

T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THE DEPARTMENT OF CINEMA AND TELEVISION
DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN CINEMA AND MEDIA RESEARCH

SONIC IDEOLOGIES:
SOUND, AFFECT, AND POWER IN THE NEW NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

PHD THESIS
PINAR ÜZELTÜZENCİ

ISTANBUL 2025

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ISTANBUL 2025

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Thesis Defense Date	27/05/2025

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ABSTRACT

SONIC IDEOLOGIES:

SOUND, AFFECT, AND POWER IN THE NEW NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

Pınar Üzeltüzenci

Cinema and Media Research PHD Program

Thesis Advisor: Assist. Prof. Gönül Eda Özgül

May, 2025, 222 pages

This thesis explores the ideological implications of sound in the cinema of Turkey through five feature films produced between 2016 and 2022. Intertwining cultural theory, affect theory and sound studies, it analyzes the patterns manifested in the forms of absence, repetition and distortion of sound through an original methodology of “symptomatic listening”. Tracing the historical transformation of sound in cinema from the early Republican period to Yeşilçam and to the present day, it opens up the functions of cinematic sound to discussion through detailed analyses of the films. The thesis claims that after 2016, cinema in Turkey has entered an era in which sound is used as an ideological infrastructure that determines what can be heard, what emotions can circulate, and what silences will be produced. In this context, cinema sound is positioned as a device that makes ideology heard, felt, and embodied.

Key Words: Film Sound, Ideology, Turkish Cinema, Affect, Cultural Criticism

ÖZET

SONİK İDEOLOJİLER:

YENİ YENİ TÜRKİYE SİNEMASINDA SES, DUYGULANIM VE İKTİDAR

Üzeltüzenci, Pınar

Sinema ve Medya Araştırmaları Doktora Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Gönül Eda Özgül

Mayıs, 2025, 222 sayfa

Bu çalışma, 2016-2022 yılları arasında üretilen 5 filme odaklanarak Türkiye sinemasında sesin ideolojik etkilerini araştırıyor. Görselliğin ana anlatı olarak kabulüne bir alternatif önermeyi amaçlayan tez, sesin politika, öznellik ve duygulanımın aktarımında önemli bir araç haline geldiğini savunuyor. Kültürel eleştiri, duygulanım teorisi ve ses çalışmalarını bir araya getiren disiplinler arası bir teorik çerçeveye dayanan bu çalışma, sonic yoklukları, tekrarları ve beklenmeyen sesleri ideolojik alanlar olarak yorumlayan eleştirel bir pratik olan “semptomatik dinleme” metodolojisini tanıtıyor. Beş filmin (*Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, *Sibel*, *Hayaletler*, *Karanlık Gece*) detaylı analizleri ve Türkiye sinemasında ses kullanımının bir soy kütüğünü çıkarırken Erken Cumhuriyet döneminden Yeşilçam’a ve günümüze kırılmaları takip ediyor ve 2016 sonrası siyasi ortamda sinema sesinin, neyin duyulabileceğini, hissedilebileceğini ve tahayyül edilebileceğini şekillendirerek, krizi hem yansıran hem de duyulur hale getiren ideolojik bir araç olduğunu ileri sürüyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Film Sesi, İdeoloji, Türkiye Sineması, Duygulanım, Kültür Eleştirisi



Annem'e

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their support throughout the writing of this thesis. To my mother Emine and my sisters Alev, Elif, and Ekin: Your love, patience, and constant encouragement have sustained me through the challenging moments of this study. I am eternally grateful for your nurturing presence.

Special thanks to my supervisor, Gönül Eda Özgül, whose positivity, encouragement, and insightful guidance played a crucial role in the completion of this thesis. Her expertise, constructive feedback, and unwavering support have been significantly helpful; I am grateful to her.

I also want to thank Şoreş Oruç for our conversations that helped me develop my initial ideas, and to my dear friend Melis Kurultay for her support at every stage of this study and life.

My sincerest gratitude.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A subtle shift has become noticeable in the recently produced films in Turkey. In the midst of the ongoing global and local political turmoil, and social fragmentation, cinematic expression has become gradually more atmospheric and allegorical. This turn toward ambiguity may not be a coincidence in a social climate where the visible is subject to increased surveillance. Simultaneously, in global cinematic contexts, the sonic realm has been emerging as a site that complicates the image track, rendering control either more elusive or insidious. This has to do with the fact that, unlike the image, sound resists complete transparency: it resonates, masks, and suggests rather than fully disclose. However, like vision, listening is not an objective act. Shaped by the listener's history of power and positionality, it holds the potential to open spaces of resonance, and relational meaning. These qualities position sound as a terrain where affect, ideology, and resistance clash and are continually negotiated. This thesis listens to this emerging, affectively charged sonic turn in the recent cinema of Turkey closely, treating it as both a methodological commitment and a political imperative.

The films that constitute my main focus, *Kaygı* (Ceylan Özgün Özçelik, 2017), *Sibel* (Çağla Zencirci & Guillaume Giovanetti, 2018), *Hayaletler* (Azra Deniz Okyay, 2020), *Karanlık Gece* (Özcan Alper, 2022) and *Kurak Günler* (Emin Alper, 2022), do not limit their intents to just visuals or overt dialogue. They also use drones, glitches, silences, and distorted sounds to construct affective landscapes of resentment, moral suspicion, and political deadlock. This thesis, then, is an attempt to theorize how power hides in the cinematic sonic realm. It asks what kinds of subjectivities, memories, and politics are constructed through the sounds of post-2016, self-acclaimed political art-house films in Turkey and argues that by listening symptomatically, we can hear the ideological contradictions in film that visual analysis often leaves unheard.

The decision to focus on films made after 2016 stems from a historical and affective turning point in Turkey's recent political trajectory. The failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 marked the start of a new era characterized by increased censorship, reinforced surveillance, and political paralysis; conditions which particularly become

palpable in the western regions of the country.¹ This brought with it an atmosphere of fragility, insecurity and repression that was felt more intensely for this part of society; artists, secular voters, etc. The trends observed in post-2016 cinema can be evaluated as reactions to the political and affective climate of this period in which cinema began to exhibit a subtle yet significant shift, especially within the circles of arthouse films.

The films focused on in this study represents a current trend loosely referred to as New New Turkish Cinema² and includes examples of politically engaged, formally experimental or atmospheric cinema. This formation differs from previous periods in terms of the political sensitivity and aesthetic formation it represents. Although they share a partial continuity with the tradition of New Cinema of Turkey that emerged in the early 2000s and indirectly opened up the political to discussion through personal stories, the films made after 2016 both centralize politics at the thematic level and transform it into a sensory strategy that permeates the entire aesthetic structure. This difference is most clearly evident in the use of sound. For example, while the cinema of the previous period, characterized by directors such as Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz, was constructed with less dialogue, minimal use of sound and existential themes, the films produced after 2016 adopt a new form in which sound is both intensified and centralized as an atmospheric element. Although these films are not radical on the narrative level, they have become more ideologically charged on the auditory level. This transformation marks a shift from discursive to sensory modes of political expression as well as an epistemological reconfiguration in which the sonic realm becomes a highly mobilized site of ideological work. While narrative remains

¹ What I mean by this statement is not that such conditions became newly manifest to particular segments of society after 2016. In the southeastern provinces of Turkey, Kurdish populations have already experienced decades of military conflict, security measures, and systematic erosion of basic rights and freedoms. Likewise, across the country, working-class populations had long endured chronic economic hardship, precarious labour conditions, and inequality. What shifted after 2016 was that intensified forms of censorship, surveillance, and authoritarian control began to permeate the relatively privileged Western urban middle classes, particularly secular segments who previously had greater access to European legal and cultural frameworks. The imprisonment of cultural figures, including Osman Kavala, increased censorship on film festivals and funds, further contributed to a sense of fragility and panic among these groups, especially those engaged in movements such as the Gezi Protests. For them, the targeting of symbolic figures and the direct threat to their value systems rendered the authoritarian turn more immediate, hence producing a new affective climate of insecurity within these circles.

² The term *New New Cinema of Turkey* is not yet institutionalized but is used here to designate a cluster of post-2016 films that share thematic, aesthetic, and production-based shifts from the earlier *New Turkish Cinema*. For discussions of *New Turkish Cinema*, see Suner (2010) and Arslan (2011).

more or less politically resonant, it is through intensified sound design, affective textures, and atmospheric immersion that these films mediate the crisis of representation and the embodied experience of political anxiety. These films signal a new form of cinema in which the political goes beyond being a represented content and is structured as an experienced atmosphere, *a structure of feeling*.

The five films that form the core of my analysis (*Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, *Sibel*, *Hayaletler*, *Karanlık Gece*) were selected for their shared interest in the affective and political atmospheres shaped by post-2016 anxieties. What unites these works is the way they deal with sonic atmospheres, auditory dissonance, spatial fragmentation, and temporal suspension in detail, all of which mediate the felt dimensions of contemporary political crisis, pessimism and moral exhaustion. This affective state overlaps with Wendy Brown's notion of "wounded attachment," where political subjectivities are shaped around repeated experiences of victimization and desires to regain lost moral superiority (Brown, 1995). In the context of Turkey, this conceptual framework is explanatory in terms of making sense of the emotional regime of a secular, educated, and urban segment of society that feels culturally marginalized and politically excluded under AKP rule.

This affective structure is not limited to individual experience; it circulates in a broader cultural field shaped by class and ideological displacements as well. In this field, I argue that the grammars of injury, loss, and moral superiority which are often associated with right-wing populist formations are now also effective in secular opposition, and expressed from a counter socio-cultural position. Esra Özyürek's work on secular nostalgia shows how the secular, "Atatürkçü"³ leaning public experienced the erosion of their symbolic authority as a profound loss, which contributed to the formation of a form of identity politics based on the idealized visions of the past (Özyürek, 2006). I argue that the films analyzed reflect this wounded subjectivity in their sonic dimensions too. The sounds mobilize emotional withdrawal, environmental

³ "Atatürkçü" refers to a person who adheres to the principles and reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. Often used as a softer version of "Kemalist," it denotes a commitment to secularism, nationalism, republicanism, and modernization as outlined in the official ideology of the early Turkish Republic. Depending on context, it may carry either a progressive or conservative connotation, especially in contemporary political debates.

dread, and claustrophobic atmospheres that speak to the melancholic and moralistic tone of a secular subject who finds himself excluded from the nation he once imagined himself representing.

It is important to note that my initial interest in this topic was not based on a pre-established theory, it emerged from a patterned recognition from viewings of these films in close succession. Although the films were different in terms of their forms and narration, they all conveyed a pervasive sense of paralysis, dread, and moral ambiguity. What struck me was how this emotional tone was also constructed, executed and reinforced by the sound design. Certain sonic strategies such as recurring hums, muffled voices, flattened dialogue, and stuffy atmospheres were used repeatedly. These did not sound like accidental aesthetic coincidences, but intentionally executed patterns that demanded attention. I began to hear a shift: a move away from the minimalist style of earlier 2000s art-house cinema, toward a denser, more self-conscious and ambitious sonic field. Hence, the films were not chosen because they confirm a hypothesis, but because they provoked one. I did not set out to prove a theory; on the contrary I was drawn into theorization by what I heard. These films reflect and sonically materialize political despair. They also share a common formal ambition, and a claim (implicit or explicit) to be consciously political. Thus, they provide a productive site to examine how post-2016 Turkish cinema constructs ideological meaning through sound.

I approach cinematic sound as an ideological apparatus shaped by power, class, and affective management. While selectively drawing on ontological, phenomenological, and acoustic traditions, the study's central analytical orientation remains rooted in Marxist cultural theory, particularly the frameworks of Fredric Jameson, Althusser, and Raymond Williams. The concepts developed here (such as sonic resentment, negative catharsis, and cognitive mapping through inheritance) are tools to reorient the existing theories toward a materialist analysis of contradiction, affect, and positional listening. Affect theory and psychoanalysis are treated as conceptual bridges that help articulate the ways in which sound encodes ideological deadlocks. The theoretical density thus should be seen as strategic to reveal how sound

mediates between political dead ends and emotional acceptance in contemporary cinema of Turkey.

While recent scholarship has addressed narrative and representational politics in the cinema of Turkey, the affective-political effects of sound remain largely neglected. This thesis fills that gap by centralizing sound as the infrastructural force that organizes political perception. In doing so, it extends film sound studies into a new terrain that connects sonic form to historical crisis, and political affect.

1.1 Methodology

My central methodology for analyzing the selected films is “symptomatic listening”: a critical form of close listening that is attuned to what is normatively classified as anomaly in the sound dimension, such as absences, repetitions, distortions, and ambient silences. Drawing on and bringing together Althusser’s symptomatic reading and Jameson’s dialectical critique, symptomatic listening focuses on what is silenced, what is unsaid, and what cannot be expressed outside of sonic tension or atmospheric composition. Applying this method to the selected films, I explore how sound embodies political contradictions. In contrast to empirical audience research, symptomatic listening pays attention to the forms that encode meaning at the level of sound design, focusing on the gaps and excesses in sound that visual analysis often overlooks. This offers a new way of spotting the contradictions and tensions embedded in these films.

This method was implemented in a systematic procedure throughout the thesis. Each film was viewed multiple times, each time with a different sonic focus. At the first viewing I aimed at grasping narrative structure and affective tone, paying attention to the relationality between the images and the sounds. The second time, I have watched the films with headphones and concentrated on the material aspects of the sound world including ambience, music, silence, spatialization, and speech. The third time, I focused on the details of moments that appeared to contradict or complicate the visuals, particularly in scenes that signal tension and/or ambiguity. These viewings

were documented through time-stamped and scene-specific notes and guided by a set of interpretive codes:

- Silences (intentional silencing of characters and/or the environment),
- Repetitions and loops (sonic motifs that circulate and resist closure),
- Distorted sounds (compressed or manipulated sounds),
- Vocal disjunctions (disembodied, foregrounded/backgrounded voices),
- Spatial construction (foregrounded/backgrounded sounds that define spaces),
- and affective misalignments (scenes in which the narrative and the intended affect diverge)

Together, these tools allowed me to listen for the ways contemporary cinema in Turkey encodes ideological tensions, repressions, and affective dead-ends through sound. Symptomatic listening thus serves as both a method of analysis and as a mode of ideological critique that foregrounds the sound realm as a site of power, affect, and meaning.

I chose symptomatic listening as my main method because the sound of the films I studied does not employ traditional sonic transparency⁴. Unlike approaches that treat sound as expressive design or sensory immersion (as in phenomenological or affective methodologies), symptomatic listening allows me to question what is explicitly encoded, excluded, or rendered inaudible within the sound structure of a film. These films dwell on ambiguity, repetition, and tension; they do not offer emotionally stable meanings. As such, they advocate a method that is more sensitive to contradiction than coherence. While useful, ethnographic or reception-based approaches could have shifted the emphasis to the audience's interpretation of the text; however, my aim here is to trace how the text itself uses sound to stage ideological conflict. Similarly, stylistic analysis would risk reducing sound to a technical category, whereas the films mobilize sound affectively, spatially, and ideologically. Symptomatic listening, then, also emerged as a method these films themselves demanded. The method was realized in

⁴ I use the term *sonic transparency* to describe a sonic regime in which sound is perceived as neutral, invisible, and supportive of the visual narrative. The term builds upon Chion's observation that film sound is often "heard but not listened to" and rendered inaudible through perfect synchronization (Chion, 1994).

response to the sonic excesses, discontinuities, and affective tensions I repeatedly encountered in the films.

Choosing symptomatic listening was not an abstract theoretical decision, it was a methodological necessity that emerged from a moment of recognition. As I was watching these seemingly unrelated films from post-2016 Turkey, I noticed common recurring sonic strategies, dissonant drones, muffled ambiences, fractured vocal presences, that could not be accounted for narrative analysis alone. Their meaning was not always thematically explicit; hence they didn't invite such interpretation. If I had relied on more conventional formalist or reception-based approaches, I might have focused on narrative structure, audience affect, or stylistic design, but I would have missed what these sounds were doing symptomatically, how they repeated, or over-articulated something the visual field could not stabilize. Symptomatic listening emerged as the only method that allowed me to stay faithful to the contradictory and unresolved nature of the sounds I encountered.

However, it is worthy to note that in analyzing these films, I speak from my own position as a listener shaped by specific historical, spatial, and class conditions. My thesis is based on a *politics of location* as proposed by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) who argue that power relations and geopolitical positioning shape all knowledge. Like other forms of knowing, listening is mediated by how one's location intersects with histories of class, gender, and state control. Having grown up in Gebze, Kocaeli (a small industrial town with a crowded working-class population) and later moved to Istanbul for university education, I have been exposed to multiple sonic worlds: the everyday sonic violence of urban renewal, the noise of bureaucratic control, and the silences around consent and dissent. These experiences structure the conditions of how I hear and analyze film sound. Dylan Robinson's (2020) concept of *listening positionality*, also informs my understanding of listening as a political act shaped by histories of dispossession, belonging, and embodied proximity which decides on how the listener hears their environment. My method of symptomatic listening, acknowledges that interpretation is always situated, and conditioned by the residues of one's own lived experience. The thesis therefore also argues for a situated

and politicized way of engaging with cinema, one that takes sound seriously not just as form, but as ideology.

My MA education in sound engineering at ITU MIAM played a major role in my awareness of the distinction between sound in the technical sense and sound in the ideological sense. The program offered a specialized and scientific approach to sound which focused mainly on measurable parameters such as frequency, amplitude, and clarity, and technical skills such as microphone placement, mixing, and mastering. However, in doing so, it mostly treated sound as a neutral, scientific and apolitical phenomenon; sound was something to be discussed in terms of fidelity, transparency, and clarity. The courses did not question the social meanings or emotional dimensions behind these technicalities and who defined these standards, instead it offered an education that emphasized universality, rationality, and control. This made me think about how sound might encode hierarchies, mediate power relations, or participate in ideological reproduction but still stay “neutral.” It was precisely this gap and the neglect of the sociality of sound, that led me to develop a more critical and historically informed approach to listening.

This thesis builds on an interdisciplinary approach, weaving together critical cultural theory, psychoanalysis, sound studies, and affect theory. By symptomatically listening to selected films, the study explores the specific ideological functions of sound in selected films and how cinematic sound regulates political sentiment, moral perception, and aesthetic foreclosure. A series of key concepts ground the central argument, which will be explored further in Chapter 4. However, to provide clarity from the outset, I outline them briefly here as introduction. These concepts help me articulate what emerges in my analysis through symptomatic listening. They treat sound much more effectively than visuals as a structuring force that codifies oppression, moralizes space, and perpetuates political dead ends.

Interpellation (Althusser, 1971): The process by which subjects are “hailed” into ideological positions through cultural forms. This thesis extends interpellation to the sonic domain, where voices, repetition, and ambient cues function as ideological calls.

The Sonic Unconscious (original adaptation): A layer of sound where repressed historical trauma, social violence, and collective memory accumulate and resurface through tonal ambience, silences, or distortions. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious (1981), the sonic unconscious is treated as a formal site where unresolved contradictions persist affectively. These sonic residues bypass linguistic articulation but persist as aesthetic and ideological pressure points.

Symptomatic Listening (original adaptation): A critical mode of listening that identifies ideological contradictions in what is absent, excessive, or unstable in the sonic register. It draws from Althusser's method of symptomatic reading and Jameson's dialectical criticism, adapting them to the affective and sonic dimensions of film.

Sonic Ressentiment (original concept): A condition where sonic design affirms and recycles moral judgements without resolution. Rather than opening critique, sound is used to validate feelings of futility, resentment, or superiority within a particular ideological framework.⁵

Negative Catharsis (original concept): An aesthetic narrative strategy in which emotional tension is intensified but never resolved. Unlike classical catharsis, it does not bring a sense of purification through resolution, instead it keeps the audience within an affective discomfort without offering relief which in the end work to confirm political or ethical deadlocks through immersive but unresolved sonic design.

Cognitive Mapping by Inheritance (original adaptation): As a reinterpretation of Jameson's cognitive mapping. Rather than constructing new ideological maps, audiences decode film sound through inherited sonic grammars, structures shaped by prior exposure and social memory.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche uses the term *ressentiment* in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887/2006), describing a reactive, moral affect arising from repressed agency. Max Scheler later makes a distinction between *resentment* and *ressentiment* in his 1915 work *Ressentiment* in which he defines *ressentiment* as a persistent, repressed affect that substitutes moral condemnation for structural transformation, whereas *resentment* refers to a more immediate and politically justified reaction to injustice. This thesis refers to this distinction in developing the concept of *sonic ressentiment*, which is further elaborated in Chapters 4 and 5.

Sonic Capitalist Realism (original adaptation): A concept that captures how neoliberal sound design flattens affect, optimizes sonic delivery, and aestheticizes pessimism. Clean, compressed, and algorithmically optimized soundtracks often overwrite critical content, reinforcing affective passivity.

The dissertation consists of five chapters, and it is organized in a way that proceeds from theoretical groundwork to historical genealogy and finally to symptomatic analysis and theoretical synthesis. Each chapter builds on the previous one to support the central claim that sound in the cinema of Turkey, especially in the wake of 2016, functions as an ideological apparatus that organizes political affect, moral judgment, and aesthetic dilemmas.

In Chapter 2, Mapping the Field, I examine the key traditions that inform sound studies and film theory, including acoustic ecology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, affect theory, and cultural criticism. Rather than treating these traditions separately, I map their convergence around a common conclusion: sound is never neutral. This chapter also lays out the critical characteristic of symptomatic listening; therefore, it helps me position it as a methodology that pays attention to omission, repetition, etc., as signs of political contradiction.

In Chapter 3, A Genealogy of Sound Ideology in Turkish Cinema, I trace how sound functioned in specific periods and map out three main sound regimes: the authoritarian synchronization of early Republican cinema, the affective harmonies of Yeşilçam melodrama, and the fragmented, privatized sounds of the post-1980 era through New Cinema. I see these genealogies as histories that constitute the sonic memory that contemporary films inherit, rework, or rupture. This chapter also provides a contextual basis for understanding the ideological characteristics of sound use in my main films.

The main analysis chapter of the thesis is Chapter 4: Sonic Traps and Sounds of Polarization. Here, I provide symptomatic readings of five post-2016 films: *Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, *Sibel*, *Hayaletler*, and *Karanlık Gece*. Each film is analyzed following

four axes developed. I read these films not as responses to political crises but as sonic constructions of them and show how monotonous music, distorted sound devices, fragmented dialogues, and acoustic voids encode resentment, moral fatigue, and class hierarchies.

Finally, in Chapter 5, synthesizing the findings of the analyses, I argue that *sonic resentment* and *negative catharsis* are not isolated stylistic tendencies but central organizing logics of contemporary sound worlds in the cinema of Turkey. Drawing on Jameson's theory of contradiction this chapter shows how sound encodes and aestheticizes structural immobility and irresolution. Here, sound becomes a means of representing political exhaustion, the erosion of the future, and the privatization of emotions. Hence, a response to my main thesis question emerges: In post-2016 cinema of Turkey, sound is the acoustic front, not the background, of ideology. The chapter concludes by reiterating the provocation that has guided this study: what we hear and what we are not allowed to hear is not accidental.

While this thesis aims to advance a critical understanding of cinematic sound as an ideological apparatus in post-2016 cinema in Turkey, several conceptual and methodological challenges inevitably emerge. As a practice that prioritizes absence, distortion, and atmosphere as sites of contradiction, symptomatic listening relies on interpretive proximity rather than empirical certainty. It does not claim objectivity or universality in how sounds are perceived, instead, it situates listening within historically and politically conditioned structures of feeling. As such, one challenge is the potential subjectivity of the method, which may not be reproducible with the same effect across different listeners from various cultural contexts. In sum, this thesis listens to cinema not for harmony but for contradiction. It contends that in post-2016 cinema in Turkey, sound is not an ornamental layer but an ideological engine that encodes political deadlocks, aestheticizes exhaustion, and organizes affect beyond the limits of visual legibility.

Chapter 2

Mapping The Field

Sound in cinema has many functions, from harmonizing the audience's attention and senses with the plot to influencing political perspectives and reinforcing narratives. Yet, it is still under-examined in film studies, which have historically analyzed visuality as the primary form of knowledge and representation. This chapter focuses on certain studies on sound by addressing the critical tension that is dominant in both film and sound studies: how can sound simultaneously transcend meaning as affect and be ideologically charged at the same time?

I trace how sound has been theorized in fields like acoustic ecology, psychoanalysis, sonic materialism, affect theory, and ideology by going over both foundational and contemporary work as I argue that affect and ideology are rather than separate or opposed within the sonic dimension of cinema and that attention to this intertwining is key to understand both the construction of cinematic meaning and the ideological implications of sound. I map out my main theoretical framework to set the stage for my central question: How does sound function as an ideological tool in “new new cinema of Turkey”? I suggest that sound in film can intervene in, regulate and undermine overall meaning, even in ways that are not specifically intended. This makes the analysis of sound particularly urgent in the Turkish context, where language, political polarization, and the aesthetics of erasure have historically converged.

In this framework, affect and ideology are theorized as interdependent modes of power. The theoretical approaches employed in this chapter, ranging from Marxist and psychoanalytic to affective and new materialist, are explored to illuminate different aspects of sound's ideological operation. Althusser and Jameson offer tools for thinking the political unconscious of sound; psychoanalytic theorists such as Doane and Dolar foreground sound's relationship to desire, authority, and the speaking subject; while affect theorists like Ahmed and Berlant provide insight into how sound governs embodiment and political attachment. Together, these approaches contribute to a multidimensional analytic of cinematic sound as an ideological, affective, and material formation.

Within this broader theoretical constellation, I also engage various scholarship that explores the cultural and political dimensions of listening. Influential figures such as Metz, Chion, Baudry, and others are explored to situate this thesis's conceptual vocabulary within an established, historical critical lineage, although they are not adopted as core analytical frameworks. These scholars demonstrate that listening is an act that is shaped by social norms, aesthetic conventions, and structures of power. Their work supports the foundational claim of this thesis: that cinematic sound operates as a site of affective governance, symbolic inclusion and exclusion, and ideological encoding. The original concepts developed in the following chapters, such as *sonic ressentiment*, *cognitive mapping by inheritance*, and *negative catharsis*, are informed by, but also depart from, this theoretical groundwork in order to attend to the specific sonic and political conditions of post-2016 cinema in Turkey.

