anthropocene, which is also known as the age of human and stands for a range of human impacts on the environment. Thus, these films will be associated with a newly established perspective: *anthropocenema*.

Lastly, the ultimate purpose of this thesis is to understand how these three directors of new Turkish cinema conceive and construct the world. Furthermore, this thesis aspires to contribute to the new Turkish cinema studies in terms of realism discussions. The research process of this thesis has also revealed that although it has great potential, new Turkish cinema remains to be unexplained and overlooked in many aspects. Hopefully, with this study the potential will be brought to light for further investigation; and furthermore, considering that the mentioned directors in this study are currently working on their new film projects, this thesis may lead the way for the forthcoming studies to analyze the new films of those directors.

## CHAPTER 2

### CINEMA AND REALISM

Film art can closely be associated with external reality. With the invention of cinema, the reality issue became more stratified and complex when compared with the other fields of art as painting or literature. This is because cinema includes visual and aural layers in itself, it is possible to reach the perfection of producing the shadow copy of what people may see with their eyes. While some theoreticians, filmmakers or critics have supported the idea of copying the reality as exactly it is by using camera, others have criticized this argument. In fact, we can comprehend this debate more accurately when the cinema and its technical specialties are considered. “Cinema has a potential for realism because, though film projection is a process of illusion, relying on a defect of eye (the inability to differentiate images which follow one another at a rate of sixteen or twenty-four frames a second), the camera does not cheat” (Armes, 1974: 17). At the outset, with its technical opportunities the cinema supported the promise of showing the reality itself, and in time the approach to realism evolved into different dimensions. When this issue started to be discussed deeply in 1950s:

French theoretician Andre Bazin’s pioneering realist theory stated that photography, and consequently film, had an ‘ontological’ relation with the real derived from automatic nature. Therefore, in his defense of realism, he praised those directors who, rather than manipulating objective reality, as in the Soviet montage tradition or in German expressionism, highlighted it through choices

such as location shooting, deep-focus cinematography and non- professional acting. (de Luca, 2011: 15).

Because it is thought that cinema automatically creates the reality regarding to its existence and nature, it also has its own reality, namely cinema takes the place of realism. Moreover, Arslan (2009: 114) states that:

In the Bazinian sense of cinema, the ability of the medium of cinema resides in its realistic presentation of the world and cinema incessantly moves toward complete realism. However, what is yearned for is not the reality as such, but the completeness and perfection of its illusion. It is this sense of illusionism which underlines the western modes of representation.

As stated, the reality of cinema is completed with the support of illusion reflecting the impression of perfection. One of the keywords to be underlined is the instrumental use of cinema, which emphasizes the reality in the expression.

There is no doubt that the cinema having many layers in itself is open to many different point of views and it does not change when it comes to realism. Realism in the cinema is just one way of looking at life, one style among several others. Unlike the reality of life, cinema creates its own reality even in its fictional worlds. Namely, a fictional film has still realistic concerns while creating a story and linking it to the real life despite of its fictionalized nature. As a result of this tendency, realism has become one of the most effective trends when cinema is discussed. The issue that should be examined is the background of the realism in cinema and its evolving process in order to handle the trend properly. When turning back the origins of cinema, we see that with the dichotomy of Lumière Brothers and George Méliès the realism issues have started in film history and become one of the crucial concepts to be discussed.

## 2.1 The Lumière and Méliès Dichotomy

Since the very beginnings, the relation between cinema and reality has been an intense debate. With the origins of cinema, the discussions about reality, aesthetic use and the function of cinema have started and critics have argued these claims throughout the film history. Monaco (2000) states that “the first dichotomy of film aesthetic is that between the early work of the Lumière Brothers, Auguste and Louis, and Georges Méliès” (p: 285).

Several film historians, cinema academics and critics say that Lumière Brothers, who were initially photographers, used the cinema to reproduce reality with some slices of life such as a train's pulling in the station or workers leaving a factory. Since their films captured the real life just as it was, they have been accepted as the ones who started the realist tendency in cinema. On the other hand, George Méliès, who was originally a magician and illusionist, has been seen as the formalist who saw the cinema as a new way of portraying fantasies and creating illusions by using special effects.

In parallel with these arguments, Siegfried Kracauer (1974: 293) claims that “if indeed it is the Lumière Brothers who established the realistic tendency in cinema, it is suiting that Méliès be credited as the establisher of the formative tendency in cinema.”

At this point, it is very crucial to say that this dichotomy between realism and formalism has been problematic since the beginning of film history. This issue has

been debated through years, but it is still not a clear cut distinction which can be applied very easily.

In order to show a rewriting film history by challenging traditional notions of what is real and what is not real, in his article, Andrew Sarris states over from the character's mouth of Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise* (1967) that:

Lumière was no more a pioneering realist than Méliès was a mere magician. Lumière did photograph the reality of trains steaming into a station or of workers filing out of a factory, but these were painterly subjects fashionable with the Impressionists of the late 19th century. By contrast, Méliès may have staged the state visit of a Balkan monarch to France with actors and fake sets, but nonetheless he transformed the cinema into a kind of Brechtian newsreel. Hence, Méliès came closer to reality and modernity through artifice than Lumière did through literal reproduction.

As it can be seen, these distinctions have to be questioned, otherwise these kinds of dichotomies will be artificial. Categorizations in such subjects are always useful but they are also problematic, because they are open to critical discussion with their wide range of features, too. In *The Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities*, Martin Scorsese as the lecturer states that (2013):

Over the years, the Lumières and Méliès have been consistently portrayed as opposites -one filmed reality, the other created special effects. Of course this happens all the time – it's a way of simplifying history. But in essence, they were both heading in the same direction, just taking different roads – they were taking reality and interpreting it, re-shaping it, and trying to find meaning in it.

As Scorsese states, it is also accepted that the reality of the Lumières and Méliès is not completely different. By all means, they have separate features which reflect their own styles, but in fact they serve the same trend with their own ways.

## 2.2 Realism in World Cinema and its Plurality

Every art movement in history is affected by the reflections of the social, political, economic and cultural atmosphere of that era. And the movements seen in cinema are also affected by these components. Among them, it is obviously seen that the movements bearing realistic traces have been adapted into cinema quite quickly. The notion of realism in cinema can be a way to reflect reality in different filmmaking tendencies. Since the inception of cinematography, many critics and filmmakers have regarded several different styles as a sort of realism. Within the diverse group of films, it is very hard to look for common points of realism. As Crous (2011:9) cites from Noel Carroll that:

‘Realism’ is a term used to denote a certain group of characteristics proper to a number of films, but its application to one film should in no way be construed as a claim that it shares the same kind of properties with reality as another so-called “realistic” film. “To call [...] a group of films realistic is to call attention to some feature that the items in question have that other films don’t have.

As stated before, the concept of realism in cinema is not merely based on one source, but it is developed from different filmmaking tendencies. “In film studies, ‘realism’ refers not only to one of its central concepts, but also to a number of film-making movements, styles, sensibilities and genres (e.g., Italian Neo-Realism or British social realism)” (Johnston, 2011:1). In accordance with these, it is obvious that in cinema there is not just one realism, there are realisms. When ‘realism’ is taken as the core term, it is possible to add various adjectives into this notion in order to indicate different kind of approaches or qualifications of this core and central idea, Carroll indicates that (1996: 244):

Of course, realism remains as elusive as ever if considered on its own, but by restricting it to a sociological, geographical or other point of view, the filmmaker

is better able to name her approach. Because ‘realism’ is a term whose application ultimately involves historical comparisons, it should not be used unprefix – we should speak of Soviet realism, Neorealism, Kitchen Sink and Super realism.

André Bazin, who acknowledges the scope of the “realism” designator and says that in the cinema there can only be a representation of reality, also states on this issue that “there is not one, but several realisms.” (Bazin 1948: 41)

### **2.2.1 Hollywood Cinema and Classic Realism**

From its earliest days of cinema, there have always been different principles chosen during the filmmaking process. Every movement, every country, even every director choose their own ways to reflect the story on the screen. There are two main narratives of films: classical and nonclassical. As known with mainstream films, Hollywood uses classical narrative as building very safe cinema to make the audience feel as if they were a part of the film. This much-used and restricted world in classical cinema has its own kind of realism to capture the attention of audience.

Classic realist tendency became the foundation for commercial narrative cinema worldwide, and Hollywood cinema with standardized storytelling and studio productions became dominant in cinema. However, like the influences on every field, the World Wars affected cinema as well, and the new tendencies such as neorealism also known as structural realism were getting widespread throughout the world and national cinemas came into view.

### **2.2.2 Post-war era and Neo-realism**

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were world wars that affected nations in many aspects including cinema. After World War I, Hollywood dominated



international markets, and then many nations took a stand against American films. Those nations did not only compete against Hollywood but also each other, because they were also keeping their hopes for the success in the international film market. And After World War II, 'realism' was a dominant mode in cinema. There were several impacts of the war on countries as the studios in European countries were destroyed and too many technical materials were damaged. These results especially appeared in Italy and the idea of realism came up there in the post-war era. This is also because all those damages and destructions caused directors to use real backgrounds instead of studios and a simple style. Bordwell and Thompson state on this situation that:

Italian film has become known with their magnificent studios. But the government's Cine-citta studios were heavily damaged in the war and could not support opulent productions. Filmmakers moved into streets and the countryside. Since Italy had long mastered post synchronization for dubbing foreign movies, crews could shoot on location and dub in dialogue later (2010: 331).

In addition to moving the cinema to streets, characters were chosen from the working class and these were the main focus of the neorealist films. "Moreover, the films had fictional narratives, yet their setting and social circumstances corresponded to a very recognizable reality" (Crous, 2011: 15). The filmmakers whose names are mostly associated with this new realism -that would later be called as Italian Neorealism movement- are Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis, and Luigi Zampa. These directors did not use the traditional conventions of the cinema industry. They mostly used the major characteristics of this new movement which were on-location shooting rather than studio settings and the mise-en scene technique, which was highly praised by André Bazin. Like most realist movements in the arts, "neo-realism was an attempt to get closer to reality by

refusing old and outmoded conventions which inevitably falsify our picture of it” (Armes 1971: 22).

### **2.3 The Impact of Neo-realism on National Cinemas**

The post-war era brought and reconstructed a new phenomenon called as Neo-realism, which is a term nouveau and complex. “Not surprisingly, it was adopted by many contradictory intellectual circles, each defining it according to its own political and ideological purposes” (Daldal, 2013: 183). It inspired many national movements around the world as a model for an oppositional cinema against the Hollywood classic realist cinema, such as the birth of national cinemas of Indian, Brazilian, African and Turkish etc.

It also inspired the filmmakers in Europe such as the directors of the French New Wave School of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer embraced neorealism as proof that filmmaking could be possible without a huge industrial structure behind it and filmmakers could be as creative as novelists.

In Latin American Cinema, neo realism shows the directors and producers that it was possible to make films on the streets and they did not need studios. Then, young directors learned the neorealist aesthetic and they directly reflected this trend in their Cinema Novo groups in Argentina and Brazil. Neorealism’s influence can also be seen in the Free Cinema of Britain, the Nova Vlna of Czechoslovakia, the Third Cinema of Argentina and in Egyptian neorealism. Furthermore, “in Hollywood in the immediate postwar period, such important works show the direct influence of

neorealism's preference for authentic locations within the American tradition of film noir" (Carlo Celli & Marga Cottino-Jones, 2007: 71). Furthermore, Bordwell and Thompson state (2010: 297) about the situation of world cinema that "Filmmakers from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary achieved fame in the postwar era. Elsewhere, Third World film industries were increasing in power. India led the way in output, while Argentina, Brazil and Mexico were also major producers. All of these industries produced significant genres and directors." In other words, it is possible to say that in cinema history beside some examples of films out of classic realist line, the 'realism' was always in the focus of cinema. Moreover, especially in post war era, the realist tendency became more dominant and films were made in realistic ways for national cinemas.

However, it is important to point out that, it was still possible to witness some examples contradicting with the realist tendency. For example, we see some films from Latin America that Glauber Rocha made out of this classic realist line.

Similarly, in the film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Under Development, 1968), Cuban director Tomas Gutierrez Alea used a different mode to create a more complex portrait of Cuba than the rest of the world had generally done in the conventional way.

#### **2.4 Realism in Turkish Cinema**

The introduction of cinema in Turkey dates back almost to the invention of cinema itself. However, the history of Turkish film-making started much later. After pre-republican period, the Theatre Artist's period in 20's was dominated by the theatre

artist Muhsin Ertuğrul. Turkish cinema in 1930's and 1940's passed in hard conditions in many ways. It was also affected badly by war and as a consequence of this, in cinemas American films were mostly shown rather than the European films, which were also affected by the war. At the end of 40's, after film producers had begun to organize, some film studios were established. Thus, that was a transition period in Turkish cinema, and it was a sort of bridge between Theatre Artist's period and Cinema Artist's period.

Then, with the impact of Hollywood, in the era between the 1950s and 1970s, the Cinema Artist's period and Yeşilçam Period, during which theatrical language was abandoned and cinema language was improved, were showed up and they produced highly commercial and extremely popular films in the domestic box office. After the Yeşilçam Period, the productions and popularity in Turkish cinema declined due to political and economic problems.

Like other national cinemas influenced by Neo-realism, Turkish Cinema was also affected from that realist tendency in itself, and it had a great impact on the Turkish Cinema. And even though melodramas and romantic comedies of Yeşilçam were continuing, socialist realist films emerged and a new breathe Social Realism marked Turkish Cinema from the second part of 1960's until the end of 70's. With social realism, films told about class differences, poverty and immigration.

#### **2.4.1 Social Realism**

As stated in the previous parts, movements in national cinemas have been directly affected also by the events in that period of a country. After the 1960's Coup d'Etat

in Turkey, neo-realism footsteps were seen as “Social Realism” movement in Turkish Cinema between 1960 and 1965. Aslı Daldal states that:

Like the French Nouvelle Vague and the Brazilian Cinema Novo, Turkish Social Realism was also related to the legacy of Italian neo-realism whose leftward oriented politics and realist-minimalist aesthetics fitted well with the socio-political concerns of a new generation of Turkish filmmakers eager to develop a “national” film language (2013: 183).

Like in Neo-realism, the Turkish Social Realism in cinema was also strongly related with politics. The realist tendency especially in the films made in 1960’s was also seen in the previous periods stylistically; however, they were different than those films which had the concern about social problems. As Çoşkun (2009:38) exemplifies that the films like Metin Erksan’s *Gecelerin Ötesi* (Beyond the Nights, 1960), *Yılanların Öcü* (Revenge of the Snakes, 1962), *Acı Hayat* (Bitter Life, 1962), *Susuz Yaz* (Dry Summer, 1963); Atıf Yılmaz’s *Dolandırıcılar Şahı* (King of the Swindlers, 1961), *Yarın Bizimdir* (Tomorrow Is Ours, 1963), *Murat’ın Türküsü* (Murat’s Song, 1965), Halit Refiğ’s *Şehirdeki Yabancı* (Stranger in the City, 1963), *Şafak Bekçileri* (Watchmen of Dawn, 1963), *Gurbet Kuşları* (Birds of Exile, 1964), Ertem Göreç’s *Otobüs Yolcuları* (The Bus Passengers, 1961), *Karanlıkta Uyuyanlar* (Those Awakening in The Dark, 1964), and Duygu Sağıroğlu’s *Bitmeyen Yol* (The Road That Has No End, 1965) take place within the scope of Social Realism.

There was the discourse of social classes’ problems in the previous period but it wasn't clear. In this new period we see the people who come to Istanbul from other cities or the villages of Turkey. Istanbul was still background of the films. Social Realistic films showed new comers and told their stories by using Istanbul as a background. Furthermore, the main characteristic features of Social Realism were

handling the social problems from an objective view and creating a new, unique and modern language. Those films produced in that period addressed the ‘real’ problems of human rather than heroes or marginal stories. In addition, its main criticisms were about socio-economic situations and political processes.

#### **2.4.2 New Cinema and Yılmaz Güney**

Movies in Turkish cinema, especially those which produced in 70s, are mostly influenced by Italian neo-realism. “The main points that distinguish those movies from Italian movies occur in the context of cultural resources and social-historical basis by which they are supported” (Yüksel, 2012: 145). Yılmaz Güney is one of the pioneers who broke with the conventions of Turkish commercial cinema. He put emphasis on the intimacy and warmth of everyday life and human relations, and in 1970’s he mostly produced political films.

Considered as a landmark in Turkish Cinema history, Yılmaz Güney’s film *Umut* (Hope, 1970) drew a comparison with Italian Neo-realism because of his direct and ordinary style. Like the films of other neo-realist directors, *Umut* represents a limpid style which is against not individuals but society, injustice and inequality. The film is often compared to De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves, 1948). *Umut* made a great contribution to Yılmaz Güney to be counted among the neo-realist directors in world cinema. “*Umut* is Yılmaz Güney’s first thoroughly artistic work and it also signals the birth of the so-called “new Turkish cinema”, it is also Güney’s closest film to Italian neo-realism” (Daldal, 2013: 185). Therefore, instead of using light, montage and camera movements to strengthen the dramatic narrative, in *Umut*, the

style is constituted as closer to real life. And it tells the story of ordinary people portrayed in their real environment with facing real problems.

## **2.5 The Criticisms Against The Classic Realism in the World**

In the 70s, some film theorists and filmmakers started to criticize the formalist and ideological domination of Hollywood cinema. Until then, there were not so severe criticisms against the dominant Hollywood productions that other major film industries in the world replicate and provide to keep its continuance. Those film makers and institutions, who set against this domination, attempted to create another field in order to change the route of this “secure path”. On this point, Jean-Luc Godard, who is seen as an iconoclast, opened a new door into the cinema. The counter-cinema (also called “oppositional cinema”) actively opposes mainstream cinema and its discourses, and offers an alternative construction.

In the meantime, Peter Wollen, in a sense, put forth the seven deadly sins of the cinema against the seven cardinal virtues. He set out them as the alternative counterparts of the specific characteristics of dominant cinema. In his article, he states how the dominant cinema creates the sense of reality within a fictional one feeding from the stereotyped rules and also serving for the dominant ideology. Within the basic framework, the categorization for the seven deadly sins of the cinema against the seven cardinal virtues show the basic formations and core meanings of these two opposite cinemas. Regarding this matter, the underlying results of this scheme directly affect the reality issue on the cinema. While the specific features of the dominant cinema discussed in Wollen’s article as seven

deadly sins promise a fictional and artificial reality to the audiences, the counter-cinema opposes this with its seven cardinal virtues. To set an example, there is narrative straightforwardness (transitivity) in the dominant cinema versus narrative intransitivity in the counter-cinema. While the former one supports the fictional reality in the story, the latter one particularly uses gaps, ellipses, digressions, episodic constructions, disjuncture, etc. As Wollen states:

[...] the hope is to disrupt the emotional spell of narrative, to refocus the spectator's attention and allow for thought and reflection. In addition to this, the transparency in the dominant cinema provides a seamless flow of images conceals the fact that the film is a construction, a fictional product, someone else's fantasy (1972: 6).

On the other hand, the foregrounding of meaning production provides a different sense of reality rather than a representation of the world.

To sum up briefly, not only the dominant cinema but also its sense of reality has been criticized by the supporters of the counter-cinema.

## **2.6 Non-realism in Turkish Cinema**

Similar to the world cinema, approaches to films have shown alteration in Turkish cinema as well. Although the realist tendency had been dominant in cinema like in Europe and America, there were some exceptional films at various periods. For example, although by 1930's we came across some examples of non realist features in several musical films made by Muhsin Ertuğrul, they were not long-termed because those were opposite of the verisimilitude sense.

In other respects, when we look at 1980's, it is seen that some dramatic changes has started in Turkish Cinema in terms of the contents and narratives of the films. In



those years with the effect of censorship and depoliticization, unique themes and characters were seen on the screen. During this period, directors started to search for new modes of expression. And the films were made mostly about individuality, women's search for identity and human emotions. Among the new modes, films with non realist features were also made. Atıf Yılmaz is one of those directors who could step out of the conventionalist line.

### **2.6.1 Atıf Yılmaz in 1980's**

As it is stated, one of the pioneer directors who go beyond the conventions was Atıf Yılmaz. Apart from his films made during Yeşilçam period, he contributed a new breath to Turkish cinema with his films in 1980's. Firstly, he carried the woman on screen, and marginal characters began to take place in films. In addition, women, men, homosexuals, transsexuals, prostitutes, and 'others' were presented with their sexualities to the viewers. Moreover, the themes staying focused on human and emphasizing his psychological problems were observed in the films. In 1980's, with Atıf Yılmaz, the non-realist films with realist settings appeared.

Some of the films he called as 'socio-fantastic like *Adı Vasfiye* (Vasfiye is Her Name, 1985), *Aaahh Belinda* (Oh Belinda, 1986), *Hayallerim, Aşkım ve Sen* (My Dreams, My Love and You, 1987), *Arkadaşım Şeytan* (Devil, My Friend, 1988) can be counted as the primary samples of films which go out of conventionalist and classic realist films in Turkish Cinema. These films are important because they have fantastical elements such as in the film *Aaahh Belinda*, an actress acting in a

shampoo commercial suddenly finds herself transported into the role she plays, but also they are touching upon social problems.

### **2.6.2 Spreading Non-Realist Films in 2000's**

While the world cinema is proceeding continuously in terms of modern changes, technological improvements and new narrations, Turkish cinema also tries to keep up with all those new trends to a certain extent. Starting from 1990's, new approaches have become widespread in 2000's in Turkish cinema.

When we look at 90's, we see that directors have started to produce films with different narrative and styles beside realistic movies. Çağla Karabağ exemplifies from 90's non realist films that:

Known as cinematographer for long years, Orhan Oğuz desired to turn a surrealist sense even if he was not be able to go beyond the artificiality with the film *Üçüncü Göz* (The Third Eye, 1988). In other respects, Reha Erdem created a poetic realism with literary references through his first feature film *A Ay* (Oh, Moon!, 1988) which is shot by 16 mm camera, and as black and white (2005: 72).

The post-2000 Turkish Cinema, within all the conditions created by the environment itself preceded, has demonstrated a breakthrough especially in terms of number of films produced annually. During this period, commercial cinema has brought the dominance of American cinema in Turkey to a close in terms of popularity, Turkish art cinema has won prestigious awards at major international festivals, Turkey's history and its current social and political problems have become the field of interest for the cinema, and many young directors have produced their first films, and all of these developments constitute the essential characteristic of this period.

Especially by 2000's directors have begun to create their own realities with unique styles and narratives in their movies. Büyükdüvenci and Öztürk point out in their studies *Searching New Turkish Cinema and Aesthetic* (2007: 46-49) that within this new cinema search, in which the author cinema is determinative, a new aesthetic and visual language have been started to be constructed. In this period, some directors came to the forefront in terms of their approaches to realism. And as it was stated in the heading of plurality of realism, the notion of realism can be described with an adjective, and in fact, the films of these directors created these new versions of realism with specific and new approaches to realism.

As it will be examined in the next chapters, Semih Kaplanoğlu is one of the directors whose approaches to realism mostly carry spiritual searching, meanings and elements; therefore, it is possible to say that he is creating his realism with spirituality in spiritual realism. Furthermore, while Reha Erdem is producing his films in an unspecified time and space settings and showing a realistic atmosphere in sort of an anthropocene fantasy world, Onur Ünlü creates a magical atmospheres in his films by mostly using black humor, irony and a magical realism features.

These three directors and their tendencies will be studied in the next chapters in order to clarify their approaches to realism in 2000's of Turkish cinema.

## CHAPTER 3

### ONUR ÜNLÜ AND MAGIC(AL) REALISM

“What’s real and what’s true aren’t necessarily the same”

-Salman Rushdie

The term ‘magic(al) realism’ has gained popularity within various fields. Although the term is strongly associated with literature, the term magic(al) realism was first introduced by the German art critic and historian Franz Roh and he outlines the main features of this style. Moreover, with increasing frequency, it has been applied to cinema, however, few studies have been done on magic(al) realism in the medium of film.

#### 3.1 Discussions on Magic or Magical Realism

It may be the first step to clarify that using the term as ‘magic realism’ or ‘magical realism’, because while sometimes it is seen as ‘magic’, sometimes it is called as ‘magical realism’ in some texts. Eddie Bertozzi noted that “this terminological distinction exists in English, but not in other languages – the French only uses ‘magique’, the Italian ‘magico’, and the Spanish ‘mágico’.” (Eddie Bertozzi, 2012, 154). It can be also added that the Turkish the equivalent of the word is ‘büyülü’ as in

'büyülü gerçekçilik' does not cause any discord. Moreover, Maggie Ann Bowers explains this theoretical distinction between 'magic' and 'magical' realism (2004) as

'Magic realism' or 'magical realism' are terms which many people have heard and yet very few readers have a clear idea of what they may include and imply. Much of the confusion concerning their meaning has occurred due to the conflation of criticism on 'magic realist' art and literature and that of 'magical realist' fiction. Although they have many features in common, the two terms refer to subtly different characteristics and influences. [...] I will distinguish between 'magic realism' as the concept of the 'mystery [that] does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it' (Roh 1995:15) and 'magical realism' that is understood, in Salman Rushdie's words, as the 'commingling of the improbable and the mundane' (1982:9).

In order to discuss these terms in her study, she prefers to use magic(al) realism. In most of the studies on this issue, the use of the term as magic(al) is seen; therefore I am also going to prefer to use the word as magic(al).

### **3.2 What is Magic(al) Realism**

As a mode or movement rather than a definable genre in literary and cinema which will be discussed later, the definition of magic(al) realism can be described as characterized by two conflicting perspectives, the one based on a rational view of reality and the other one on the acceptance of the supernatural as ordinary and usual reality. It is fundamental to specify the internal limitations of magic(al) realism. In order to be able to point out what is magic(al) realist and what is not, one should address the degree of interaction between the magic and the real. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris:

Magic elements that cannot be explained according to physical laws, detailed descriptions of the phenomenal world, fluid boundaries between diverging realms (real and magic, life and death, fact and fiction), a pluralistic vision of the world that challenges received ideas of time, space and identity – these are the main features of magical realist fiction (1995: 167-74).

Furthermore, beyond these main characteristics, the main point in magical realist texts is the extraordinary has to be regarded as an ordinary occurrence as it is stated by Zamora and Faris “the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism” (1995: 3).

When magic(al) realism is taken as a literary movement, it is mostly associated with a writing narrative or technique which compounds supernatural or magical events into a realist event. And what makes unique this is that all the events happening without questioning from the characters, and the supernatural is naturalized within the diegesis. According to all these definitions, it can be said that one of the best description of magic(al) realism then could be the combination of literature and art. And by means of the combination of magical elements with reality, people can express what they imagine a world to be like, because magic(al) realism gives opportunity to change the perceptions of the world and offer to view history differently.

The variety of magical occurrences in magic(al) realist works includes ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmospheres but does not include the magic as it is found in a magic show. Conjuring ‘magic’ is brought about by tricks that give the illusion that something extraordinary has happened, whereas in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary really has happened (Bowers, 2004: 19).

Nevertheless, some problems occurs about magic(al) realism because of the widespread use of the term. When it is used widely and that’s why sometimes differently, it is getting harder to differentiate a text as magic(al) realist or not.

Unlike the movements’ first half of the 20th century, magic(al) realism recently has started to draw interest. Different sets of standards are used today to define magic(al)

realism; this is causing confusion about what criteria are applied to contemporary work. An Bowers (2004: 1) states another problem of magic(al) realism in literature that “the popularity of such writing with the reading public has never been higher, but writers and critics are concerned that the terms are being reduced to vague clichés. Writers have been distancing themselves from the term whilst their publishers have increasingly used the terms to describe their works for marketing purposes.” Thus, this causes too much works named as magic(al) realist and confusion to understand what is magic(al) realism.

Another problem, on the other hand, is the closeness magic(al) realism to some other terms such as fantasy and surrealism. Especially when this literary term is applied into cinema people get confused to separate a fantastic, surrealist or science-fiction films from magic(al) realist ones. Magic(al) realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society. Additionally, it is important to remember that magic(al) realism cannot be seen as science fiction. On the contrary, Magic(al) realism is related to everyday life and it encourage to improve the imagination rather than seeing the boring and ordinary and by means of this the viewers or the readers have excitement to the minds. On the other hand, Bowers (2004: 22) states about surrealism that “it is most distinct from magic(al) realism since the aspects that it explores are associated not with material reality but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the ‘inner life’ and psychology of humans through art.” The difference between magic(al) realism and surrealism is not limited with only this, there are also other specific characteristics of the former one. For example:

Magic(al) realism excludes unmotivated hallucinations or images of the sub-conscious – as in Surrealist art; unrealistic settings – as in science fiction; hesitation regarding the occurrence of the extraordinary – as in fantastic literature; or consistent doubts about possible alternative meanings, whose relevance is hierarchically more significant than the actual fact described in the text – like in allegorical writing (Bertozzi 2012: 156).

Although the whole terms given above seem to be related to each other, of course there are some points that help to categorize them. Therefore, as Bertozzi states that:

Magic(al) realism is neither the representation of bizarre objects in a Surrealist way, nor a mere materialistic depiction of reality; it provides instead a new vision of the everyday world by means of its spiritual undertones, in order for the inner life of things to emerge from the cold soberness of the picture (2012: 154).

### **3.2.1 Magic(al) Realism In Art**

The term ‘magical realism’ has gained popularity within various fields. Although the term is strongly associated with literature, originally, the history of magic realism goes back into the early decades of the 20th century.

The term magical realism was first introduced as an aesthetic category in the study of post-Expressionist painting in the Weimar Republic by the German art critic and historian Franz Roh as ‘Magischer Realismus’. Considering the works of such painters as Otto Dix, Max Ernst, Alexander Kanoldt, George Grosz and Georg Schrimpf, Roh outlines the main features of this new style: a careful attention to details, the photographic quality of the image, and the representation of the non-material side of reality (Bertozzi, 2012: 154).

Roh states that “with the word “magic” I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (Roh 1995: 16). Although, it is a fact that the term magic(al) realism in painting is little known as Seymour Menton discusses in his book “Magical Realism Re-discovered” that:

It was due to the popularity of another term marking the post-expressionist tendency: new objectivity, a tendency of magic(al) realism emerged after Roh’s



introduction in 1925 and revived after the Second World War. However there was not any strict definition of magic realism, Roh and later various other art critics clearly identified magic(al) realism as a distinct tendency. (Menton, 1983: 15)

### **3.2.2 Magic(al) Realism In Literature**

Afterwards, in the 1940s and '50s, magic realism was seen in Latin America, as a means of expressing the authentic American mentality and developing an autonomous literature. As Amaryll Chanady asserts that “a dichotomous way of thinking is expressed in magical realism, which she characterizes as the juxtaposition of the "primitive," "archaic" American Indian mentality and the mentality of the "erudite," "rational," "empirical," "super-civilization" of Europe” (cited in Tudor, 2010: 1). Similarly, Spanish Professor Ray Verzasconi identifies the magical realism as an “expression of the New World (North and South America) reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilization, and the irrational elements of a primitive America” (cited in Rashed, Farzana and Mehedi, 2015: 226).

In 1955 Angel Flores introduced magic(al) realism in a modern sense in his essay “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” and he was the one who presents a general trend in Latin American fiction and terms this trend as “Magical Realism” (1955: 188). After the term magic(al) realism emerged in critical essays, some divisions started between scholars and critics about the origin of magic(al) realism. When magic(al) realism is at stake, Latin America region is most commonly associated with the term. Maggie Bowers states that it is a common misconception that “all magic(al) realism is Latin American and that it originated particularly in tropical regions of Central America. All the same, it must be acknowledged that

Latin America is an important location for magical realist literary production” (2004: 32). Furthermore, some critics state that, even though the usage of the term in the meaning of art has broadened throughout the years, magic(al) realism can only be applied to literary works of Latin America. On the other hand, it could be stated that it has become more international, it can be applied the works in Europe and the U.S. as well. Stephen Slemon was the first to treat magic(al) realism as a globalized, post-colonial phenomenon in 1988. “In his article “Magic Realism as Post-colonial Discourse” that the locus for critical studies on magic realism has been broadened outward from Latin America and the Caribbean to include speculations on its place in the literatures of India, Nigeria, and English Canada.” (cited in Petersen, 2013: 59

In time, magic(al) realism becomes more of a cross-cultural phenomenon, but still The Nobel Prize winning Gabriel García Márquez “who has come to epitomize the image of magic(al) realism, has influenced many writers to adopt the mode due to his innovative use of the technique, and has reinforced the connection between magic(al) realism and Latin American literature” (Bowers, 2004: 32). Moreover, as Michael Bell argues, “there are many people who believe that ‘since García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was the most popular, substantial and summative work in this mode, it is the principal source from which magic(al) realism became a dominant form in late-twentieth-century fiction worldwide” (Bell, 2010: 179).

All these discussions about the terms have actually helped to define the magic(al) realism within a certain framework.

In this respect, one of the unique features of magic(al) realism is its reliance upon the reader to follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. “It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter

how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgements." (Bowers, 2004: 4)

### 3.2.3 Magic(al) Realism in Cinema

At the beginning, films have not been considered as magic(al) realist in criticism, and as a term magic(al) realism has not been recognized as a category of film.

Nevertheless, according to scholar Maggie Ann Bowers; "it is possible to recognize features of both magic(al) realism in many films" (Bowers, 2004). Although there have been a few studies about magical realism in film studies, in his essay *On Magic Realism in Film* (1986) Frederic Jameson states that "one can take a critical approach that explores the images of film using the same skills employed by visual art critics." As it is seen in the later studies, magic(al) realism has become a term that can be applied into film studies.

However, another question arises when trying to put this term into a place in cinema studies because the use of magic(al) realism in film studies presents various difficulties. Fredric Jameson's account on the topic, which is the first attempt to engage magic(al) realism as a cinematic genre, understates its contribution due to the number of the works under analysis (Cited in Bertozzi, 2014: 157). The application of this concept to film, thus, often results in analytical over-simplification.

Magical realism is a new and sophisticated term to apply to cinema because it has as a literary origin. Nevertheless, some studies and scholars states that magical realism features in novels can be used in the cinema accordingly or it is possible to say that the films adapted from the most suitable novels and accepted as magical realist carry these features. And over the past decade with some examples of films which carry

the features of magic(al) realism like *El laberinto del fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth, by Guillermo del Toro, 2006), *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Amélie, by Jean-Pierre Jeunet 2001) and *Midnight in Paris* (by Woody Allen, 2011), the movement have expanded and applied to motion pictures. Moreover, the facilities and possibilities provided by cinema make it convenient to connect two contradictory title 'magic' and 'realism'.

It is seen that magic(al) realism is discussed as a narration style, a movement or a mode. Thus, magic(al) realism still remains a vague term today. This problem occurs mostly because it is applied to both art and literature, and has recently been applied to cinema. Furthermore, according to sources, magical realism is not an officially recognized film genre. This is another difficulty and problem about magic(al) realism when it is applied to cinema. Bowers indicates on this issue that:

Critics still debate whether the terms refer to modes, genres or forms of writing, or simply cultural concepts. In fact, they are discussed most frequently in their widest senses as concepts of reality. Since the introduction in the 1950s of the terms 'marvelous realism' and 'magical realism' in relation to literature, critics have attempted to identify those aspects that define this type of fiction. Due to the variety of applications of these terms and their changing meanings, critics have found that it is difficult to consider them in terms of one unifying genre, but rather that they constitute particular narrative modes (Bowers, 2004: 3).

In addition to these discussions on whether magic(al) realism is a genre or a mode, there are other opinions about it. For example; it is safer to consider magic(al) realism not as a genre but as a mode in the same way Christine Gledhill sees melodrama as a mode in the study of "Rethinking Genre". As it is seen in this example, the magic(al) realism is not exposed to those disagreements of opinion, there are also other contradictory terms in cinema. Herein what is important is to

categorize the term with its specific characteristics and create your own consistent perspective on the basis of previous works.