2.1 The Sonic Turn: From Margins to Meaning

The studies on cinematic sound have been in close link to philosophical questions of listening, meaning-making, and embodied perception. It is therefore important to take this literature review from the intersection of both fields.

Sound studies have roughly emerged as two distinct camps: ontological-relational and cultural-representational. The former focuses on conceptualizing sound as a force in its own right, relatively resistant to representation and symbolism, while the latter focuses on voice as a cultural construct which embodies symbolic meaning. I would like to emphasize that this division is not strict; many theorists have consciously broken this distinction and argued for sound's capacity of extending to both realms. Even studies that consider sound as ontological often recognize it as situated in cultural, historical and political contexts, just as representational critiques often draw from phenomenological understandings of the impact of sound. I use this framework to draw attention to the conceptual overlaps and discontinuities that characterize much of the work in this field.

In his book *Listening* (2002), which is accepted as one of the most important philosophical interventions within debates on sound, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that listening is an embodied and relational act. Nancy criticizes Western philosophy for traditionally being more interested in clarity and vision as well as its preoccupation with linguistic meaning. In contrast, he suggests that listening is an inherently open and never-ending process, closely connected to being itself. He reimagines sound as a relational force that underlines our experience of self and world.

However, Nancy's phenomenological approach has been criticized by many, including new materialists, for being anthropocentric and overlooking the non-human and material dimensions of sound. Thinkers such as Christoph Cox (2011), Jane Bennett (2010) and Karen Barad (2007) shift the focus to sonic ontology by conceptualizing sound as a vibrating substance that does not need to be heard by a subject to be an active agent, since it already exists independently of human listeners. They highlight that sound is also a material phenomenon as a field of force, resonance and mutual influence operating between bodies, objects and environments. While Cox proposes a sonic materialism that treats sound as an autonomous process independent of representation, Bennett emphasizes the vitality of matter and argues that sound has its own agency within a distributed field of emotional forces. Bringing together quantum physics and feminist theory, Barad introduces the concept of *intra-action* to explain the emergence of sound within a particular relationality. However, while these perspectives offer valuable ontological expansions, they often risk detaching sound from its cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. My thesis critically departs from their vibratory ontology by foregrounding the social inscriptions and political functions of sound in cinema. In particular, I argue that while sound can indeed act as a nonhuman force, its affective and epistemological effects are rarely evenly distributed. Instead, they are mediated by social institutions, production logics, and aesthetic conventions. Therefore, I approach sound not as a purely vibrational or non-signifying force, but as a culturally codified and ideologically encoded phenomenon.

This departure is crucial for my method of symptomatic listening. Whereas scholars like Barad, Bennett, and Cox focus on sound's ontological autonomy, I locate sound within a historical materialist framework that attends to how sonic elements

function as ideological cues, tools of affective governance, and infrastructures of perception. In this way, I treat vibratory ontology not as incorrect, but as insufficient for understanding the role of sound in filmic ideological construction. My aim is not to reject their insights, but to situate them within a broader critical tradition that accounts for power, ideology, and historically conditioned listening practices.

Following this, many sound theorists increasingly underline that sound and listening are historically and socially conditioned. For example, sound media archaeologists argue that acoustic technologies such as phonographs, telephones, and stethoscopes have shaped and continue to influence contemporary listening practices by determining norms of intelligibility, fidelity, and discipline (Kheshti, 2015; Sterne, 2003). These techniques have helped establish the normative forms of listening because people have become accustomed to paying attention to certain sound elements that these technologies have allowed while overlooking others. This historical conditioning is relevant to cinema, where those norms similarly structure the sound worlds of movies. In this perspective, cinematic sound emerges as a product of and operates as a social technology that play a huge role in how we listen and conditions what and whom we to listen to.

In addition, it has been widely emphasized that film sound is not a completely free creative space because it is tied to large production networks shaped by audience expectations, studio systems, European festival aesthetics, and political economies (Born, 2013). What determines the preferred aesthetics, including sound, in films is often closely linked to the dominantly Western taste-making processes and other variables such as finance, distribution, and identity. This means that the loud soundtrack of a Hollywood action film and the quiet sounds of an experimental film are not just stylistic choices but also the results of important sociopolitical conditions.⁶

Sound theorists also argue that listening experience is shaped by the social, conscious and cultural background of the listener as well, which makes it an interactive

⁶ For example, a blockbuster film such as *Oppenheimer* (Christopher Nolan, 2023) uses loud sound design to emphasize a narrative of “scientific genius,” whereas a non-mainstream film such as *Atlantics* (Mati Diop, 2019) uses low-frequency sounds to portray a sense of trauma that owes as much to the budget and genre expectations as to the intended plot of the narrative.

practice (Voegelin, 2010; LaBelle, 2018). From this perspective, the sounds in the film go beyond supporting both narrative and images; they create the atmosphere, mood, and affective environment.⁷

Although extensive work has been done on issues such as sound editing and the use of music in film, the concept of soundscape, for example, began to gain attraction in the cinema medium in the not-so-distant past. The concept was first put forward by R. Murray Schafer, whose academic orientation was initially in acoustic ecology. Criticizing the way industrial modernity made the world more polluted in terms of sound, the researcher distinguished places through measuring their sonic identities. He conceptualized places that are silent and clear in terms of their soundscapes as “hi-fi” and environments where sound information was blurred by excessive noise as “lo-fi” (Schafer, 1977). Schafer’s work remained limited to ecological frameworks, but his student Barry Truax took it further and studied the role of everyday sounds in the formation of social identities. His concept of *acoustic community* (Truax, 1984), which he developed with reference to communities that unite around shared sonic environments, is one of the early significant leaps in sound studies that shifted the focus from the environmental nature of sound to its cultural nature.

Theories that treated sound as a cultural and ideologically implicit construct also provided a framework for treating film sound as cultural and relational in this way. Michel Chion’s *audiovisual contract* is a concept that refers to the way in which sound and image in film are perceived as a single text, even when they are originally combined in post-production. This process, which Chion calls *syncretism*, demonstrates how audiences are conditioned to perceive audiovisual harmony as natural, even though it is actually combined later (Chion, 1994). These helped to challenge the traditional privileging of the visual in film theory and allowed sound to be recognized as an active narrative authority.

⁷ The “mysterious” sounds in *Zone of Interest* (Jonathan Glazer, 2023) create an auditory space that resists visual meaning, which directs the audience to “hear” the boundaries of established perceptions. Cinematic sounds and listening to them, then, are also historically informed interpretive, embodied, spatial hence, political acts.

This perceptual and narrative approach was countered by many opposing arguments. For instance, Brian Kane (2014) has offered a more historically and ideologically grounded conceptualization of sound and argued that the way we understand sound can never be completely abstracted from the cultural, historical, and material contexts. For him, acoustics is also an epistemological and a political category as well as affective; hence, it always brings in ideological weight. Recent work on cinematic sound has increasingly focused on its potential for emotional manipulation and spatial construction. For instance, Budhaditya Chattopadhyay (2012), a scholar of global southern cinema, argues that the use of sound in these cinematic traditions has long ago become a narrative tool in its own right. According to him, sound is consciously used in these films to create perceptual fields and spatial images and to position the audience in relation to power, mobility and memory.

In his perception and symbol-based theory of film sound, Thomas Goerne (2019) argues that sounds in film are interpreted as *auditory objects*, by the audience which are cognitive constructs that are shaped by cultural, cross-modal and emotional associations. He argues that sounds come with embedded emotional weight because of the historical associations and metaphors, such as the association of low-pitched sounds with danger or darkness. According to him, these sound symbols, when encountered, activate unconscious cultural codes (e.g., thunder as anger, silence as repression). This argument makes more sense when we think about the universality of such associations. Though his framework remains more descriptive than political, Goerne's work provides an important basis for understanding how inherited sonic codes work to structure affective listening (Goerne, 2019, pp. 17–26). This thesis later builds on and politicizes this insight through the framework of *cognitive mapping by inheritance*.

Today, debates within sound studies are increasingly converging around a common theoretical theme that recognizes the ideological potential of sound. Rather than a strict linear movement from ecology to perception, perception to ideology, and ideology to power, these conceptual orientations now coexist and intersect to form various multidimensional frameworks. However, this theoretical evolution has not been reflected in film sound theories comprehensively. This has to do with the fact that

apart from all the implications cinematic sound carries, it is still greatly being shaped by aesthetic, technological and industrial necessities and obligations, rather than just theoretical advances. As a result, the awareness of sound as a meaning-making, directive force has often entered cinematic practice indirectly and relatively late.

The emergence of sound studies as an autonomous field has influenced film theory in a particular way. From acoustic ecology and semiotics to affect theory and postcolonial criticism, the detailed study of sound has led to the recognition that sound is as important as the image as a site where ideology is constructed, contested and felt. As many basic texts and theoretical frameworks of film theory are still central to our understanding of the film form, narrative and ideology, the ideological function of sound is still largely overlooked. In the structuralist, psychoanalytic and early apparatus theories, the visual dimension is systematically privileged while the sound is ignored, naturalized or evaluated as purely affective.

However, in Althusserian terms, the presumed neutrality of sound itself functions as a mechanism of interpellation: it catches the subject precisely through its invisibility by absorbing ideological contents without drawing attention to its own constructed nature. Hence, this recurring absence of sound in ideology criticism represents a structural silence that may also requires a symptomatic reading. Cinematic sounds routinely interpret ideological themes through music, voice and ambient noise; they position work, shape affective reactions and reinforce moral and emotional orientations, but their function is rarely questioned. This continuing neglect requires a critical realignment: the sound should be highlighted as a central and active force within the ideological apparatus of cinema.

The treatment of sound as a culturally induced phenomenon implies its relationship and role in the formation and degradation of ideologies, such as capitalism, colonialism, race, gender, etc. (Attali, 1985; Eidsheim, 2019; Sterne, 2003; Stoeber, 2016). Scholars working on these areas treat sound as a constitutive element of subjectivity and social order, which makes listening itself a political act, and hence, matters of who or what is deemed worthy of being listened to and which sounds should be foregrounded or backgrounded become all ideological questions. For example,

Chion's concept of the *acousmetre* describes the disembodied voice as an omniscient site of control, while feminist theorists have shown how sound codes regulate audience desire and authority through gendered regimes of sound (Silverman, 1988; Doane, 1985). In this respect, an important intervention involves rethinking the structural significance of sound within cinematic language. As Altman's (1992) concept of "mise-en-bande" draws attention to how different layers of sound in film, dialogue, music and ambient noise, undergo a process of being assembled into coherent structures, just like image editing. This framework implies the narrational power of sonic organization and its constitutive role in cinematic meaning.

Taken together, these interventions require rethinking the sound track as an important ideological operator in the cinematic apparatus. These approaches argue that the sound dimension of film can also be understood as a site of ideological negotiation. They encourage us to consider how film sound can contribute to the reproduction, contestation or subversion of social orders. Through these theories film sound becomes a medium through which ideologies are both interpreted and potentially undermined. By considering sound in this way, film analysis can reveal the infrastructures that govern our ways of listening and, therefore, our ways of moving in the world.

2.2 Film Sound and Ideology

The sonic turn in film studies has also required a sustained interest in the various implications of sound. If sounds effect emotional responses and play a role in identity formation in real life, then they should also be studied as mechanisms of ideological inscription, as means through which power, identity and social order are reproduced, contested or re-imagined. These frameworks shape the approach of this study, in which sounds are treated as ideological symptoms embedded in the political unconscious of the nation. As we will see, in the analyzed films, sound often operates independently, sometimes even in contradiction with the visual field, producing moments of tension, dissonance or rupture that reveal the cultural and political fault lines shaping contemporary society of Turkey.

In this framework I use Fredric Jameson's (1981) concept of the *ideologeme*, which he defines as the smallest intelligible unit of ideological meaning within the symbolic field of culture. *Ideologemes* are socially symbolic units that mediate between collective ideology and narrative structure for Jameson. In a key passage, he writes:

"Ideology necessarily implies the libidinal investment of the individual subject, but the narratives of ideology, even what we have called the Imaginary, daydreaming, or wish-fulfilling text, are equally necessarily collective in their materials and form. In this chapter, we will argue that the culture or 'objective spirit' of a given period is an environment peopled not merely with inherited words and conceptual survivals, but also with those narrative unities of a socially symbolic type which we have designated as ideologemes. Such ideologemes are the raw material, the inherited narrative paradigms, upon which the novel as a process works and which it transforms into texts of a different order" (Jameson, 2006, p. 173).

Jameson employs this argument in his analysis of George Gissing's novels, in which unresolved contradictions are dealt with ambiguity or symbolic displacement. Although Jameson initially developed this concept in relation to literary form, I extend it to the sound dimension of cinema, which I consider as a narrative form as well. The central argument of this study is that certain circulating sound patterns or the dominant use of certain sounds in specific scenes function as sonic ideologemes. These historically situated, emotionally charged sound forms communicate social contradictions and ideologically position the listener within the cinematic world; therefore, they should not be treated as simply stylistic elements.

As a multisensory practice, cinema activates visual, narrative and sonic ideologemes which are manifested through certain patterns, music effects or environmental textures that convey a coded meaning. For example, scared and high-pitched female voices in moments of vulnerability or monotone ambiances in depictions of rural spaces are sonic ideologemes because they organize contradiction

into legible emotional configurations⁸. Through these forms, films do not directly resolve ideological tension. Rather, they present the listener with an emotionally recognizable structure shaped by previously internalized sound codes. These sonic ideologemes pave the way for *cognitive mapping through inheritance*, a process in which orientation is achieved through emotional and ideological recognition of previously sedimented sound codes that resonate with the listener's cultural positioning. When these sonic cues are misaligned or cross the narrative flow, they produce a formal conflict that makes contradictions audible. These breaks in sonic coherence reveal the ideological connotations inherent in the sonic structure of the film and point to the political sonic unconscious.

While Jameson's concept of the *ideologeme* emphasizes how cultural forms mediate social contradiction through symbolic and affective configurations, Althusser's theory of interpellation provides a complementary account of how ideology addresses individuals directly. Both frameworks converge in this study's approach to cinematic sound, which functions not only as a site of symbolic containment but also as a mechanism of subject formation. The concept of interpellation, derived from Althusser's theory of the ideological apparatus of the state (ISA), is central to this study since it posits that ideology "summons" individuals to the position of the subject through repetition (Althusser, 1971). Sound in cinema participates in this process through explicit verbal phrases or voice-over narration and through ambient sound, musical cues and spatial noise that seem natural but carry ideological weight. While early ideological film theory often emphasized the visual aspect, especially within the framework of psychoanalysis and apparatus developed by theorists such as Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry, the auditory dimension functions with intensity in conditioning the subject's position (Baudry, 1975; Metz, 1977).

⁸ The ideological function of sonic ideologemes lies in their ability to translate contradiction into affective familiarity. High-pitched female voices may evoke emotional intensity, but they mark the character as unstable or powerless and creates a gendered hierarchy of voice. Similarly, the use of monotonous ambient drones in rural scenes reinforces a stereotype of the regressive rurality. Both examples displace social tensions into aesthetic codes. This aligns with Jameson's claim that ideologemes mediate collective contradictions by offering symbolic resolutions that feel natural, even when they obscure the structural antagonisms beneath (Jameson, 2006, pp. 173-176).

The optimal combination of sound elements and image is important to create an immersive film viewing experience. The regular repetition and standardization of these practices in time, leads to the normalization of certain associations that sounds carry and are internalized by the audience. Here sound also contributes to creating the illusion of realism and objectivity. Since cinematic sound produces predictable emotional responses and helps to stabilize meaning and prevent fragmentation, this strategy achieves ideological coherence through the sonic dimension rather than direct messages conveyed through images. These architectures of listening orient and situate the audience within the film. This spatial positioning increases the political power of sound and places it at the center of cinema as an ideological state apparatus.

2.2.1 Inherited listening and cognitive mapping. While ideology operates largely invisibly, there is empirical research that suggests the ideological function of sound and listening practices. For example, in a 2021 study, listeners were exposed to a type of music often used to represent rural settings in films without visual cues, and even in the absence of visual cues, listeners overwhelmingly associated this music with rural landscapes, gentle environments, and peaceful atmospheres. This suggests that certain types of music, or music containing certain codes, are internalised through repeated use in films to represent the same world of meaning, and viewers tend to associate these codes with certain images through a process of association (Bourne 2021).

In another empirical study, Juslin & Västfjäll (2008) show that certain music genres can correspond to certain emotions in the audience since they rely on visual imagery and episodic memory. Similarly, Margulis et al. (2022) emphasize the role of cultural background in influencing these associations between music genre and visual emotions in their study on the production of narrative imagery in response to music. These studies show that sounds in films have the potential to trigger memory, emotions and expectations; which can be read as the ideological sedimentation of listening habits (Coulthard, 2021; Dyer, 2011). They also emphasize that cinematic sound is perceived through preconditioned and historical frameworks rather than through newly constructed interpretations of immediately received information.

These studies point to a form of sonic literacy acquired through repetition of institutionalized listening practices in cultural forms which presupposes common sonic grammars. Even in films that do not use traditional audiovisual structures, the listener is already familiar with what is being disrupted and subverted (Coulthard, 2021; Dyer, 2011). These inherited grammars function by offering the listener familiar symbolic forms, ideologemes, to orient themselves within a film's ideological landscape. Throughout this thesis, I argue that these pre-acquired sonic grammars are interpreted by the audience in a process of *cognitive mapping by inheritance*, which suggests that when watching a film, audiences interpret sonic codes through the sonic grammars they have already inherited from their previous cinematic experiences. By activating pre-existing sonic associations through cognitive mapping, they position themselves within familiar or unfamiliar ideological spaces in the film. Film sound relies on these recognizable codes, which often operate below the level of conscious awareness. This suggests that the audience is already conditioned and prepared by a sound archive that allows them to decode what they encounter in the film. Therefore, understanding the sonic dimension of cinema requires tracing how the conditions of this sonic grammar are translated into meaning (Bourne, 2021; Coulthard, 2021; Dyer, 2011).

2.2.2 Silence, and ideological framing. While much of the discussion so far has centered on the presence of sound as an ideological material, the absence of sound can also be ideologically loaded: it may operate as a sonic ideologeme that encodes exclusion, spatial stratification, and affective regulation. The association of silence with nature and peace masks the commonality of noise as innate to life and therefore lead to spatial discriminations. Since silent areas are often reserved for economically privileged classes today, the loudest areas of the city are usually the poorer places subject to urban transformation. In this respect, when we listen to the level of ambient noise within a space, it is possible to find clues to broader power structures by looking at whose voices are foregrounded, whose voices are pushed into the background, and whose and which voices are completely unheard in that specific location.

Silence can also function as an absence that can signify oppression and exclusion. In this context, the sound field becomes a system of inclusion and exclusion, where access to audibility symbolically determines presence. This becomes

particularly visible in mainstream cinema, where characters from marginalized identities, for instance a Kurdish character, a woman, or a gay friend, are often included as part of the protagonist's social circle with their most stereotypical characteristics. The sonic treatment of these characters follows pre-established cultural norms: the Kurdish character might speak in an exaggerated dialect, the gay character may be overly loud, and the woman might be speaking in an overly emotional tone.⁹ Here, vocal stereotype and strategic silencing can be seen as ideologemes that resolve social tensions by aesthetic containment (Jameson, 2006, p. 173).

Music in films itself has several functions, one of which is the reinforcement of normative social roles. Conventions such as the tradition of representing conformist heroes with orchestral music and dissimilar figures with more experimental music function as part of a larger sound regime shaped by histories of bourgeois and capitalist rationality. These pairings between particular sounds and images reproduce through this repetition what might be called normative sound representation: witnessing the same pairings over and over again, audiences learn to associate tonal harmony with order and moral legitimacy, while more experimental music becomes a cue for chaos, marginality, or threat. This mapping, sketched out in detail in section 2.2.5, draws on a long tradition from the tonal systems of the Enlightenment to the digitally compressed sounds of today, in which dominant ideologies sonically encode who and what is considered intelligible, desirable, or disposable. They function as ideologemes in that familiar sound-image pairings offer affective resolutions to underlying ideological tensions. By implying pre-established emotional associations, they render socially contested meanings such as authority, deviance, or legitimacy more coherent and acceptable within the narrative framework.

⁹ A concrete example of this can be found in *Kocan Kadar Konuş* (2015), where the different identities within the female protagonist's friend group, such as the "marginal" or "outspoken" woman, are sonically marked through high-pitched, fast-paced, and didactic vocal deliveries. These vocal performances serve as auditory codes of difference, highlighting their deviation from normative femininity. In contrast, the protagonist's "reasonable" or "moderate" womanhood is constructed as the sonic norm against which the others are measured. Thus, even when the narrative appears inclusive, the sonic layer often reinforces hegemonic norms by shaping how these characters are meant to be heard and, by extension, understood.

Another sonic element that is used to imply certain characteristics of a character is the leitmotif.¹⁰ For instance, a musical melody that signals fragility, when regularly assigned to a female character, helps construct and stabilize gendered meanings and solidifies the expected gender roles in society. When certain sounds are repeated at moments of vulnerability or moral weakness in female characters, this can contribute to the association of those sounds with vulnerability and femininity. These recurring sound-meaning pairings operate as sonic ideologemes and shape perception through affective habits.

Dialogue is also a powerful interrogation tool. In many films, the voice of the protagonist is always foregrounded in the sound mix to emphasize his or her importance and authority. This also lets the audience know who to identify and sympathize with. On the other hand, the voices of marginalized characters or anti-heroes may be presented masked by other voices in a way that emphasizes their subordinate status in the narrative scheme. In mainstream films that promote normative values, this technique can have the effect of reinforcing existing social hierarchies by covertly guiding the audience to accept the dominance of certain voices and the marginalization of others.

Another critical component of the cinematic sound world is ambient sound, which reflects the sonic identity of public or private social spaces. Ambient sounds are the sum total of sounds in a given space, such as the rustling of trees, traffic, human conversations or, if the film takes place in an office, the sounds of computer keyboards; like soundscapes, they constitute the identity of the space. For example, in the representation of crowded environments, details such as transportation vehicles, people talking on cell phones, and sounds of hustle and bustle, combined with images, can indicate modernity, progress and economic growth. However, in films depicting rural or peripheral environments, there can be a prominent use of silence. The repeated

¹⁰ A leitmotif is a recurring musical phrase associated with a specific character, object, or idea, used to reinforce narrative elements in operas, films, and other works. For further information, see Carl Dahlhaus, "Leitmotif," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

use of these sounds leads to a norm of sonic representation of rural and urban spaces, often in the same ways in different films. The specificities of geographies are sacrificed for normative sounds that immediately trigger such established associations. As a result, this serves to place certain environments and their inhabitants within a particular ideological framework, often directing the audience's interpretation of these spaces to support dominant ideologies. In this way, cinematic soundscapes¹¹ actively contribute to an ideological framing that places these spaces within fixed socio-political narratives from a particular point of view that, from a particular point of view, construct a fixed spatial ideology. Rather than offering contingent or contested representations, sound design frequently affirms inherited mappings of space, class, and temporality. As Jameson (1991) argues, representations of space in late capitalism are the sites where history is either repressed or symbolically resolved.

Although it is true that cities have different sonic characteristics than rural areas, focusing on the over-representation of these differences risk ignoring sounds and representations in the grey area, hence reinforcing existing stereotypes. This can lead audiences to interpret the sounds used in urban areas as progress, movement and development, and the absence or rarity of industrial sounds in rural areas as stagnation and primitiveness. Not only does this oversimplify the realities of both spaces, but it also forces a perspective that may favor urban, industrial growth over rural traditions (Buller & Morris, 2004). When we consider that rural environments possess their own forms of dynamic sound, such as the activity of agricultural work, animals, and community life, this framing gets more complicated (Rodaway, 1994). When movies silence these different but vibrant forms of daily life in the rural areas, they may reinforce the idea that these spaces are passive or they lack any meaningful human activity, which ultimately contributes to the idea of rural places as alienated or cut off from the progressive modern cities and hence backward (Sterne, 2003). Such spatial sonics are ideologemes that resolve or displace social contradictions by encoding developmental hierarchies into ambient cues. The opposition between vibrant cities

¹¹ The term *cinematic soundscape* was introduced by Budhaditya Chattopadhyay to describe the spatial and narrative functions of sound in film beyond dialogue and music. He defines cinematic soundscapes as immersive auditory environments that shape audience perception and meaning-making by foregrounding ambient and environmental sounds as central narrative elements. See Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, "The Cinematic Soundscape: Conceptualising the Use of Sound in Indian Films," *SoundEffects* 2, no. 2 (2012): 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.7146/se.v2i2.6398>.

and passive rurality functions ideologically by offering emotionally legible resolutions to contradictions between modernity and tradition, centre and periphery. As a result, the consistent use of these selective sounds creates a hierarchy that favors urban sounds as markers of progress and rural sounds as markers of passivity. Which in the end implicate a fixed, never-changing ideological understanding of space.

In cinema, sound functions as one of the most effective tools of naturalization because breaks, disruptions and transitions in the sonic dimension are easily “corrected” over in post-production through various techniques such as dubbing. This tradition of maintaining harmony at the sound level functions to anchor the audience’s emotions and attention in the narrative flow without any interruption (Altman, 1992; Chion, 1994.) Such techniques create a sense of realism and emotional continuity and subtly manipulate the audience’s reactions by aligning them with the ideological position of the film. Sound becomes constitutive and keeps on being evocative: it appeals to the audience, invites identification and encourages emotional engagement, often without conscious awareness.

Moreover, the repeated use of certain sonic cues with certain characters in a film attribute to them emotional and moral values historically associated with these musical genres. For example, brass instruments, because they are not popular and are known to be traditionally used in marches, often evoke a sense of victory, authority, nationalism or masculinity, at least that is how they circulate in the wider popular imagination. On the other hand, low-frequency, more bassy tones target the bodily senses and escape meaning; hence they connote danger, threat or deviance. These associations are constructed through repeated exposure in specific historical and ideological contexts so that audiences react in predictable ways when exposed to them: admiring, fearing, trusting or rejecting based on sonic cues.