All in all, critics and directors have recognized that magic(al) realism features can be applied to the films by using magic(al) realism characteristics. Bowers investigates the adaptations of magic(al) realist novels into films. According to her, the analysis of film adaptations from pages to the screen provides a means to consider how the visual elements affect the narrative magic(al) realism. Furthermore, in consideration of her statement, after having been so popular in Latin American literature, magic(al) realist novels were started to be adapted into screen in 1950s, therefore, the analysis of these films provides a means to consider how the visual elements affect the narrative magical realism. Moreover, according to the great majority of critics the adaptations are the only films that are categorized as magic(al) realist. As it is mentioned at the beginning of this part magic(al) realism in literature and film is almost always associated with the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. However, in fact the first magic(al) text was not this novel of Márquez, and also it has not been made into a film. Actually the novel *The Tunnel*, which was written by Ernesto Sábato, was the first magic(al) realist literary work which was adapted into film. In spite of this, it has been argued that the real beginning of adaptations of magic(al) realism literature into film was based on the short story “Talpa” of Juan Rulfo, which was the original work of the 1956 movie of the same name in Mexico. Moreover, the adaptation of Laura Esquivel’s novel and directed by Alfonso Arau, *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*, 1991) is another popular and known example in both genres. Because of the

established literary genre and the adaption of what is called as a magic(al) realist story to the screen, critics suggest that this is a rather safe categorization when the main features are transmitted between the genres. For example, the film *Like Water for Chocolate* begins and ends with the first person narrative to establish the magic(al) realism storytelling frame as in the novel. *Like Water for Chocolate* is a good example of how magical realism is used to portray political as well as cultural issues that the author wanted to focus the reader on. Laura Esquivel, the author of the book and also the scriptwriter of the movie, effectively combines reality and the supernatural to distance Tita from the miserable life she is forced to live. The movie, follows the original novel quite closely, therefore, we can see all these messages and details that the author of the novel wanted to tell in the film as well. In addition, the works adapted from magic(al) realist novels to screen such as *Like Water for Chocolate* (1991), *Midnight's Children* (by Deepa Mehta, 2012), *Life of Pi* (by Ang Lee, 2012), *The Time-traveler's Wife* (by Robert Schwentke, 2009), *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (by Tom Tykwer, 2006), *Big Fish* (by Tim Burton, 2003), *Chocolat* (by Lasse Hallström, 2000) become popular in both film and literature.

As it is mentioned that the characteristics of magic(al) realism in literature are very similar to those of magic(al) realism in film, because of the participation of the authors of literary work in the production of the scripts used to make the films. On the other hand, in brief, according to Zamora and Faris (1995: 167-185) the characteristics of magic(al) realism, that were summarized before, include five primary traits:

- i. An "irreducible" magic which cannot be explained by typical notions of natural law.
- ii. A realist description that stresses normal, common, every-day phenomena, which is then revised or "refelt" by the marvelous. Extreme or amplified states of mind or setting are often used to accomplish this. (This distinguishes the genre from pure myth or fantasy.)
- iii. It causes the reader to be drawn between the two views of reality.
- iv. These two visions or realms nearly merge or intersect.
- v. Time is both history and the timeless; space is often challenged; identity is broken down at times.

Moreover, it is added that secondary characteristics often included are:

- i. The work is often metafictional or self-referential.
- ii. The text may employ a "verbal magic" where metaphors are treated as reality.
- iii. Phenomenological states may include the primitive or childless that seem to dislocate our initial perceptions/understandings.
- iv. Repetition, as well as mirror reversals, are employed.
- v. Metamorphoses take place.
- vi. Magic often is used against the established order.
- vii. Ancient systems of belief and local lore often underlie the text."This results in a respect (however complicated) for local faith.
- viii. Collective symbols and myths rather than individual ones haunt the work.
- ix. The fiction in form and language often embraces the carnivalesque.

### **3.4 Magic(al) Realism in Turkish Cinema**

Comparing with the number of examples in the world cinema, when we look at the place of magic(al) realism, there are only a few examples related the term magic(al) realism in Turkish cinema. As Bowers suggests, "magic realism and magical realism have as many forms of magic and the magical in them as the number of cultural

contexts in which these works are produced throughout the world” (Bowers 2004: 4–5). This is an observation that can be applied to Turkish cinema, and with its specific context we need to consider this style relevantly and coherently.

Moreover, as it is stated that cinema and literature are two separate media and cinema is specific with visuality, they require two distinct approaches. In this regard, Bertozzi indicates that:

One could also argue that cinema itself, from its very beginning, has always been magical (and) realist. In the following decades, due to its ‘intrinsic heterogeneity’ (Hart and Ouyang 2005: 11), magical realism has spread to different cultural contexts all over the world, denying Carpentier’s claim of its specifically Latin American character – a narrow viewpoint that failed to recognize the broader applicability of the concept (Bertozzi, 2012: 155).

By considering a number of films produced in Turkey especially after 2000, it would not be wrong to say that some of those have specific form of cinematic realism that can be interpreted within the framework of magic(al) realism compared to the past. “Disorienting tones, puzzling atmospheres, unusual visual elements, and the fundamental obviousness” (Bertozzi, 2012: 168) through which the magic unfolds make this aesthetic link consistent. Moreover, this style has a historical coherence when it is examined in the context of Turkish folk tales, legends that have been told since time immemorial. As it is cited in Bell-Villada García Márquez says “That’s how my grandmother used to tell stories, the wildest things with a completely natural tone of voice” (1990: 71).

Although it is seen that there are some written works of magic(al) realism in Turkish literature written by Latife Tekin and Hasan Ali Toptaş, there are not many studies on magic(al) realist films. Despite of the fact that ‘magic(al) realism’ as a key word is



used by film critics in Turkey, there is almost no detailed analysis about any film that carries magic(al) realism characteristics. After a short comparison of Turkish films with the main characteristic features of magic(al) realism, some examples could come to mind. In some blogs, and interviews with the directors, the term ‘magic(al) realism’ has been passed on behalf of their movies. However, as it is stated before because it is not approved as a film genre even in the world, it is hardly ever studied in Turkey.

After a survey on Turkish films through the elements of magical realism that is mentioned in the previous title, some movies can be seen as examples of this term. Mainly and mostly in the last years known with his mysterious, magical and absurd films Onur Ünlü is the director in Turkish Cinema whose films can be classified under ‘magic(al) realism’. In other respects, it is important to mention that with the adaptation of novel written by Hasan Ali Toptaş, whose novels are discussed and studied and examined within the frame of magic(al) realism, *Gölgesizler* (The Shadowless, 2000) directed by Ümit Ünal can be taken into account as an example of another magic(al) realist film in Turkish cinema. It can be stated that the film *Gölgesizler* carries the elements of magical realism, for example the fantastic features are given in a realistic life. In the film there are mysterious disappearances after another in a village but these are all happening in a location which is real, the characters are carrying real features but there are some mysterious and fantastic features in the film similar to magical realist films.

When we turn to Onur Ünlü who is the subject of this study because of his consistent film style and his magic(al) realist side, his films are made in a real setting with

fantastical and unreal elements and this makes his films connect under two title ‘magic’ and ‘realism’. Although the juxtaposition of the two words magic and realism sounds quite contradictive, Turkish films’ audiences have been getting used to this situation thanks to his feature films from the beginning, *Polis* (Police, 2007), *Çocuk* (The Child, 2008) *Güneşin Oğlu* (Son of the Sun, 2008) and *Beş Şehir* (Five Cities, 2010), *Celal Tan ve Ailesinin Aşırı Acıklı Hikayesi* (The Extreme Tragic Story of Celal Tan and His Family, 2011), *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* (Thou Gild'st the Even, 2013), *İtirazım Var* (Let's Sin, 2014).

### **3.5 Onur Ünlü’ Cinema and Magic(al) Realism**

Onur Ünlü whose film style is authentic, unique and receptive use magical surrealist and fantastical elements within this style of his films. And as Aytekin states even though his films are interpreted under mainstream cinema, when they are examined in detail, we encounter works far from popular culture either in respect to their narration or film language (2014: 271). In his films, it is apparent that he enriches his movies with the elements of black humor and absurdity, on the other hand, he stuns and seeks to take emotional reactions of the viewer with dream, violence and death scenes.

Since the beginning of his film career, we have been seeing a ‘different’ style that we have not accustomed to watch in Turkish cinema. We have witnessed a non-classic realist or a non-conventionalist narration made by him, because he have used various ‘unreal’ elements in his films. Although, there have been always even a little

magic(al) elements and features, until he made the film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi*, rather than magic(al) realism, black humor and absurdity has stood out in his films.

### 3.5.1 Black humor in Onur Ünlü's Films

Onur Ünlü frequently mentions that he is using black humor in his films and states that:

This so-called black humor has changed the minds, the point of views. That's why we have lost the elegance of the relationship that we have established with the truth. Just then those things are wasted, otherwise the relationship between you and the truth usually makes you laugh like a fool without doing anything else. Because humor is included in astonishment. When you come across the truth, you become astonished. Then the person who is astonished starts to laugh, and (s)he laughs while talking about this. And the people listening to the person starts to laugh. The thing that I try to do is perceived as strange and anomalous thing. People are astonished when they watch a self-mocking movie because they have been always taken films serious (cited in Turan, 2012).

He defines the film *Celal Tan ve Ailesinin Aşırı Acıklı Hikayesi* as a black humor and he says in an interview that he tried to make a black comedy film and adds "I made this film in order to mock at the desperation that people have against death." (Yönetmen Koltuğu, 2013). We can see the humor and the 'stupidity' that he mentioned through the characters actions that is getting out of control. Especially in his films such as *Celal Tan ve Ailesinin Aşırı Acıklı Hikayesi* and *Polis* and *Beş Şehir* it is possible to say that these films are shaped around 'religion' 'death' and 'fate' with specific criticisms. While doing this, he is benefited from magic(al) elements but specifically on a realist and usual setting the same way as used in magic(al) realism. For example, in the film *Beş Şehir* we can see that there are religious conversations between one of the characters and a 'cat'<sup>1</sup> who likes Heidegger.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually this cat is a character animated by a woman for the film.

Maggie Ann Bowers states that “magical realist films are usually concerned with ‘philosophical issues such as the existence of God, the role of fate, and the idea of the self’ (Bowers 2004: 115).

Hereby with these statements, it can be said that the relation between the reality and the characters in films is not completely unusual. As Onur Ünlü states: “I usually mock at my characters and stress stupid people and their stupidity. My characters are not ‘unusual suspects’, but they are full of frailty like me” (cited in Turan, 2011: 25-26). Furthermore, Onur Ünlü says “It does not seem possible for me to get rid of the nuisance arising from being human.” Basic meaning of humor is making fun, slight and insouciance, moreover, director could achieve to make humor as holding his characters at a certain point between tragic and dramatic lines (cited in Aytekin, 2014: 273). When it is asked about reality to him, Onur Ünlü states that:

On the contrary to what is usually thought, the main concern of cinema is not reality but persuasiveness. If you persuade the viewer that the film they watch really happens, people interiorize the situation in which a man with a red cloak. Therefore, superman is not realist but persuasive, and this is the main point. If you construct or create a persuasive world and if your characters are persuasive, audiences include in that world and watch without connecting any real connection in denotative meaning. If it happens in any contrary case, we could not talk about a long-established tale tradition (cited in Yengin, 2012).

There are various fantastic, supernatural and extraordinary situations and elements in the films of Onur Ünlü such as the superhuman actions of Musa Rami in the film *Polis*, the spirits traveling from body to body in *Güneşin Oğlu*, the philosopher cat in *Beş Şehir*, the cane of the blind man in *Celal Tan Ve Ailesinin Aşırı Acıklı Hikayesi* in order to make contribution to the narration of director.

### 3.6 *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* (Thou Gild'st the Even)

Although most of his films carry non-realist characteristics and elements within their narration and they can be associated with magic(al) realism because of the backgrounds of the events reality while magical and fantastic events occur, his film which can be directly related with magic(al) realism is *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi*.

The film shot in black and white and set in the Anatolian town of Akhisar focuses on a young man Cemal and his group of male friends. During the film everything is seen and everyone is acted as usual and typical in this town, just like any other Anatolian town; there are artisans, shops, school, coffee and tea shops and all these places are extremely typical. The days pass by slowly and routinely, everyone pretty much knows one another and nothing really new ever happens. Except for some supernatural things; for example, this town has two suns and three full moons in the sky. Moreover, Cemal and his friends all have extraordinary and supernatural abilities. Therefore, in this so called ordinary town we begin to see various magical events from the beginning scene of the film in which Cemal walks through the wall of their barber shop in order to take his keys.

As the movie progress we are witnessing that every character has a specific power. In another scene, Cemal goes to doctor and we see that the doctor who hates the town and its people sheds blood tears. Moreover, one of the main characters of the film Yasemin who Cemal falls in love with, can move the objects remotely by just her fingers. Another character Defne who sells book in the street can freeze the time and everything outside of herself when she claps her hands. Furthermore, in a scene that

Cemal and Samim who is one of Cemal's friends go hunting and we see that Samim can use his finger as a gun and shoot bullets to hunt. Additionally, we understand when Cemal tries to kill Dündar who is the boss of Yasemin in the egg factory, is an immortal man and he has been lived for a long time. İsmet, the security guard in the factory can become invisible at will. Nazım who is a service man is a giant. The referee in the film can heal the wounds with his hand. And the teacher of Cemal, Vildan is invisible and she can be only seen in the mirror and only when she dies. Apart from the character's specific features, there are also some other magical events throughout the film such as Yasemin and Cemal's flying scene over the town, or Defne and Cemal's talking and kissing scene that lots of stones are falling into their heads.

In another interview made with Onur Ünlü, he states that he is affected by magic(al) realism and he likes the style of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Furthermore, he mentioned that since he saw one of the Chagall's painting, he has always wanted to shoot a scene like this which illustrates himself and his beloved as flying. Additionally he states that he likes this movement,

This narration, for example, the presumption of one can shoot with his finger without using gun is not impossible for me. It could be and I just wonder the part of what if it is possible? If one can shoot with his finger, then another one can be invisible. And then a different world is created by itself. If I can catch something about human being, then it is possible to fly as well. Through this way, the feelings of reality pass to the audience (cited in Kaya and Karsan, 2013).

Moreover, when it is asked to him whether his film style is surrealist or not, he states it is not surrealism, but it is possible to say that it is magic(al) realism.

The most salient feature of magic(al) realism is passing all these magical events in a real setting and completely realistic environment the same way as in literary works and in the other accepted magic(al) realist movies around the world. Through this style, audiences also watch everything as usual and ordinary in time and they can match the lives in the film with their lives.

### **3.6.1 Metaphors: As an Important Feature of Magic(al) Realism**

In Onur Ünlü's films we frequently come across several metaphors. Again specific to his film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi*, it is possible to say that there are various use of metaphors. As it is mentioned, in this small Anatolian town, life goes on usual and everything seems real and ordinary. Those characters who have magical and supernatural powers do not offend the eye because they are doing their routines and jobs as the same way in usual life. The film does not define its characters' properties as 'superpowers' or the characters bearing them as 'superheroes'; it argues that the essence of humanity would remain the same even if the world worked in such a way, that troubles, sorrows and anxieties of mankind would not be much different. This can be seen as the reason why the movie starts with the Euripides quote: "Man is created from anxiety." In a fantastic or superhero film, a superhero may not carry this kind of manly anxiety about life. Characters in the film act as if they have not such magical powers that they were gifted. This 'gifting' issue also closely related with magic(al) realism effects in both magical realist novels and in the accepted magical realist films like the adaptation of *Like Water for Chocolate*. Then, when the film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* is examined in terms of the main characteristics, examples such as real life setting, real life rules, absurd called actions are seen.

Another important feature of the film is that the metaphors are used in their denotative meanings. Occurrence of the relation between a metaphor and its denotative meaning brings about the absurdism with it and this enriches the film. By this way, audiences transfer the visual element into words in their language. The images push the audience to think about the equivalent idiom in the language. This feature helps the film to be considered in a literary sense. For example, the doctor, İrfan sheds blood tears (kan ağlamak), this is a metaphor and the meaning of its equivalent idiom in Turkish 'feel very dejected'. This gives the audience a kind of literary pleasure rather than visual. One of the most beautiful examples of this feature is passing in the tea garden. In that scene, Yasemin and Cemal have met in a tea garden, and all the metaphors related with falling in love are reflected with their denotative meanings. Firstly they take pills and then their hearts wiggle (içleri kıpırdanmak), they start to laugh and then they fly because of happiness (mutluluktan uçmak). These metaphors take attraction more than the scene itself. Then they decide to marry when all the phases are completed about love. In another scene, when Defne and Cemal are talking and then kissing on a hill, lots of stones are falling into their heads (başlarına taş yağmak) that occurs when wrong, forbidden or illegal things happen. Moreover, in a bad mood of Cemal, the camera is turned upside down to reflect his life which falls apart because of the ups and downs in the life (hayatı alt üst olmak). The great effects of language and literature in this film make it more appropriate into magic(al) realism. Similarly, in the film *Like Water for Chocolate*, the metaphors are used in their denotative meanings as the bath house firing set by Gertrudis' passion. She feels that "her body was giving off so much heat that the wooden walls began to split and burst into flame." Therefore, in both films magic becomes ordinary, accepted and



integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism, and also metaphors are used in their denotative meanings.

These elements can be seen in the light of Angel Flores' theory of magic(al) realism, since they are not only extraordinary, but their supernatural characters acquire a fundamental obviousness in their relation with the surrounding environment. To put it with Parkinson and Zamora, these features are 'admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of realism'; they are not surrealist images of the characters' subconscious or hallucinations, they do not take place within unrealistic settings, their presence is not questioned by any doubt or hesitation and they are a constituting part of the real, and thus deserve to be investigated as such.

In conclusion, in this part of the study, Onur Ünlü and magic(al) realism have been examined closely. It is likely to say that film of Onur Ünlü are far from the classic realist line with his specific style. By using literary originated approach to create his world in cinema and while doing this, he uses metaphors in their denotative meanings. Moreover, he creates a magical world with also his cinema's mostly known features: absurdity and black humor. As states, especially in the film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* he displays a magical town with magical characters in it who take their supernatural features normally. All magical, supernatural and non realist things happens in an ordinary and quite realist settings. That's what makes this film magical and realist at the same time by uniting together two contradictive notions and make this approach magical realist. All in all, based on his own words in various interviews, it is possible to evaluate that Onur Ünlü likes to use magic(al) elements to indicate his approach to reality.

## CHAPTER 4

### SEMIH KAPLANOĞLU AND SPIRITUAL REALISM

As it was stated in the previous section, in cinema history we see ‘realism’ being used with various adjectives besides it. Each director interprets reality in different ways in their films. Then, in this part of the thesis, Spiritual Realism within film studies will be investigated. Before discussing spiritual realism in cinema, the notions of religion and belief in film studies will be examined. Giving examples from precursor directors from all over the world will be studied shortly in terms of religion and spiritual realism. When it comes to Turkish Cinema, transcendality seen in cinema in Turkey will be viewed and Semih Kaplanoğlu as an example with his films made after 2000’s will be analyzed within spiritual realism frame especially with his trilogy *Yumurta* (Egg, 2007), *Süt* (Milk, 2008) and *Bal* (Honey, 2010). In order to express this, some comparative analysis will be made between him and other precursor directors from the world.

#### 4.1 Religion and Cinema

The relation between religion and cinema has been seen in a wide range of matters. Cinema refers to the concepts and stories of religion from various perspectives as its subject. The religion in cinema is encountered in many ways from the movies

making religious propaganda to the movies against the religion, from the movies using religion in a direct or an indirect way, or maybe establishing a new religion to the movies addressing the spiritual and mystical dimensions. In the world specific to Hollywood and Christianity, the films about the New Testament narrations are common; on the other hand, there are a series of the movies about the Old Testament narrations such as Adam and Eve, Exodus, the wars of Prophet David, Solomon's temple, and the story of Esther and Mordechai (Balcı, Demirkıran, 2005: 2). Making the Islamic sources carry to cinema is less common when compared to the former one, it is usually understood that the prohibition within Islam to depict holy figures has discouraged cinematic representation. However, Feride Çiçekoğlu explains as the art that the iconoclastic tradition of Islam is inherited from Judaism and this is mostly decisive in the narrative techniques. Then we understand that this difference is also because of the lack of mimetic culture and individuality in depiction in Eastern culture. While with the mimetic culture in western portraiture, identification is provided with one character, in Eastern culture all faces appear to be same. She explains the reasons of these over Ottoman art in details that:

The difference between the “art of the book” (the only form of illumination allowed in Islam) and Renaissance painting is greatest in the depiction of faces. In Ottoman miniature art, inherited from the Persian tradition under Mongolian-Chinese influence, all faces appear to be the same, as if duplicated from the same blueprint of central Asian origin (Çiçekoğlu, 2003:127).

Moreover, ‘ways of seeing’ also affects the depiction in Islamic culture she states.

While in Western culture depiction of the world is made by the way an eye see it, one who tried to depict the world use the way God saw it in Eastern culture, for example as in miniature art.

Furthermore, we can deduce that western culture has maintained this into this further art movements, including cinema. They have depicted the characters from Bible throughout history. But there has been almost no contribution of miniaturist in Ottoman to the filmmakers. “It is no coincidence that “portraiture occupies a central position in the mimetic culture of the West.” The main contemporary medium of the mimetic visual culture finds expression in cinema, where the character is none other than the versatile version of the portraiture” (Çiçekoğlu, 2003: 127).

On the other hand, we are widely witnessing the films criticizing religion as church criticism in Hollywood productions as well as in the cinema of Europe and Latin America, while it is witnessed as the form of criticism of the clergy in the local cinema. Another reflection of religion on the cinema which will be mentioned specifically in this study can be seen in the movies having more mystical, and spiritual dimensions rather than a religious story, advocacy, or opposition. We see that in these films the true meaning of life, destiny, and God are questioned directly instead of giving a religious reference. The worldwide examples of these movies including “spiritualism” are shot by the certain pioneer directors such as Tarkovsky, Bergman, Bresson. In other respects, Semih Kaplanoğlu, who calls his own films as “spiritual realism” in the recent years, discusses his films especially on the basis of “born again, revival religion, invention of tradition and fascinated from that tradition” rather than questioning it as it is done in the movies of those directors from the world. The aim of this chapter is to look through the spiritual realism in the historical and general process, to analyze the worldwide directors that can be showed as references on this perspective, and to discuss Semih Kaplanoğlu, who is

considered as the closest director in Turkish cinema within the framework of spiritual realism.

#### **4.2 Religion, Spirituality, Transcendancy, Metaphysics and Spiritual Realism**

In such a wide scope, there are very close analogies and generally confusable notions such as spirituality, religion, transcendancy, metaphysics etc. and in order to be more clear it is important to be able to mention these words at least in their general senses.

First of all, spirituality includes all kinds of unworldly affairs, while in a narrower sense it may evoke a religious concept and it may be associated with spiritual concepts like eternity or after-life in a religious sense. David Rousseau gives references in his article “Self, Spirituality, and Mysticism” (2014: 487) to some descriptions of spirituality made by some scholars. One of them about spiritualism is stated as “the way individuals experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, others, nature, and the sacred” (Puchalski et al., 2009) or “the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66). Moreover, while Hufford describes spirituality as our relationship to the transcendent” (Hufford, 2005, p. 2), Puchalski and Romer call it “the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life the search for that which gives a sense of meaning and purpose in life” (Puchalski & Romer, 2000, p. 129). Therefore, indeed, generally spirituality is used and defined to answer some questions in order to find out the meaning of life, life beyond. That’s why, at this point spirituality is different from religion because religion mainly consists of beliefs, rituals and symbols to show closeness to another sacred or higher power,

may be God. William James defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine”(1902/1961: 42).

On the other hand, what is transcendental is mainly a concept that emphasizes the supernatural powers more than our senses. We can also read it in an aesthetic way from Immanuel Kant’s distinction the beautiful from sublime as he states it as the ultimate form is the “absolutely great” (cited Leitch, 2010: 433). According to him what is transcendental is an experience that astonishes people and confuses their mind.

Thirdly, metaphysics is more philosophical and scientific compared to others. Even though many of questions they dealt with, about the concepts of ontology, cosmology, and epistemology, are the same, comparing with spirituality which has more grounds in intuitive experiences, metaphysics mostly relies on reasoning, hypothesis and observation.

In this study, in order to define a cinematic mode related to something beyond experienced as in the cinema of Semih Kaplanoğlu who defines his cinema as ‘spiritual realist’, and to emphasize the realistic way while referring to spiritual things, it is much more convenient beside others. Spiritual realism, as David Rousseau explains the dimensions of spirituality that “spiritual realism includes personal values and spiritual percepts and the intuitive conviction that existence has meaning and value and life has an ‘ultimate’ purpose” (2012).

### 4.3 Spiritual Realism in Films

When the term ‘spiritual realism’ is examined in film studies apart from religion in cinema, we see that before spiritual realism - as a cinematic term - cinematic transcendentalism has been studied and has been used as a style, as Paul Schrader indicates that “transcendental style is first and foremost a style; it uses specific film techniques for specific purposes” (1972) - by directors to show the transcendent meaning that we cannot reach with our five senses. Their intention is mostly to show the meaning beyond seen. Moreover, “transcendental style in film posits that there is a common film style used by various film-makers in divergent cultures to express the transcendent” (Schrader, 1972).

More recently, Michael Bird has theorized the metaphysical in film as ‘hierophany’. Borrowing this term from Mircea Eliade - ‘the disclosure of the transcendent or sacred precisely through the material of reality’ - Eric Wilson conveys Amédée Ayfre argument that “films can only be significantly religious through realistic style” (2012). Bird, following the steps of Ayfre, coins the term ‘spiritual realism’ for films “in which cinema’s technical properties become the vehicle of meditation’ and ‘the sacred is sought at the depth in reality itself” (cited in de Luca). Spiritual Realist cinematic language which usually carries minimalist features focuses on the reasons of human existence in this world.

On the other hand, it seems possible to mention that there are different kinds of spiritualisms and transcendencies when the examples in cinema are examined.

Directors express different spiritualities in their films and this may depend on their nations and backgrounds and also the audience they aim to reach.

### **4.3.1 Spiritual Realism and World Cinema: Tarkovsky, Bresson and Bergman**

The belief in unseen things makes human detract from concrete and tactile realism and thus a new sense arises. Directors aiming to reach beyond the seen have used images and symbols. Therefore, it can be said that cinema is one of the most important and effective platforms that provide a basis to this. Then, religious aspects and spiritual features have been the issue of cinema throughout its history in many ways, that is why some discussions have been also held about labeling these kind of movies as Liliya Berezhnaya & Christian Schmitt stated:

In film studies, the issue was raised regarding the question of what the label “religious film” should refer to. Some have argued that the label should not be limited to films that depict religious practices (church services, priests, religious holidays) but could be useful in dealing with films that try to establish a new medium for representing a “religious,” transcendental sphere.

This view opens up the possibility to compare how film represents transcendence with religious ways to do so. For instance, as Paul Schrader has pointed out in his influential *Transcendental Style in Film*, French director Robert Bresson’s films were influenced by the Orthodox theology of the icon. Eastern European directors have been particularly influential in this respect, notably Andrey Tarkovsky. If one thinks of religion and film this way, the transfer between religious and national codes in film can be analyzed on a structural level, enabling questions like: How do religious modes of representation (e.g. “transcendental style”) help to promote profane goals (e.g. nationality)” (Berezhnaya, Schmitt, 2013: 17-18).

As it is stated in this perspective of religion in cinema, some directors have used the film medium as a gateway to the transcendency and also metaphysical dimension.

While Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Andrei Tarkovsky,



Yasujiro Ozu's names are referred within this style, it can be said that all these filmmakers are seeking the same thing, but finding and reflecting it in varying degrees mostly because of their national and personal backgrounds.

Moreover, obviously there are various ways to reach all these aesthetics and meanings. Hernstein states what these ways as are that:

These filmmakers seek their getaways with great ingenuity using a variety of methods: story, anti- story, symbol, image, varieties of "realism," stylization or myth. Some want to engage ideas, others are more concerned with formal elements; all seek that elusive combination that opens the door of truncated being—not just from alienated Modernity to postmodern anarchy—but to wholeness (2008: 8).

Furthermore, Tiago De Luca mentions (2011: 40) in his study about some of the pioneer director of this style from their mouths that:

For example, Dreyer maintained that 'it is not the things in reality that the director should be interested in but, rather, the spirit in and behind the things' (Dreyer and Carney 1989: 65). Similarly, Bresson postulated that 'your film's beauty will not be in the images (post-cardism) but in the ineffable that they will disengage' (Bresson 1986: 109). In his turn, Tarkovsky argued that '[t]he image is tied to the concrete and the material, yet reaches out along mysterious paths to regions beyond the spirit' (Tarkovsky 2005: 116).

In order to see some of these the pioneers a bit more in detail, and understand some differences in their styles, in this part a short analysis will be made about three of these directors; Andrei Tarkovsky, Robert Bresson and Ingmar Bergman, who are also stated by Semih Kaplanoğlu as he was affected by their films and styles.

#### **4.3.1.1 Andrei Tarkovsky**

Raised in a Orthodox tradition, the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, whose films generally consist of one long shots, "directed movies that differ from the Soviet cinema in his living period. A conception of spirituality is indispensable to acquire a

holistic perspective on the films of Andrei Tarkovsky. Unlike any other film-maker of his generation, Tarkovsky's films invent a language of the spirit through the poetry of cinematic images" (Kona, 2010). According to him there is a relation between art and spirituality and art should have a metaphysical function. About this, he indicates that "art expects the human to buckle under the spiritual energy transmitted by the artists rather than the strict rules of logic, and art requires spiritual experience, not an educational foundation even with the most positivistic meaning" (Tarkovsky, 1992: 44). Believing that art should question the meaning of human existence, Tarkovsky also sees that (1992: 96) "art must transcend as well as observe; its role is to bring spiritual vision to bear on reality: as did Dostoievsky, the first to have given inspired utterance to the incipient disease of the age."

One of the most important and distinct feature of him is that he suggests that symbols and images are not necessary when reading his films. It would be wrong to see the movies as a collection of signs. On the contrary, they should be watched in the same way as watching a view, the sky and stars. For him it is important that "the camera catches what there is and does not construct anything" (Botz-Bornstein, 2009: 49). When Tarkovsky is the subject, it is inevitable to mention about dreams. His films are read as dreams because he transfers the inner logic and time of dreams into cinema. And what is important is that while doing this, he is not using fantastic elements but constructs with real elements. Dreams which are seen separately in his first movie *Ivanovo Detstvo* (Ivan's Childhood, 1962) come to a point as the film is a dream itself in his last film *Offret* (The Sacrifice, 1986). When a film is a dream, it

allows to the viewer to see and experience that dream in their own time and conditions. Therefore, Tarkovsky's films arouse spiritual experiences on viewer.

Moreover, within the concept of spiritual realism, Tarkovsky is looking for the meaning of life through his films in which he tries to understand and searches what we should do in this world. His versatile style of filmmaking has always attracted attention by many people. Stan Brakhage (2001) states that:

I personally think that the three greatest tasks for film in the 20th century are 1) To make the epic, that is, to tell the tales of the tribes of the world. 2) To keep it personal, because only in the eccentricities of our personal lives do we have any chance at the truth. 3) To do the dream work, that is to illuminate the borders of the unconscious. The only film maker I know that does all these three things equally in every film he makes is Andrei Tarkovsky, and that's why I think he's the greatest living narrative filmmaker.

Furthermore, it is possible to say that unlike the directors whose main concerns are profane and secular, Tarkovsky defines his aim to make films as praying to reach the truth. With this aspect, he makes an impact on intellectual Muslim society which will be mentioned in detail. They read Tarkovsky with an islamic sufism and also they see the cinema of dreams that Tarkovsky did as a sufistic value. And, it would not be wrong to say that Semih Kaplanoğlu in Turkish cinema become the one who is affected what Tarkovsky did in cinema in spiritualistic meaning.

#### **4.3.1.2 Robert Bresson**

Another pioneer Robert Bresson of course offers a much less poetic style than Tarkovsky. "Known for his minimalistic approach to characterization, cinematography and the use of non-professional actors and actresses; his call to the actor was always to pare everything down, without embellishing the delivery of

words with facial or physical gestures” (Hall, 2009). In his films Bresson’s camera generally is nonmoving and he does not use camera angles frequently. Furthermore, he gives place to dialogues only when they are needed. The format of Bresson's films is designed “to discipline the effects when they are waken and stirred, and to create a certain quiescence in the audience and a spiritual equilibration which is also the subject of the film.” (Sontag, 1991). Moreover, his films’ minimalist style is mainly important because of trying to show God in simplicity and ordinariness.

Bresson is known as Catholic but indeed mostly a non-believer who does believe, therefore, it is possible to say about him that he is questioning belief not denying it but contrarily characterized as believer. In his films the characters are alone with their destinies and they make an effort for a spiritual salvation from the material world. In other words, his one of the main queries is the malignity, its impulse and the escape way from it. It would not be wrong to say that he is looking for something to hold on to the life, however, he is not denying religion while doing this as a person grown up in a religious environment where there is no repression for beliefs.

Bresson shows humans in his films with their malignancies by releasing the unseen spirituality in a daily reality with earthly and material images. Oruç states that:

In the final scene of *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* (A Diary of A Country Priest, 1951), the cross seen on the wall, again in the final scene film *Procès de Jeanne d’Arc* (Trial of Joan of Arc, 1962) the remained stake after Jeanne d’Arc was burnt and lastly baptized, canonized but at the same time abused Balthazar in the film *Au hasard Balthazar* (Balthazar, 1966) are the examples of material images of transcendental (Oruç, 2014: 7).

As it was stated in the first chapter, social events have very crucial effects on art, in this case cinema. When the invention and proliferation of cinema are thought, World

War II is very important to consider. We can see the effects of the war on the moods and psychologies of the characters in the films. The priest in the film *A Diary of A Country Priest* states the situation that people are not coming the church as Miss Louise attends holy mass every day. Without her, the church would be empty. “This is important to show the situation that people are getting unbeliever in a country after World War II”. (Oruç, 2014: 27). Moreover, after diagnosed with stomach cancer, the priest also seems that he lose his belief.

As it is mentioned, spirituality shows up in a daily and a physical reality. Paul Schrader states that the films of Bresson that spirituality felt mostly are the ones that called as “prison quartet”. These are *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* (A Diary of A Country Priest, 1951), *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé ou Le vent souffle où il veut* (A Man Escaped, 1956), *Incertitude* (Pickpocket, 1959) and *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (The Trial of Joan of Arc, 1962). “In these movies the characters reach the spiritual salvation by self destruction, by escaping from prison or by going to prison.” (2008: 73-74). Therefore, in the cinema of Bresson, while souls are imprisoned in bodies the only way escape from there is possible with death.

#### **4.3.1.3 Ingmar Bergman**

Lastly it is important to mention about another important pioneer Scandinavian director Ingmar Bergman who remained under the influence of his Lutheran upbringing, but his transcendency and spirituality seem relatively more negative than the others. In almost all of his films, the fundamental themes are God, death and human relationships, and the main characters are family and God and also priests

with their distasteful presentation. And he claims that he finds his cinematic style thanks to the images from his childhood since his films were influenced by his life in childhood and youth. For Bergman, making a film is possible by going back to one's childhood times by borrowing roots deep in the author's childhood. Like Bresson, Bergman also grown up in a religious environment and also with religious pressure. Again after World War II, loyalty to religion and traditions started to be shaken and suicide rate increased in Sweden and Bergman as a director was affected from these situations in his country and constituted his cinema on the elements of suicide, miscommunication, unhappy marriages (Ekici, 2007: 242). Although by learning God with some impositions, instead of being an unbeliever on shaky ground, he prefers to question the God. Thus, in his films he has some questions to himself to a viewer and to God and he struggled with the question, "Why does God appear to be silent?" Moreover, thinking that people fill the gap of religion and God issues with false precepts, he does not deny but defines his God as 'love'.

*Det Sjunde Inseglet* (The Seventh Seal, 1957) is one of his most important films, carrying all these themes and questions. According to Lefèvre (1986: 25), this film move with some questions like "is there a God, can religion give peace to people, is it belief to hereafter that giving meaning to life"

#### **4.4 Religion and Spiritual Realism in Turkish Cinema**

As it was stated before, like in Christianity, in Islam sometimes art and religion are seen together. However, because of the reasons explained by Çiçekoğlu who states the iconoclastic tradition of Islam on Ottoman art is mostly decisive in the narrative

techniques of the Ottoman artistic geography from those times. Islamic art has followed a way to reach spirit instead of Aristotelian mimesis understanding. Instead of recreating the apparent reality, metaphoric expressions made by using symbols, metaphors and poetic themes have been used in Islamic art in order to tell the things beyond visible.