Jean-Louis Baudry’s theory of the ideological cinematic apparatus might be extended to sonic structures when considering how synchronized sound and post-production processes render sonic labor invisible, giving the illusion of seamless realism (Baudry, 1975). Baudry argues that film functions ideologically by hailing the audience in a specific position with the help of technical strategies such as editing and

perspective. Drawing on Althusser and Lacan, he shows how cinema creates a seamless *reality effect* that masks its own constructed nature, which resembles the ability of dominant ideologies to promote themselves as natural. Extending this to sound, we can easily say that synchronized sound and the cleaning of the sonic field from unwanted frequencies similarly conceal such labor of construction and situate the audience within a controlled sonic field.

Randolph Jordan takes a materialist and ecological approach to cinematic sound to underline that sound has spatial and political functions (2023). He develops the concept of *acoustic profiling*, which refers to a technique of structuring perceptual hierarchies and shaping ideological spaces through the organization of sound. According to him, one of the effects of sound in cinema is that ambient noise, reverberation and spatial acoustics regulate how bodies and environments are perceived and evaluated. In this way, Jordan frames how sound is distributed, that is, sonic spatialization, as a form of acoustic governance that produces social hierarchy. Because in this way some voices are centralized and others are pushed to the periphery. As he writes, “sound’s spatial affordances not only locate bodies but regulate their proximity, agency, and relationality within the cinematic field” (Jordan, 2023, p. 591). This framework complements affect theory and ideological critique by demonstrating that the atmospheres created in film through sound or other methods regulate the political imagination.

This effective masking ability of sound can help us think about how it functions below the threshold of cognition and shapes the emotional experience in ways that are largely unconscious. Based on Jameson’s theory of the political unconscious, it is also possible to read sounds as agents who bring symbolic solutions to social contradictions that are unresolved or rejected to be resolved (Jameson, 1981.) These sonic allegorical resolutions are often used, especially in the Yeşilçam melodramas. For example, the economic situation of poor families doesn’t improve as the film ends, but an allegorical music symbolizing joyful and collective love, while avoiding real political conflict, emotionally dissolves ideological tensions and can provide catharsis for the audience, even if everything remains as it is. The sound thus becomes an emotional anesthesia, offering softening and false closure instead of “rupture.”

Where Althusser emphasizes the unconscious repetition of ideology, Jameson adds historical specificity, reminding us that even seemingly apolitical films follow the imprint of their ideological circles. These resonances are usually encoded not in the image or dialogue but in the spatial configurations of sound: in the normalizing background hum of bureaucratic areas, in the explosive parts of nationalist marches, or in the hyper-audibility of certain sounds over others. In this view, these soundscapes become codified spaces where capitalist, patriarchal or nationalist ideologies are logically made and conform to a sonic capitalist reality.

When we talk about certain sonic norms and their emotional connotations, we also need to talk about the sounds that are categorized as abnormal and disturbing and are often eliminated in the editing process. Theorists working on sonic hegemony examine such sounds, which can also be described as coded anomalies, to understand what they mean historically and culturally. These studies reveal that dominant sonic regimes are systems that regulate what is considered sonically intelligible, emotional or legitimate, depending on their own history and culture. Jennifer Stoeber, for example, develops a concept called the “listening ear,” which in the US context refers to a dominant form of listening shaped by white, bourgeois and patriarchal norms. The voices of the working class and non-White practices disturb this listening ear and they result in being labelled as excessive, incomprehensible “noise” (Stoeber, 2016.) So, the dominant listening ear gets to decide the cleansing of public spaces of these uncomfortable sounds, a process which reflects and constructs the ideologies of their respective times. Sonic hierarchies that become the norm through technological standardization and the aesthetic preferences of particular classes also reproduce racialized systems of power by determining whose voices are heard or silenced. This framework suggests that the sonic dimension of film reproduces racialized ideologies through speech or musical code and through the representation of some subjects with clearly audible voices and others with disturbing and often incomprehensible sounds.

Nevertheless, as Gramscian theory reminds us that since hegemony is never complete and is always contested (Gramsci, 1971), sound also may emerge as a site of resistance. Unconventional sound design, unusual soundscapes, and the foregrounding

of voices of the excluded and the marginalized can all serve to provoke critical listening. Tina Campt's concept of the "felt sound" is a good example to show the power of sound even in instances where it is used very subtly. For her, "felt sounds" are quiet sonic elements often overlooked by dominant listening regimes, but they present rich affective and political meaning for those who can hear (Campt, 2017). Campt's work can be seen as a challenge to the interpretation of silence as noise and the absence of influence. Within this logic, sound does not always have to be loud or intelligible to be politically powerful. On the contrary, infrasonic textures, whispers or moments of near-silence may function as strategies of avoidance that subvert dominant aesthetic codes which equate audibility with legitimacy.

This strategy is frequently used in movies that intentionally leave out particular viewpoints or use silence to convey censorship, oppression, or the violence of erasure. In such situations, silence shows the limits of representation and draws attention to what is unsaid, unspeakable, or unheard. Scholars like LaBelle and Campt argue that these limits of representability can also work as challenges to the dominant sonic order and can also be productive. For instance, LaBelle (2018) values these moments of silence since they can also create opportunities for "sonic agency," a term he uses to define the ability of sound and listening to challenge, interfere with, or reshape prevailing power and meaning structures. In addition, sonic agency can also function through the deliberate removal, inversion, or distortion of sound, and holds the potential to shift how bodies orient themselves toward power. This is where LaBelle's idea engages in a fruitful dialogue with Tina Campt's (2017) concept of felt sound. Campt's uses felt sound to refer to the sonic experiences that are rarely loud or clearly audible within hegemonic listening frameworks, yet they resonate affectively with those attuned to their presence. Ambient frequencies, whispers, vibrations, and muffled breath are examples of felt sounds that may fall under the audibility threshold. According to Campt, the reason these sounds have political power is that they function on the level of the body or the unconscious rather than the structures of recognition. She contends that these pieces of sound can convey histories of trauma, survival, or rejection and provoke an intimate and rebellious way to listen.

When it comes to portraying experiences of marginalization, silencing, or resistance, the combination of *sonic agency* and *felt sound* is particularly powerful in cinema. Films can create sonic spaces that resist narrative closure or ideological transparency by using subversive sound design, distorted speech, muted voices, acoustic voids, or ambient tension. These methods highlight sound's capacity for relationality and its ability to reveal exclusionary systems through affective resonance and perceptual dissonance rather than direct representation. The audience may be challenged by such practices to listen differently, to become more sensitive to politically charged silences and sounds that function below the threshold of dominant audibility. Thus, both *felt sound* and *sonic agency* emphasize the flexibility of sound. One can even use its absence as a means of criticism. These strategies highlight the culturally constructed nature of listening, revealing the ideological frameworks that dictate who is heard, how, and under what circumstances, as opposed to promoting prevailing forms of cinematic realism. Additionally, they create room for counter-audibility, in which small sound registers serve as possibilities for affective survival, memory, or defiance. These dynamics will be revisited in Chapter 5 through the analysis of contemporary Turkish films such as *Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, and *Hayaletler*, where sound design deliberately employs silence, vocal suppression, and sonic ambiguity to articulate affective resistance and expose structural repression.

Together, these critiques reveal how listening itself is a site of ideological contestation and how racialized or classed subjects are interpolated or excluded not only through visual representation but also through sonic norms and expectations. Yet if listening is shaped by ideology, it is also deeply felt, as a phenomenon of bodily intensity, emotional attunement, and atmospheric modulation. This raises the question: how do we know the political force of sound that is not fully representational, but mostly affective?¹²

¹² Although this chapter highlights the political potential of sound strategies such as disharmony and silence, it is essential to note that these formal qualities are not inherently subversive. Noise, for example, may serve both liberating and authoritarian purposes; it has been mobilized in fascist aesthetics, military technologies, and corporate branding as well as in experimental or dissident art. Similarly, silence can refer to censorship or erasure, but it can also point to minimalism or emotional and political uncertainty. As Stuart Hall reminds us, meaning is determined not by the form itself alone but by the cultural and historical context in which it is produced and interpreted. Thus, resistance arises from how these formal qualities are embedded and decoded into specific ideological, institutional, and

2.2.3 Affective frequencies. When it comes to theorizing sound and affect, there has been a noticeable conflict between the two prevalent frameworks. On the one hand, scholars like Brian Massumi hold the view that affect is an autonomous, pre-cognitive intensity. For Massumi, sound is an unrepresentable intensity that operates below the threshold of cognition. The ideological framework, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on how sound organizes meaning, shapes subjectivity, and power through socially embedded codes. This tension poses important queries regarding the transmission and perception of power. To more specifically address this contradiction, we should refer to Baruch Spinoza's conceptualization of affect as a relational, embodied force that arises from the encounter of different bodies and their capacities to affect and be affected. Spinoza offers a basis for understanding affect as both a pre-personal and historically conditioned phenomenon that also functions at the level of sensation. For him, while simultaneously being entangled with power and ideological structures, affect is also a preconscious ability.

According to Spinoza, the body is not a closed entity; it is a part of a network of forces that are continuously changing through encounters with other bodies. These encounters increase or decrease the body's power to act, which he calls *potentia*. Affect is the thing that emerges during the increase or decrease of the body's power to act. Though relational and operating through embodied experience, affect is not in opposition to reason. Theorists who argue that affect is always linked to a field of relations and that physical reactions are influenced by social and political factors have primarily adopted this point of departure. The foundation for comprehending how sound, through vibration, resonance, and rhythm, can reshape one's sense of agency, relationality, and embeddedness in the world without the aid of language or representation is based upon Spinoza's conception of affect as a profoundly embodied force (Spinoza, 1677/1996). Spinoza's emphasis on embodied relationality opened up ways to rethink affect as a dynamic, interpersonal force that shifts between bodies, spaces, and geographies rather than as an internal essence. This is especially helpful when thinking about the function of sound in movies: how acoustic resonances and

social economies. This framework invites a contextual reading of film sound, where destructiveness cannot be assumed but must be critically evaluated within the broader semiotic and political sphere.

vibrations function beneath or above language to organize power dynamics, recondition perception, and strengthen affective ties.

While this thesis critically engages with the conceptual tension between affect and ideology, it does so within a broader concern: the historicization of affect through sound. Drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of *a structure of feeling*, I approach affect as a historically situated, collectively recorded atmosphere, an atmosphere that saturates the sonic grammars of cinema (shared patterns of audibility, rhythm and acoustic expectation) with its ideological textures and affective atmospheres. I use affect as a methodological horizon rather than a standalone concept: a way of listening to how historically contingent affective formations surface, circulate and crystallize in sound and how societies feel them. The genealogies of ideology, sonic regimes, ruptures and the sonic unconscious analyzed in the following chapters are part of this broader project: to understand how cinematic sonic affect is felt, organized, layered, reproduced and transmitted over time. In this sense, sonic ideologemes function as affective containers that momentarily stabilize contradiction. These recurring affect-sound configurations do not merely express meaning; they organize emotional legibility for ideological tensions across historical structures of feeling.

Nonetheless, understanding ideology as an embodied, affective, and temporal structure rather than just a representational system is vital. Even Fredric Jameson, whose work serves as a crucial conceptual framework for this thesis, recognizes the ideological role of affect despite not working directly within affect theory. According to his concept of the *waning of affect* in his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), affect is reorganized per late capitalism's logic. Jameson claims that postmodern culture creates affective intensities that conceal material, political, and historical contradictions while simulating emotional depth. This critical insight demonstrates that affect, even when stylized or flattened, plays an active role in maintaining ideological coherence.

Affect then, is not simply an atmosphere or ephemeral sensation, it is a material force with tangible consequences. Jameson reads affective modulation under postmodernism as structurally embedded, rather than merely symbolic, revealing how

sensory economies maintain ideological coherence (1992). Affect emerges here as one of the intimate and efficient modalities of ideology, precisely because it bypasses critical reflection and works at the level of sensation, and bodily response. Cinematic sound becomes a key apparatus in modulating affective life as a technology of ideological interpellation. Sound directs feeling, organizes time, and positions subjects within particular relations to power. Thus, even in Jameson's Marxist analysis, affect emerges as a structurally consequential force: it mediates how ideology is felt and how it produces material effects through the sensory and emotional conditioning of the subject.

Nevertheless, some theorists have framed affect as resistant to ideological capture because of its ability to function below the threshold of cognition. For instance, Brian Massumi (2002), a key figure in affect theory, argues that affects are autonomous and precognitive, functioning through intensities and flows that transcend representational and ideological bounds in his earlier work. With its focus on the body's ability to sense any change before it is processed cognitively, Massumi's work is significant since it opens affect as a field of study. However, his views have drawn criticism for separating affect from its material and historical context. I agree that Massumi's focus on intensity and precognitive affect is a helpful diagnostic of how sound functions beneath language. However, I locate these intensities within the historical and political formations that affect is the means and ends. Although affects by themselves might not represent a "meaning" in the traditional semiotic sense, their relational emergence and implications are unquestionably meaningful because they help shape the atmospheres, sensibilities, and embodied orientations that organize how ideology is experienced, lived, and reproduced (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011; Williams 1977).

Lauren Berlant's concept of the *impasse* offers a particularly relevant framework for analyzing the temporal and affective characteristic of cinematic sound, particularly for my main films in Chapter 4. The *impasse* as she conceptualizes, is a durational condition in which "the experience of the present is of being in the middle of something that is not moving forward" (Berlant 2011, p. 199). It is not simply a narrative or political stasis, it is a mode of being-in-time, where potentialities are sensed but remain

unrealized. This is particularly useful for understanding how sound functions in movies that keep the audience in a state of anticipatory suspension rather than moving toward resolution. Here, sound serves as a holding pattern that keeps the subject in a state of affective suspense without fulfillment rather than as a means of transformation. Berlant underlines that impasse is “a stretch of time lived without predictable outcomes, a sense of the world as de-narrated” (2011, p.199), which rings familiar with what I describe as *negative catharsis* in sonic terms: a buildup of emotional intensity that neither culminates nor dissolves, but sustains a condition of catatonic expectancy.

Raymond Williams’ *structure of feeling*, which describes how historically embedded affective experiences frequently elude formal articulation but organize collective life, speaks directly to Berlant’s *impasse* (Williams 1977). Both concepts underline the temporality of affect, showing how certain affects shaped by historical and social factors get woven into a location’s social atmosphere. However, while Williams focuses on emergent cultural formations, Berlant foregrounds the affective cost of suspended political agency within capitalism. This temporal suspension is also reminiscent of Lisa Baraitser’s notion of *enduring time*, where time itself becomes thick, recursive, and saturated with care, delay, or non-action (Baraitser 2017). In this convergence of concepts of the *impasse*, *structures of feeling*, and *enduring time*, a view of affect as a means through which ideology is temporally organized and affectively lived emerges.

Still some scholars continue to frame affect as an autonomous intensification of bodily capacity, whereas some focus on the relational and discursive nature of affective experience. Salomé Voegelin (2010), for instance, reconceptualizes listening as a generative and embodied practice that resists fixed meaning, not as a passive reception. For Voegelin, unfolding temporally and relationally, listening is always situated and subjective and is shaped by one’s position in the world. She argues that the sonic has the potential to reveal what is absent or suppressed in visual regimes, precisely because it resists capture and closure. In this way, sound becomes a contingent and unstable realm through which the listener takes part in the creation of its meaning. This enables thinking cinematic sound as a volatile and ideological

terrain, where affective dissonances may produce critical engagement or ideological attachment.

Listening, then, is an interpretive, political act. This understanding resonates closely with the concept of *symptomatic listening* developed in this thesis. While Voegelin foregrounds the instability and co-constructed nature of listening, symptomatic listening draws attention to specific ruptures, absences, or repetitions that expose the ideological contradictions embedded in the film's soundscape. Both approaches share a commitment to treating listening as an active and situated process, rather than a transparent or innocent mode of reception. However, where Voegelin emphasizes the generative openness of listening as a resistance to fixed meaning, symptomatic listening adopts a diagnostic orientation that seeks to locate and interpret ideological tension within sonic dissonance. Symptomatic listening benefits from Voegelin's refusal of sonic closure and her emphasis on temporality and relationality, as it similarly prioritizes how sound is felt and interpreted within specific historical and political contexts. By drawing on Voegelin, this thesis reinforces its claim that meaning in cinema is also made through sonic dissonance, spatial tension, and affective residue.

Building on Ahmed's claim, recent theorists like Marie Thompson further reveal how affective norms are policed through sound and its ideological regulation. In *Beyond Unwanted Sound* (2021), Thompson argues that noise has an ideological weight in our society which is also transformed into a moral category that signals judgments about order and discomfort. According to her, these "undesirable" sounds emerge by social hierarchies, norms, cultural expectations and they are conditioned by negative regulations such as racism. Sara Ahmed also underlines the potential of affects to become norms and suggests the concept of *sticky feelings* to refer to the contagious characteristics of affects. These affects when emerged become ordinary through sticking to one's body and become open to regulation by power structures and relationships (Ahmed, 2004) since affects refers to the capacity to be affected within a relational network of forces. These arguments are useful in thinking about film sound's power to reinforce normative or idealized ways of being in the world. The legibility,

discomfort or excessiveness of sound is connected to systems of inclusion, exclusion and aesthetic policing.

These theoretical frameworks also inform the case studies analyzed in this thesis, where symptomatic listening is employed to trace ideological contradiction and affective tension through the sonic dimension. In *Kaygı* (2017), sonic glitches such as looped cassette noise signal a crisis of perception and authority, revealing ideological repression beneath the surface of personal memory. In *Sibel* (2018), the protagonist's non-verbal whistling, although operating outside normative linguistic ideology, functions as a gendered affective code that signals her exclusion and fragile agency. These examples illustrate how sound encodes political tension not through narrative resolution but through auditory excess, rupture, and dissonance.¹³

Sonic affect crosses the boundary between diegesis and reception and interpolates the audience through embodied, rhythmic synchronization. Techniques such as sudden silence in crowded scenes evoke perceptual disorientation, producing a bodily engagement that bypasses rational interpretation and attaches the listener to a particular ideological position through sensation alone. This kind of sonic manipulation of affect is often done so that the audience experiences a bodily identification next to the semantic one. For example, suddenly cutting out all sound in a crowded scene, a tactic often used in traumatic films, can create an atmosphere of dissociation by isolating the audience's perception. In mainstream cinema, emotional sound design often trains the audience to associate musical cues with moral orientations. A major chord implies resolution; a dissonant hum is unsettling. These associations are learned through repetition and socially embedded emotional schemas.

Affect theory plays a central role in this thesis since affect, like ideology, operates below the level of conscious cognition. Both are forms of governance that do not declare themselves as such but feel natural, intuitive, and even inevitable. This

¹³ The film *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1996), in which noise is used to signify political tension, could be a good example of talking about the bodily effects of sound. In the film, police sirens, screams, helicopter sounds and radio sizzles create a bodily uneasiness through the connotations of security and surveillance. These reactions are, of course, both emotional and ideological, because they describe how certain sounds are encoded in danger and iniquity by their relationship to specific places.

convergence of affect and ideology is particularly strong in the sonic domain, where sound infiltrates perception at the corporeal and temporal level. By situating affect theory alongside ideological critique, this thesis argues that sonic affect is just as constitutive of political subjectivity as it is an expressive and atmospheric tool. In the analyses that follow, affect enables a reading of sound as an agent of ideology that molds emotion, produces attachments, and organizes perception through rhythm, tone, and acoustic pattern. It is this capacity of affect to structure experience while concealing its operation that makes it indispensable for symptomatic listening and critical sonic analysis.

In short, cinematic sounds are transmitters of ideas, shapers of perceptions, and interpolators of subjectivities. They are ideological in the sense that they draw attention, shape emotions, and position subjects in relation to power. By framing listening as a political and ideological act, this approach goes beyond viewing sound as an atmosphere or influence and repositions and reframes it as an active area of ideological production that constructs the cinematic subject. This is especially evident in moments of sonic excess, distortion, or suspension, what I have termed negative catharsis, where the failure of emotional resolution becomes itself a political structure of feeling. In such moments, sound generates affective stasis, temporal blockage, or perceptual dissonance that interpolates the listener through unresolved tension. Thus, by placing affect theory alongside ideological critique, this thesis argues that cinematic soundscapes reflect, rehearse, embody and transmit ideology through the sonic textures of power, repetition, and affective saturation.

2.2.4 Psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches. Mary Ann Doane's work on sound design plays a foundational role in psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches to film sound. In particular, her essay *The Voice in the Cinema* (1980) offers a crucial framework for understanding how voice and gender operate within cinematic systems of meaning and desire. Alongside theorists such as Christian Metz and Mladen Dolar, Doane helps position the voice more than a technicality or an affective element, she sees it as a psychoanalytic object implicated in processes of subject formation and ideological positioning.

Doane's work focuses on the relationship between ideology and sound as she underlines the ways mainstream cinema uses softening techniques such as crossfades to disguise the structured nature of film sound in order to create the illusion of realism (Doane, 1980). She argues that this superficial harmony masks the ideological labor done in post-production in favor of bourgeois norms by presenting sound coherence as natural. Doane identifies a hierarchy of intelligibility that privileges synchronized dialogue as meaningful but backgrounds other sounds such as ambient sound, music or silence. Having identified that, she suggests using the disruptive potential of sound and how its temporal, emotional and ambiguous properties can fragment the visual regime and reveal tensions between coherence and chaos.

Doane (1980) argues that synchronized sound often ties the female voice closely to the image of the female body, reinforcing patriarchal structures by limiting the interpretive flexibility of femininity. In contrast, male voices are allowed more sonic autonomy; they may be disembodied or off-screen, thereby connoting a broader authority. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, she emphasizes that listening, like looking, is an ideological act that positions the subject through sound. When the female voice is rendered off-screen or becomes dislocated from the image, it can momentarily disrupt this patriarchal coding. While brief, such disruptions may open space for alternative modes of subjectivity. These insights are foundational for this thesis's inquiry into how practices of sound design and listening contribute to the ideological construction of gendered subject positions in cinema.

Mladen Dolar also considers sound in cinema within psychoanalytic frameworks and sees sound in Lacanian terms as an object-cause of desire (2006). This suggests that sound is a force that resists full symbolization. In cinema, this "object sound" has the power to become a disturbing presence that challenges the audience's identification with the image and disrupt narrative coherence. The fact that the voice is not fully part of the symbolic (it is only a medium in which language becomes audible) is the reason why it has the potential to undermine authority. As such, sound also offers a powerful way of understanding how it opens cracks in the ideological surface of film. This understanding resonates in the film *Kaygı* in which the hero of the film, Hasret, goes through a psychological breakdown reflected in the fragmented sonic world that

surrounds her. As she begins to question the narratives about the traumatic event in her past, the voices she hears become fragmented. These sonic distortions function as residues of trauma in which communication becomes impossible. Instead of pointing out subjectivity and meaning, the sounds in *Kaygı* work as an affective and destabilizing force.

Christian Metz offers one of the earliest theoretical articulations of how sound operates within the cinematic signifying chain. Metz examined how sound functions with image and suggested that film is a language without a grammar. Although he focused more on visual codes, Metz's notion of the "aural object," that is, a sound that functions semiotically within a film, anticipated a broader interest in how off-screen sound, asynchronous sound, and diegetic/non-diegetic distinctions contribute to narrative and ideological effect. Metz also helped legitimize psychoanalytic frameworks in film theory, bringing the Lacanian subject into discussions of spectatorship and sound. For Metz, the voice, like the image, participates in the construction of a cinematic imaginary in which the spectator is positioned and controlled (Metz, 1974).

Claudia Gorbman (1987) draws attention to the "unheard nature" of the classic film score, in which music is inserted to be felt but not consciously noticed. Gorbman argues that this unheard nature is what makes music so ideologically effective: it works at the level of influence, guidance, interpretation, and emotional response while it is masked. The semiotic opacity of this voice makes it a powerful tool for ideological inscription, especially when its refusal to be fully legible reinforces dominant emotional codes, such as romance, fear, or triumph.

These theoretical frameworks emphasize that sound is at the center of the emotional, ideological, and narrative structure of the film. In the psychoanalytic model, sound is a field where the subject is both constructed and divided; in the semiotic model, sound works within a system of signs that both reflects and constructs social reality. They allow us to question how the sonic dimension of cinema participates in the construction of race, gender, class, and national identity, not just by

what is heard but through how the act of listening itself is shaped, normalized, or distorted.

2.2.5 Sounds that make sense: If sounds are not received neutrally and if what is considered as norms in sonic terms is reflective of the values of the ruling classes, then the question of which sounds are preferable while others are not becomes ideological. This section focuses on the historical background of the sonic norms of today and on how public sounds have come to reflect the dominant values, such as rationality, harmony, and effectiveness. From the musical forms of the Enlightenment to the digital sounds of neoliberal capitalism, sounds have a history of being mobilized to comply with and reproduce dominant values, especially those compatible with bourgeois capitalist productivity and nationalist coherence.

Especially since the Renaissance, the classical Western musical tradition, which glorified tonal harmony and order, has carried forms that conformed to bourgeois ideals such as harmony, hierarchy and individuality, since it has always been an area that the ruling class wanted to control (Attali, 1985; Darmon, 2015). Therefore, a musical notation that was formally based on predictable progressions and clarity and was thought to be in line with the logic of enlightened rationalism was adopted. Considering that the idea of harmony is not the basis of music and bourgeois morality and the bourgeois understanding of social order, it is quite possible to say that this musical order reflects the ethos of the bourgeois class. This ethos has also prepared the ground for musical traditions that do not conform to this harmonic standard, especially non-Western ones, to be generally sidelined as irrational, vulgar, or primitive throughout history.

This historical perspective on sound continues to influence the ways in which sound is represented and perceived in the Western world. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) argued in their critique of the culture industry, music plays a central role in disciplining audiences through aesthetics by providing emotional cues that align them with dominant ideological positions. In the context of film, this discipline manifests itself in the instrumentalization of music and ambient noise to establish spatial, emotional, and moral hierarchies. For example, Suner (2010) has noted that Turkish

films often depict urban spaces with Westernized, song-like music but construct rural settings through sonically “complex” or emotionally charged music, thus reinforcing existing class, geographic, and cultural boundaries. One might respond to such readings that the films do so because they aim for a realistic representation, but since representation always involves a gaze; the tendency to naturalize the location of that gaze cannot escape being ideological.

Fredric Jameson (1991) discusses this understanding in his approach to “realist” narrative forms. According to him, many cultural forms that call themselves realist actually produce it themselves. For realism is not a passive mirror but a kind of “praxis,” it is a creative formula that offers the audience not a depiction of the world but a particular way of experiencing it (p. 224). This makes realism also a commentary on how reality should be felt and understood. What appears as a neutral representation can function ideologically since it smooths out contradictions, offering an “aesthetic constraint” that renders fragmentation coherent, and thus naturalizing dominant social logics (Jameson, 1992, p. 224). Realism, then, cannot simply be called representation of the world, because it functions as mechanism for reproducing and naturalizing it as ideologically readable.

These presuppositions and hierarchical norms regarding sound continue in different ways today through digital technologies and global media economies. In fact, researchers such as Jonathan Sterne (2012) and Robin James (2019) have even paralleled the normative power of sound with the working principles of neoliberal economics. Robin James, for example, argues that in the neoliberal world, the structure that controls the economy as a result of interventions made in material conditions, rather than the market itself, also manifests itself in sound and music. Accordingly, although the songs themselves may not be, the technologies with which they are produced will also affect the production of the music, and this will automatically bring about a new form of listening. In other words, productions that are purified from certain frequencies and emphasize more high-pitched sounds thanks to technologies that are already programmed to optimize them will now become the norm. Sterne, on the other hand, discusses the same logic through formats and argues that it is no coincidence that formats such as MP3, which prioritize clarity, efficiency, and

portability over richness or variety, coincide with the neoliberal period. They argue that such formats eliminate certain nuances found in sound in order to conform to neoliberal values of optimization and consumption. This results in a standardized, flattened soundscape that is supposedly “cleansed” of unnecessary inter-tones, targeting sounds that privilege readability and emotional manipulation while suppressing noise, ambiguity, or dissent.

When talking about data compression and its consequences, it is important to explain the technical processes involved. As Jonathan Sterne explains in his book *MP3: Meaning of a Format* (2012), data compression techniques such as MP3 work through psychoacoustic modeling; this reduces file size by removing audio information that the average listener might not hear or realize their absence by ear. The aim is to get rid of certain frequencies based on the assumption that certain frequencies are useless in order to fit the file in a small-sized MP3. This process foregrounds sounds that are already audible and easily processed. Sounds that may affect us through the body but are under the threshold of hearing frequencies are omitted. These are mostly the sounds that are deemed unpredictable, uncomfortable or exaggerated like very high frequencies or very low ones that are deemed not needed. Data compression is therefore a policy of audibility: It naturalizes a listening pattern as normative; a listening that, consciously or not, mimics and conforms to neoliberal ideals such as efficiency, clarity and optimization.¹⁴

Robin James’s “sonic episteme” is another concept that theorizes the neoliberal structuring of sonic information. Similar to Sterne, she argues that recent sonic practices are governed by prediction, optimization, and control, which are also the distinctive features of the neoliberal economy. In this way, the management of affects

¹⁴ MP3 compression is a data reduction technique based on psychoacoustic models of human hearing. These models, which are based on studies on auditory masking, frequency sensitivity, and perceptual thresholds, are intended to remove sound information that the typical listener is not aware of. This procedure is regarded as an objective and effective optimization in scientific and engineering terms, with the goal of maintaining perceptual quality while reducing file size. Sterne (2012) does not contest the scientific foundation of psychoacoustic compression. He contends that even perceptual judgments can contribute to broader ideological formations, especially when it comes to determining what constitutes vital sound. Hence, he provides a cultural critique of how these auditory thresholds are operationalized in technology design. For more on the ideological dimensions of listening technologies and standardization, see Sterne (2006), and for a critical engagement with auditory epistemologies, see Thompson (2020).

by instrumentalizing minimal content becomes the priority. By prioritizing clarity, repetition, and emotional calibration over ambiguity or dissent, the sonic episteme aestheticizes a predictable and optimized sonic understanding. Analyzing certain pop music anthems, James identifies a common strategy that highlights minimalism, lack of acoustic instruments, the reliance on loops, and minimal but strategic use of slogan-like lyrics. Certain musical genres get rid of everything that is deemed extra and only focus on the main idea through repetition and very minimal digitalized arrangements, which can be read as a symptom of neoliberal logic in the way it highlights optimization and efficiency (James, 2019, pp. 135–157). Sonic episteme is an epistemological framework that translates neoliberalism into sonic and affective terms, thereby structuring how sonic meaning and intelligibility are culturally produced.

What these theories present is compatible with what I call “sonic capitalist realism,” which extends Mark Fisher’s (2009) theory of capitalist realism. Fisher was arguing that in its current state, capitalism was internalized by the people around the globe as the only possible system for humans, which is a sign of how it manages to present itself as natural by being easily adopted to every situation, even the crises that it caused itself. Sonic capitalist realism extends this to the sonic domain in order to identify how sounds of certain events, places, genders, etc. have become attuned to reflect neoliberal values. These sounds present themselves as the optimum associations with such things, just like how capitalist realism is perceived as the only way, and no other alternative is imaginable. Both systems achieve this naturalization process through the normalization of market logic, not by enforcement through the organizing of material conditions: capitalism organizes the conditions so that competitiveness is perceived as human nature, and sonic episteme naturalizes this through new technologies that adopt the system’s fast pace and “make everything” easier for everyone.

Fisher describes capitalist realism as an all-encompassing atmosphere that feels natural through the normalization of market logic (pp. 2–3, 21–22). *Sonic capitalist realism* also refers to the ways in which sound and music are employed to aestheticize and normalize this logic. The normalization of these processes as aesthetics, taste, realism, the zeitgeist, etc., helps this process to escape from criticism or possible

problematizations as well. In cinema, this manifests in soundtracks and sound worlds that immerse the audience and affirm the plot through sonically encoded meanings, which makes it impossible to distance oneself from the screen and make a judgment or criticism. These carefully established sonic environments reinforce affect, but they don't let that resolve so that the audience would decide for themselves. Instead, they reproduce what Fisher calls *reflexive impotence*, a condition where audiences can perceive crisis but cannot imagine a way out; hence, they fall into pessimism and passivity. In sonic capitalist realism, then, sound secures the ideological field, rendering the neoliberal order both thinkable and audible as the only possible reality.

In repetitive sonic environments, both in urban life and in film, alienation is individualized and aestheticized. Emotion becomes internalized, disconnected from systemic critique, and instead channeled through affective familiarity. Repetition of familiar sonic tropes in media and public space generates a false sense of coherence that connects personal feeling with capitalist ideology. As James notes, this episteme naturalizes inequality and obscures conflict by framing it as noise, something to be eliminated for the sake of productivity and social order. By focusing on the rationalization and standardization of sonic environments, the concept of *sonic capitalist realism* becomes a tool to interrogate how sound in film can make political and economic systems appear natural, desirable, or inevitable.

Several scholars already analyze cinematic sounds through such frameworks. For instance, Anahid Kassabian's (2001) work on "ubiquitous listening" shows how background music in film is designed to produce emotional coherence that aligns audiences with dominant ideologies. Similarly, Claudia Gorbman (1987) emphasizes the ideological work done by the "unheard" film music of a movie, which, despite not being in the foreground still influences affect and meaning and simultaneously escapes conscious attention. These frameworks all point to the ideological naturalization of particular sonic regimes. I draw from these theoretical frameworks for a deeper reading of how sound design, ambient noise, musical scores, and vocal presence or absence work ideologically and how they also encode broader systems of power. By approaching the sonic dimension of cinema as an affective, political, and historically conditioned formation, this framework reveals the invisible labor of ideology in what

we hear, hence makes it possible to identify ruptures, silences, and tensions that resist or expose the prevailing order.

2.3 Studies on Cinematic Sound in Turkey

Film sound technology arrived in cinema of Turkey around the early 1930s, and the first sound film in Turkish was Muhsin Ertuğrul's film *İstanbul Sokaklarında* (1931). However, the cinema industry was facing significant technical and economic constraints from the beginning in the country. As a result, synchronized sound was only able to become the norm a few years later, during Yeşilçam period (1940–1980). Since this historical moment coincided with the birth of the Republic regime, sound cinema became one of the most important propaganda tools of the newly constructed governance.

One of the foundational works in sound in cinema of Turkey belongs to Nezih Erdoğan. His essay “Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices: Notes on Sound in Turkish Popular Cinema” (2002) explores the ideological implications of Yeşilçam's post-synchronized tradition. Analyzing dubbing practices, Erdoğan argues that dubbing created a detachment of voice from body that resulted in a paradox of presence because actors' bodies were being complemented with alien voices that belonged to other bodies; dubbing actors. He describes this phenomenon as a cinematic Logos that worked over Yeşilçam as a moralizing force. In this system, Erdoğan suggests that it was Yeşilçam's own voice that got inside the bodies of actors: a ventriloquized, disembodied authority that suppressed individual subjectivity in order to enforce a larger moral order. This voice homogenized affect and dialogue, echoing the logic of the cinematic apparatus itself (Erdoğan, 2002, pp. 242–243).

While Nezih Erdoğan describes dubbing as the *logos* of Yeşilçam, an organizing principle that sutured fragmented cinematic elements, Savaş Arslan draws attention to its ideological function as a standardizing mechanism. Arslan notes that dubbing in Yeşilçam films promoted a homogenized national speech, primarily through the deployment of accentless Istanbul Turkish by professional stage actors. This vocal uniformity, applied even to rural and working-class characters, created an auditory

illusion of cultural coherence which reflected the republican desire to unify the population through cinema (Arslan, 2011, pp. 117–118).

Both Arslan and Erdoğan emphasize that dubbing in Yeşilçam cinema functioned as an ideological mechanism of normalization rather than a technical feature. While Arslan foregrounds how dubbing promoted linguistic standardization and cultural homogenization, Erdoğan highlights how the disembodied voice of Yeşilçam imposed moral coherence through gendered and classed norms. Taken together, their analyses reveal how sound, particularly through dubbing, was central to constructing idealized cinematic subjects aligned with nationalist, patriarchal, and modernist expectations.

Studies that focus on Turkish cinema through sound have generally concentrated on the dubbing practices of the Yeşilçam period. In her doctoral thesis, which provides a historical account of these practices, Yelda Özkoçak (2013) argues that a standardized ideal was constructed by systematically separating the voice from the body (pp. 174–182). These techniques led to the association of clean, Istanbul-accented voices with social authority. By demonstrating how audiences were conditioned to associate vocal clarity with classed and gendered norms, Özkoçak's thesis aligns with my argument concerning the concept of cognitive mapping by inheritance. While her work is primarily descriptive, it nonetheless reveals the structural logic behind voice-body dissociation in Turkish film history, where physical presence becomes secondary to vocal intelligibility.

Studying the gendered implications of the dubbing tradition in Yeşilçam melodramas, Müge Turan engages with Arslan's (2011) use of the concept of *Turkification*, to examine the gendered and ideological implications of voice. While Arslan focuses on dubbing as a cultural homogenization mechanism that erases regional and class markers, Turan foregrounds how this process operates within an already gendered sonic regime. Her work also includes the patriarchal implications of dubbing into the equation and argues that the practice of dubbing produced a homogeneous national imagery by erasing class and regional codes, but this happened against an already gendered background. While Turan draws on Kaja Silverman's

concept of the acoustic mirror to underline the gendered and nationalist role of dubbing, she argues that this complicates Chion's concept of the audiovisual contract by revealing its historical and cultural status. The historical ideological connotations of film sound, which Turan also highlights, feed the methodological framework of my thesis's "symptomatic listening" and the "sonic unconscious" and provide a historical basis for the persistence of gendered and homogenized vocal tropes in contemporary sound design.

Another interesting and useful study on Yeşilçam, traces how Yeşilçam music strategically manipulates its audience emotionally (Dönmez & İmik, 2018). This empirical study in the field of musicology presents findings such as the association of Largo tempos with melancholy and Allegretto with joy. This information is consistent with my claim that audiences are trained with sonic grammars through repeated exposure to certain sounds and musical genres. Taken together, these studies provide a historically grounded and ideologically charged framework that helps explain how post-synchronized sound practices shaped Turkish cinematic listening habits, constructed normative emotional registers, and created a sonic template that continues to structure audience orientation today.

Meri Kytö's (2017) work offers a complementary yet different perspective by reframing Yeşilçam's post-synchronized sound tradition as a historically specific aesthetic shaped by impossibility, improvisation, and shared cultural conditions. Through ethnographic and historiographic methods, Kytö investigates the acoustic epistemologies and cultural affinities of dubbing culture in Turkey, highlighting the emotional labor of sound workers, sound actors, Foley artists, and sound engineers whose craft produces a unique aural regime marked by asynchronous dialogue, exaggerated Foley, and recycled scores. She uses the concept of *cultural intimacy* (Herzfeld, 1997) to reveal certain affects that this tradition evoked in the society as collective pride and shame. This framework is compatible with my concept of cognitive mapping through inheritance which refers to the acquired interpretation habits that result from being exposed to certain associations between sound and meaning. Kytö also mentions spectral and disembodied voices, which in my thesis are treated as the unresolved sonic contradictions that are embedded in the sonic

unconscious and in the sonic fabric of Turkish cinema. Kytö's insights enrich the ideological and emotional genealogy of sound in Turkish cinema by situating post-synchronization within larger cultural structures of memory, proximity, and sonic legibility.

More recent work in this area in Turkish has begun to move beyond technical discussions of sound to explore its narrative and psychological effects. Mustafa Sözen examines sound effects in three narrative categories: simple, expressive, and surreal. He argues that these forms dramatize emotional and spatial dynamics. His attention to foley as a creative rather than just technical process also points to cultural implications. While Sözen's approach remains largely descriptive and does not foreground ideology, his awareness of how sound modulates audience perception provides a useful foundation for this thesis's emotional and ideological analysis of cinematic soundscapes (Sözen, 2017).

These studies show how Yeşilçam's post-synchronized sound regime functioned as a powerful ideological apparatus shaping national identity, class listening habits and emotional orientation, but ultimately this regime did not last forever. The early 1990s marked a significant break in the cinema of Turkey, as the industry gradually abandoned dubbing in favor of live sound recording. This change was symbolic as well as technical: it signaled the emergence of a new cinematic direction. As Asuman Suner argues, this transition was an important threshold in the development of New Cinema of Turkey, where sound began to function not as a harmonizing force but as a site of fragmentation, displacement and critical distancing from dominant national narratives.

Suner sees the complete abandonment of dubbing in the early 90s in favor of live sound recording, which included a break with the exaggerated sentimentality of Yeşilçam, as an important threshold in the emergence of the New Cinema of Turkey. In her analysis of these new cinemas, Suner identifies a common feature of their sound worlds: more fragmented sound environments that emphasize diegetic sound, ambient noise and silence. Additionally, commonality is also closely related to the content of the films, which emphasize themes such as subjectivity, displacement and trauma. This new cinema breaks away from the consistent and organized soundscapes of its

predecessors and positions itself at a distance that undermines traditional national narratives. Thus, film sound has gained an important function that questions unity, and issues such as displacement, identity and memory (Suner, 2005, p. 34).

In summary, the study of sound in the cinema of Turkey is still in its infancy but has developed into a rich field of research that shows how aural practices intervene with nationalism, gender, memory, censorship and modernization. Sound here is not simply a continuation of the image but a tonal field of ideological disputes where power is exercised, challenged and rethought. Against this background, the thesis examines how contemporary sound in cinema both reflects and actively shapes the political unconscious of the nation.

2.3.1 Bridging the gaps in literature. Studies on the cinematic sound in the cinema of Turkey largely focused on the dubbing practices of and concepts such as national identity, political violence, gender and memory (Arslan, 2010; Suner, 2010; Gurbilek, 2001; Erdogan, 2008). Current studies on sound have focused mainly on musicology, the technical dimensions of sound production, soundscape studies in architecture, and the role of music in expressing national identity (Akser, 2018, Ergül, 1993; Özgün, 2015, Perkün, 2018, Sözen, 2017). While these studies have contributed to important insights, they often fail to see sound as an ideological force, a constructivist element actively involved in political intervention, emotional conditioning, and cultural hegemony. Despite the increasing number of international studies examining the sound dimension of cinema through ideological, emotional and psychoanalytic lenses (for example, Chion, 1994; Altman, 1992; Sterne, 2003), the specific application of these approaches to Turkish cinema has not yet been sufficiently developed.

What is notably absent from current scholarship is a systematic investigation of how the overall sonic architectures of films from Turkey participate in constructing, reinforcing, or contesting hegemonic ideologies. This gap is particularly striking given the politically charged history of sound regulation in Turkey, from the state-controlled sonic environments of TRT broadcasts to the censorship or outright erasure of non-Turkish languages, particularly Kurdish, in mainstream media (Ahıska, 2010; Suner,

2017). The history of sound in Turkish cinema is entangled with the history of authoritarian governance, cultural homogenization, and capitalist modernization. Yet these entanglements have rarely been addressed as central to the cinematic experience.

Visual analysis has long dominated the study of political violence, migration and memory in Turkish cinema, but the ideological burden of sonic elements, diegetic noise, silence, music, and ambience still has not been studied widely. The rare times film sound is studied; it is often framed as a tool of realism or atmosphere rather than an ideological realm in its own right. This lack of critical attention ignores the important role that the sonic dimension of cinema plays in shaping political subjectivities and in structuring the emotional landscape in which ideology is internalized. For example, in the Yeşilçam period, the use of post-synchronized dubbing served to impose standardized Turkish and idealized gendered expressions, as well as secular, middle-class, urban norms. Films that defied nationalist narratives or depicted dissident voices through the 80s often faced censorship or editing tasks that affected visual content as well as dialogue, musical cues, and background sound (Ahıska, 2010; Gurbilek, 2001).

Post-2010 films began to break this pattern by using sound as a means of expressing ideological tension, fragmentation, and resistance. For example, in *Hayaletler* (Okuy, 2020), sonic distortion and sudden silence evoke a sense of social rupture and existential anxiety, reflecting the dislocation of urban life under neoliberal rule. In *Kurak Günler* (Alper, 2022), the sound design emphasizes ambient noise and suggests a claustrophobic space, making the sonic environment itself a metaphor for authoritarian imprisonment. These films stand out for their humor or realism and as a contested ideological space in which competing structures of control, subjectivity, and resistance are enacted. Moreover, Kurdish-language films in Turkey, though still marginal, offer critical alternatives to dominant sonic regimes by foregrounding suppressed voices and challenging the homogenizing logic of Turkish-language hegemony.

The thesis draws on frameworks such as Althusser's ideological state apparatus, and Jameson's *political unconscious*, to situate cinema of Turkey within broader

theoretical discourses on cinematic sound and ideology. It argues that the sonic architecture of Turkish films actively mediates power relations and encodes historical traumas and political conditions. In doing so, this study hopes to contribute to the ongoing effort to undermine visual bias in film theory by reorienting critical attention to the auditory as a site of ideological regulation.

Fredric Jameson's concept of the *political unconscious* is used as a framework to follow how cultural texts mediate ideological contradictions underneath the surface narratives. Extending this logic into the domain of sound, Viktoria Tkaczyk's notion of the *sonic unconscious* theorizes listening as a historically conditioned and epistemologically structured activity, shaped by scientific discourses, cultural institutions, and unconscious affective patterns. I adopt the term sonic unconscious as a unifying concept that defines these dimensions of latent ideological structure within the sonic realm. The *sonic unconscious*, as used in this study, refers to the affective implications of sound that go beyond conscious interpretation but are still able to shape perception and subjectivity. By connecting Tkaczyk's emphasis on the historical and epistemic conditioning of listening (such as how inner speech, auditory memory, and early sound technologies shaped unconscious hearing) with Jameson's argument that any narrative text must be read for what they repress or ignore ideologically. Hence, *the sonic unconscious* refers to how ambiguous and seemingly not suspicious sounds, such as echoes, backgrounded whispers, tonal ruptures, and vocal timbres, can operate as ideological remnants that produce historically situated affective responses. Rather than treating sound as a supplement, this framework highlights its role as an important agent of ideological work.

By analyzing how sounds are used in selected films to reinforce or challenge hegemonic norms through various techniques, this research will explore how cinema in Turkey has historically functioned both as a platform for ideological reproduction and as a site for sonic dissent. It will also draw attention to the material and political conditions under which listening itself occurs, how listeners are shaped and conditioned into listening in certain ways, and how these forms of listening participate in reinforcing or challenging ideological structures. It also foregrounds the material

and political conditions under listening modes participate in either the reinforcement or contestation of ideological structures.

By placing these global frameworks in dialogue with the specific cultural and political context of Turkey, this study contributes both to Turkish film scholarship and to global sound studies, offering a new way to understand cinema as an auditory ideological apparatus. In sum, this thesis addresses a substantial gap in the study of Turkish cinema by foregrounding sound not just as a technique or aesthetic but as an ideological and affective infrastructure. Through close textual and sonic analysis, it aims to map how the sonic dimension of movies in Turkey reproduces, challenges, and complicates the political unconscious of the nation, offering new insights into how power is heard, internalized, and resisted.

This section mapped the main theoretical resources that I use when exploring the sonic dimension of film, from the ontological claims of acoustic ecology and sonic materialism to psychoanalysis and affect theory. Scholars have shown that sounds form charged terrain at the intersection of influence, identity, power, and ideology. Whether in the immersive logic of synchronized sound, the racialized exclusions of the *listening ear*, or the spectral voltages of sonic phenomena, cinematic sound functions simultaneously as sensory atmosphere and ideological apparatus. Most importantly, this literature review highlights a central paradox: sound is both pre-cognitive and ideological. It shapes subjectivity, naturalizes power, and undermines rational control of emotional responses. This paradox makes sound a powerful yet elusive site for political analysis.

From these reflections, the following chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis by introducing a method of symptomatic listening informed by Althusserian and Jamesonian thought but extended to the sonic realm.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

If sound in cinema functions simultaneously as an affective atmosphere and an ideological apparatus, as established in the previous chapter, then listening must be

reconceived not as passive reception but as a critical practice, a method for diagnosing how power is organized, naturalized, and experienced. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework and methodological approach that guided this thesis.

Symptomatic listening, adapted from Louis Althusser's *symptomatic reading*, serves as the primary methodological tool for analyzing the sonic dimension of the films in terms of their ideological content, affective charges, and unconscious resonances. Fredric Jameson's *dialectical criticism* complements this work by interpreting cinematic sounds as sites of ideological contradictions reflecting their historical and sociopolitical contexts.

Sound regimes, the basic norms and conditions that determine what can be heard and how, emerge within specific technical, institutional, and historical contexts. In contemporary cinema of Turkey, the conditions for sound production and reception are shaped by neoliberal film financing structures, state and self-censorship, inherited sound mixing patterns, and audience expectations established by decades of standardized media. What I call *sonic unconscious* emerges here at the intersection of historical and ideological sound traditions that persist beneath the surface of ordinary film viewing. This notion is informed by Jameson's *political unconscious* which suggests that cultural texts should be interpreted as symbolic acts that address real historical contradictions through formal breakdowns, gaps, or aesthetic distortions rather than explicit statements (1981, p. 64). Jameson argues that "history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but... is inaccessible to us except in textual form" and "our approach to it... necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (p. 20). I extend this into the domain of sound, with the argument that sound in cinema functions as latent content, as a structure of feeling that indices ideological tensions, affective residues, and repressed historical traumas below the level of conscious interpretation. It is the domain in which that which is unspeakable becomes audible through the medium sound.

Furthermore, I introduce the concept of *cognitive mapping by inheritance* to highlight how audiences understand and interpret the sonic grammars from previous eras and make use of them through current listening practices. This concept relies on

the interpretive aspect of listening habits, seated or emerging cultural associations between sounds and meaning. For instance, if a film uses background music patterns or the sound signatures of melodrama, this works to bind the audience to those pre-coded emotional positions. This is a kind of cognitive and ideological orientation based on what is already known and heard. I argue that cinema often draws and/or experiments on already inherited, socially embedded sounds that are familiar to the audience and reproduces structures of sonic meaning not through innovation but through the repetition of sonic patterns sedimented over time.

Throughout this thesis, I conceptualize the sound dimension of cinema as a field in which all the auditory elements that shape the cinematic experience (diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, ambient and environmental noise, sound textures, silence, and rhythmic patterns) are contained and operated. I treat sound as a constitutive force that constructs the spatiality of the film, organizes its temporality, and conditions the affective and ideological responses of the audience. In this context, for this thesis, the sonic dimension of cinema is a spatial, temporal, and affective architecture in which subjectivity, power, and ideology are rationalized.

In this framework, the sound dimension is analyzed as a politically coded formation that carries the residues of historical cultural meanings and operates below the threshold of conscious recognition. Since sound cinema is generally used to reinforce and support the meaning already present, this power is often overlooked, and its ideological effect is hidden precisely on this unnoticed side. It participates in the creation of meaning through immersion and emotional modulation, such as texture, tone, dissonance, and repetition, and encodes the tensions of anger, repression, and unconscious political desire. To analyze these aspects of sound in cinema, I use a method called *symptomatic listening*, which attends to the gaps, absences, and excesses that go unnoticed on the conscious level. By tracking how sound relates to image, how voice relates to space, and how background ambiances signal containment or rupture and by focusing on how sonic elements resonate emotionally, rhythmically, and spatially, this method allows for the detection of hidden contradictions of the film. In doing so, the thesis sees sound as a critical site where political affects and ideological fantasies are stored.

2.4.1 Symptomatic listening. Symptomatic listening is derived from the concept of symptomatic reading (Althusser, 1971), which emphasizes the exposure of ideology through structural gaps, absences, and contradictions rather than explicit statements. Jameson (1981) extended this framework in *The Political Unconscious*, arguing that cultural texts resolve or displace social contradictions not through what they say but in how they struggle to say it, through formal, narrative, or aesthetic failures. He contends that “the formal processes of narrative are themselves strategies to manage social contradiction” (Jameson, 1981, p. 85). I see a similar logic in cinematic sounds, in which tonal dissonance, ambient instability, or acoustic fragmentation can be read as strategies of containment. In this regard, *symptomatic listening* is not just a decoding method but a historically and ideologically grounded critical practice. It interprets film sounds as “social texts” embedded with unresolved historical contradictions. These contradictions often manifest through tonal uncertainty, acoustic rupture, or emotional excess. By adopting Jameson’s dialectical method not as a historiographical and interpretive tool, this thesis brings together psychoanalytic, materialist, affective, and political perspectives to trace how sound in film mediates tensions between neoliberal fragmentation and collective longing, between state violence and intimate subjectivity.