Cultures are continued with their histories and unlike western culture, which continued its aesthetics into modern art, Eastern culture has maintained its art culture to further art movements, including architecture, calligraphy, ornamentation, poetry. However, in modern art like cinema there is seen almost no contribution because it remains in the background. Today, it is seen when examining that religion, in this case Islam, has been reflected in Turkish cinema generally in negative ways and it has been mostly shown through the imam or sheik figures, and that figures have been seen as a figure of comedy or zealot, uncultured and against national struggle or told over horror movies, for instance, about jinn. Firstly we see these figures in the films about national struggle in Turkey. Starting with the films like *Nur Baba / Boğaziçi Esrarı* (The Bosphorus Mystery, 1922) which shows a sheik as lecher in the first periods of Turkish cinema, especially in the films adapted from books in national struggle literature such as *Vurun Kahpeye* (Hit the Bitch, 1949), *Ateşten Gömlek* (The Shirt of Flame, 1923) the religious figures were reflected as opponents who are against the struggle.

On the other hand, again in Yeşilçam, in one period (called Hazretli Filmler) of Turkish cinema religious films increased as a trend. It is seen that the number of religious films has increased rapidly than had been expected and the producers who

cannot be considered as very religious people are looking for new religious heroes to make money from this glut. Starting mid 50's to 70's of, various religious characters are seen in those films. The first example of these films is, *Aşıklar Kabesi Mevlana* of Hicri Akbaşlı in 1956. Following this film in the same line, films were made on religious figures and characters. (Evren, 2003:12). *Hazreti Ayşe* (Nuri Akıncı, 1966) , *Hazreti Süleyman and Saba Melikesi* (Muharrem Gürses, 1966), *Hazreti Ali* (Tunç Başaran, 1969) were among the films that took Islamic figures into their focal points.

When we come to mid 90's, a mystic aesthetic of cinema called 'the cinema of dreams' is suggested by a group of Islamist critics as a result of looking for a new cinematic language suitable for the ideas of intellectual islamists in Turkey instead of that schematic understanding of religion in Turkish cinema.

The opinion that the relation of religion, sufism and cinema can provide depth into the language of cinema with the help of dreams is discussed theoretically in the book named *Dream, Reality and Cinema* by Sadık Yalsızuçanlar, Ayşe Saşa and İhsan Kabil. Based on the words of Ayşe Saşa's "the basis of cinema is social culture" (1997: 46) and with the claim of Islam is one of the basic constitution of Turkish society, Yalsızuçanlar mentions that because of being stuck in Aristotelian drama tradition and not building proper functions of social culture, Turkish cinema has never gone beyond the dramatic forms even in National Cinema period.

Depending upon an argument saying that Turkish cinema has not gone beyond 'melodrama' besides the worldwide popular and followed directors who go into their films both psychologically and historically. Yalsızuçanlar mentioned that "the



consistent relation between Bergman, Kurosawa, Tarkovsky and other creative directors and their social cultures has introduced a real cinema language, while we have created an artificial cinema producing much more traditional dramatic schemes” (1997: 46).

In the authentic expression style which has been attempted especially for National Cinema period, Yalsızuçanlar shows Metin Erksan’s *Sevmek Zamanı* (Time to Love, 1965) and mentions that this film reflecting the traditional oriental suffering and the pain of transcendency was a promising progress for 1960’s; however, in 1980’s ‘the artificial films moving between symbol and reality (1997: 53) were produced.

He also refers that as Tarkovsky, Turkish film directors should make an effort for approaching the concept of the cinema of dream with an expression style having their own traditions and he adds cinema should be considered as an opportunity for the restatement of Islamic Civilization’s artistic and spiritual dimension within an aesthetic form (1997: 54).

In 2000s, in consideration of all these examples and the ideas of a lack of a spiritual realism in Turkish cinema, it would be possible to say that Semih Kaplanoğlu, who frequently indicates that he is affected from Tarkovsky, and influenced by the notion of cinema of the dreams. Therefore, in 2000’s some films in Turkish cinema, religion started to be seen in a more objective way. The characters are reflected more regardfully whatever the aim is. However, the other Islamic cinema tradition has also continued with horror movies or with comic religious characters. Then, Semih Kaplanoğlu with his great amount of audience at home and abroad has become one

of the representatives of Turkish cinema with his awards, including Golden Bear, which he won. And when ‘the cinema of dreams’ is thought, what he does is important and pioneering with regard to the relation of film and dream in a spiritualist way. Because what he has been doing since his first film is almost similar to what 90’s intellectual Islamist thinkers desired to see in Turkish cinema. Moreover, he usually states he is affected by the cinema of Tarkovsky whose cinematic style is linked together with dreams.

#### **4.4.1 Semih Kaplanoğlu and Spiritual Realism**

Semih Kaplanoğlu stands out with his films with some Islamic metaphors in them. “In a period when Islamic cinema was on the wane in Turkey, the critical acclaim that Yusuf’s Trilogy by Semih Kaplanoğlu received in the international arena has created excitement and celebration in Islamic circles” (Süner, 2014: 48). But, Semih Kaplanoğlu proclaims himself in the lines of spiritual realism as Tarkovsky and others are defined. On this, Asuman Süner says that, “while Kaplanoğlu publicly emphasizes his Muslim identity and relates himself to the Islamic cultural revival, his films are no way continuous with the Islamic cinema tradition in Turkey” (2014: 48).

Prakash Kona indicates that:

Speaking specifically on Tarkovsky’s style, that as opposed to the genre of “religious films” which deal with the role of religion in the lives of people, the “spiritual cinema” is about interior terrains where a person is one with oneself – where faith is not about making public declarations of belief but more about waiting for the miracle to happen, a miracle that occurs on the borders of invisible realms and can be felt rather than logically deciphered (Kona, 2010).

With his sophisticated and intellectual style, Semih Kaplanoğlu should be evaluated in art cinema tradition compared with schematic religious films made in Turkey. As

Süner states (2014: 48) Kaplanoğlu conceives cinema as a spiritual domain. It can be said that Kaplanoğlu mainly argues the reasons for modern day people's problems which are not able to comprehend reality and that cinema can serve as a means of showing people what reality is.

“Art and movies can make us recall the true reality we belong to, they can make us sense it. That's why I try to include anecdotes that hint at concepts in my films,” he explains. (cited in Dalgaldere, 2011). In most of his interviews Semih Kaplanoğlu says that his films reflect on reality in a different light and through this he defines the style of his films as ‘spiritual realist’ - “in the sense that he attempts to balance spirituality and realism without falling into either an extreme realism leaning toward rigid naturalism or into a fantastic spirituality devoid of reality” (Şirin, 2010: 185).

It is possible to say that although his first two films contain the overtones of what he want to show, especially with his trilogy Kaplanoğlu could reach the success to reflect the spiritual concerns. Asuman Süner separates Kaplanoğlu's cinema into two eras as “half of the 2000s” with his earlier two films *Herkes Kendi Evinde* (Away From Home, 2001) and *Meleğin Düşüşü* (Angel's Fall, 2004) and “mid-2000s” with his trilogy *Yumurta*, *Süt* and *Bal* by claiming for the former two films that, “neither of these films fully reflects his gradual awakening and adds that Kaplanoğlu's search for spirituality materialized in the mid-2000s with the trilogy, as he grew increasingly uneasy with the conventional rational, secular and materialist worldview he had internalized” (2014: 48). That's why the discussions are generally on trilogy, but still there are some common points in all his films in some ways. Specifically examining his trilogy -claiming that the vision of spiritual realism comes in full view

in Yusuf's Trilogy- Süner mentions that Kaplanoğlu invokes a sense of Muslim spirituality without addressing contemporary religious issues (2014: 48). It can be said that for Semih Kaplanoğlu it is important to look for the spirituality in realism or reality in spiritualism more than merely seeing reality or metaphysics separately. And in order to reach that reality beyond the seen he uses cinema as medium. As stated briefly that the trilogy narrates the life of a man, Yusuf, in reverse order. It begins with Yusuf's adulthood in the first film *Yumurta*, goes back to his adolescent years in the second film *Süt* and concludes with his childhood in the last one *Bal*.

One of the apparent features of his films is a minimalist and plain cinematic language. In addition, the other common and important features of his cinema are the narration in which he uses metaphors, allegories, and symbols intensely. The plainness enables his films to be read with metaphors. The general features and details in the films of Semih Kaplanoğlu compose his general characteristics of his cinema. "Human, human nature, social types, nature, city and rural, the figure of mother, father and child, solitude, family, objects, animals, home, homecoming, belongingness, are the outstanding aspects in his films" (Toraman, 2011: 32). The plainness and purity of his films is always seen and even it is asked why he chose the titles "egg," "milk" and "honey" for the films, Kaplanoğlu says about the titles that:

Suggest human nature through the purest products of nature that are essentially as pure as human nature. He adds "Eggs symbolize future or adulthood; milk symbolizes late teenage years, a young man leaving his home, separating from his mother; while honey, a magical product of nature, [symbolizes] the spirit of a child (interview; Dalgaldere, 2011).

## **4.5 Main Features of Spiritual Realism**

When one examines the spiritual realism in films, some basic terms come front as time, nature, images and metaphors. It can be possible to change or add some notion in terms of spiritual realist films when examining the spirituality in Semih Kaplanoğlu's films such as destiny and nostalgia.

### **4.5.1 Time**

Time is one of the important notions in films which have spiritual realist features.

The passage of time is, in general, not very obvious or certain in this kind of films. In spiritual realistic cinematic language, time is something that belongs to the individual and depends on his inner world which gains value with experiences. Time generally is taken and shown independently from chronological, homogenous or mathematical order, thus, time is evaluated in an area beyond any physical perception (Toraman, 2011: 19).

Some theorists have not written about spiritual film explicitly but their theories and concepts can be used for the resolution of some other questions like Gilles Deleuze's time-image and the crystal of time. Therefore, to mention about time in spiritual realism, Deleuze's time and image theories are important. "Different from the model of "movements-image", where there is a tightly structured narrative and where objects and settings have a functional reality, "time-image" cinema tends to describe open-ended situations where things do not necessarily serve a narrative purpose." (Süner, 2014: 49). Moreover, for Deleuze, time image is pure visual and sonic integrity:

In motion image oriented cinema, only the affecting format related to motion is essential, but a visual and sonic integrity is not. In time image cinema, there is “Crystalline narration” composed of pure visual and sonic. There is not certain events in crystalline narration and the characters do not react to happenings in the film. “Crystalline narration is quite different... sensory-motor situations have given a way to pure optical and sound situations, to which characters have become seers, cannot or will not react. So great is their need to “see” properly what there is in the situation (Deleuze, 1989:128).

In accordance with Deleuze’s time image cinema, Semih Kaplanoğlu creates a specific cinematic style and meaning with ‘pure optical and sound situations’ beside his minimal narration. Contrary to motion image, audience is active and free to question and generate ideas. And with the images Kaplanoğlu puts story in background and allows audience to ask questions. Moreover we witness the time image in his cinema with the immobile scenes, still plan sequences and calm atmosphere which are the features of it.

Mostly, when it is adapted into Yusuf’s Trilogy, the visual style of Yusuf’s trilogy is also closer to “time-image” cinema because of its preference for long shots and long takes that present situations in their spatial and temporal entirety, without any interruption. Time is not divided into fragments through heavy editing. Events are de-dramatized. No musical soundtrack is used (Süner, 2014: 49).

In Semih Kaplanoğlu’s films, there is a unique time comprehension. In his time understanding, it is like audience is inside another world and another time. In addition, the real time is one within that ‘imaginary’ time. Semih Kaplanoğlu describes the time in his films in the frame of spiritual realism

We are here right now in this life, this is the real thing; but here's another world. We are in a universe and this situation is not only limited to us and our vision, and to our being human. There are a lot of things together here at the moment, and actually I am concerned to make the situation where everything is together,

interested in transmitting and reflecting it. That's why, actually my concern is to create a moment in a moment, to create another moment, and to establish together what we have seen and haven't seen" (cited in Aytaç, Çiftçi, 2009).

While Yusuf's Trilogy represents three stages of a man's life, Kaplanoğlu is not interested in offering a sociologically accurate representation of reality. As in Yusuf Trilogy, the time is not linear. For Kaplanoğlu cinema, time is the center of life, and the past should be approached in an integrity with present and future time. On time in his films Süner (2014: 54) states that spiritual realism is conveyed in Yusuf's trilogy also through the idea of "cosmic time." Time is represented the trilogy as the experience of a perpetual present that includes life and death, past and future. Death, in this regard, is not seen as nothingness but as giving birth to a new existence. The past penetrates the future. Even the order of trilogy is going from end to beginning. While in the first film *Yumurta*, Yusuf in his adulthood, in *Süt* he is in puberty and in the last film of trilogy *Bal*, we see Yusuf in his childhood. Semih Kaplanoğlu defines this situation as peeling something to reach its core. In Kaplanoğlu cinema, especially in the *Meleğin Düşüşü*, *Yumurta*, *Süt* and *Bal* movies, time is intended to be made visible by making 'time' cycle apparent. Instead of homogeneous time sense, it emphasizes sense of time belonging to inner world.

#### **4.5.2 Destiny**

The cinematic language of the spiritual realism establishes a bond with spirituality through fate in a strong way. "God transmits what is best for human through fate. What is important to make the audience feel a more supreme existence, and a stronger willpower than human, which is apart from human and controls human" (Toraman, 2011: 21).

Among his films destiny notion is seen in *Yumurta* more dominantly. Spirituality proposes to narrate characters and events from a different perspective and destiny is one of the center points in this narration. “The film *Yumurta* has an important place in Turkish films as a non-secular film, aside from its other qualifications” (Gergerlioğlu, 2013: 35). Instead of having the sense of destiny in which there is no other solution than surrender, Semih Kaplanoğlu brings a new dimension to destiny notion and the relation with spirituality in his cinema is established on destiny very powerfully.

After his mother’s death, Yusuf goes to his hometown, Tire -a small town- and his plan is going back after funeral. But one of his distant relatives, Ayla says to him that his mother had an oblation and he should not go before fulfilling this will. At first, Yusuf ignores this situation but the ‘destiny’ does not give him up to go until he carries out that will. Some consecutive events like blowing of fuse of the house, couldn’t find the lawyer in his place, coming across one of his old friends, breaking of the glass draws a Yusuf character who cannot go beyond his destiny .

In the final, while Yusuf is trying to return to İstanbul, the dog which does not let him go is the peak point of destiny that we see during the movie. Yusuf cries and relieves his feelings not just because of his mother’s death or his desperation, but because of his surrendering to destiny and life.

#### **4.5.3 Images and Metaphors**

One of the foremost features of spiritual realism in films is that using images and through these making a metaphorical narrative. Semih Kaplanoğlu is questioning the



meaning of life and the aim of human being with metaphorical elements which remind us of our dreams instead of appealing but superficial human stories. In Islamic sufism, metaphors have a very important place. By preferring to tell his story with metaphors, Kaplanoğlu constitutes a spiritual language in his cinema. When Kaplanoğlu is evaluated among the Muslim critics who have already an admiration to Tarkovsky, his style is found close to Tarkovsky's, although to a lesser extent.

Enver Güneş states that:

By seeing and using dreams as a way opening to the truth, he gives the first signals of sufistic language in Turkey, and this is also shows that he will be able to make much deeper movies as well.” Moreover, he also states that *Yumurta* is an important film that could be compared with *Stalker*, which is the best spiritual film in history. (2009)

Musa Ak examines the metaphors in four films (*Meleğin Düşüşü, Yumurta, Süt, Bal*) of Semih Kaplanoğlu in detail. He states statistically that, there are 46 metaphors in all four films, and 94 times they are used within narrative in different time zones.

When it is examined in terms of time, duration of these metaphors is 90'06" in total 396 minutes for four films. In consideration of these statistics, it is seen that Kaplanoğlu gives place metaphors intensively and establishes his narration on a metaphoric cinematic language (Ak, 2012: 36). Starting with the name of the film, it carries many metaphors in it, According to Ak's table that some of the most common metaphors in Semih Kaplanoğlu's trilogy films are chosen and are going to be mentioned briefly. Firstly for the film *Yumurta*, the specific metaphors are “egg” which symbolizes the rural and also the rebirth of Yusuf, “well” reminds us the story of Prophet Joseph, and also well shows his hometown and when he get rid of that well it again shows that he reborn - about the well in the film Uygur Şirin comments that the well is one of the key words of *Yumurta*. It defines both destiny and rural,

then it brings these two with Yusuf. During the film, we come across with the ‘well’ in different meanings and connotations. As an occupation in which he was the apprentice when he was a child, as a place that he cannot be able to exit, as a poem in his book, and as the meaning of love in the identity of an old frame in the poem, but above all as the sign and symbol of destiny (Şirin, 2012). “Dream”, again, shows his forthcoming transformation, “blood and oblation” symbolizes that Yusuf’s destiny is that rural town and the fate is now in his forehead with blood, “flowers” shows Yusuf’s is getting older and lastly the “mirror” shows that Zeynep alters her personality.

Secondly, in the second film of trilogy, *Süt*, the metaphors are “milk” symbolizes purity “snake” generally symbolizes evil, one of the scenes that Yusuf does not do anything when he sees the snake reflects his renunciation, “coffee cup” says that someone else comes between mother and son “fish” usually symbolizes fortune, and in the film it shows the destiny that prevents Yusuf to kill station chef who has a relation between his mother, with “mirror” Yusuf explores his mother’s femininity while she was looking herself and primping. Again the mirror relates to a woman character.

Lastly, in the last film of trilogy, *Bal*, as in his other films we encounter various metaphors such as, “bird” is a kind of messenger in film, and also a guide and guardian during the film, “bees” represents the communication between son and father, moreover, Yusuf sees bees in his dreams as they get message from his father after his lose, “dream” as metaphor emphasizes that our questions, non responses and uneasiness are all because of our separation from God, “tree” on the other hand have

been denoted to life in primeval cultures as in this film, “milk” shows that the relation between son and father is very strong (benefited from Musa Ak’s tables and examples - Ak, 2012: 36-92).

Apart from all of these objects, wares, animals and assets “home” is also one of the principal spaces for Kaplanoğlu’s films. By using the skill of cinema to play with the perception, he opens a door into another different world. Even though, it seems that Yusuf finds that symbolic home that he has been looking for, once lost, once found at the end of *Yumurta* with Ayla, indeed his image when he is sleeping under the huge rooted trees in the film *Bal*, is really symbolizing to home coming. Because this trilogy’s common feeling 'loss' may be not there only in the venter where the first disengagement has not taken place yet (Aytaç, 2010: 24).

Regarding the films of Kaplanoğlu, it is possible to mention about over-emphatic use of metaphor by Semih Kaplanoğlu. During the films audiences are expected to infer the meanings from the images and metaphors in the films. Director does this intentionally but excessively, moreover, because the things are attributed meanings it is very possible to infer some meanings from any objects, views, dialogues.

Similarly, Seçil Bükler and Hasan Karabulut read another metaphor in their study

‘Journey to the Soul of the Provinces: Semih Kaplanoğlu film the *Egg* (2012) that:

We can easily claim that the name of the film and its space are closely related. Because an egg reminds us of the provinces because of small scale poultry coops. Furthermore, quietness and heat are vital for the embryo to develop, incubate and hatch. An egg is the symbol of the world, it unfolds life and the world, standing for life, the world is created from an egg too because an egg has everything in it to bear life. With its wide spaces, meadows and quietness, the provinces could well be the host of the egg. An egg could be the home for Yusuf as well as the chick.

#### 4.5.4 Nostalgia

We can see many similarities between the character Yusuf in trilogy and in director's own life and especially his childhood. Moreover, this nostalgic approach can be seen in one of his interview:

I drew on my own past experiences while shaping the character of Yusuf. So we can say that Yusuf has parts from me. I referred to my own youth and childhood while writing the three scripts and I believe I was able to handle the issues about Yusuf's life, troubles and quests realistically. My own childhood served as a point of reference for the script of *Bal* as well. My troubles at school while trying to learn how to read and write, my questions which grown-ups left unanswered, the intense cruelty and richness of nature... In a way, a child forms his personality while discovering the world with curiosity. An occasional misunderstanding leading to naïve mistakes, dreams, joys and sorrows allows him to reach the truth. I hope *Bal* allows us to reach the truth of Yusuf.

In his films, it can be deduced that there is a nostalgic and exotic spin as well.

Through some anecdotes, metaphors and scenes like miraj kandil, he shows and sometimes he reminds the viewer the older and in a way more spiritual days of life in Islamic sense. And he tries to establish reality by using these allusions. We can see this with his own words.

“Anatolian people are already familiar with these narratives,” (mentioning Prophet Joseph and Prophet Jacob) Kaplanoğlu says, adding that the reason he uses these allusions in his films is that he wants to remind viewers of these narratives. He says: “Reality is something directly associated with God. Through acknowledging God ... we discover our own reality. ... My intent is to make films that will help the knowledge that we already have inside us to resurface.” (interview; Dalgaldere, 2011).

#### 4.6 Comparative Analysis of Semih Kaplanoğlu with Other Three Directors

At the beginning of this chapter, three pioneer directors from the world cinema, Andrei Tarkovsky from Russia, Robert Bresson from France and Ingmar Bergman from Sweden were mentioned. These three director's common point is the notion of spirituality and the spiritual realism seen in their movies. Furthermore, Semih Kaplanoğlu from Turkish cinema is the one who is obviously affected from these directors and whose films carry the features of spiritual realism. However, despite all these directors are evaluated under the head of spirituality, their ways and some of their questions to reach that 'spiritual' concerns are different in some ways. In this part, firstly short comparisons in terms of styles, especially between Kaplanoğlu and Tarkovsky, will be shown and then the contrast arising from cultural and social and national differences will be made in order to understand their nuances of these directors. As he indicated most of his interviews, there is an obvious effect of Tarkovsky on Semih Kaplanoğlu. One of the Tarkovsky's film *Zerkalo* (Mirror, 1975) which affected Kaplanoğlu deeply, shows its impact on Kaplanoğlu's films apparently. Specific to the film *Mirror* the styles of Tarkovsky and Kaplanoğlu are seen close to each other. According to Kaplanoğlu, an 'urbanite' does not know anything about life, s/he does not have any idea about the natural flow of time. The kid finds his futures safety in nature, and nature trains him (Devarrieux, 2009: 54). Similarly, Kaplanoğlu is also keen on nature and plants. All plants, both in the house or in nature, have affected him. He especially states that "I was interested and have observed plants and nature since my childhood" (Kaplanoğlu, 2011: 111).

While sometimes we see that nostalgic features in the films of Semih Kaplanoğlu as mentioned before, in those other directors' films especially in Tarkovsky's movies, for example in the film *Mirror* some attributions to his childhood can be seen.

Tarkovsky says that, one should believe his origins and needs to know where he came from and where he is going to, why he is living and feel loyalty to his creator. Semih Kaplanoğlu transfers his memories and experiences more directly to his films. Especially in *Bal*, it is very easy to link up some scenes about the little kid and his own childhood memories as can be read in the interview book made with him by Uygur Şirin. The scenes in the school are mostly inspired by his memories. He states that "Through this (spiritual realistic style) I believe we (Turkish filmmakers) can establish a cinematic language through which we can easily and freely relate our very own roots, and one through which we can relate the realities of the past together with the realities of the present day (cited in Dalgaldere, 2011).

As it was stated in previous parts, one of the most basic feature seen in spiritual realist films is using minimalist language. Semih Kaplanoğlu chooses a simple and minimalist language as Bresson and Tarkovsky, these directors usually cast amateur actors in order to make a plain acting, natural light is used as far as possible, and we see long shot with nonmoving cameras, lastly there is no extradiegetic music heard during the films. Therefore, Semih Kaplanoğlu makes his film in a minimalist and plain way. Furthermore, as Oruç states:

Both in Bresson and Kaplanoğlu's films, the spirituality is not far from the daily life. Contrarily, all the confusion of daily life is transferred naively into the sense of transcendency like Kaplanoğlu also states that spirituality cannot be disconnected from reality. In the film *The Diary of a Country Priest*, daily life is shown with its all ordinariness and boringness. (2014: 12).

Andrei Tarkovsky in his film *Mirror*, he uses a kind of episodic storytelling which we may liken that in Semih Kaplanoğlu's trilogy. Furthermore, similar to the objects used or events that we named as metaphors in Semih Kaplanoğlu's films like milk, well, mirror etc. We also see that Tarkovsky uses some objects and images in more than one films as well. "In his most of films, in points of conflict, a milk pitcher pours to ground and symbolizes that familial relations are going to split apart or the characters rise to sky suddenly with an invisible hand or they fall down" (Yaren, 2000).

Lastly, the notion of time is complicated in many films partaking in this style and nature and natural events are taking place a great role such as wind, water, vapor, steam, flame. Again in the film *Mirror*, as roughly said that destiny is following us in our life, this is almost the same as we see in *Yumurta*. In *Yumurta*, even though Yusuf tries to go, his destiny never gives him up to go.

It is seen that Kaplanoğlu uses the general features of spiritual realism especially as Tarkovsky and Bresson did, therefore, he can constitute a language of spiritual realism. However, when it comes to contrast, some disparities between their aims and manners are seen. Initially, when three directors from world cinema are examined, some little differences are seen in their way to create spirituality. We see differences mostly from the characters in their films. As it was stated before, in the films of Bresson, when the characters are in conflict and discrepancy between their life in the real world and spirituality they find the solution in suicide as in *Mouchette* (1967), *Le diable probablement* (Devil Probably, 1977) and *Une femme douce* (A Gentle Woman, 1969) On the other hand in Tarkovsky's movies, despite of that

discrepancy, we see characters who struggle to hold on to life with powerful psychology like the stalker in *Stalker* (1979), Domeniko in *Nostalghia* (1983) and Alexander in *Offret* (The Sacrifice, 1986). Even the reason of the suicide of insane Domeniko in *Nostalghia* is not because of weakness but for showing the way out to humanity. They believe that they can change everything with their spirituality. (cited in Özdaman, 2014). On the other hand, in the films of Bergman, any way out is not seen because Bergman who confronted various failures states that he even does not know the way out. Thus, in spite of their disparities, they were commonly looking for the answers to their questions in a spiritual extent.

When it comes to Semih Kaplanoğlu; as he indicated in most of his interviews, there is an obvious effect of Tarkovsky on him and mainly using a spiritualistic approach in his films like Bresson and Bergman, his films carry some common points with them in various ways. However, still it can be said that because of some specific features that Kaplanoğlu's films and his identity as a Muslim director, they show differences in certain ways. While these three directors underline the faith and faithlessness, on the other side Kaplanoğlu's spiritualism is more likely giving nostalgic and mystic meanings to Islam religion as a he publicly emphasizes his Muslim identity and relates himself to the Islamic cultural revival. He shows the reality in a spiritual level and existence of God with invisible symbols, signs and metaphors.

When Semih Kaplanoğlu tries to adapt what these directors had done to Turkish cinema, some features are seen to extrinsic because of cultural and social codes. Considering Bresson, who had grown up in an environment without any repression



about religion which was a part of life, a film setting could be created to question that religion. However in Turkey, starting with the republic period, westernization ideas of governors and intellectuals suppressed religion, seeing it as a danger against progress. These repressions have continued on Islam for long times. Then, in the times when passing into multi party system, despite the changes in repression, a threat risk about reactionism was still seen. And, these effects were also in cinema parallel to state and in the films, religion were shown badly. Therefore, after being repressed in a secular society, and when there is an occasion to use Islam religion and make film around it, the results more seem a 'born again' situation. When this rebirth happens, the invention of tradition and a fascination for the same degree of that tradition show up. Thus, an admiration to traditions arises without questioning seen in the other three directors films.

Moreover, again while it can be easily understood from Kaplanoğlu's interviews that he mainly shows the beyond specifically as a path to God. On the other hand, "Tarkovsky's religious cinema does not depict Christ or God, but does reveal a world in which the unknown is not in the next country or the next town but right here, in this building, in this room." (Robinson, 2007: 275) Furthermore, in Tarkovsky, spirituality is not so much about Christianity, which served as a leitmotif to his work, or about institutional religion, as much as it is about how we go through our life on earth, which is a journey of spirit more than anything else.

Another feature of Kaplanoğlu films are symbols and images as it was stated. He is using symbols, metaphors to tell the spirit. However, the spiritual landscapes in Tarkovsky are deeply private worlds:

Not the domain of symbols and metaphors attempting to impress the audience with their sense of grandeur and becoming. Tarkovsky dislikes symbols, metaphors, parables and phantasies. He acknowledges the power of dreams, the occurrence of miracles, the movement of inanimate objects and the existence of God, but he denies symbols and metaphors.” (Robinson, 2007: 155).

All in all, in this part of the study, Semih Kaplanoğlu and spiritual realism have been examined closely in this chapter. It is possible to say that Kaplanoğlu’s films, especially his trilogy, are not under the scope of in a conventionalist or classic realist line. He is using a spiritualistic ways in order to create his world, in this sense, a world with spiritual reality. While doing this, he carries the similar stylistic features of some pioneer directors into his cinema, however, some discrepancies are shown up when they are examined in terms of cultural, social and national backgrounds. Thus, it seems very possible to deduce that there are different ways to reach a spiritual realism in cinema.

## CHAPTER 5

### REHA ERDEM AND ANTHROPOCENE REALISM

Reha Erdem is one of the pioneering directors with his unique and innovative style in the last decades of Turkish cinema. His films are not like the films regarded as naturalist and realist in a classical way that reflect the life as it is.

He looks at the life from a different realistic perspective compared to conventional cinema does. He compels the viewer to see the images in a culture outside of their routine social codes with their different aspects. Moreover, the films are not completely a fantasy world, rather they are realistic and seen in a way that we have already known in a daily life and, but with their ‘weird’ characters, vague places and times and their dreamlike narrations, it becomes possible to say that Reha Erdem creates his own reality through his films. Thus, his films take a non-conventionalist and non-realist / place in Turkish Cinema. As we understand from his interviews, even in times when he was a student in France and making films in an institution based on Cinema Direct ecole, his desire was to make films in the opposite way of cinema direct which is a documentary originated genre. Senem Aytaç (2009: 73) states about his style that:

When we look at Erdem’s films, on one hand we meet a world which looks for the answers of some fundamental questions about time, space, and human in a well-

grounded today and here that are bound to gravity; on the other hand, we come across a world which creates its own reality by breaking with that defined external reality through cinematic expression. Erdem has a style that is busy with the details of everyday life while making everyday closer to the fantastic ones. For this reason, while looking at the films on Erdem's filmography, we can only open the door of that world by trying to describe it within the perspectives that he escaped or tried to escape from the reality, not within the tight bonds between the reality and the codes of the world opened to us on the curtain.

Reha Erdem also explains his views on reality issues in art and cinema in many of the interviews that he is asked about his films. With his words, the reasons and the ways of making the non-realist films can be understood: "I do not find realism interesting. I mostly chase for searching meaning. I believe you can produce only a story, not create the meaning with the claim that I haunted the truth itself. However, only meaning can make art exciting or thrilling. I think that can only be defeated by the renewal" (Kuleli, 2006: 23).

As it was stated, when we look at Turkish cinema history, the tendency for realism is much more dominant. And when Reha Erdem is asked about whether his films are out of this realistic tradition starting with his first film *A Ay* (Oh, Moon, 1988), he states his place in Turkish cinema and the directors and their films that he has taken as examples which is cited by Yücel (2005: 61):

During the times that I was shooting *A Ay* (*Oh, Moon*), even if we had opposed that idea saying "Turkish cinema is realistic", there would have been no other cinema ecocole which we could substitute. But, for instance, the reason why I appreciate most is Metin Erksan's fantastic side, and his using the cinema as a fantastic factor. For example, *Umut* (*Hope*) of Yılmaz Güney still seems to be a miracle: his use of cinema as plastic is extraordinary. I also like *Sürü* (*The Herd*), but it has never motivated me to make movie. However, there were a number of movies such as *Umut* (*Hope*), *Sevmek Zamanı* (*Time to Love*), or *Son Kuşlar* (*The Last Birds*) which very briefly represents something I described as plastic that is not realistic... These films and directors still carry the same meaning for me. Those are the people against voyeuristic cinema"

With his first film *A Ay*, which is stylized in black and white visual structure and tells the story of a teen girl, we witness a new different style from conventionalist and experimental cinema. The orphaned girl, Yekta is living in between dream and reality to look for meanings. One of the scenes of the film is that a mystic warden harangues to her and says “Never search the meanings and the reasons of your dreams! Dream is just for dream, the bird that you see in your dream is the bird that you see in your dream. Dream birds are not like these birds, they speak another language.” This is the way as Reha Erdem looks at reality in cinema. In one of his speech, he repeats these words for reality and states that for some films people comment as they do not seem like the life. Yes, cinema is different from the life. For example, the bird in the cinema is the bird of cinema. There is no such a bird in real life. (Erdem)

Like Reha Erdem’s films, when a film carries non realist elements, generally it is considered as surrealist in cinema. In the example of Reha Erdem, his films are also examined as surrealist in many studies, articles, columns and writings. However, emerged an art movement in Vienna in the late 1950 called ‘fantastic realism’ which is inspired by surrealism is obviously seen much more suitable approach for his films. Although it is seen difficult to adapt into cinema because of referring to the group of painters’ workings in painting, because their images were dreamlike visions from the subconscious painted in a realistic manner with lofty themes, such as War and Peace, Culture and Nature, the Rational and Irrational, civilisational and, in the narrower sense, psychological problematic, it might be more suited to Reha Erdem’s films rather than surrealism.

Nevertheless, even if a relation could be established between fantastic realism and Reha Erdem's films, it also would not be the most suitable term to describe his cinema, unlike the directors in previous chapters and the terms they are related with.

Although there are some specific and common points in almost each of his film, which show us that the films certainly belong to him, the viewers also come across specific concerns, issues and unique styles and narrations. This makes it hard to classify his films under a certain headings or genre. Therefore, instead of focusing on just one mode or genre, it would be more useful to define his cinema with its most specific features that he has used in almost all of his films, such as unspecified time and place and also with the themes about ecology, women, anthropocene epoch that we have witnessed especially in his last three films *Kosmos* (2010), *Jin* (2013) and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* (Singing Women, 2013) that will be examined soon. The specific and common points that compose his general filmic style are, "unspecified time", "unspecified space", "sound and music usage". These are also the elements of we put him out of conventionalist cinema.

Reha Erdem mentions about the general concepts of his films that "My films have different rhythms but they all come together on the same point" (2009: 155). The similarities in his films are that all of his films are composed of montage, they all have their own specific time and space and they are supported by sounds and music usage. Thus, in this part of the study, these specific features in the cinema of Reha Erdem which also make his films non realist will be examined over the films.

## 5.1 Main Features of Reha Erdem's Cinema

### 5.1.1 Sounds and Music

Sound and music usage are also the elements supporting Reha Erdem's montage cinema. While he is creating atmospheres for the world he created in the films, he uses sounds and music. Showing difference from its usage in conventional cinema, music and sounds have important place in Reha Erdem's non conventionalist cinema.

In addition to using diegetic sounds, non-diegetic sounds -and even sometimes intra-diegetic sounds because of the self-conscious repetition of same sounds as Ali Deniz Sönmez (2011) stated- are also used in Reha Erdem's films. For example, in *Beş Vakit* (Times and Winds, 2006), as a diegetic sound we hear the sound of a donkey repetitively, but after many repetitions it starts to function as non-diegetic sound which then is used to describe the characters. When Yakup's father is on screen we hear the donkey sound again and again. Moreover, we hear the sounds of the seagulls when Zekeriya is in trouble. As Reha Erdem says, these are the fictional points in the film in order to tell the conflict between animals and the character.

To be more precise about the music in his films, it can be said that he prefers to use music which does not directly reflect what is seen on screen emotionally in a classical way. Instead of using the music with which we are familiar from the scenes of classical narratives, he even sometimes prefers to use the music in the scene contrary to expectation.

Burak Acar (2009: 32) gives example from the birth scene in *Korkuyorum Anne* (What's a Human Anyway?, 2004) that during the scene which we expect to hear

happy music, he uses very sad tones. By doing so, he plays with our perceptions and takes us out of the limits of what we have memorized from conventional cinema.

About this matter, the director himself also indicates that “I do not like when the music becomes the background to the film. I consider it is useless if the music does not bring a new meaning to film (2009: 167).” Furthermore, when we look at the the film *Beş Vakit*, where we hear azan and prays in the village, it reflects the religious situation out of frame. But what is opposite sense in this film is the overused themes of Arvo Part that create a great geographic and cultural contrast with the film’s location. Sönmez (2011) states on that in a film set in a Turkish village, hearing the music of an Estonian composer of orthodox church music creates a really uncanny situation. However, it functions as the alienation object for the audience and puts the film’s narrative on a universal level.