Symptomatic listening can be a powerful critical tool to reveal encoded ideological and affective structures in cinematic sound; however, it comes with certain limitations. First of all, the interpretive variability inherent to this method should be noted: because it prioritizes absence, distortion, and contradiction over the overt meaning, the outcomes depend on the listener’s material and affective positioning. This means that interpretations may not be universally reproducible across different audiences. Moreover, symptomatic listening relies on close textual engagement, which risks privileging the analyst’s subjectivity in the absence of empirical audience data. While this thesis reduces such risks through theoretical grounding and historical contextualization, it acknowledges that any act of listening, particularly those that attend to unconscious structures and affective tensions, is also shaped by the positionality of the interpreter. It is this awareness that should be central to the

method's critical use, which encourages a historically situated understanding of how sound functions ideologically.

2.4.2 From media epistemes to sonic unconscious. Following Marshall McLuhan (1964), who argued that media environments shape human consciousness and carry ideological patterns beyond the visible realm, some scholars who extend this argument argue that sound technologies are always intertwined with ideological structures that shape perception, subjectivity, and cultural memory of their times. For example, Jonathan Stern (2003) argues that the conditions under which we listen (such as signal, noise, or silence) have historically been shaped by technical, institutional, and epistemological structures. According to Stern, technologies such as the phonograph, radio, and data compression have also organized how we listen into formats that reflect dominant cultural logics such as capitalism, colonialism, and modernity. Another figure who expands on this idea is Robert Ryder (2022), who proposes the concept of the acoustic unconscious to describe how sound technologies mediate memory and ideology by preserving the ghostly traces of sound history suppressed by official narratives. Viktoria Tkaczyk (2023) introduces the term *sonic unconscious* to describe how listening is historically conditioned by disciplinary, epistemological, and institutional paradigms. While her work focuses primarily on the scientific and perceptual history of listening, this thesis develops a different but related usage of the term. Here, the *sonic unconscious* refers not only to epistemic conditioning but to the ideological and affective traces embedded in cinematic sound, drawing on Fredric Jameson's theory of the *political unconscious* as a framework for interpreting how repressed contradictions return through sonic texture, tonal rupture, and ambient dissonance.

These theoretical insights become particularly important when applied to the cinematic apparatus, where sound functions as a means for the dissemination of ideology. In cinema, listening is neither natural nor innocent; it is cumulatively developed through the inherited sonic grammars, technological infrastructures, and culturally coded expectations of previous eras. Cinematic sounds, from background noise to voiceover to ambient silence, are among the important elements that organize the audience's emotional and political relationship to space, character, and the plot.

This thesis therefore argues that cinematic sounds are historically and ideologically produced fields that assume their audience also interprets this historical sonic heritage: films are about what is heard and how and why certain sounds are made audible, while others are silenced, and some are coded atmospherically. This thesis locates its analysis within this tension between cinematic sounds as carriers of affect and sites of ideological labor.

2.4.3 Mapping the sonic cinematic unconscious. In addition to the view that sound is culturally constructed and carries historical and ideological traces, there is another theoretical strand that addresses its affective and unconscious aspects. In this chapter, I focus on how these impacts affect cultural memory and political subjectivity. If sound has the potential to be used in a transformative way for consent and dissent, it is necessary to examine how this potential is affected by factors such as history and culture. And this requires a new way of listening.

Jameson, who argues that aesthetic objects, namely works of art, also contain contradictions by their very nature, also asserts that the task of a critical analysis should be to uncover the political unconscious that causes these contradictions. According to this, since cinematic sounds are also aesthetic products, they are mediums that carry ideological weight, and such an assessment also requires symptomatic listening (Jameson, 1981).

Another important concept that also underlines the methodology of symptomatic listening is Anahid Kassabian's *distributed subjectivity*, where she frames sounds as factors in subject formation. Kassabian uses this concept to describe how shared cultural references embedded in music and sound create collective affective responses, not individual responses. By emphasizing that listening is often passive or unconscious and contributes to the formation of a common culture through regular exposure to certain sounds, Kassabian provides one of the foundations for the concept of a shared sonic unconscious that this thesis adopts. Like Kassabian, I start from the idea that cinematic sounds are often processed at an unconscious level and primarily shape affect and cognition, and I argue that sound elements rooted in shared cultural and

political contexts produce collective affective responses and thus function as a cultural unconscious (Kassabian, 2013, pp. 9–13, 70–74).

Framing listening as a bodily and contextual experience, Don Ihde also emphasizes that auditory perception is not limited to the ears, but that one listens with one's entire body: "Phenomenologically I do not just hear with my ears, I hear with my whole body" (Ihde, 2007, p. 45), and "sound permeates and penetrates my bodily being... Listening begins by being bodily global in its effects" (p. 44). According to this view, sound in cinema leaves a physical, or affective, effect rather than a conscious one through the plot. However, this corporeality is also loaded with ideology. Ihde does not directly mention ideology, but the framework he draws on how sound can position the audience before a cognitive decision makes this intervention possible with the ground he presents on how sound affects human perception.

The fact that despite using the 1980 coup d'état as a historical backdrop, Çağan Irmak's *Babam ve Oğlum* (2005) is widely recognized as a family melodrama exemplifies this. Irmak uses highly agitated music to transform a political causality (what happens in a family after the coup) into a personal narrative. Even the actors' speaking voices are designed in a way that they would directly influence the body. These sonic elements succeed in directing the listener's instant reaction, and they disappear on the body without reaching the political dimension of the event. The political dimensions of state violence are thus rendered invisible, and structural trauma is presented as an intimate loss. Thus, even in seemingly apolitical films, sound plays a decisive role in shaping ideological influence through embodied listening.

In this study, I argue that sound in films made in Turkey operates through a similar collective sonic unconscious, where the audience's interpretation of cinematic sound is shaped by ideological formations such as nationalism, neoliberalism and patriarchal modernity that bear the traces of the social situations the country is going through. This sonic unconscious also bears traces of the suppressed or obsolete sonic regimes of various eras. Instead of words, these listening regimes process ideology through sound stylizations that emotionally and structurally situate the audience's affective response by directing it in predetermined directions through techniques such

as ambient codes and emotional silences; it identifies how cinematic sounds register repressed political traumas, unresolved social antagonisms or latent ideological contradictions through ambient noise, tonal refraction, acoustic absence or sonic excess. Unlike *cognitive mapping through inheritance*, which operates through the recognition and decoding of familiar sonic grammars, *the sonic unconscious* foregrounds the displaced, the unassimilable or the repressed. It is structured by the emotional residues of uncertainty, tension and ideological crisis.

In this thesis, in which cinematic sounds are treated as hidden carriers of ideological battle mediating the intersections of cultural memory, political contradiction, and emotional formation, I use the above concepts together as the basic theoretical framework. That is, I argue that sound elements in films should be understood as active ideological forces in archival, constitutive, and conflictual sites, and that to understand them requires symptomatic listening in a dialectical sense.

2.4.4 Synthesizing the framework. The main theoretical framework that I use in this study brings together various tools such as *cultural coding*, *cognitive mapping by inheritance*, and *the sonic unconscious* that function to complement each other in the analysis of sounds in the cinema of Turkey. Each concept addresses a different dimension of sound's ideological potential as a site in which power, subjectivity, and ideology intersect. This section synthesizes these frameworks to demonstrate how they work together to produce a historically and ideologically grounded method of symptomatic listening.

Cultural coding provides a framework for understanding how particular sounds are imbued with historically and socially constructed meanings. Drawing on semiotic and media theory, it allows for the analysis of how auditory elements, such as state anthems, rural ambiances, or sonic inconsistencies, carry ideological weight and shape how audiences interpret cinematic settings, bodies, and relations. While cultural coding explains how sounds acquire meaning, Fredric Jameson's concept of *cognitive mapping* helps explain how these culturally loaded sounds contribute to the formation of mental and ideological representations of that culture. In the context of Turkish cinema, sounds often serve as cognitive anchors through the repetition of specific

sound patterns and the association of sounds with images. These anchors orient audiences in the socio-political terrain. To explain the layered repetition of historically sedimented sound forms, this thesis extends Jameson's framework through the concept of cognitive mapping through inheritance.

Cognitive mapping by inheritance refers to the way films employ pre-existing sonic grammars, such as standardized dubbing conventions, classed or regional vocal patterns, spatial acoustics, and culturally encoded ambient textures, to orient audiences within ideological terrains. Rather than generating entirely new auditory codes, contemporary cinema frequently draws upon inherited, socially embedded sonic forms that feel familiar to specific listeners, thereby reinforcing ideological positions through affective recognition. Whereas Jameson's original notion of *cognitive mapping* emphasizes the imaginative production of new representational strategies to navigate unfamiliar social totalities, *cognitive mapping by inheritance* highlights how orientation occurs through the activation of already internalized, historically sedimented listening codes (Jameson, 1991, pp. 51–54). Audiences recognize certain sonic representations through this inherited sonic grammar and locate themselves within emotional and ideological coordinates that are already familiar since they have been repeatedly presented to them.

To uncover how listening practices reflect embodied cultural conditioning, this concept also engages with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus. However, while habitus primarily concerns the construction of taste and behavior, *cognitive mapping by inheritance* foregrounds how sound functions cartographically as a tool for emotional and ideological understanding. Unlike concepts that focus on embodied listening practices, cognitive mapping by inheritance emphasizes the ideological function of historically familiar sonic grammars and how they organize emotional recognition within cinema.

The framework is further informed by Jonathan Sterne's work on audile technique, which historicizes the training of perception under modernity, and on sonic memory studies and affect theory, which underline how sound carries trauma, memory, and cultural sediment. However, these approaches do not fully account for

how sound conventions, vocal stylizations, and ambient markers operate ideologically to structure listeners' positions within familiar terrains of class, region, and nation. *Cognitive mapping by inheritance* thus names a process in which sound actively orients the subject by mobilizing pre-coded, affectively charged sonic grammars, anchoring perception not in the unknown but in the recognizable and already naturalized.

This process is inherently class-coded, resonating with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of habitus and cultural distinction. According to Bourdieu, aesthetic preferences are socially cultivated through education, taste, and access to cultural capital. Applied to listening, this suggests that sonic interpretation is conditioned by class position: the capacity to decode and emotionally engage with sonic signs depends on one's embedded cultural experience. In films such as *Kaygı* (2017), where urban paranoia is communicated through layered news broadcasts, distant sirens, and fragmented voices, a politically literate, middle-class audience is more likely to recognize these auditory details as indicators of post-coup ideological crisis rather than dismissing them as background noise. Similarly, in *Bozkır* (2019), minimalist sound designs marked by ambient isolation and intermittent gunshots resonate with audiences culturally primed to detect political subtext in the formal austerity of festival cinema.

Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model further deepens this audience-centered dimension of cognitive mapping by inheritance. According to Hall, audiences do not passively consume cultural texts but actively interpret them through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. This thesis applies Hall's insight to sound, arguing that audiences construct auditory maps of social reality based on their ideological positions, cultural codes, and socio-economic backgrounds. Listening, therefore, becomes a site of both ideological interpellation and class distinction.

Cognitive mapping by inheritance describes the audience's interpretive process by which they "translate" sonic elements within structurally inherited listening practices: it's rooted in reception and builds on Fredric Jameson's *cognitive mapping*, with a crucial distinction: rather than constructing new orientation maps within unfamiliar systems, audiences in this framework navigate films by reactivating

inherited sonic grammars. However, the *sonic unconscious* functions on both sides: as a structural feature of filmic sound design (that's embedded in tonal choices, ambient noise, and acoustic absences) and as an affective register within audience experience. To distinguish between these in analysis, this thesis treats diegetic encoding as symptomatic of the sonic unconscious, such as the use of infrasonic hums, distorted voices, or unresolved musical motifs, while interpreting audience decoding through the lens of cognitive inheritance. In short, cognitive mapping by inheritance refers to how audiences locate themselves ideologically via familiar sonic codes. The *sonic unconscious* refers to the repressed contradictions embedded in the film's sonic structure, which operate beneath both narrative and conscious listening.

By bringing these concepts together, this study develops a multidimensional framework for understanding the ideological implications of sound in Turkish cinema. It demonstrates that cinematic soundscapes are ideological agents, structuring cognitive and emotional responses, encoding power relations, and constituting audience subjectivity through recognition, repression, and tension. This theoretical orientation allows for a historically and politically attuned analysis of contemporary films from Turkey, illuminating how sound produces, naturalizes, or unsettles dominant discourses and affective structures. These three key concepts, *cultural coding*, *cognitive mapping by inheritance*, and *the sonic unconscious*, function as the methodological pillars of this study.¹⁵ A comparative chart summarizing their definitions, theoretical lineages, and analytic functions is included in Appendix A for reference.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for a comparative chart summarizing these concepts. The chart outlines each concept's definition, key theoretical influences, and their analytical roles across the affective, spatial, and ideological dimensions of film sound. It serves as a quick reference tool for understanding how these frameworks interrelate throughout the study.

Chapter 3

A Genealogy of Sonic Ideology in Turkish Cinema

Not only cinema itself but also the history of it is usually told through images. In the case of Turkey, these images were the exaggerated emotions of melodramatic heroes, the difficult lives in villages, and the symbols of national unity. However, there's also another way to learn about the history of cinema in Turkey: by listening to it: a history hidden in noise, silences and music. This chapter explores the transformations in the use of sound in cinema in Turkey from early sound films to the period referred to as the New Cinema of Turkey. I believe a genealogy of the ideological aspect of sound in film is necessary in order to fill a critical gap in national film studies and to understand how contemporary sonic regimes are influenced by the previous processes of creation, standardization, and exclusion. I use genealogy here in a Foucauldian sense as a method to trace how certain sonic ideologies emerged, solidified, and were later ruptured in relation to shifting political, aesthetic, and affective structures.¹⁶

Following the lead of affect theorists such as Ahmed (2004) and Berlant (2011), the chapter makes use of affect theory in exploring sounds that reproduce and rupture political and ideological norms. In cinema, sound is often reduced to an emotional background, and its potential to contribute to ideological construction is mostly overlooked. I argue that it is precisely this assumed neutrality that makes sound an important realm; behind its ordinary disguise, there lies a history of accumulated cultural codes and political charge.

I also treat affects as sites of both tension and ideology. As Sara Ahmed (2004), with her concept of “stickiness,” suggests, affects stick to bodies through repetition and exclusion and move between bodies with that same stickiness. In this context, the affective codes embedded in cinematic sounds operate through conflicting promises, delayed gratifications, and socially engineered desires that can both reinforce and

¹⁶ This approach to genealogy follows Michel Foucault's understanding of the term, which emphasizes discontinuity, rupture, and the entanglement of knowledge and power. See Foucault, M. (1977). *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (pp. 139–164). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

destabilize dominant structures. However, sounds also actively shape social structures. As Brandon LaBelle (2010) and Salomé Voegelin (2010) argue, sounds are not passive reflections; they are sites where social inclusion, exclusion, and belonging materialize. On that note, listening is productive: it spatializes relations of power before they are encoded in the unconscious. In cinematic contexts, soundscapes form the space in which ideology is felt, experienced and naturalized. Therefore, studying cinematic sound allows us both to interpret cultural representations and to examine the sonic architectures through which political and emotional realities are constructed.

This chapter does not offer a detailed technological history of sound media in the cinema of Turkey, but the analysis is based on an implicit recognition that material transformations played a major role in shaping each sound regime. The advent of magnetic tape, the transition from mono to stereo, the spread of dubbing, and advances in recording technologies provided the technical background within which the ideological and affective functions of sound were expressed. Rather than treating these technological developments separately, I see them as conditions that made particular forms of sound production, circulation, and reception possible at different historical moments. Thus, without embarking on a mechanical history of technology, I agree with the suggestion that material infrastructures make ideological structures possible. Following theorists such as Rick Altman (1992) and Jonathan Sterne (2003), I approach cinematic sound as a historically situated practice in which technical advancements are always already ideologically charged.

It is no coincidence that in a country like Turkey, where linguistic diversity is restricted and dissenting voices are periodically silenced, cinematic sound has a very important history of dubbing. Studying sound, in this light, offers an alternative archive of oppression and resistance, a chance to deal with the preserved traces that visual analysis often misses. Cinema definitely works as a mirror of social change, but when we listen to its sounds, it also becomes clear that it also works as an active agent that constructs affective and political imaginaries central to Turkey.

This chapter is structured genealogically in order to unravel the affective and ideological layers of meaning that cinematic sound has accumulated over time. I listen

to these layers symptomatically, attending to what is silenced, marginalized, or made inaudible through ideological processes. Each sonic regime analyzed here is treated both as a historical artifact and as an ongoing ideological process that has seeped into what I call the *sonic unconscious* of cinema in Turkey, a collective field where audiences have been trained to listen and interpret modernity, nationalism, class, gender, and alienation. It is worth noting that sound studies is not a monolithic field. Approaches that privilege some sounds over others (for example, R. Murray Schafer's concept of the "hi-fi" soundscape, which idealizes sonic purity and associates it with ecological and moral balance) have been questioned widely by theorists who emphasize how such ideals mask historical structures of sound hierarchies (Jonathan Sterne) and frame listening as a speculative and political act rather than an act of recovery (Jennifer Stoeber, Salomé Voegelin). My approach acknowledges these critical interventions and informs my treatment of cinematic sound as an ideological field shaped by historical tensions, exclusions, and affective investments.

Symptomatic listening is itself a situated and politically charged practice. As Sterne (2003) argues, the way we listen is socially constructed through education, media technologies, and cultural expectations. James (2015) also argues that listening practices that decide who is heard, how, and under what conditions are stratified along lines of class, race, and gender. This also means that my own analysis is shaped by a listening position that is neither entirely urban nor socially privileged. Having spent a significant part of my life in rural contexts and having personally experienced economic precarity, my interpretive stance emerges from overlapping and sometimes conflicting sonic sensibilities: secular yet familiar with traditional soundscapes, culturally attentive yet materially constrained. These embodied experiences inevitably shape how I perceive and construct the imagined listener within these films. So, in this study, I treat listening as a contested space: one where ideological investments condition emotional responses and where sonic hegemonies try to discipline the ear as much as the eye.

Sound in early cinema of Turkey, whether through post-synchronized dialogue, gendered voice casting, standardized music cues, or the erasure of ambient noises, built a sonic world that aided the Turkish nation-state in its ideological aspirations. As

Mladen Dolar (2006) reminds us, the voice is both a material trace and a symbolic excess: a site where ideology, identity, and desire come together. Cinema of Turkey, particularly during the Yeşilçam period, disciplined this convergence by controlling what could be heard, who could speak, and how emotions were to be felt.

I organize this genealogy as three major periods. First, I look at the early Republican era, and since this period coincided with the introduction of sound film in Turkey, I analyze how synchronized sound was instrumentalized in the state's cultural modernization project and influenced national listening habits and codified sonic markers of the idealized modern Turkish identity. I argue that these early films helped establish a sonic infrastructure that reflected and reinforced these homogenizing efforts, particularly through the deployment of standardized Turkish and Turkish art music. The sound regime of this period was shaped by the tension between the new and the old (also thought of as forward and backward) (Ahıska, 2010). While repeated sound practices normalized certain emotional responses to certain situations, they also repressed unwanted sounds and their effects into the sonic unconscious; thus, apolitical concerns were not eliminated but were covered up through aesthetic softening and reinforcement of the norm. The standardized affect produced by dubbing practices masked class differences and obscured social contradictions; it offered an aural fantasy of unity while material inequalities remained intact. Symptomatically listening to these films also reveals ideological contradictions through how sounds and soundscapes were organized, distorted, or silenced.

The second section focuses on the Yeşilçam era, during which post-synchronized dubbing, standardized musical cues, and gendered voices well-established a sonic fantasy of national unity. This period normalized certain affective and ideological tropes that would reverberate through the following decades.

In the third section, I focus on how the effects of the military coup and neoliberalism after 1980 transformed the use of cinematic sound. During this period, when issues such as identity fragmentation and emotional alienation began to be increasingly addressed in cinema, sound also began to be used in a more minimal and

nostalgic manner. Cinema, which became a symptomatic expression of individual fears and unresolved traumas, also coded these feelings at the sonic level.

The final section examines the transition from late 80's to the emergence of the New Cinema of Turkey. During this period, collective political narratives gave way to individual stories and melancholic atmospheres. Similarly, soundscapes embedded uncertainty and inner turmoil as sound codes into the auditory subconscious of the audience. Listening to these films ideologically and emotionally allows us to uncover the repressed tensions, silenced languages, erased class identities, and unresolved traumas that visual narratives only partially record.

Throughout the chapter, dominant sonic forms are also treated as *structures of feeling* (Williams, 1977): structures where political meanings are affectively produced, contested, and sedimented over time. By listening symptomatically, attending also to what is silenced, backgrounded, or excluded, this genealogy reveals how cinema in Turkey has historically shaped not just what is seen but also what is heard, unheard, and felt. In mapping the historical accumulation of sonic meanings into a collective sonic unconscious, the chapter aims to show how subsequent cinematic soundscapes operate within, and occasionally rupture, the ideological conditions of neoliberal governance and cultural polarization.

Before tracing the ideological evolution of sound in the cinema of Turkey in detail, it is useful to outline the major sonic regimes that have historically shaped its auditory landscape. The table below presents five dominant sonic regimes that have emerged from the early Republican period to the post-2016 era. Each regime reflects a specific grouping of ideological functions, aesthetic strategies, and affective orientations that, I argue, together form a historical matrix of listening and sonic governance in the cinema of Turkey.

Table 1

Sonic Ideology as Aesthetic Form: A Historical Periodization of Turkish Cinema's Sound Regimes

Period	Sonic Regime	Key Concept	Ideological Function	Representative Films
1930–1950	Sonic Authoritarianism	Disembodied Voice	Produces national unity through vocal standardization and erasure	Aysel, Bataklı Damın Kızı (1934)
1950–1980	Yeşilçam Regime	Affective Containment	Constructs emotional and moral norms; represses diversity and class	Kara Gözlüm (1970)
1980–2000	Sonic Excess	Sonic Grotesque, Affective Overload	Expresses repressed class anger, emotional chaos, and ideological confusion	Arabesk (1989)
2000–2016	Sonic Fragmentation	Affective Minimalism	Signals identity fragmentation, privatized emotion	Beş Vakit (2006)
Post-2016	Sonic Polarization	Negative Catharsis, Sonic Ressentiment	Enacts affective immobilization; via sonic withholding	Kurak Günler (2022) etc.

3.1 Sounds of Nationalism: Early Sonic Ideologies

Cinema arrived in Turkey at a very critical juncture, that is, during the country's transition to a new regime. That's why, from the late Ottoman Empire to the early years of the Republic, sound practices in cinema played a formative role in the construction of the new national identity. From the early sound films onwards, dialogues were written in standard Istanbul Turkish to fit and promote the state's new language reforms. This practice erased regional accents and minority languages, such as Kurdish, Armenian, and Greek. The spread of dubbing technology intensified this process, and it gave birth to what Nezih Erdoğan (2002) calls a *disembodied voice*, a voice that does not belong to a particular body but is heard in films as a stable and idealized voice that represented Yeşilçam as a whole. Erdoğan calls this reoccurring dubbed voice *Yeşilçam's voice*, and he underlines that this standardized dubbed voice was often performed by theater artists who spoke a polished Turkish that showed no accent and smoothed over class, gender, and regional distinctions. As much as this voice provided narrative clarity, it also contributed to a constructed habitus in which voices did not represent individuals anymore but a collective identity. This disembodied voice is also reminiscent of Michel Chion's concept of the "acousmetre" in the sense that this disembodied Yeşilçam's voice itself may be reflective of the central power of the state, which reinforces authority.

Thus, early Republican cinema, which was built on the broader authoritarian cultural practices discussed by Şentürk (2020), established a sense of "sonic authoritarianism." Later, the standardization of dubbing helped erase vocal diversity, such as regional accents, gendered vocal timbres, and class-based jargons that might undermine this ideological consensus. The use of formal Istanbul Turkish in all characters' speech, regardless of their depicted class or setting, contributed to what might be called a *fantasy of coherence*, a representational harmony that masks existing social contradictions (Ahıska, 2010).

Early films treated Istanbul as the center of this fantasy. It was constructed as the symbol of a modern city sonically as well, with its soundscapes that included ferries,

trams, seagulls, industrial machines, and crowds. As Kytö (2019) notes, through these representations, Istanbul's sonic landscape became a symbol of progress, secularism, and rationality. Early Yeşilçam films constructed an acoustic image of Istanbul as a growing, modern, and secular city, full of sounds of ferry horns, tram sounds, and the noise of urban crowds. In contrast, rural soundscapes were either flattened or completely erased. The absence of animal noises, agricultural labor, or folk accents in films of the times represented the rural not as an organic, audible space but as an ideological canvas to be overwritten by modernist intentions similar to the sonic sterilization of the urban space.

Music was at the center of this acoustic architecture. Popular genres such as the “folk song” (türkü) and the “song” (şarkı) were used in films strategically: the former to mythologize the village as the moral root of the nation, the latter to create a continuity between the Ottoman past and the future of the Republic (Arslan, 2011; Özbek, 1998). These genres were used to assimilate and erase cultural diversity to fit the sanitized national ideals.

When relevant, Western orchestration would be carefully applied to traditional motifs to achieve the project of the controlled hybridity (Abisel, 2005). The ezan (call to prayer) was often felt in the background of the mix, signaling the adoption of secularity as the new central marker of cultural atmosphere. When present, as distant echoes or time cues, *ezan* functioned more to set the localization than to spiritualize the scene. In this way, religious sound was reduced to a manageable form for the secular nationalist audience, much like the village itself was kept visually but in an acoustically reorganized way. The spiritual voice of the community was not completely erased but was disciplined as a sonic ornament that echoed the broader transformation of the time.

There was more to this sonic restructuring of the village that reflected the broader ideological operation on rural identity. Rural characters in cinema, especially women, were often portrayed as being close to nature and tradition, but they were almost all the time denied vocal authenticity (Erdoğan, 2002; Gürata, 2010). Rather, they spoke in the same urbanized language, rarely sang folk songs in their local dialect, and often

existed within a musical frame that was imposed rather than emerging from within the narrative world. This process turned the idea of the village into a visual site of remade tradition but a sonic site of discipline, what one might call an aligned periphery. The consistent sonic erasure of minority voices and regional dialects in early films created a sonic cinematic grammar that was to be adopted by the audience. These grammars were already familiar to middle-class urban audiences; hence, they allowed them to locate themselves easily within a coherent, modernizing national fantasy that affirmed their preferred status as citizens of the new nation. This carefully crafted sonic representation of modernity with no dialectal variation, no conflicting religious presence, and no ambient noise of class or poverty produced a sense of affective certainty that masked the material contradictions.

In short, early Republican sound cinema did the job of both representing and helping to construct Turkish modernity. Through standardization, repression, and symbolic orchestration, cinema was used as a sound laboratory where the Turkish national subject was shown the ideal ways of speaking and listening in accordance with state ideals (Şentürk, 2020). The emotional intimacy of sound, the presence of music, and strategic silences functioned together as a set of pedagogical tools that together, they implied a project of erasure: erasure of voices not allowed to speak, accents erased, and expressions silenced in the service of a new nationalist imagination.

Since this period was dominated by the works of Muhsin Ertuğrul, it is appropriate to focus on a film he directed and analyze it both historically and ideologically. One of the first examples of village films, *Aysel, Bataklı Damın Kızı* (1934), clearly shows how the new cultural agenda of the Republic was sonically and visually encoded into early cinematic narratives.

3.1.1 Case study: *Aysel, Bataklı Damın Kızı* (Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1934). *Aysel, Bataklı Damın Kızı* (1934) has an important place in the history of early republican cinema in Turkey, both as the first example of the genre of “köy filmleri” (village

films)¹⁷ and also as a cinematic expression of the cultural policies of the early republic. The film, through the main characters Aysel and Ali, two morally proud but socio-economically humble villagers, establishes a message of morality and simultaneously reconstructs the rural space sonically according to the ideological imperatives of the time. The film's sonic choices, especially its silences, dialogues, music, and ritualistic sound events, all participate in a larger project of modernist-nationalist rebranding of the rural. Its most striking sonic feature is that there is almost no rural ambient sound from start to finish. While this was due to the technological constraints of early sound cinema, this constraint had worked in line with the needs of the nation as Nezi̇h Erdogan (2002) argues regarding the broader history of cinematic sound in Turkey. What draws instant attention in the film is that despite the visuals that show a more or less standard village life, ambient sounds like wind, water, agricultural work, or animal noises are not present at all. Instead, a standardized Istanbul Turkish and an exclusively urban musical repertoire dominate the sonic field. Through symptomatic listening, this auditory minimalism reveals itself as ideological erasure. The silence of the sonic identity of the rural ends up portraying a fantasy image of the rural life, one that has already been domesticated by the Republic's project of linguistic and cultural homogenization.

Moreover, regardless of their class or local identity, every character in the film speaks in standardized, formal Turkish known as Istanbul Turkish. Regional accents and classed vernaculars are absent, as well as different voice timbres among same-sex characters. This linguistic uniformity functions both as a performance of intelligibility for targeted audiences and also as a sonic staging of national unity. As Erdoğan (2002) points out, the dubbing practices of early cinema in Turkey, including this one, treated the voice separately from the speaking body as if the voice was borrowed from a higher authority, reminding us of the historical importance that is attributed to speech as a symbol of reason in Western philosophy;¹⁸ hence, there's an implicit association with

¹⁷ Köy filmleri (village films) refer to a wave of films in Turkish cinema from the 1950s through the 1970s that depicted rural life, focusing on themes of poverty, and social injustice and carried a reformist tone. See Suner (2010) for an analysis of how these films constructed both the village and the nation as cinematic spaces of tension and hope.

¹⁸ Western philosophy has privileged speech as the medium of presence and reason. For instance, Plato, contrasts the liveliness of spoken dialogue with the static nature of writing, warning that writing

speech and rationality here as well. This separation of voice from the body allowed for the sonic ideological correction that could not be achieved with the visual representation of the village; hence, the voice becomes a site of ideological correction. To extend Erdoğan's idea that the dubbed voice is the voice of Yeşilçam par excellence, the village here can be seen as speaking as an entity in itself, not in its own terms but through the authority of the centralized republican subject.



Figure 1. Aysel, Bataklı Damın Kızı.

The music used in the film intensifies this process of sonic reconstruction. Instead of folk songs associated with Anatolian village life, the soundtrack consists of Türk sanat müziği (Turkish art music)¹⁹ that had already been appropriated and sanitized by the Republic for its cultural projects. For example, in one of the few scenes where the village is appropriately portrayed, the “meyhane” (pub) scene, the dominant

fosters forgetfulness (see Plato, 1997). Derrida later critiques this “phonocentrism,” the metaphysical bias toward voice as the site of truth and origin, in *Of Grammatology* (see Derrida, 1976).

¹⁹ *Türk Sanat Müziği*, Turkish Classical Music or Turkish Art Music refers to a music tradition that was developed in the Ottoman elite circles, from the 17th to the early 20th centuries. It is known for its use of the *makam* (modal system), *usûl* (rhythmic patterns), and aesthetic principles. While its roots are in the Ottoman cultural sphere, the genre was standardized during the early Republican era and was presented in contrast to both Western classical music and local folk songs. See: Feldman, W. (1996). *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire*. Berlin: VWB, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung.

musical instrument is the “tanbur,”²⁰ not the “saz,”²¹ which is rooted in rural places. This substitution functions as what I call *sonic assimilation*: a re-imagining of the rural through sonic codes associated with urban values in the name of national unity.

However, there is one exception that reveals the limits of this ideological construct. During a brief scene in which villagers perform a folk dance called Efe, which is a folk dance also known by the name “zeybek,” admired particularly by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a saz is seen and heard for a short time. This moment uncovers what can be identified as the film’s sonic unconscious. This traditional musical expression, associated with marginality and rural autonomy, can only enter the diegetic soundscape under the legitimizing sign of the nation. It is precisely the fact that Mustafa Kemal admired the tradition that allows for this brief break. However, even here, folk music appears as a monumentalized moment, detached from everyday life and put into a controlled space of representation.

The soundscape of the film complies with and activates existing sonic grammars that are familiar to urban, middle-class audiences of the early Republic. These include standardized language and Turkish art music but also sonic rituals of modern governance, most clearly exemplified in the mention of a municipal wedding. The depiction of a civil wedding, which was uncommon for most rural communities in 1934, is presented with an institutional seriousness: careful speech, and the very calm and normalized acceptance of bureaucratic modernity. These sonic choices train the audience in remapping the village as an extension of the new secular Republican order. Through sound, the village as an innocent but modern site is carved into both the ideological geography of the nation-state and the cognitive mappings of the audiences.

²⁰ The tanbur is a long-necked, stringed instrument, one of the main instruments of Ottoman court music. It is particularly associated with urban, elite and classical musical traditions; it is an instrument that belongs to high cultural environments rather than rural folk music. For detailed information, see Behar, C. (1987). *Klasik Türk Musikisi Üzerine Denemeler*. İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları.

²¹ The saz is a long-necked string instrument used in Turkish traditional music. It has a strong connection to the aşık (minstrel) tradition, when poet-musicians enact stories about politics, love, and religion. Throughout Anatolia and among Kurdish and Alevi populations, the saz serves as a cultural and ideological emblem of rural identity, oral tradition, and collective memory in addition to its musical function (Stokes, 1992).

This ideological reimagining peaks at the end of the film, in which Ali, a villager who is neither rich nor urban, chooses poor Aysel over rich, manipulative, and morally dubious Gülsüm. This narrational resolution works to preserve the moral integrity and traditional values of the village by staying within the limits of goodness and moral purity. However, the acoustic profile makes it clear that the village is no longer the village we know that speaks in its own language and exists in a different soundscape of its own; a carefully curated sonic environment. The village is visually there, but it has completely changed acoustically.

This tension between visual authenticity and sonic reconstruction implies a broader structure of sonic revisionism. This did not necessarily mean the rural was neglected, on the contrary the silence worked as a correction. The result is a paradox: although to a certain degree (the headscarf is used in a more modern way and the fact that the emblem of the modern Turkish woman, Cahide Sonku, plays Aysel), the people are allowed to remain “rural” in image, in labor and in morality but are denied sonic authenticity, such as speaking, singing and listening to their authentic music and selves. This paradox is not expressed in hostility but by a benevolent integration, by a disciplined affection that makes the countryside (or the periphery) exist only insofar as it resonates with the voice of the center.

In short, *Aysel*, *Bataklı Damın Kızı* can be interpreted as the sonic reconstruction of the rural subject under the ideological pressure of early republican modernization. The accurate visual representation of houses and quiet paths conceals a sonic assimilation, in which the voice, soundscapes and folk music of the village are reimagined to adapt to the harmonizing norms of the new national order. It is only through listening; either symptomatic, critical, or ideological listening, that these transformations become audible.

While early Republican cinema aimed to produce an affectively coherent nation through sonic authoritarianism, the anxieties it repressed, such as class conflict, linguistic diversity, and regional differences, continued underneath. Yeşilçam inherited these contradictions but translated them into an economy where affective resolution substituted for material transformation.

3.2 Yeşilçam's Melodramas: Sonic Regimes, and the National Ear

The era of Yeşilçam is a period that lasted decades (roughly from the 1950s to the early 1980s) and produced movies from a wide range of genres. Given this diversity, this section does not claim to represent Yeşilçam in its entirety. Instead, I focus on the dominant melodramatic style of the period which is seen as the official genre because Yeşilçam most consistently articulated its ideological functions via sound in this genre. The exaggerated emotions, recurring narrative templates, and reliance on music and voice as carriers of affect make this genre particularly effective in influencing the listening habits of the audience. At the same time, sonic practices such as dubbing, musical repetition, and vocal stylization were intensively used in this period and created what I call Yeşilçam's "sonic regime." By centering on melodrama, I aim to illuminate the auditory mechanisms through which national belonging, gender roles, and class positions were made audible.

While existing scholarship on Yeşilçam melodramas has often emphasized narrative, visual style, or star personas, this chapter foregrounds the role of sound as a structuring ideological force. Because most of these films have not been analyzed through the lens of sonic ideology, this chapter engages with them through my methodological lens: symptomatic listening.

The sound patterns analyzed here relate to the popular studio productions in which post-synchronization, musical repetition, and gendered vocal aesthetics were heavily used. While exceptions and other examples certainly exist (the realist films of Yılmaz Güney, the political cinema of Erden Kral, or the early auteur experiments of Metin Erksan), this section focuses on the mainstream tradition that defines the emotional and ideological structure of what can be called "canonical Yeşilçam." By clarifying this scope, I aim to better outline the "national ear" that Yeşilçam helped construct, but I also acknowledge the heterogeneity that lies beyond the dominant sounds.

Yeşilçam cinema did not just tell stories; it also taught its audience how to listen. The images of most of the early melodramas, which included romantic struggles and rural life difficulties, were accompanied by a carefully constructed sonic world in which voices, music, and soundscapes were organized to play a central role in shaping gender identities, national coherence, and emotional norms. Through post-synchronization (dubbing), orchestrated melodies, disembodied voices, and the systematic erasure of linguistic diversity, Yeşilçam created a familiar sonic grammar that normalized listening as a political and affective practice. This sonic grammar functioned as what Jameson would describe as a textual form through which history and ideology become intelligible. As he writes, “history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but [...] it is inaccessible to us except in textual form” (Jameson, 1981, pp. 20–21). Yeşilçam’s sonic regime, then, can be understood as a narrativization of ideological contradiction, operating within what this thesis terms the national ear.

This sonic identity functioned as an educational tool that, through constant repetition over the years, taught the audience to hear femininity as virtue, to associate harmony with modernity, and to read loud voices, accents, laughter, and silence as sonic signs of moral instability. With the comfort of the familiar dubbed female voices and the exhilaration of melodies emerging at the same critical moments, the audience internalized a certain way of experiencing cinema through listening as well as seeing it. This section examines how Yeşilçam created a national sonic imaginary through using concepts and methods such as *symptomatic listening*, “*cognitive mapping by inheritance*,” and *acoustic profiling* to demonstrate how Yeşilçam’s sonic regime fostered a new listening habit, normalized inequality, repressed diversity, and performed an acoustically coherent national identity.

One of the most important analyses of Yeşilçam melodramas comes from Neziha Erdoğan (1998), who approaches the genre as an aesthetic form through which the ambivalences of national identity, modernity, and cultural aspirations are expressed. Erdoğan argues that melodrama in Yeşilçam stands for the fantasy of a coherent national identity, one that desires both Western modernity and the preservation of local morality. According to this analysis, melodrama functions as a form that circulates

desire, repression, and fantasy through affective means. His analysis of how class, gender, and national identity are woven into melodramatic structures, often through exaggerated moral binaries, aesthetic repetition, and affective excess, provides a crucial theoretical precedent for understanding Yeşilçam's sonic regime. The repetitive musical motifs, disembodied voices, and silences analyzed symptomatically in this chapter operate as auditory analogues of the ideological containment Erdoğan describes. His work thus supports the broader theoretical framework of this thesis in describing how cinema encodes ideological contradiction through listening habits and affective repetition (Erdoğan, 1998, pp. 259–271).

3.2.1 Acoustic homogenization and the voice-body split. As well as reflecting the values of a newly modernizing nation, Yeşilçam also shaped how that nation should be experienced sonically. From the early post-Republican years to the 1980s, it crafted its own sonic regime through heavy dubbing, musical repetition, and the use of strategic sounds. These sonic regulations decided how classed, gendered, and spatial subjectivities could be expressed, as in who, how, and where one could be heard. Behind the ambient sounds and emotionally full scores, traces of anxiety, oppression, and erasure were hidden. Through symptomatic listening, we can encounter these repressed tensions that sometimes would flash out and subtly disrupt the apparent harmony.

Dubbing in Yeşilçam had a function beyond the technical necessity. It imposed a system of acoustic standardization in which Istanbul Turkish ruled as the preferred language code. The characters in films all had the idealized bourgeois city voice, regardless of their regional or class identity. This tradition created the illusion of a monolithic citizenship, and those who were thought to be abnormalities in terms of their region or ethnicity were excluded, and a sonic normativity was enforced. Through such dubbing practices, the audience was trained to internalize sonic hierarchies and exclusions that felt natural over time. This was a listening regime where absence was rendered normative, and working-class, Kurdish, Armenian, and rural voices were suppressed under a single auditory unity. The practice of dubbing, in this regard, is closely aligned with the homogenizing cultural objectives of the Republic. All characters, regardless of their geographical or social origin, were placed in a more or

less the same upper-class urban soundscape, which created a sonic homogeneity of a modernist fantasy: Sonic differences were overlooked and regional, ethnic, and emotional specificities were assimilated into a sonic “fantasy of unity” (Ahıska, 2010) that masked Turkey’s fragmented socio-political realities, particularly the massive rural-urban migration and rapid modernization.

This disjunction between image and sound, especially when non-Istanbul bodies were speaking with the voice of Istanbul, also created the acousmatic effect in which the origin of the voice, never to be found in its body precisely because of this disconnection, assumed a position of authority (Chion, 1994; Erdoğan, 2002.) It is as if the voice were floating above the image as an omnipotent national sign. But this depersonalization was effective because it silenced the linguistic diversity of the region. This was where the sonic unconscious of Yeşilçam emerged, a space where historical, ethnic, and affective refusals were suppressed but not completely erased.

3.2.2 Spatial sonic profiling. The disembodied voice is not the only sonic marker of ideological containment of Yeşilçam; soundscapes of outdoor and indoor places were also subjected to intervention through *acoustic profiling*. Acoustic profiling refers to the construction of the sonic identity of a place or community through the selective inclusion, manipulation, or exclusion of certain sounds (Jordan, 2023). In Yeşilçam, acoustic profiling was audible in the depiction of rural areas in particular, which were filtered through a pastoral sonority: bird chippings, running streams, the noises of cattle, wind, barking dogs, and folk melodies evoked a feminized, static, and mythical landscape. Although such sounds suggest realism, the problem lies not in their presence but in the organization of these sonic elements to create an essentialized picture of rural life.



Figure 2. *Yılanların Öcü*.

Yılanların Öcü (Metin Erksan, 1962) is a particularly useful example in this regard. While the film visually highlights the exploitation, poverty, and class antagonisms that are common in village life, the soundscape lacks the dialects and sound structures that would confirm this reality. Instead, the village is profiled by a generic sonic character: the quiet exterior and conversations in clean Turkish do not represent the reality of village life. This acoustic profiling is in contradiction to its visual reality. Most of the main characters, regardless of their social status, speak in well-articulated Turkish decorated with a bit of accent, which sounds more theatrical than natural. This idealization transforms the village into a sonically assimilated space, which reduces differences under a homogenized national scenario. In this way, though the film points to the rural as a place of moral roots of the Turkish identity, it only confirms this virtue after taking away its voice, hence its agency and its legitimacy. This creates a dissonance between image and sound. Additionally, the music that accompanies the movie from start to finish is composed entirely with Western classical instrumentation, rather than local folk traditions. By removing the village's authentic voice, these sonic corrections turn it into a uniform national emblem.

The sonic identity of another popular Yeşilçam film that is set in a village, *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1978), is constructed in a way that reinforces the village as a space of collective longing and not as a differentiated place of its own. Through this intended erasure of the village as a specific place, a generalized sense of rural purity seems to be staged for urban consumption. The acoustic profiles, therefore, by erasing the rich diversity of voices that exist between real villages, often function as if they represent a universal rural identity. The sonic textures smooth out differences in dialect, sounds of seasonal differences, population density, vegetation, and even local weather conditions. In doing so, they suppress the complexities of rural life in favor of a homogenized sonic code that can be instantly mapped by the urban audiences and memorized to be activated when they encounter it in the future again.



Figure 3. Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım

The film's most iconic musical cue is its recurring melancholic theme composed by Cahit Berkay, and it operates as a form of sonic brand. Audience studies show that scenes without music were misinterpreted; what appeared romantic in the musical version was read as suspenseful or threatening without it (Yıldız, 2017). This indicates how Berkay's soundtrack guides emotional perception and encodes meaning beyond the visual.²² This recurring leitmotif doesn't just support the narrative; it transforms the rural love story into a sonic allegory of emotional sacrifice, teaching audiences

²² Yıldız (2017) notes how audience reception to the film changed in the absence of music, highlighting the soundtrack's affective power.

how to feel within the ideological frame of Yeşilçam melodrama. It repeats almost in every scene in which the characters played by Kadir İnanır and Türkan Şoray are present together and underlines their emotions and reinforces the timelessness of the love story as a genre. Rather than advancing the narrative, this music works affectively to anchor emotional memory in a stylized rurality. The village becomes not a lived space but a listening memory, a space that is heard more as a metaphor than as a material setting. This sonic abstraction can be interpreted with Anahid Kassabian's concept of *affiliative identifications*, in the sense that the audience's shared affective experiences are triggered by recurrent leitmotifs (Kassabian, 2001). These recurring melodies work as an affective shorthand. In the end, this technique flattens the village's sonic profile into a familiar sonic schema, teaching listeners to link the countryside with moral truth, emotional clarity, and nostalgia rather than diversity or genuine conflict.

In contrast, urban spaces are acoustically profiled as more ordered in tone, modern, and masculine in Yeşilçam. In films like *Namuslu* (Eğilmez, 1985) and *Züğürt Ağa* (Çölgeçen, 1985), urban modernity is sonically encoded by calm homes, bureaucratic silence, soft apartment music, interestingly foregrounded footsteps, and the distant noise of traffic. The noise of life, street vendors, music, domestic fights coming from a window, or daily chatter is either minimized or omitted, creating the illusion of an emotionally stable and rational modernity. This acoustic profiling produces the city as a place of rationality, progress, and self-control, an ideological construction that represses the chaotic, emotional, or "backward" sonic traces inherent to the city but associated with rurality. This portrayal is built by silencing or excluding the rural echoes that, in reality, also exist within the city: a lingering *türkü*, loud conversations in regional accents, or a migrant voice would always trigger this carefully constructed order. These sonic interventions point to the continuity of what the urban imagination seeks to suppress: the unresolved and arguably unwanted intimacy of the rural within so-called modernity.

Thus, the spatial sonic profile in Yeşilçam works to position its narratives in concrete space, but it also ideologically decides who belongs to this space and who is *the other*. The boundaries between the city and the village are set through visual and

sonic regimes in which class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies are naturalized through sonic inclusion and exclusion. These sonic associations teach the audience to listen to the city in a way that acknowledges it as a place of civilization and rationality and the village as a place of loss, nostalgia, or irrationality. Listening becomes a field of ideological intervention that reproduces the structures of value that underlie Turkey's not-so-equal modernity.

3.2.3 Gendered voices and affective absences. The ideological encoding of sound use in Yeşilçam was not limited to geography or class. Gender was perhaps one of the most carefully orchestrated dimensions of Yeşilçam's sonic regime. The female voice in these films was treated with over-stylization, often dubbed with high-pitched, soft, or breathy vocal textures that functioned to emphasize emotional fragility, sexual innocence, and desirability (Ahıska, 2010; Turan, 2024). These choices, which seemed to result from and reflect what Pia Palme (2016) has called "male ear" (adapting Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" to the sonic realm), functioned ideologically to confine women to normative roles. Innocent heroines whispered their desires shyly; modern or villainous women were assigned deeper, foreign-accented voices to mark their moral ambiguity in order to link their villainy to foreign geographies. Even within the narrative, a woman's voice was rarely her own; it was mediated, softened, or remade. With such manipulation, gender differences were made sonically intelligible and they carved the ideological project of heteronormativity into the very texture of sound and the sonic unconscious of both the cinematic tradition and the audience of cinema in Turkey.

Yeşilçam's melodramas were the main genre in which the idealized female voice was imagined by male desire or patriarchal ideals. In this context, dubbing practices also performed the work of detaching women's authentic voices from their bodies and placing them within an ideological soundscape to suit the expectations of a sonic patriarchy.

The social implications of the practice of dubbing can also be thought of in broader cultural terms. In our society, the human voice is mainly associated with agency and subjectivity, as seen in expressions such as "giving voice to someone" or

“having a voice.” For Adriana Cavarero, the human voice is the carrier of linguistic content but most importantly it also works as a sign of individuality. As she writes, “The voice is the emission of a unique body and cannot be abstracted into generality. To hear a voice is to hear who is speaking, not just what is said.” (Cavarero, 2005, p. 173). In this sense, the voice is ontologically tied to the speaker’s presence; it determines their identity. Replacing it with a stylized, pre-recorded voice therefore cannot be reduced to a technical substitution; it should be seen as an act of control. Dubbing takes away the actresses’ real voices but also symbolically erases the possibility of women’s autonomy under an affective sonic regime that serves patriarchal and nationalist ideals.

A symptomatic listening of Atıf Yılmaz’s melodrama *Kara Gözlüm* (1970) presents a good example of this operation. While previous analyses have focused on the film’s class dynamics and visual stylization (e.g., Özker, 2019), this one extends such readings by highlighting how these dynamics are reinforced and aestheticized through sonic abstraction and disembodied vocality. Türkan Şoray’s character, Azize, a fisherman’s granddaughter whose talent in singing leads her into a wealthy, elite urban setting, represents a divided female identity: she looks glamorous but sounds disconnected from her own body. The voice heard while Şoray is singing in the film belongs to Belkıs Özener, a professional singer who was frequently used as the voice of idealized femininity in Yeşilçam cinema. What we see on the screen is a dissonance between Şoray’s visual performance and Özener’s highly emotional but rented voice. Belkıs Özener’s studio-oriented performance infiltrates Türkan Şoray’s staged body and separates the affect from the bodily authenticity to which they originally belong. This soft voice represents emotionality and melancholic desire and functions as a tool of limiting them: feminine expression is allowed only in a softened, melodic form. Listening symptomatically to this draws our attention to the fact that this voice/body incompatibility reveals cultural anxieties about female authenticity and autonomy (Turan, 2024).

Through repeated exposure to vocal substitutions like this, audiences become accustomed to perceiving feminine emotionality as something soft, pure, and emotionally repressed. Such sonic training has implicitly reinforced gender structures

in which femininity is associated with fragility and passivity. In this context, silence also functions to reinforce gender norms, particularly around Şoray's character. When Azize is silent, this does not mean rejection or reflection; rather, it expresses surrender, emotional frustration, or loss. This implies the silencing of her voice, personality, and historical specificity; hence, silence becomes a sonic remnant of displaced desire, reminding us of Mary Ann Doane's (1980) argument that female silence in cinema often operates as a site of ideological and psychic containment. The film *Acı Hayat* (Metin Erksan, 1962) is another nuanced example of how gendered representations of voice define the identities of female characters in melodramas. The film's protagonist, Türkan Şoray, climbs the social class ladder throughout the story, from a poor family to an elite urban environment. However, despite this change in Şoray's social position, her voice remains soft and melancholic. This fulfills a clear ideological function: it underlines the universality of the passive, vulnerable, and morally virtuous femininity, regardless of class or changing conditions. The ideological implication is clear: Yeşilçam's ideal feminine voice fixes gender identity within the framework of rigid patriarchal expectations.



Figure 4. Mavi Boncuk.

In addition, these interferences reposition women as examples of affective stability during periods of social transformation. In popular melodramas, women's

voices symbolize nostalgia and purity and create a connection between femininity and morality. This strategic use of women's voices and the melancholic musical themes that accompany them also tapped into the collective emotional memory, and the audience's affection was fixed within these boundaries. Films such as *Mavi Boncuk* (Eğilmez, 1974) demonstrate this: the voice of Emel Sayın, the main female character, mediated the competing desires of the men in the film, confirming a patriarchal consensus about womanhood through sonic effect.

These gendered vocal practices reflect another ideological concern with female autonomy, social mobility, and emotional expression. Through dubbing and recurring association of emotional musical themes with women characters, women were portrayed as fitting into a regulated emotional economy of patriarchal ideology. In this context, dubbing functioned as a form of emotional suppression and as an ideological mechanism through which Yeşilçam melodramatic cinema drew the sonic borders of the disciplined and gendered characteristics of the nation.

But these elements contain hidden tensions and contradictions, too. The apparent softness and exaggerated sweetness of women's voices in these melodramas also reveal certain anxieties: the fear that authentic, assertive, subversive, and autonomous women could destabilize dominant patriarchal values if they expressed themselves vocally. The systematic control of these voices, then, underscores a subversive potential. Drawing on Doane's (1980) analysis of female vocalicity as a site of ideological anxiety and containment, symptomatic listening allows us to identify an underlying uneasiness in Yeşilçam's controlled sonic identity. Despite being carefully managed and emotionally controlled, women's voices still remained implicitly threatening, pointing to the possibilities for *sonic agency* and expressive autonomy that Yeşilçam's sonic ideologies violently attempt to suppress (LaBelle, 2018).