Music also becomes the main tool to keep the rhythm of the story together, which was originally created as a shattered narrative. In addition to using music in these ways, it is possible to say that he also ‘shapes’ the films with music together. For example, we hear arabesque music in general of *Hayat Var* (My Only Sunshine, 2008) as music and when it comes to the sounds, in most of the scenes of *Hayat Var* we hear insistent and unknown sounds, murmurs, moanings, breathings which give the film a catastrophic and uncanny atmosphere; moreover, these sounds explain the emotions in narration instead of dialogues.

Thus, music and sounds we confront in Erdem’s other films are also various and specific: they sometimes give the meaning to the scene, create the atmosphere or just confuse audience because of its opposite meanings to the scene.



Reha Erdem says in an interview that half of the cinema is image, and the other half is voice. And we can see the importance of sounds in his cinema. Like *Hayat Var*, *Kosmos* is also one of the films that sounds have a great role. As Acar (2009:25) states, throughout the film we hear bomb explosions, bird sounds, plane sounds, siren sounds, glass breaking sounds and all these shape the place and atmosphere. Similarly, we witness the people sound like animal and they all continue till the end of film. As it will be stated next in unspecified space in Reha Erdem films, it is possible to say that with the help of these sounds the place of the film is shaped in mind. While the noise of wind shows a place with cold climate, bomb sounds and conflicts state that the film is taking place in a border town. Mostly, when *Neptün* and *Kosmos* sound like animals and scream, it can be deduced that they are flirting as it happens in nature.

Again in the film *Jin*, which has less dialogue and is mostly taken place in nature, we hear sounds from nature and animals in a peaceful atmosphere; however, the sudden conflict, helicopter, bomb sounds destroy that peace, and by doing so, the director creates the meaning, then we see the oppositeness of war and nature with these sounds.

As we see, the sounds and music in Reha Erdem films have an important role in terms of creating cinematic narration in an unconventional way.

### **5.1.2 Unspecified Space**

As it is mentioned, we see that Reha Erdem sometimes makes use of sounds in order to describe the places and locations; it is because there is vagueness in his films in

terms of defining places. Then, when we look at the films, it can be said that another most salient feature is the places that the films appear in. At first view, they are known as places, cities, or towns; however, these places are not directly same as we are familiar with in our daily life. They are not shown as how we know and are accustomed to see. Except for three of his films, İstanbul is seen as the common place. However, unlike in most of Turkish films, we come across a different and isolated İstanbul portrait. We perceive that it is İstanbul, but it is not shown with the scenes and views that we have been accustomed to see on screen. It seems more likely that he created an artificial İstanbul in a fictional way. Although every time we look at İstanbul from the different point of view, they are also consistent when they are considered together. In *Kaç Para Kaç* (A Run for Money, 1999), *Korkuyorum Anne* and *Hayat Var*, we see an artificial İstanbul from the characters perception. Reha Erdem reflects the emotions of characters through the way of how they experience İstanbul. He gives the example from *Kaç Para Kaç* to define that artificial location: “We tried to change daily İstanbul for the film. When Selim leaves from the shop in tunnel, he locks the door and walks that we hear the sounds of his steps, and it is seen that the street is empty and the only thing to be seen is the man and the city. This is what I said as artificial” (Erdem, 2009:149).

Furthermore, in *A Ay* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*, we see the Prince’s Islands in İstanbul. In the film *A Ay*, for example, it focuses on how the ruins of the house and the image of İstanbul are differentiated from the known. Although it was shot in the well-known places of the city, another İstanbul image different from the other movie was created in the film *A Ay*. City is also a place of being rootless, games, open-

endedness, dreams, as much as alienation, uncanny, claustrophobia, and obsolescence. In this sense, house forms a quite different world from the city with its unknown downstairs and the room not being entered despite its obsolescence. As Ercan (2011:13) says it is a representative space where both national and personal history intersect with its museumesque atmosphere. On the other hand, filmic space and simple present tense make it being perceived as a world although there is nothing to see the interior of the house, and form the basis of the contradictions emerged in opposition to the idea of nostalgia and a dull future.

Apart from İstanbul which has an important place for Reha Erdem's films, we are visiting different towns in his other three films; *Kosmos*, *Beş Vakit* and *Jin*. Actually we do not know where these films take place because they are no name towns, and there are little clues on them, but we are informed by extradiegetic knowledge that the border town is Kars in *Kosmos*, the village is in Çanakkale in *Beş Vakit*, and *Jin* apparently shows us there is southeastern Anatolia region, which is a conflict area despite of that the film was shot in Edremit and Mersin. In a way, the imaginations of the viewers are allowed by the director. Sensöz calls the places in Erdem's films as "elselands" and he states that "They are created in the audience's mind as well as on film. As a result of these "elseland chronotopes," characters who have adolescent struggles, characters who are in between accepted reality and their minds' reality and a time that's indescribable are born and reproduced in every narrative. Briefly these "elselands" signify a time and space that are on the edge of our reality "(Sensöz, 2011).

It would be said that the uncertainty and vagueness of place is another factor that provides Reha Erdem's films to be non realist. Firat Yücel states that:

It is not completely in a different place. It is partly the world we know, and partly the one we don't know. It is also not a fantastic world which tells a story credible and consistent within its own borders, and has its own internal rules. It also refuses to become a kind of virtual shelter altering a gravity with another gravity in order to ensure the audience to escape from the current world for a few hours. Where it heads you toward is your own life, is the world and the community you live in. But this time, you are not encouraged to think about how the film is compatible with reality; you are supposed to look into your own world within the holes that the film has opened on that assumed reality (Yücel, 2009: 8).

On the basis of what Shiel says as "Cities are the places that determine the relationship between cinema and social realism" (cited by Ercan, 2011: 12), it may be right to say that Reha Erdem's reason of reflecting the places different from its mostly known shape is escaping from the daily and social realism, in other words, this makes his cinema non realist.

### **5.1.3 Unspecified Time**

Beside those ambiguous spaces in the films of Reha Erdem, time is another salient feature with its uncertain presentation. Events in the films are not clearly stated in terms of time or date. It is more likely seen as creating a filmic world out of time. All the films are passing in their specific time. He states this uncertainty and vagueness in his films:

My films have their own times. Time is only specific for that film. It might be 1962 or 2067. What I say is the figures and locations and the history, and these are only existed in that film. The reason of that is I love the artificiality in cinema. In my opinion, realism and naturalism are the enemies of cinema. There is a trend now saying that it is like inside the life, it is like in right here at the back street. However, I am interested in the cinema that is real in a sense but can relate itself with the produced meaning and reality. Thus, dates and times are not daily (2009: 149).

The films do not refer to any certain time when they are examined in terms of costumes, spaces, or any other details related with time. In his first film *A Ay*, which is shot black and white and evokes a feeling belong to the past, the time of general and atmosphere are seen different from the ones that costumes and designs belong to. This is another feature to make his films non conventionalist and realist. Mostly, this causes alienations on audience that exactly the same as Reha Erdem wants to do. The viewer does not deduce what is the term, period of time of the film. Fırat Yücel says about the movie of *Korkuyorum Anne* that “It was a movie which seems as if it belongs to a period with colors, costumes; but in fact it is a movie which doesn’t stick to any periods (Yücel, 2009: 150).

In the film *Kosmos*, we never comprehend how many days, weeks, or months have been passing since Battal (Kosmos) came to the town, and we perceive that most likely time is static. Because there is not any adverb of time, it seems time is not passing. In addition, the clock tower in the square sometimes works, but sometimes acts up. It only shows us that time exists, but it also makes us live as if there were no time. Moreover, in the film *Beş Vakit*, definitely the time in the village of *Beş Vakit* goes by in a different way from the city of modern man. “At the beginning of the movie, the old grandmother in the village tells the story of Yakup by saying "His father's father's father was like that. “The time of the story elapses not in parallel with the time of calendar, but in the natural flow of generations following each other” (Altıntaş, 2009: 62). Thus, it is true to say that the films have their own times and sometimes the characters create their times in narration.

Then, beside these main features and the non realist narration that are common in Reha Erdem films, they may show differences in their themes. According to Ceyda Aşar:

Erdem indicated his “eccentric art” even in 1989 by showing the traces of his cinema which excludes casual and realistic one at his first movie *A Ay*. He also made a movie relatively 'close to reality', *Kaç Para Kaç*, which has a clear story. However, while the themes such as lovelessness, rebellion, growing pains, provincialism in the big cities are repeating in his six movies which are very similar and totally disparate, his most visible route became to get away from the ‘realistic’ view” (Aşar, 2010: 11).

Thus, for his initial films especially *A Ay* and *Hayat Var*, fixation on pains of adolescence can be seen as a major theme. This is most distinctly seen in *Beş Vakit*, which tells the traumas of three teenagers growing up in a village. On the other hand, in *Hayat Var*, with an artificial İstanbul views, we are watching flutters of a teenage girl. In *Korkuyorum Anne* and *Kaç Para Kaç*, which are seen to have more conventional story, the director is looking for answer for his question “What is human?” and draws attention to the issues such as being stuck in the big cities.

Then, while these main themes are seen until his fourth film *Kosmos*, with and after *Kosmos*, other concerns have started to be seen dominantly in a more dystopian and apocalyptic atmosphere. The films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* are much more related with nature, ecology, feminism, and also belief. When they are examined in detail, it is possible to say that the apocalyptic atmosphere is reflected as both product and producer, so this can be examined in anthropocentrism. Moreover, as it was mentioned, he offers the places we know in such a manner that we do not know and in an ambiguous time, but anyway we can infer those are the dates we were in. For this reason, it is not possible to tell about a literally 'future' description.

Searching the dystopian mood in the movies not at the future, but at the present time will be reasonable in order to interpret the films of Reha Erdem. In a sense, in Erdem's films it is possible to live the 'anthropocene' epoch which is thought to be the times we are in. Therefore, looking at these films from anthropocentric point of view in cinema is much more suitable for his filmic style. Thus, in this part of this chapter, Reha Erdem's last three films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* will be studied in the frame of 'anthropocene cinema' with these main themes.

## **5.2 What is Anthropocene**

In order to understand anthropocene cinema or the cinema in anthropocene clearly, it is important to comprehend the term anthropocene that is gained traction only in the past few years and describes the present geological epoch. Actually the holocene epoch which we have been officially in it from the last major ice age, is updated in and some experts start to call a new epoch as anthropocene. The word is constituted according to Stromberg (2013) from anthropo, for "man," and cene, for "new"—because human-kind has caused mass extinctions of plant and animal species, polluted the oceans and altered the atmosphere, among other lasting impacts. "This human based epoch refers to the idea that human activities since the Industrial Revolution have led the Earth into a new geological epoch, in which humankind has played a decisive role in radically reshaping the world's ecosystems, the biosphere, and even the geological record itself" (Kara, 2016: 3).

Even though there has been general scientific acceptance on labeling this epoch as the age of humans and the meaning of it, there has been not a clear consensus on

when the era began and whether it was time to end the holocene epoch and replace it with the Anthropocene. On the other hand, although there are some opinion about how this term first is coined is that it had been proposed by Sir Charles Lyell in 1833 and adopted by the International Geological Congress in 1885, but as mostly known about the ones who revived the term, Richard Monastersky (2015) transmits that “In the 1970s and 1980s, Paul Crutzen made major discoveries about the ozone layer and how pollution from humans could damage it — work that eventually earned him a share of a Nobel prize. In 2000, he and Eugene Stoermer of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor argued that the global population has gained so much influence over planetary processes that the current geological epoch should be called the anthropocene.” Again by indicating to assign a more specific date to the onset of the anthropocene seems somewhat arbitrary, Crutzen and Stoermer (2000: 17) say that “we propose the latter part of the 18th century, although we are aware that alternative proposals can be made (some may even want to include the entire holocene). However, we choose this date because, during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable.”

From the beginning of Industrial Revolution, humans have caused too many damages on earth. However, when the impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere are considered, it can be deduced that most of the negative effect will be continuing to be emerged in a long term. “Without major catastrophes such as an enormous volcanic eruption, an unexpected epidemic, a large-scale nuclear war, an asteroid impact, a new ice age, or continued plundering of Earth’s resources by partially still primitive technology mankind will remain a major geological force for many



millennia, maybe millions of years, to come” (Crutzen, Sotermer, 2000:18). Then, the human-driven processes that are likely to leave a lasting mark on the planet include: “habitat destruction and the introduction of invasive species, which are causing widespread extinctions; ocean acidification, which is changing the chemical makeup of the seas; and urbanization, which is vastly increasing rates of sedimentation and erosion” (Kolbert, 2010).

Furthermore, since this scientific term was coined and discussed, it has also been subject to social and cultural studies beside geological sciences. And for also those who are interested in the social and cultural dimensions of the Anthropocene, Von Mossner (2014: 204) states that “they tend to look not only at its present challenges but also at its potential future dimensions and the consequences for ecosystems and humans alike.”

### **5.3 Anthropocene cinema or Anthropocenema**

As it is mentioned, anthropocene has also provided new models to culture, politics, and everyday life. Besides studying the term anthropocene in environmental and geological studies in scientific community, an interest to study it in art and cultural studies has also emerged. In her study named Anthropocenema: Cinema in the Age of Mass Extinctions, Selmin Kara states that “the proliferation of films with ecological disaster and extinction narratives in recent years suggests that the Anthropocene might also signal a new epoch in the ecology and temporality of cinema” (2016: 3).

When we look at especially the last decade, it is seen that there are various films about the end of the world generally stylized by apocalyptic and catastrophic narrative in several ways like *The Day After Tomorrow* (by Roland Emmerich, 2004), and *2012* (2009), and *World War Z* (by Marc Forster, 2013).

As for the cinema of the anthropocene, this time we watch the human as the leading role who ruins the earth irrecoverably. “Mankind’s irreparable and irreversible influence on the face of the planet will totally define its fate from now on. Several films have as their central idea humanity’s impact on the planet” (Cox, 2016).

Regarding to the name of cinema in the age of the Anthropocene, Selmin Kara proposes a neologism as the concept of Anthropocenema. When the possible contents treated in anthropocenema are considered, different phases of it can be reflected to screen. For instance, in her study, Kara (2016) focuses on two main trends by sampling with some movies; giving examples from *Tree of Life* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* she underlines “the post-cinematic return to the tropes of primordality and extinction in recent films depicting human loss”, and with the examples from *Gravity* (by Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) and *Snowpiercer* (by Joon-ho Bong, 2013) she emphasizes “the fantasies of grand-scale waste and its impacts.”

“The two films establish a parallelism between extinct prehistoric creatures and mournful human characters, pointing to a shift in post-cinema’s approach to our existential temporality” (Kara, 2016: 15). In another study named “*Beasts of the Digital Wild: Primordigital Cinema and the Question of Origins*” (2014) of her, For

Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* she gives the example from the mostly criticized dinosaurs scene and states that:

In a much talked about twenty-minute sequence, Malick's period piece on a family's emotional struggle with the death of their son depicted the creation of the universe and primordial forms of life on earth leading up to the dinosaurs. And for Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, she expresses that dealing with a little girl's battle for survival amidst rising waters in the Louisiana Bayou and her father's impending death, turned its gaze towards another extinct species, the aurochs. (Kara, 2014: 2).

When the humans who are the charged of the climate change are considered like in the discussions on anthropocene epoch, the responsible of the events in these films are again the humans.

On the other hand, other two approaches to take Anthropocene in cinema can be mentioned. The first one is making the films about the "life after the extinction of man" (i.e post-anthropocene). About this, in the study of *Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene*, Irmgard Emmelhainz gives the example from an essay-film Godard made with Anne-Marie Miéville, *The Old Place* (2000), which addresses Anthropocentric concerns of life after the extinction of man:

In the film a satellite shaped like a bird and sent to space in 2001 is supposed to come back to earth in 5,000 years to inform its future inhabitants about the Earth's past. It is stated in the voice-over: "We are all lost in the immensity of the universe and in the depth of our own spirit. There is no way back home, there is no home. The human species have blown up and dispersed in the stars. We can neither deal with the past nor with the present, and the future takes us more and more away" (2015:138-139).

Second one is, on the other hand, making films to show the phases which caused to the epoch with their current and future damages. In other words, with these kind of films, we are witnessing the man-made devastations to earth from the beginning.

And rather than the first one, we mostly see the second way of telling anthropocene in Reha Erdem's films. He shows pre sections of oncoming human extinction inflicted by again humans by telling present situation and showing apocalyptic views.

#### **5.4 Reha Erdem and Anthropocenema**

In this part of the study, the films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* will be examined in terms of their common points which are the current situation of human in modernism, the patriarchal structure destroying the nature and earth, and the place of women in this structure. More than general mankind, in Reha Erdem films this patriarchal structure causes this anthropocene epoch in a sense.

While reflecting the damages of this structure to the nature and earth, he uses an apocalyptic atmosphere showing wars, conflicts, disaster epidemic, earthquake etc. and these are combined with the features of unspecified time and space. While in the film *Jin* we watch the damages of a war to nature, in *Kosmos* we observe to turning back to our origins and our instincts like animal, and in *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* we directly see an apocalyptic atmosphere with coming earthquake, an epidemic, a deteriorative ecologic balance and some men with personality disorder. On the other hand, there are women who are actually integrated with nature and shown with their naive and calming views in all those devastations throughout the films.

#### **5.5. Femininity, Nature, and Patriarchy in Anthropocene**

Firstly in the anthropocentric apocalypse atmospheres in these films especially seen in *Kosmos* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*, the humans who cause this anthropocene are

mostly the men in patriarchal system. We are watching *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* directly from the woman's point of view, on the other hand, even though the events are shown from the male character Battal's perspective (or Kosmos as he introduces himself) in *Kosmos*. He is also shown as a part of nature with his instincts like animal, he reminds us our origin before dominating nature and animals as the superior living beings. Still, the women characters in the film suffer from the structure.

Another most distinct subject that we see in these films is the nature. It is even possible to say that sometimes nature has much more a leading role than the other protagonists. As it is mentioned, especially women are seen as integrated with the nature. In the opening sequence of *Jin*, we watch and listen to the nature and slow floating clouds, great mountains, green valleys with its calmness, then we close up with some animals like grasshopper, turtle, deer and lizard. And this calmness is suddenly interrupted by bombs and gun fires, and all those beauties in nature are damaged, mostly we see that the lizard run back to its nest. During the film we continue to see the devastations of war to the nature and animals by seeing a dead body of a hinny. And as from the first sequence we watch these harms of human to the nature by addressing Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Reha Erdem demonstrates the common fate of woman and nature over the character Jin, who is a young woman guerrilla running away from the organization and hiding in the forest which is full of animals she can easily engage with.