In Yeşilçam melodramas, the regulation of the voices of women functioned as a tool for organizing affective labor. Audiences learned how to feel gender and morality through these stylizations of vocal timbres and tones. Since affect comes before conscious cognition, this kind of sonic organization (breathy vocal textures, softened intonations, and melancholic musical motifs) worked to create emotional attachment

to normative structures (Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2011) and established embodied associations between feminine virtue and sonic fragility.

These emotional economies glued certain sonic qualities to idealized representations of femininity in order to ensure that public feelings were tied to established ideological patterns. Gendered and morally idealized subjectivities were tightly coded in sound, and the repetition of these sonic representations embedded patriarchal values into the infrastructure of listening as well as training the audience to normalize emotional submission below conscious recognition. Yeşilçam's sound regime thus operated as a form of affective governance as well, helping the audience to feel and recognize social identities. Thus, the gendered regulation of voice in Yeşilçam was an integral part of its broader sonic imaginary, which involved the construction of a disciplined and predictable national subject whose affective boundaries were also policed sonically.

3.2.4 Sonic abstraction and musical containment. While gendered voices structured affective norms, musical abstraction further extended this logic by aestheticizing emotional and class contradictions. Yeşilçam trained its audience to feel through storytelling and also a tight sonic architecture, through encoding abstract emotions, stylized effects, and contradictions into carefully constructed sound worlds. One of the most striking examples of this is seen in *Sevmek Zamanı* (Metin Erksan, 1965), where language is detached from its physical and spatial sources. In the film, the dialogues flow independently of the bodies and the spaces, and they create an acousmatic disconnection that resists exaggerated emotionality. Thus, the film resists masking the ideological contradictions that Yeşilçam does through sound and allows them to emerge. The measured voices of the characters lack personal texture, and they gain a metaphysical feature that belongs to no one. This abstraction of the voice also fits the thematic issue of the film: an unrealized, unembodied love story. The film eliminates the connection of the voices to both bodies and spaces, turning its characters into allegories of postponed desire and repressed material contradictions. Thus, it does not need to offer a resolution as melodrama does, because it creates a silent, withdrawn atmosphere that fosters introspection rather than an affective arrangement.

In *Boş Beşik* (Orhan Elmas, 1969), music constructs motherhood through the repetitive use of a lullaby, which functions as both a sonic and ideological enclosure. This melodic motif, coded with tradition, sacrifice, and selfless femininity, does not develop narratively but loops persistently, reducing the woman's emotional universe to a singular axis of grief and virtue. Rather than offering expressive depth, the lullaby delimits affective possibility: emotion is permitted only when it aligns with culturally sanctioned roles of maternal suffering. As Çil (2023, p. 286) notes, this repetition functions as a form of affective pedagogy, teaching the audience what kind of sadness is legitimate and how feminine emotion should be internalized. Within this sonic economy, the lullaby becomes an instrument of affective containment, not liberating emotion but disciplining it into normative structures of gendered grief.

Repetition in these films acts as sonic glue that sticks familiar melodies and motifs to certain emotions in a way that recalls Sara Ahmed's "sticky feelings," where emotions stick to signs and become self-evident. She says, "We could argue signs become sticky through repetition; if a word is used in a certain way, again and again, then that 'use' becomes intrinsic; it becomes a form of signing (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97)." In most melodramas, like *Tatlı Dillim* (Eğilmez, 1972), *Mavi Boncuk* (Eğilmez, 1974), and *Gülen Gözler* (Eğilmez, 1977), familiar melodies and repeating musical cues invite this sort of affective recognition. Songs or character leitmotifs do not contribute to narrative or uncover conflict; they just stabilize meaning. This repetition of familiar musical expressions creates emotional continuity among different films and provides a shared listening experience that reinforces cultural memory. Audiences learn to react emotionally to these sonic triggers that express romance, loss, or intimacy. Through repetition, a certain ideology of emotions is placed within listening practices and the emotional reflexes these practices cause. Instead of opening up space for uncertainty, it becomes the organizing principle of emotional consensus.

Yeşilçam melodramas, in which music functioned as an affective infrastructure that consisted of Western classical harmonies, Turkish art music, urban *şarkı*, and sanitized *türkü*, music performed emotional governance: it encoded affective hierarchies and instructed audiences how to feel and also what to feel about whom, when, and why.

Jacques Attali (1985) asserted that music acts as the rehearsal of upcoming social orders. In Yeşilçam, this order was the affective republican nation: unified, harmonious, and predictable. Music rendered this fantasy audible, and repetition made it believable. Over time, specific melodies, orchestrations, and tonalities came to symbolize certain moral registers: maternal sacrifice, masculine longing, nationalist melancholy, or romantic fate. These forms, repeated across films, created an emotional familiarity that went beyond the individual work. This sonic continuity allowed audiences to internalize an entire sensory regime as *a structure of feeling*, that linked cultural belonging with particular emotional codes.

The power of musical repetition is very obvious in *Kara Gözlüm* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1970), where the song “Sevedim Kara Gözlüm” functions as a sonic anchor throughout. The song repeats in multiple diegetic and non-diegetic forms, as a studio recording, as a rehearsal, and as a live performance. This repetition makes the song familiar for the audience and the song evokes, in terms of lyrics, tone, and orchestration, codes of grief, longing, and impossible love. It also functions as a strategy of containment in the sense that it overwrites class resentment, gender-based anger, or systemic injustice, and even glorifies these repressed tensions by transforming them into a gentle, melancholic, and inherent beauty. As Attali might argue, this sublimation works as pacification: the music masks social contradictions by burying them in harmony.

Anahid Kassabian’s (2001) notion of *affiliating identifications* is again helpful here. Kassabian uses this term to explain the process by which familiar songs or musical styles in a film score activate listeners’ existing cultural and emotional attachments and enable audiences to align themselves with characters or moods through shared histories. The theme music of *Kara Gözlüm* intensifies emotions and aligns the audience with specific positions. They are encouraged to affiliate emotionally with Şoray’s bourgeois transition, with Kenan’s silent suffering, and with the romance that remains unfulfilled. These affiliations are affective as they are political; they teach the listener to desire an emotionally expressive femininity that is

ideologically passive and a masculinity that is silent, sacrificial, and sonically contained. The music functions as an overarching main character.

Fredric Jameson defines the ideologeme as “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (Jameson, 2006, p. 61). In realist fiction, ideologemes often appear as recurring narrative or rhetorical motifs that provide recognizable resolutions to social contradictions. They include figures such as “the people,” “philanthropy,” or “renunciation,” which function as closures within otherwise unstable social texts. These motifs do not materially resolve contradictions but convert them into symbolic forms that stabilize meaning and create the appearance of moral coherence. In Yeşilçam melodramas, ideologemes were not restricted to narrative or character construction. They were also embedded in the sonic composition of the films. Sentimental music, stylized female voices, and coordinated group performances contributed to the auditory framing of moral and social tensions. Instead of addressing contradiction directly, sound produced a sense of resolution through emotional coding. The recurring musical themes in *Kara Gözlüm* and *Mavi Boncuk* illustrate this function. As much as supporting the overall affective tone of the movies, these motifs also organize social tensions such as class resentment, gender conflict, and political unease into familiar sonic patterns. In this context, sonic ideologemes operate as condensed aesthetic forms that render historical antagonisms emotionally accessible. Yeşilçam’s sound design did not rely on visual containment alone. It reinforced ideological closure through sonic repetition and tonal coherence.



Figure 5. *Vesikalı Yarım*.

Another example of how music occupies more than ornamental space can be found in *Vesikalı Yarım* (Lütfi Ö. Akad, 1968), where the dominant melancholic music both seems to underline and mystify the socio-economic contradictions between Sabiha and Halil through a fantasy of impossible emotional intimacy. The music is almost always sad, as if giving clues to the unhappy ending and sealing it off as fate. When Halil and Sabiha are together in the city by daytime, Istanbul remains unusually silent. The sounds of construction, traffic, or market conversations, when they appear, push themselves to the background. Rather than overwhelming the screen, these urban noises seem to hold back just to create space for the impossible lovers. The city silently allows their fragile intimacy, offering a temporary melancholic refuge in an otherwise cruel world.

Vesikalı Yarım stages a melancholic sonic abstraction of Istanbul's gendered and classed spaces. Çiçekoğlu's (2007) reading of the film as a spatial narrative of gender and agency provides a valuable backdrop to my argument, which reinterprets the same tensions through the film's melancholic sonic minimalism and acoustic erasure. The film shows the doomed relationship between Halil and Sabiha through a series of spatial and auditory contrasts. The transition from Halil's familiar working-class

periphery, accompanied by Turkish music and a sense of routine, into the inner urban spaces of jazz and modern nightlife marks the shift from communal intimacy to alienation (Çiçekoğlu, 2007). Sabiha's presence in these modern interiors destabilizes the binary of the virtuous housewife and the "fallen woman": she becomes a flaneuse, a woman who walks, who gazes at the city rather than being just gazed upon, reclaiming a form of spatial and emotional agency. However, the film ultimately denies this autonomy. Sabiha is abandoned, not because of her choices, but because Halil returns to the patriarchal safety of his home and family, and the film's sonic world falls into subdued tragedy. This acoustic transition, where Istanbul's noise recedes and melancholic music envelops Sabiha, underscores her marginalization. The soundscape thus encodes both her subjectivity and her dispossession, through sonic withdrawal to signal her final exclusion from normative domesticity and masculine comfort.

However, silence often operated as an acoustic closure in these melodramas: a way of stopping meaning, postponing conflict (as it does in *Vesikalı Yarım*), or aestheticizing pain. In *Kara Gözlüm*, the moments of silence around Şoray's character are heavy with emotional weight, but not with agency. These silences are not acts of refusal or resistance; they are pauses that signal submission, sadness, and loss. These gaps signal what cannot be spoken and therefore has been repressed to the sonic unconscious: the suppressed memory of class antagonism, the inaudibility of minority voices, and the impossibility of sonic agency.

In the end, in Yeşilçam melodramas, music was not just a backdrop; it was the glue that stuck together a fragile narrative of national unity, gender harmony, and class compromise. But this imagined harmony reveals its cracks when listened to symptomatically. The familiar melodies, disembodied voices, and silences heavy with unspoken truths all become sonic signs of repressed ideological tensions. And with their repetitions and absences, they reveal the limits of the world that Yeşilçam is trying to construct sonically.

3.2.5 Class-based sonic divisions: acoustic stratification. The illusion of a harmonious society required the erasure of class differences, and Yeşilçam

melodramas were very good at downplaying the importance of class by representing the lower classes as morally pure and good-hearted, as it did in the rural areas by reducing conflicts to a simple good/bad difference between people. But the problem of class was always there, and sound was the medium through which class could be both heard and emotionally internalized. In this chapter I use the concept of acoustic stratification, where sound becomes a means of representing, organizing, and ideologically framing class distinctions through soundscapes, dubbing styles, musical framing, and vocal clarity.

For instance, in *Kara Gözlüm*, the bourgeois and working classes are also separated by the difference in their sound worlds. Azize's transformation from a fisherman's granddaughter to a wealthy nightclub singer occurs parallel to the sound transformation of the environments she is in: the cacophony of coastal life is gradually replaced by a sound world dominated by silence, politeness, and orchestral musicality. Azize's mobility to a new class position is marked by a stylized, emotionally rich vocal identity. Meanwhile, her working-class lover Kenan remains in the world of noise: clanking dishes, vague chatter, and the distant echo of the songs he wrote, which, despite being performed publicly, remain sonically alienated from his body and space. This distinction might encode what Jameson (1981) described as a *structural absence*: the working-class authorship that sustains bourgeois aesthetic production but is alienated and invisible within it. Its reality is not directly represented in the narrative, but this very absence becomes constitutive of the structure or meaning of the film.

This film provides a particularly distilled example of how Yeşilçam trained its audiences to sonically associate emotional depth, romantic legitimacy, and cultural value with sanitized, musically framed, upper-class spaces. Working-class spaces, while not necessarily vilified, are represented as sonically chaotic, emotionally excessive, or aesthetically raw. These sonic differences hint on what is hidden: class is not explained but felt, absorbed aurally as part of a broader national emotional grammar.

Azize's upward mobility is marked by visual signifiers such as bourgeois interiors, staircases, and stylized urban décor (Özker, 2019), but a sonic shift toward

orchestral music, polished dubbing, and a recurring melancholic theme also implies this mobility. The recurring song “Sevedimim Kara Gözlüm,” functions as a sonic anchor that frames Azize’s affective journey and encodes the changes she went through into an emotionally recognizable auditory pattern (Perkün, 2018; Kassabian, 2001). However, this transformation also introduces a disjunction between Şoray’s visible performance and the dubbed voice of Belkıs Özener, whose stylized singing creates an acoustic detachment between body and voice (Ertuğrul, 2020, pp. 296–297). This disembodiment, heard rather than seen, exemplifies what this thesis calls acoustic stratification, where class distinctions are mapped through sonic refinement and cognitive mapping by inheritance, wherein audiences come to associate bourgeois modernity with orchestral and vocal clarity.

In comedies and musicals such as *Mavi Boncuk*, working-class characters are associated with noisy but lively sounds such as crowded but happy houses, loud communal laughter, and a clumsy but lovable chaos; sounds that associate the lower classes with livelihood, warmth, and communal spirit. However, this energy is also a means of affective erasure. These sounds work to over-humanize the lower classes as empathetic and emotionally rich, functioning to either console the “poor” audience or free the middle-class audience from guilt. Each sonic detail supports this fake harmony: from affectionate musical themes to ambient textures, the audience is directed to conclude that “money doesn’t matter; what matters is humanity.” Other melodramatic conventions reinforce this representation: wealthy characters are frequently represented as cold, unhappy, or morally corrupt. Yeşilçam actually paradoxically suggests that being poor is a blessing of some sort, and it does so by generously using sounds that society already associates with joy, sincerity, and authenticity.

In *Mavi Boncuk* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1974), resolution is achieved not through narrative logic or class-based negotiation, but through shared musical performance. As the kidnapped singer, played by Emel Sayın, gradually bonds with her captors, the film orchestrates a sonic fantasy of class reconciliation. Turkish folk culture, proverbs, idioms, local songs, and rituals are mobilized to construct a highly idealized image of working-class warmth and sincerity (Bayat & Köktan, 2022, pp. 10–13). The final

musical number, in which all characters sing together, functions as a sonic equalizer, but one that operates ideologically: This sonic closure functions as a class-based ideologeme: a musical resolution that absorbs structural antagonism into collective affect (Jameson, 1981, p. 61). Here, the affective harmony of the scene masks underlying economic hierarchies and substitutes emotional bonding for structural critique. This moment exemplifies what Attali (1985) describes as sonic pacification as well, through a process by which music transforms inequality into a shared emotional experience, allowing contradiction to be felt but not confronted.

In Yeşilçam melodramas, class conflicts are often resolved not through narrative confrontation but through sonic harmony. Yet the modes of this resolution differ across films. In *Tatlı Dillim* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1972), the interclass romance between a wealthy urban man and a rural girl is musically bridged through sanitized folk melodies. These orchestrations do more than accompanying the plot; they function ideologically to erase structural inequalities by framing difference as romantically reconcilable. The sonic world transforms material distance into emotional intimacy, offering an “imaginary resolution” of class antagonism, achieved through musical abstraction rather than political address (Arslan & Erdem, 2023, p. 136), (Jameson, 1981).

While *Tatlı Dillim* resolves class through romantic folk motifs, *Mavi Boncuk* stages reconciliation through collective sound and group harmony. *Mavi Boncuk* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1974) constructs a sonic fantasy of communal class reconciliation. Rather than focusing on romantic resolution, it mobilizes Turkish folk culture, proverbs, rituals, and group singing to portray working-class characters as emotionally generous and morally upright. The final musical scene, in which all characters sing together, acts as a sonic equalizer and sonic pacification: music transforms social contradiction into affective unity. Yet this unity is ideologically shaped, offering emotional closure in place of structural critique (Bayat & Köktan, 2022, pp. 10–13; Attali, 1985; Jameson, 1981).

In films such as *Züğürt Ağa* (Çölgeçen, 1985), which became especially popular in the 80s, class descents lead to a serious loss in the sound world. In this film, the

person who is the “ağa”²³ in the village comes to the city and joins thousands of poor people with a clear sonic change: a soundscape that confirms his authority and signifies power and wealth changes to symbolize chaos and the common sadness of silence. Because in these films, the urban poor, although visually present, are left aurally marginalized and are represented by a generic ambient sound, which strips them of a certain linguistic or cultural texture. The process of class downgrade works as affective erasure. The transition from audibility (when rich) to inaudibility (when poor) marks a broader pattern in Yeşilçam: upward class mobility of men is sonically rewarded with clarity, melody, and orchestration; downward class mobility is rendered through sonic erasure and fragmentation. The rich men are heard in clarity; the poor men are felt in noise, or worse, in silence.



Figure 6. Tatlı Meleğim.

However, the situation is different for women. In Yeşilçam films, money doesn't bring women emotional clarity or authority but instead brands them with moral corruption. Wealthy female characters often have a cold, distant voice that suggests arrogance or moral decline. Women from poorer backgrounds, on the other hand, have

²³ A term historically used in Ottoman and Republican Turkey to refer to a local landowner who often exercise significant economic, social, and sometimes political power over peasants and villagers.

warmer, more emotional voices that are associated with honesty and virtue. For example, in *Tatlı Meleğim* (Mehmet Dinler, 1970), the wealthy Belma, played by Suzan Avcı, speaks with an assertive and emotionally distant voice. Her confident voice contrasts with the coquettish and fragile voice of Leyla, played by Türkan Şoray, who represents the virtuous working-class woman. This strengthens the association between wealth and moral ambiguity in the portrayal of women. The voice functions as a gendered moral code: the poor woman's voice represents ethical purity, while the rich woman's represents alienation.

However, even in such films that plot around different identities, their sonic dimension remains within the limits of sonic acceptability. Dialects, minority languages, and disruptive voices, Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, and Romani, are absent. Everybody speaks in post-synchronized Istanbul Turkish. The voices only change in tone and expression to signal the characters' morality. This is not just about aesthetics but about the active shaping of cultural memory: by excluding the sounds of subaltern voices, Yeşilçam assimilates everyone in the imagined sonic harmony, and by framing difference as only a moral matter, it actively draws the limits of affective relationality with identity.

In Yeşilçam, the sonic construction of class was, of course, central to an ideological project. Through sonic strategies such as dubbing, acoustic profiling, musical hierarchy, and the strategic use of noise and silence, the films constructed a sonic hierarchy in which class was made audible and emotionally charged but ultimately depoliticized.²⁴ Listening to Yeşilçam symptomatically reveals that its curated sound worlds offer the audience a structure that buries inequality through harmony, erases agency through melody, and masks exploited labor through emotion.

I argue that this sonic stratification of class, trained audiences to associate class difference with affective resonance and empathy. These repeated sonic structures became a part of the sonic unconscious that stores sounds associated with certain

²⁴ This observation draws on Jameson's (1981) theory of ideological resolution through form, Özbek's (1991) analysis of arabesk as affective compensation for class inequality, Erdoğan's (2002) work on dubbing and sonic homogenization, and Kassabian's (2001) concept of affiliating identifications that align emotion without political critique.

emotions; this is the reason they sound familiar and natural, precisely because they had been heard so many times before.

3.2.6 Sonic conditioning and the repressed echo. The sound strategies used in Yeşilçam, dubbing, acoustic profiling, musical repetition, and strategic silence, collectively worked to condition how the audience felt and listened. These devices worked as an auditory conditioning system that guided the audience to certain listening practices. Over time, audiences learned to recognize class, gender, and national identity through emotionally coded sounds. Repeated exposure to these sound patterns created an affective habitus in which inequality was not questioned but instead felt normal; clarity of voice was associated with coldness and power, and silence meant both femininity and obedience.

This sonic discipline functioned effectively because it mostly operated below direct discourse. The smoothness of dubbed voices and the repetition of certain melodies were part of a system that naturalized a hierarchical social order. Working-class voices were coded through ambiguity, women's voices were emotional and/or disembodied, the village was pastoral and nostalgic, and the voice of the Republic sounded clear, singular, and rational. These aesthetic patterns constituted a sonic image of Turkish modernity constructed not by those excluded.

Yet this sonic regime was not completely flawless. A symptomatic listening reveals Yeşilçam's melodramas as almost on the verge of collapse. Overly familiar musical motifs, clean dubbing, and redundant silences are symptoms of these repressed contradictions. The homogenized quality of the dubbed sound may erase ethnic diversity, but it also can't help but draw attention to its artificiality. Romantic melodies may evoke longing and loss, but their exaggerated repetition feels like an emotional imperative. Silence may sound like peace, but it is also a refusal to discuss conflict and power and to acknowledge loss.

The patterns discussed throughout this chapter, makes evident that Yeşilçam melodramas systematically employed what can be described as *sonic ideologemes* per Jameson: condensed affective motifs that served as symbolic closures for social and

moral contradictions. These sonic figures, such as the lullaby in *Boş Beşik*, the melancholic refrain in *Kara Gözlüm*, or the collective song in *Mavi Boncuk*, transformed class tension, gender hierarchy, and moral ambiguity into emotionally intelligible and culturally acceptable forms. Rather than addressing structural antagonisms directly, they translated them into symbolic configurations that stabilized meaning and anchored affect. In this way, they functioned as the smallest narrative and auditory units through which ideology could become affectively resonant and socially legitimate. Yeşilçam's recurring use of these sonic patterns thus reveals a broader ideological function: sound operated as a site of resolution, where contradictions were not resolved materially but managed through repetition, sentiment, and moral coding. The resulting sonic regime shaped listening as perception and interpolated the audience in participation in a normative emotional economy.

Therefore, Yeşilçam's sounds don't present a unified national sonic identity; it is at most a sonic imaginary: a sonic fiction. However artificial, this sonic imaginary was necessary for the construction of a modern identity in the early decades of the Republic so that the imagined Turkish identity becomes audible, gender difference becomes intelligible, and spatial hierarchies are felt. Yet underneath this sonic unity were the repressed others, they were the disturbances in the sonic regime where the ghosts of the inaudible try to speak. Listening to Yeşilçam symptomatically is also to hear what needed to be silenced to compose this coherent fantasy. The practice of re-listening is to hear again what was once buried, covered up, and denied in the name of emotional order and national unity and make the underwritten ideological work audible. And in this audibility lies the possibility of a different kind of listening that pays attention to the contradictions, to the ruptures, and the unspeakable.

Yeşilçam's sound regime was characterized predominantly by affective harmony and emotional unity, but that did not mean that films and sounds that were discordant and resisted this imposition was completely absent. Some realist and political figures, especially Yılmaz Güney and early Metin Erksan, embraced soundscapes that did not conform to this sonic harmony. However, these tendencies remained exceptional and were not successful in shaking up established sonic norms in the long run. It was only after the 1980 military coup and the neoliberal

reorganization of culture that fragmentation, that this sonic regime was able to be changed. However, the coming of better technologies did not mean that the repressed or the previously silenced sounds became to be heard; on the contrary, what became the dominant organizing principles of cinematic sound was emotional privatization, and tonal instability.

Fragmentation, individuality, and tonal instability increasingly became the dominant organizing principles of cinematic sound from this period onwards. This difference is better understood as a dialectical restructuring rather than a simple opposition between Yeşilçam's totality and post-1980 fragmentation: from a regime of harmonious emotional containment to a regime of fragmented emotional exhaustion, each in line with the ideological needs of its time.

3.3 Post-1980 Sonic Experiments

After almost 4 decades, by the end of the 1970s, Yeşilçam's sonic regime had begun to lose its magic. Melodies became repetitive, silences grew heavier, and the illusion of harmony became harder to sustain. The sonic codes that once organized affective consensus were swollen with the intensity of unresolved tensions. The 1980 military coup shattered these already worn-out sonic fantasies of unity and coherence. From Yeşilçam's broken sonic dreams, a more fragmented, privatized, and alienated sonic landscape emerged, in which collective affects dissolved into private echoes of loss and disconnection.

The neoliberal transformations that took root in Turkey following the 1980 military coup have also affected the cinematic aesthetics and sound as an indirect cultural implication. Pointing to a break from the previous era in both visual and sonic culture, this period displaced the collective aesthetic of the 1970s with a highly individualized form of expression. The transition involved a reconfiguration of the sonic field that would have long-lasting effects on how audiences came to hear, and fail to hear, themselves, their histories, and the "others." The effects of this transformation also contributed to the sonic unconscious, where sedimented forms of

listening are shaped by ideology and affect and which condition how cinematic representations are cognitively and emotionally mapped over time.

This section traces how sonic fragmentation, minimalist soundscapes, emotional withdrawal, and the silencing of collective noise became dominant strategies in post-1980 cinema of Turkey, producing not resistance to ideological capture but its mutation into a more intimate, individualized, and affectively resigned form.

After the military coup in 1980, the emotionally expressive and tightly organized harmony of Yeşilçam's sonic identity disappeared into the emergence of a new sonic grammar characterized by fragmentation, apoliticization, and allegory. But this was not a smooth transition. As the sounds and emotional excesses of Yeşilçam blurred, its sonic identity has been recycled as past fantasies of a nation in decline. As Turkey entered a neoliberal era, the country's sonic identity has been reborn as a space that is marked by the loss of collectivity, the privatization of emotions, and the silencing of opposition.

The post-coup regime was systematically silencing opposing voices, which ultimately prevented the sonic or visual representations of class, ethnicity and dissidents in cinema. These transformations were structurally generated through state-approved cultural policies and industry practices, such as censorship of certain scenes and certain music genres, which contributed to a generalized depoliticization of the cinematic ear. While previous films' sonic palettes (especially in the 1970s) featured public noise to a certain degree and music, the post-1980 cinema gradually got rid of these elements and replaced them with silences.