In most of the parts of the film we see Jin from a distance like we see the insects. It is possible to say that the director presents the girl Jin as a piece of nature among other

living creatures in nature. During the film, “we witness a friendship relation between Jin and all sorts of animals. She shares her meal and the life with the animals, she sleeps in their caves” (Karabağ, 2013) and she never gets harmed even from the most wild animals like bear and wildcat. We see a harmony between Jin and the animals while Jin is helping an injured donkey and establishing a bond with the deer. In other words, as being a piece of nature she could live and survive without getting harmed in nature, when she hits town, the struggle of life begins then only then. On this, Çağla Karabağ mentions about a duality between nature and culture. She explains that:

This is not an essentialist cliché that identifies women with nature and men with culture. The parts of the film passing in nature is kind of little red riding scarf<sup>2</sup> tale. But when Jin enters the field of culture, that tale atmosphere disappears and we are thrown up to the cold fact: masculine violence. The culture becomes a threat for Jin not because it belongs to and is identical with manhood, but because it is unequal and male dominant (2013).

Therefore, once she goes out of the nature and on the way to town, it is seen that she is actually in trouble because we watch that “she is harassed, threatened and exposed to violence by the men of the culture” (Karabağ, 2013). Almost every man in the film tries to do harm to her in a way contrary to the wild animals. Therefore, beside the emphasis on nature, Reha Erdem underscores of being woman in such a patriarchal system which is empowered by militarism and culture. Moreover, Jin is also very stern to the men that she meets while she is very merciful and nurturing to the creatures in the nature. It would not be wrong to say that the anthropocene epoch in which the earth is damaged by humankind is reflected in the film as the consequences of patriarchal culture that we are in. By transferring from Atay, Ezgi

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<sup>2</sup> She is inspired from the tale ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ but she says scarf instead of hood because the girl, Jin, wears a red head scarf in the film.

Aydın Korkmaz mentions that the first inequality appears between nature and human even before inequality of women and men and male dominance. Namely, manhood as a historical power slowly takes its roots on these inequality times. The first thing that human being deluded through culture is nature. “This starts with the discovery of agriculture. The discovery of agriculture both opened new horizons for human, and took some out of them. Property, inequality, and dominance are the result of this transformation, too.” (Korkmaz, 2015). In other words, once people look at nature and earth as a plentifulness, this later turns into an unconsciousness that uses the earth as possession.

In this sense a connection between woman and earth can be made in terms of how they are treated in the system. All in all, the film with its narration like a tale uses Turkish-Kurdish conflict as a metaphor (even though Reha Erdem insistently says that he does not like metaphor) to show how humanity has devastating effects on the nature from a woman’s point of view. At the end of the film, all animals that we have seen during the film gather around the girl and grieve for Jin when she is shot after the fire on.

In another movie of Reha Erdem, *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* again we watch the same emphasis through a female character, Esmâ. Esmâ is a believer, pure and decent woman who has some supernatural powers and lives together with nature. The location of the film is one of the Princes’ Islands in İstanbul, but as it was mentioned before, this island is not like we have familiar with. Contrary, we see the island completely in an apocalyptic climate with the people who are evacuated in expectation of an earthquake, the horses suffering from an illness or epidemic and

dying. Therefore, we see an emptied and a different island portrait than we have already known with its street with horse-drawn phaeton or green atmosphere.

However, there are still some people who refuse to leave the island. These are some men and some women who stay by virtue of those men in a sense. Esma is one of them, and she is there because she follows her intuitions and is a very devoted housekeeper working for Mesut, who is a cruel dad and a pitiless hunter as the one who actually wants to stay on the island. Beside the people who do not want to leave, there are also other ones such as Mesut's son Adem, who learns his illness and looks for somewhere to shelter like his father's house, and also Adem's wife, who comes to the island after him in order to confront Adem. Lastly there are a doctor friend of Mesut who was a torture doctor in the past giving clean bill of health to tormented people, and a lonely young woman who has escaped from her husband.

In this framework, as in *Jin*, we witness the bad actions of men and their destruction, and the women who are still naive, decent, and natural in such destruction. The destruction, as in *Jin*, results from male dominance on earth and nature. As it is stated, we see an epidemic or illness that kills the horses in the island through the film. And although Reha Erdem says it is not his style to make sense out of everything in his films, I consider it is possible to read this concerning the horses which are used for horse-drawn carriages for fun and get harmed in the 'real' island in İstanbul, Büyükada. To get the film again, nature is objectified by men, for example Mesut beheads the animals that he hunts and taxidermizes them as a hobby. This objectification is also applied to women. We watch that almost every man harasses women in the film. Both women and nature are objectified and otherized



and they share this fate on this same point. However, as it is passed in the film that ‘human is came out of woman’ and essentially everything is formed by nature. This is the thing that has been already ignored in also real life. In the anthropocene, as the years pass the damages will be more visible and better understood. That’s why this film is called a kind of ‘calm before the apocalypse’. Like in *Jin* the emphasis of women, animals and nature are always the first things that get harmed in such a male society. Consequently, Reha Erdem obviously puts the female characters in good part, while all the men have a kind of personality disorder and all are problematic and ill-minded. In the meantime, they are dependent on women with their weakness in such a time that apocalypse is close. For example, Esmâ treats Adem’s disease even though he tried to rape her. In the similar way as *Jin*, in *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*, Reha Erdem creates this near to end atmosphere in anthropocene, not over all humankind but especially over men, and he emphasizes the correlation between women and nature.

And lastly, in the film *Kosmos* we again see this apocalyptic atmosphere. As I already mentioned, this time the main character is not a woman but a man. “He is actually an animal behavior character” (Sensöz, 2011) named Battal (he decides to be *Kosmos* later on meeting with a girl named Neptün) with his supernatural power like healing people. That’s why it may be the first time possible to watch the film directly from an animal-like-human point of view like from something from the nature. The animal sounds he make, his behavior, the things he tells, his relation with other animals, and the style of his making love are establishing a connection between the main character and an animal. Therefore, it is possible to say that Reha Erdem takes

us back to our origins by telling human is also an animal in nature. However, humankind has already ruled over the nature and started harm himself by ignoring all these origin issues. “And immediately afterwards of ruling the earth, he starts to have more than his needs, he loses his soul, and then exploits the nature and his own species” (Tokul, 2016). We see this situation in a dialogue of Kosmos saying that “For a human being, there is nothing more than eating, drinking and delighting himself”. In a border town, where he came as if he was escaping from somewhere in the opening scene, we see that Kosmos lives as it should be in the nature. For example, he does not work and he states his opposition to work, and he eats only one type of thing, sugar. On the other side, he steals something from the shops. Then, we learn that he is not stealing for himself because he does not need any money. Furthermore, when he falls in love with Neptün, later on we are watching their flirting scenes by sounding like animal. As if humankind had not dominated all the nature and created his own rule on it, Kosmos lives intrinsically with his own rules which are similar to the nature. Thus, it can be said that Kosmos represents the instinctual side of humans. Emek Erez (2012) states that:

It does not matter to being an animal or a human in this world, because both of them are suffering from world pain. Human who makes nature and animals enslave for himself, today is the position of sufferer because of his unconscious domination. This can be deduced from the building full of bullet holes, and shot noises.

The town in the film is cold, catastrophic and depressed and we always hear the noise of jets, artillery shootings and other sounds of military, so this town is under a kind of military blockade. Moreover, the people in the town, mostly men are seen to suffer and are unhealthy. It seems like there are no women in the town. “Because this town is an exile city for a woman teacher, a prison for a young woman and a dead-

end for another woman who does not find a cure for herself” (Kibar, 2013). At this point we get closer the idea of the other previous movies *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*, because in this town again woman and nature are the first subjects who get harmed. And *Kosmos* shows us what should have been at the beginning with his instincts as an animal. Furthermore, even though he has supernatural powers such as healing the people, actually he is not shown as a savior in the anthropocene. Contrarily, he is more likely a passenger who comes to the town from some other place, and leaves this town for another one.

To sum up, Reha Erdem, who has taken attention with his specific style, narration, montage cinema since his first film *A Ay*, is consistently making his films without showing any certain time and space. Instead of this, he says every film has its own unique time, and sometimes films are just made for a specific place. Moreover, using sounds and music in his films give other new meanings to them. In his last three films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* he turns his steps into the concerns more related with ecology, feminism, and nature. So in this chapter these notions are dealt with the age of human, anthropocene, which stands for a range of human impacts on the environment. These films were examined in terms of their common points which are the current situation of human in modernism, the patriarchal structure destroying the nature and earth, and the place of women in this structure. More than the general mankind, this patriarchal structure in Reha Erdem films causes this anthropocene epoch in a sense. In these films, Reha Erdem emphasizes the human impacts especially on manhood, and women are seen to suffer in the same way as nature. Using apocalyptic atmospheres by showing wars, conflicts, disaster

epidemic and earthquake, he reflects the damages of the structure to the nature and earth. When we analyze them in detail, we see that there are women who are actually integrated with nature and shown with their naive and calming views in all those devastations throughout the films. While there is a peaceful environment when a woman is alone with nature as in the film *Jin*, and there is nothing to be afraid of including wild animals, but when men are included, everything is getting worse. Once women go out of the nature, it is seen that they are actually in trouble because we watch that they are harassed, threatened and exposed to violence by the men of the culture. All in all, in Reha Erdem's anthropocentric world, not just planet and earth got affected by the harms of humankind but especially women and nature have suffered because of the male dominant system.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

As I stated at the beginning of my study, I aimed to define different approaches to realism, and compare them with the previous movements. Based on this, I also analyzed in detail three prominent directors of 2000's in new Turkish cinema with their approaches to reality in their films. It is surely beyond doubt that not only the Turkish cinema, but also the world cinema has observed the change of realism. However, it has always been a complex issue to define the films thoroughly and terminologically. Many critics have discussed the realism and the opposite of realism with the related movements as naturalism, verisimilitude, anti realism etc.,. However, those were not comprehensive enough to analyze the films in the frame of this study. Therefore, this thesis also aimed to propose some new terms for corresponding those tendencies and especially to provided an understanding, specifically, of how those three Turkish directors that studied in this study conceive and construct a world by making their films in a line broadly called as non realist, and what are their approaches to reality in their films, and how we categorize them according to realism.

In the first chapter, I drew the frame of my study and described my methodology used in this thesis. I made a basic close reading and a research of related dynamics like realism and non realism in cinema. Regarding this, I provided a brief history of

some non realist tendencies not only in the world but also in the world cinema and I suggested magical realism, spiritual realism and anthropocene realism to describe the tendencies that I dealt with literary review and analysis of the mentioned three directors.

For the second chapter, the aim was drawing a frame in order to comprehend the process of realism in cinema in a historical development. Realist tendency which had been dominant in cinema became stronger with the Italian neorealism in the post war era by displaying the life conditions as they were. Mostly, it was one of the most effective movements to spread the realist tendency in the world by impacting other national cinemas enormously. Reflecting life as it appears was one of the most essential and desirable aspects in cinema. Similarly, we have seen that Turkish cinema was also affected by the realist movements in history and constructed on a realist basis. Either in Yeşilçam period with the commercial and classic realist films or with the Yılmaz Güney's social realist films we have witnessed realist films predominantly.

Over time, with changing views and needs in developing social economic and cultural environment in the world, realist tendency has started to lose its indispensability. New approaches and tendencies have started to appear and become widespread. In 80's starting with the films of Atıf Yılmaz, we have started to observe the examples of non-realist films of Turkish cinema. But, especially 2000's we started to encounter with those kinds of films made by independent filmmakers. Three prominent directors of Turkish cinema Onur Ünlü, Semih Kaplanoğlu and Reha Erdem who construct their cinematic world with some non realist elements were the starting point of this study. Thus, the primary aim of this thesis was examine

their approaches to realism in their films. In this regard, the most suitable modes, genres or tendencies have been detected and they are associated with the directors. Firstly Onur Ünlü was discussed in the scope of a literary origin term, magical realism. Secondly, Semih Kaplanoğlu was examined under the spiritual realism heading by comparing with the examples of world cinema, and lastly Reha Erdem is dealt with a newly established perspective anthropocenema especially with his last three films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*.

From this point, the third chapter aimed to examine the cinema of Onur Ünlü in terms of magical realism. Onur Ünlü who is mostly known with his absurd and black humor films was investigated by especially one of his films *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* which was considered convenient to analyze as magical realist. In this chapter, after looking at historical process of magical realism both in art and literature, its adaptation into cinema was discussed. The main features of magical realism both in literature and then in cinema was detected and the film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* was analyzed according to those basic features. One of the most important characteristics is constructing fantastical and non realist elements on real settings, so combining these juxtaposition of the words magic and realist together. In the film *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi*, Onur Ünlü displays a magical town with magical characters in it who take their supernatural features normally. All magical, supernatural and non realist things happen in an ordinary and quite realist settings. That's what makes this film magical and realist at the same time by uniting together two contradictive notions and make this approach magical realist. In an Anatolian town all characters have a supernatural power but they never assigned as super hero or this is not

reflected as above the ordinary. Furthermore, in order to detect magical realism elements in the film, metaphors are examined as an important feature of magical realism and many metaphors which were used in their denotative meanings were found during the film. Moreover, also based on his own words in various interviews, it is possible to evaluate that Onur Ünlü likes to use magic(al) elements to indicate his approach to reality.

In the fourth chapter Semih Kaplanoğlu and his spiritual and transcendental approaches to reality was aimed to be examined. After some notions such as spiritualism, transcendency, religion spiritual realism were defined as part of cinema, and mostly a short literature review and background information were given about spiritual realism, especially with his trilogy *Yumurta, Süt, Bal* which are out of the scope of a classic realist line and present a cinematic mode related with something beyond experienced, Semih Kaplanoğlu's approach to reality was discussed.

Furthermore, the main features and notions that are related with spiritual realism such as time, images, metaphors, destiny and nostalgia were adapted into the films and they were discussed over the trilogy *Yumurta, Süt, Bal* .

The similar stylistic features of some pioneer directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Robert Bresson and Ingmar Bergman who are mostly associated with transcendently and spiritual realism in world cinema was reviewed in order to compare the distinctions between different spiritual realism approaches with Semih Kaplanoğlu. When they were examined, it revealed that Semih Kaplanoğlu's treatment of spiritual realism is separated from others because of the different cultural and social codes between their societies and religions, although the ways of



creating form were mostly similar and Kaplanoğlu is under the influence of those directors. Thus, it seems very possible to deduce that there are different ways also to reach spiritual realism in cinema; growing up different cultures and looking at transcendently and religion in cinema from different point of views are some influencing factors. While doing the comparison, transcendency and religion in Turkish cinema was also looked over in a development process. It reveals that religion has been dealt with in a negative way especially in the first periods of cinema, in Yeşilçam and also after. Religion has been mostly shown through the imam or sheik figures, and that figures have been seen as a figure of comedy or zealot, uncultured and against national struggle or told over horror movies. In 90's a mystic aesthetic of cinema called 'the cinema of dreams' is suggested by a group of Islamist critics as a result of looking for a new cinematic language suitable for the ideas of intellectual islamists in Turkey instead of that schematic understanding of religion in Turkish cinema. Those critics were mostly influenced by the cinema of Tarkovsky. It may be right to say that Semih Kaplanoğlu was also impressed with the revival and looked for a new cinematic language suitable for the Islam as in their mind. However, although adapting the forms of other directors cinema into his cinema was possible, and they shared some similarities with other three directors, differences were also revealed when they were examined in detail in terms of their social, cultural backgrounds and aim, intentions.

As for fifth chapter, the last inspected director of the study Reha Erdem, who has taken attention with his specific style, narration, montage cinema since his first film *A Ay*, and who is consistently making his films without showing any certain time and

space were investigated. Instead of this, he says every film has its own unique time, and sometimes films are just made for a specific place. Moreover, using sounds and music in his films give other new meanings to them. In this regards, firstly the cinema of Reha Erdem was studied with the main features that separate it from conventional cinema. It is possible to say that being set in an unspecified time and unspecified space, and use of sound and music were the distinguished features of his cinema. Later on, with the themes especially of his last three films *Kosmos*, *Jin* and *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*; it would not be wrong to say that he is mostly discussing ecology, nature and feminism in apocalyptic atmospheres. These notions were dealt with anthropocene, which is also known as the age of human and stands for a range of human impacts on the environment. Thus, these films were associated with a newly established perspective: anthropocenema in anthropocene realism. In those films, Reha Erdem emphasizes the human's devastating impacts on earth. In these films it is also possible to see the affected ones as women and the other creatures in nature due to the damages of manhood. Mostly, women and nature sometimes are taken as the same notion that suffered by mankind. Respectively, in the second half of the chapter anthropocene epoch and anthropocene notion was explained briefly. After that, for adjusting it into cinema studies anthropocenema was discussed with the examples of some films from world cinema. As for the cinema of the anthropocene, this time we watch the human as the leading role who ruins the earth unrecoverably. Later on, the cinema of Reha Erdem was examined within the context of anthropocene realism. It was examined in terms of their common points which are the current situation of human in modernism, the patriarchal structure destroying the nature and earth, and the place of women in this structure. More than the general

mankind, this patriarchal structure in Reha Erdem films causes this anthropocene epoch in a sense. As it stated, while reflecting the damages of this structure to the nature and earth, he uses an apocalyptic atmosphere showing wars, conflicts, disaster epidemic, earthquake etc. and these are combined with the features of unspecified time and space. While in the film *Jin* we watch the damages of a war to nature, in *Kosmos* we observe to turning back to our origins and our instincts like animal, and in *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar* we see an apocalyptic atmosphere with coming earthquake, an epidemic, a deteriorative ecologic balance and some men with personality disorder.

All in all, we can clearly understand that there have always been some different tendencies when it comes to realism as a much debated issue. All of those new approaches do not pertain to only Turkish cinema; in other words, they are also reflected in the world cinema, too. However, within the framework of this study, among the new tendencies appeared in cinema, three directors from new Turkish cinema have been examined with their approaches to reality as magical realism with Onur Ünlü, spiritual realism with Semih Kaplanoğlu and anthropocene realism with Reha Erdem. Hopefully, this study will be brought to light for further investigation to define the non realist tendencies in literature thoroughly and categorize them in depth; and moreover, for the further studies it is possible to improve the scope of this study by enriching the examples of movies and directors from the world cinema.

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