Under this atmosphere, acoustic profiling has become an important method in which films build politically sanitized environments. The sonic dimension of movies that should have reflected public spaces, different dialects, or protest chants was again being curated to reflect state-approved sounds. For example, the soundscape of Istanbul has been narrowed to include only regulated traffic noise, music away from radios, and unexplained urban noises. Rural areas, likewise, were stripped of specific sounds and were made to sound "timeless" through the careful deployment of ambient

silence. The identities which were silenced in Yeşilçam films, Kurdish speakers, the rural poor, ethnic minorities, and the politically discontented, were once again excluded from the sonic field in these newer productions. But unlike the earlier Yeşilçam fantasy of a harmonious, singular national body, these absences did not dissolve into unity; instead, they remained as sonic fragmentations and affectively heavy silences.

Harmony and closure, which were used to mask the repressed in previous eras, now gave way to an inaudible but felt lack (Campt, 2017.) Silence became a symptom of trauma: the sonic imaginary was no longer able to draw a coherent sound picture. Censorship became a routine of the state and was central to this aural transformation. Political songs and any music associated with ethnic identities were either banned or discouraged. As Meral Özbek (1997) showed, popular music was also intervened in to promote a neutralized image of the nation that could be consumed across class lines.

Before the coup, political cinema had been on the rise, and films that mentioned issues of class and dissent were becoming popular, but after the coup, these topics disappeared and cinematic sounds were once again cleaned of dialect. The sonic unconscious was saturated with exclusions; certain sounds could no longer be imagined, let alone heard. As audiences repeatedly encountered these sonic understandings, they became conditioned to internalize a new normative listening regime: one that was cleaned of emotional excesses and was silenced to sustain order. This sonic sterilization was also mirrored by broader social processes. Public life in the 1980s was aggressively privatized and emptied of collective political expression. In cinema, this depoliticization manifested itself as a return to individual existential crises. Cinematic sounds were heavily driven by sighs, debates about romantic affairs, fragmented ambience, and isolated voices. Contradictions were again mystified, but this time by fragmentation instead of an imagined harmony in which emotions got rid of extra meaning and collective resistances turned into stories of personal dilemmas.

The emergence of “arabesk” as both a music and a cinematic genre can be seen as the sonic crystallization of this in-between period. Arabesk music became very popular among the people who had to migrate from middle Anatolia to big cities like

İstanbul in hopes of finding jobs. The lyrics of the genre expressed the collective experiences such as longing, loss, and displacement and also served as a medium of emotional solidarity for the new urban poor. As Martin Stokes (1992) argues, arabesk was a sonic archive of failed promises: it spoke to the migrants' disillusionment with the city and the nation. But this genre was also subjected to urban hubris and class hostility: In the eyes of the urban elite, it was seen as kitsch, emotionally excessive, musically regressive, and politically suspicious as the voice of the "yabancı" (outsider): the internal outsider who is present in the city but excluded from its cultural grammar (Gürbilek, 1992).

Ertem Eğilmez's film *Arabesk* (1989) parodies the popularity of this genre. The film takes Yeşilçam's conventions to the point of absurdity so that the use of exaggerated dubbing, melodramatic music, and sexualized voices becomes caricatured and the sentimentality is grotesquely exaggerated. However, the film cannot escape the sonic unconscious that haunts it while mocking the genre. The already trained audience could use the cognitive mapping that is inherited from Yeşilçam and could read the musical signs and affective codes hidden in the sonic world of the film. This tension reveals how Yeşilçam's sonic grammar persists, such that even a parody film can activate those emotional codes.

Through decontextualizing affect and stripping cultural forms of their subversive force, the film repositioned them as spectacles for easy consumption. The songs in *Arabesk* no longer represented a shared pain or emotional solidarity among the city poor; they became objects of aesthetic mockery for the liberal middle class. During this process, the emotional labor of culture is neutralized and absorbed into the market of irony and distance. Acoustic profiling is once again at work here, not to map communities, but to displace them, to convert their pain into cultural resources.

This dynamic mirrored the broader polarization of the cultural field under neoliberal restructuring. On one side a more "elite" cinema that relied on allegory, fragmentation, and aesthetic distance emerged; on the other, cinema and music genres like arabesk got popular among the masses, though they were being dismissed as vulgar. Drawing on Ahiska's (2010) analysis of fragmented publics under

modernization and neoliberalism, we can observe how this classed polarization extended into the sonic realm: sound was no longer a shared medium that underlined collectivity by resolving contradictions; it became a tool of blatant differentiation, a mechanism through which class was heard.

The emergence of auteur cinema of the 1990s intensified this sonic alienation. Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Kasaba* (1997), for instance, constructed its entire sonic atmosphere on near-silence: dry soils, flying leaves and sparse dialogue. This minimalistic approach to sound did not engage with political history directly; rather, it constituted a mood of ontological withdrawal and alienation as a condition of being. This stark shift from sonic affirmation to sonic alienation in the cinematic sonic grammar reflects a distancing from collective narratives toward individual, hence interiorized, listening. But the use of silence did not necessarily bring emotional depth; it mostly felt like affective detachment. It moved away from the emotionalism of the melodrama for a dry and difficult sonic register that addressed an educated, global-facing audience.

This new sonic grammar needed a new audience because it demanded a contemplative, distanced form of listening. That's why the imagined listener here is not the emotionally engaged audience of Yeşilçam melodramas but one that is trained in self-control, familiar with minimalism, and endowed with the cultural capital to be able to decode abstraction. Sound became an exclusion mechanism: those unfamiliar with the codes of the global art cinema or not accustomed to reading silence in detail might have felt excluded. Thus, the new sonic approach was different as it addressed listeners with secular and often middle-class sensibilities, and this pushed back the audiences who were trained for open narratives, emotional cues or music. Silence became a sign of taste, as it was a sign of separation.

Nevertheless, the silence that dominated this era was loaded with unresolved historical tensions, migrants, lost collectivism, and political violence but refused to talk about them. The absence of sonic variety signaled latency: it did not deny history but buried it down until it became inarticulable but affectively felt in tone, ambience, and echo. Listening to such films symptomatically then means detecting what is

deferred, what remains repressed in the sonic unconscious as traces of unresolved sonic pasts.

The cinematic sounds of the post-1980 period reflected the neoliberal transformation of the times; and what's more, they internalized it, reproduced it, and trained audiences to hear through it and learn the new sonic grammar of the new era. Through the removal of collective noise, the stylization of sorrow, and the underlying of moods, these movies contributed to the long-term construction of a new, neoliberal sonic unconscious, an auditory regime in which individualized (read: privatized) despair replaced collective speech, and silence became a substitute for suppressed dissatisfaction and political critique.

The transformation of cinematic sound after 1980 reorganized affect in ways that normalized private suffering. Sonic textures such as background hums, low-sounding murmurs, sudden silences, and ambiguous ambient sounds reframe structural and historical crises, migration, precarity, and lost collectivism as personal moods or private burdens rather than collective political conditions. These auditory forms do not offer openings for solidarity or critique; instead, they train audiences to internalize disaffection and to experience systemic conditions as individualized emotional states.

Rather than viewing unhappiness as a political problem, these sounds aestheticized it and transformed common problems into melancholic atmospheres. Affective exhaustion, detachment, and fragility were normalized as internal aspects of subjectivity. In this way, cinematic sounds were attuned to what certain affect theorists conceptualized as the *privatization of affect*, whereby collective crises are politically neutralized by being drawn into the personal realm (James, 2015; Thompson, 2017; Ahmed, 2004). Yeşilçam masked material inequalities with an imagined sonic unity and emotional reconciliation, but post-1980s sounds did not offer resolution to social fragmentation; they have privatized it and turned it into an individualized and emotionally silenced affective experience.

The sonic legacy of the 1980s was not only censorship and fragmentation; it was actually the preview of a new sonic orientation that cinema reorganized the audience's

affective expectations, in which sound no longer promised to unify but would differentiate. It was a haunted sonic landscape, crowded with remnants of forgotten languages, silenced women, mocked laments, and the ambient traces of a collective memory that continued to echo even when it was no longer heard.

3.3.1 Case study: Arabesk (Ertem Eğilmez, 1989). Arabesk stands on a critical bridge between the old-fashioned Yeşilçam tradition and the upcoming cinematic orientations of the 1990s and beyond since it openly declared a rupture with the past and, in a way, signaled the introverted world of upcoming New Cinema. The film uses the exaggeration of melodramatic elements and vocal performances with comedic intent, which is also a critique of arabesk as a genre. It mimics the overly sentimental Yeşilçam melodramas' dubbed sound tradition and unbalances the synchronization between sound and body to produce the Brechtian alienation effect. The singing is playback in the film, which was a feature of both the popular arabesk genre and Yeşilçam melodrama.

Arabesk films frequently centered around class upgrading, focusing mostly on the story of a poor rural-to-urban migrant who overcomes their devastating conditions through their talent in singing (which was a common theme in late melodramas as well.) This film adopts that tradition as well but does not employ two different performers. The characters sing in their own voices. For example, the character played by Şener Şen emphasizes the artificiality of his voice to a grotesque degree while singing. These performative choices reveal how the tradition of dubbing functioned as ideological structures; since the sonic strategies in the film were deployed in order to refer to a fragmented and ironic space that problematized that tradition.



Figure 7. Arabesk.

The film made use of the collective sonic unconscious of Turkey: familiar arabesk melodies of the period appeared in exaggerated lyrics and tones, often in scenes of absurd violence or romantic delusion. This strategy both evokes and disrupts the feeling of nostalgia. As a cultural form, arabesk was simultaneously suppressed by the state and adopted by urban immigrant communities. The film echoed this instability: it referred to the emotional sounds of arabesk music while at the same time extremely exaggerating them.

Arabesk disrupts the affective unity of Yeşilçam by parodying the very sonic and narrative conventions it once relied on. The film overstates melodramatic formulas, musical cues, and gender tropes to expose their ideological exhaustion (Özkantar & Çınar, 2022). This hyperbolic mode renders the sonic grammar of Yeşilçam audible as a fiction, no longer convincing, but still operative. *Arabesk* makes the audience aware of the sonic machinery behind affective responses and thus marks a critical rupture in the Yeşilçam tradition. Rather than smoothing over contradictions, the film renders them absurd. In doing so, it anticipates a shift in Turkish cinema toward postmodern fragmentation and tonal instability, a new sound regime in which ideological resolution becomes impossible, and sonic excess becomes a site of rupture rather than containment.

The use of sonic parody in the film at times works to disrupt the narrative harmony. Voices occur unexpectedly, musical cues are repeated ad absurdum, and the mismatch between the diegetic sound and the image creates moments of discomfort. Moreover, *Arabesk* uses laughter and noise as tools of ideological exposure in both music and dialogue. The chaotic sonic textures of the film symbolize the exhaustion of the moral narratives of Yeşilçam and the introduction of a fragmented world where meaning is no longer stable. The film also revealed and made fun of Yeşilçam's sexist, classist, and nationalist foundations. However, the exaggerated speeches and hyperbolic music cues collapsed into a sonic landscape that, in the end, still mystified social contradictions.

Arabesk's sonic architecture functioned as both criticism and an archive. It documents a particular period of Turkish cinema and parodies the sonic tropes that resonate with that period. Through its ironic approach to playback and exaggerated musical redundancy, the film challenged the ideological function of sound in cinema, opening a space for symptomatic listening that predicts a more fractured, conscious sound of the 2000s. However, although *Arabesk* parodies Yeşilçam, it cannot escape it. Yeşilçam's sonic unconscious stays alive, even in parody, and this shows that affective codes are not easily abandoned. Although melodrama has become a subject of ridicule at the level of absurdity, it continues to structure how the audience listens. The cognitive maps created through decades of sonic education are not resolved through irony. This shows that ideological formations do not easily disappear by revealing their absurdity; on the contrary, they continue to organize affect at an unconscious level by moving onto new aesthetic forms. In this sense, *Arabesk's* sonic parody unintentionally reaffirms Yeşilçam's sonic order.

3.4 Bridging to the Present

The New Cinema of Turkey, which emerged in the mid-1990s and continued into the early 2000s, reflects another critical moment in the evolution of cinematic sounds shaped by technological advances and limitations, new economic pressures, and socio-political changes. Building on the collective sonic memories from previous

cinematic eras, filmmakers and audiences worked within a sonic landscape shaped both by historical connections and contemporary limitations. The dominant sounds of this new period were a departure from Yeşilçam in the sense that they have freed themselves from the omnipresent voice of one authority and earned their individuality. But still these films continued to feed on the collective cultural memory and developed a common tone and hence influenced how the audiences internalized and interpreted the socio-economic upheavals of the zeitgeist.

A common feature of this period is that cinematic sounds increasingly focused on reflecting personal narratives while the plots conformed to a subverted form of the “hero’s journey” model of Campbell (1949)²⁵. This approach still worked to obscure broader sociopolitical structures because it tended to frame alienation as an inevitable consequence of modern life.

Recent studies further explain the implicated role of such sound in ideological processes. Robin James’s concept of *sonic resilience* (2015) refers to the way contemporary sounds teach listeners to adapt to adversity emotionally and reduce systemic crises down to personal challenges in a process similar to market privatization. Likewise, Marie Thompson’s concept of *noise as affect* (2017) argues that sonic textures (hum, murmur, and silence), which are understood as disrupting an environment, produce negative emotions but at the same time separate them from collective politics and present structural errors as individualized affect. Kassabian’s idea of *ubiquitous listening* (2013) suggests that everyday life is represented using certain constant background noises that normalize certain effects. These background noises provide a certain comfort and soothe the listeners. All these concepts reveal the power of film sound to represent social fragmentation and emotional exhaustion while coding these representations as normal and transforming collective crises into personal problems. Sound in cinema can prepare an emotional infrastructure for neoliberal

²⁵ In the classic “hero’s journey” structure, the hero ends his journey by achieving moral clarity, personal growth, or social integration, but many works of New Turkish Cinema focus on the inner journeys of the heroes, and rather than reaching resolution or self-knowledge, these characters often become stuck in states of confusion or moral ambiguity. Along the way, they learn not growth but stagnation, reflecting a broader sense of social deadlock. For more information, see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

governance. It doesn't let this discontent to become political though; it manages it by individualizing and aestheticizing it.

The binary of urban vs. rural, the actual contradiction of modernism vs. tradition, continued to occupy the minds of the directors of this era as well. This dichotomy had shifted a bit, for now the focus was on the individual rather than groups of people, but nonetheless, it remained. Sounds played an important role in reflecting alienation's effects on individuals through fragmented sonic elements. This shift from melodramatic unity to fragmented sounds was the result of a technical possibility but also an ideological one. As Jameson's concept of the *political unconscious* suggests, any narration, the sounds of cinema in our case, encodes and carries the socio-political realities of their time (Jameson, 1981). It's fair to argue that the gradual transition from the nationalist, collectivist and simple sounds of Yeşilçam to the dissonant ones of this new era mirrored the broader economic and political transformations taking place in Turkey. These sounds reflected the alienation inherent in neoliberalism, but they, on the other hand, mystified the systemic causes, presenting them as inevitable and individualized (Jameson, 1991; Ryder, 2022).

During this period, innovation and limitation grew side by side in transforming the sound of cinema in Turkey. New sound technologies were emerging but the old movie theatres were not equipped to fit those advancements. As a result, filmmakers had to find creative ways to balance these advancements with local challenges. Theaters in smaller cities and towns still relied on older sound systems. This technological imbalance required a focus on creating a clear audio work that prioritized dialogue and foregrounded voices over layers of ambient or experimental audio elements, such as the sounds of life in the background. For instance, the sparse sounds in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak* (2002) and *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (1999) reflect both an aesthetic choice and a forced adoption to these technological constraints. These strategies resulted in the foregrounding of sounds such as footsteps, distant urban murmurs or the creaking of wooden floors.

These strategies helped to evoke a sense of isolation and alienation that are claimed to be the central problems people suffered from in neoliberal conditions.

These minimalist sounds can also be said to have contributed to the collective sonic memory in the way they drew on the melancholic tones of earlier “köy filmleri” while repurposing them to reflect the cacophonies of modern urban life. In this process, what I call “cognitive mapping by inheritance” becomes central: audiences interpret these new fragmented sonic terrains by drawing on pre-existing cultural sound grammars, producing a listening practice that is both effectively resonant and ideologically located. The method of acoustic profiling reveals how sonic environments are curated to reflect personal and political order. What is omitted from the aural field, regional dialects, protest sounds, and sonic chaos is as telling as what is retained.

Economic limitations also affected the production of cinematic sounds. Independent filmmakers, often working with limited budgets, had little access to new sound technologies (Arslan, 2011). As a result, many films relied on budget-friendly solutions such as the use of stock music and simple sound designs. These economic obligations, however, also affected how films envisioned broader acoustic profiles, a deliberate (or necessary) transformation of sonic identities that reflected class and spatial hierarchies. The sonic dimensions of a film thus reflected both its production conditions and its ideological position in the cinematic landscape. These economic realities reinforced sounds that aligned with the characteristics of neoliberal modernity. At the same time, as Dönmez-Colin (2008) discusses, post-1980 Turkish cinema increasingly addressed urban modernity, alienation, and individual identity struggles, which reflected a shift to urban cultural production and the tastes of an emerging middle-class audience. In the end, this meant that access to nuanced sonic storytelling was mediated by class-based access to sound technologies and production networks, further embedding the sonic unconscious with cues of urbanity, clarity, and emotional legibility.

Mainstream films such as Yılmaz Erdoğan’s *Vizontele* (2001) appealed to both rural and urban sensibilities by blending nostalgic (sound) elements with new technologies. While the use of nostalgic sounds signaled familiarity, imagined peace, and unity appealed to collective sound memory, the marketable presentation of sound technology that provided a crisp and clean sound design was in line with new neoliberal demands for consumable sensuality and digestibility. These sounds were

emotionally powerful, but they also had an ideological function, implying a kind of emotional closure through symptomatic listening. That is; by presenting this past and present as free of contradictions, they allowed the audience to emotionally engage with the memory of the collectivity while remaining comfortably in a personal, marketable sonic space.

Social events that left their marks on the sonic unconscious of this period were the 1999 Marmara earthquake and the 2001 economic crisis. The sounds of Derviş Zaim's *Filler ve Çimen* (2000) were constructed with silences and low-frequency sounds that evoked the psychological effects of these crises. These sounds can be seen as examples of acoustic profiling in the sense that they reflected the emotional atmosphere of a traumatic social moment. Similarly, Zeki Demirkubuz's *İtiraf* (2001) dramatized urban life through sounds of conversations with silences that cut into conversations and long ambient noises that created a sense of fragility. These sonic representations can be interpreted with Tina Campt's (2017) concept of *active listening* as a way of attuning to the echoes of social violence. They stem from the political unconscious of the broader narrative, what Jameson (1981) theorizes as the encoding of collective historical trauma within the political unconscious, even in seemingly private or depoliticized texts.

Demirkubuz's films offered a certain anti-humanist perspective in the way they emphasized the unchangeable nature of the system. In his narratives, the characters lack the authority and power to challenge the oppressive situations they face, and his films often end as they begin. This hints at the futility of resistance, and the films offer neither a solution nor a catharsis. Demirkubuz's particular interest in the suffering of lower-class people further emphasizes this perspective. This could be read as a symptom of a broader disbelief in humanity and even a disdain for his characters, as the films do not explore the root causes or systemic structures that cause this suffering.

For example, there is little interaction with the upper classes, who play a central role in maintaining the heartbreaking material conditions and relationships expressed in their stories. Through symptomatic listening, these omissions can be read as silences that reflect a certain ideological force that focuses on individual choices at the expense

of systemic contradictions. The films hint at structural oppression, but they portray it as a closed, unredeemable system. The sounds in Demirkubuz's films thus work as sonic confirmations of futility. When these sonic cues are interpreted through the cognitive mapping by inheritance, a sense of futility and distress is felt. They activate inherited sonic associations of despair and immobility in instances of confrontations with sonic material such as the familiarity of domestic stillness, the hum of loneliness, or the acoustics of bureaucratic waiting rooms and old apartments. The sense of futility is not simply personal or existential but structurally ideological: these sounds teach the audience how to feel within systems that offer no exit.

There were also filmmakers such as Semih Kaplanoğlu and Reha Erdem who incorporated sound motifs inherited from earlier traditions of village dramas, political cinema, and 1980s pop culture into their films' sonic dimensions. These re-textualized sonic cues offer new possibilities of interpreting the alienation that persists in these movies. For example, in *Yumurta* (Kaplanoğlu, 2007), the sounds of footsteps walking on the ground and vague pieces of folk music seem to interpolate the film's protagonist into a collective past. However, this call is neither a savior nor continuous and often ends with silences spreading over vast areas and an emotional blockage that appears among minimalist ambient sounds. This soundscape seems to emphasize Yusuf's alienation rather than his return to his origins. This dynamic coincides with what Jameson (1991) describes as the "cultural logic of late capitalism," in which historical continuity is fragmented and the emotional lives of characters who lack any deep connection to the outside world become fanciful, lacking depth and fulfillment. In Jameson's analysis, the late capitalist subject moves aimlessly between urban and rural spaces, free of a stable sense of belonging or a coherent historical orientation. *Yumurta*'s minimal soundscape does not do much to imply a comforting return to the traditional; instead, it stages the postmodern condition: a futile longing for lost social structures that are no longer fully recaptured and an emotional dislocation made audible through the strategic absence of sound.

On the narrative level *Yumurta* seems to be suggesting a return to tradition, since the protagonist stays in his hometown and engages with customary rituals, but the sound design seems to suggest otherwise and resists this closure. The sounds nature

and folk music initially evoke a connection to a collective past, but they quickly dissolve into silence or remain emotionally idle. The rootlessness felt at the beginning of the film continues in the interrupted and vague soundscape. This dissonance between the apparent narrative turn and the auditory experience seems to indicate a tension: if the story wants to compromise, the sonic plane refuses such a relief. The interrupted or abrupt sounds prevent a sense of continuity. What we hear is not a stable belonging, but a fragile, uncertain echo of a past that cannot be fully recovered. *Yumurta* doesn't explicitly reject return, but it complicates the idea by making its impossibility audible.

For audiences trained by previous cinematic sonic grammars, these sonic environments may initially trigger recognition, especially through recurring natural cues like birdsong or flowing water, but this recognition is subverted by the absence of collective bonds that once defined rural soundscapes. Rather than invoking communal belonging, these minimalistic ambient sounds frame solitude as a natural and apolitical condition. In many films of this period, including those by Demirkubuz, although structural violence is not directly dramatized, it is felt in the overall atmosphere. The dissonance between the aestheticization of rural nature and the emotional disconnection of the protagonists creates a sonic illusion: alienation is perceived as a moral or psychological failure rather than a result of systemic oppression. This framing does not necessarily deny structural violence; it masks it beneath a surface of sonic naturalism, conditioning spectators to internalize alienation as a personal, ambient reality instead of a socially produced one.

While directors Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz, Semih Kaplanoğlu, and Reha Erdem are frequently admired for successfully depicting existential crises or emotional disarray in post-1980 cinema of Turkey, some academics contend that their works ultimately depoliticize structural violence instead of directly addressing it. For instance, Gürbüz's (2024) argument is that these frequently rely on aesthetic detachment and metaphysical ambiguity rather than political articulation in their films. In a similar vein, Oğuz (2023) suggests that this group of filmmakers creates "poetic alienation" and highlights the way they avoid addressing racial and class disparities and how this avoidance results in internalized disillusionment rather than outward

criticism. Aydemir (2023) also emphasizes how these films frequently silence collective resistance and reduce systemic contradictions to private, affective registers, even though they visually reference historical or social tensions. This is in line with criticisms made in the edited volume *Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sineması*, where Diken, Gilloch, and Hammond contend that while Ceylan's films focus on themes like "a persistent sense of nothingness and absence; mourning, melancholy, and boredom," they also sidestep political urgency in favor of cosmopolitan reflection. Similarly, Özlem Güçlü (2023) observes that these films' emphasis on aesthetic minimalism and ontological ambiguity conceals structural inequality, hiding the state and muting political content. Hence, while structural violence may still be audibly or visually present as ambient traces in these films, it is rarely thematized as a collective problem. These tendencies support this thesis's argument that alienation in such films is often framed as a personal mood rather than a social condition, ultimately training spectators to experience disaffection as interiorized and depoliticized.

These sounds represent the rural environment on a conscious level, but the sonic unconscious interprets these sounds as an unspoiled ethical order, continuity, and purity as a result of long-lasting sonic training in cinematic listening. This results in understanding the alienation of the hero as a personal failure that is incompatible with this harmonious moral landscape. This is how the sounds of nature work ideologically: placing the present in a nostalgic version of the past suggests that the loss of moral grounds and social cohesion is due to individual failure rather than systemic forces.

The popularity of the theme of alienation reflects a broader ideological trend in the New Cinema of Turkey: the privatization of trauma. Films such as *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* and *Beş Vakit* (Erdem, 2006) reflect this in their portrayals of the rural as a landscape of personal failure rather than a site of social struggle. The countryside no longer represents collectivism or reform, as in the village films. It's now an inward-looking stagnation. The disappearance of sounds that refer to sociality, such as folk songs and public crowds, is also a symptom of the dissolution of the collective political imagination. The absence of any musical guidance, especially in Ceylan's films, forces the audience to remain in the affective ambiguity created by the extremely minimal soundscape. Without music to resolve emotions, the audience is forced to navigate the

soundscape as co-subjects of uncertainty. The sonic identity of Turkish cinema that once symbolized nationalist coherence has now largely been replaced by fragmented sonic presences that fail to sustain an overarching meaning.

This makes what I call *lateral sonic agency*, a functional framework for understanding the sonic and narrative strategies of this period. *Lateral sonic agency* emerges from the intersection of Lauren Berlant's concept of *lateral agency* and Brandon LaBelle's discourse of *sonic agency*. Lauren Berlant conceptualized *lateral agency* to refer to the "barely surviving" who are subject to systemic difficulties that never seem to decrease. This form of agency does not lead to political or personal change; it only allows people to continue living in the same conditions as in tolerating them (Berlant, 2011, pp. 114–117). Berlant explains how, in order to find daily forms of endurance and belonging, people don't have to face the structures that cause this hardship. Brandon LaBelle's concept of *sonic agency* on the other hand, points to the ways sound can become a political and social force and open spaces for interaction, connection, and hence resistance. LaBelle thinks that sounds have a capacity to mediate, alter, and reconfigure spatial spaces, and sonic practices may influence the world without relying on dominant forms of representation or formal political action (LaBelle, 2018). Here, *lateral sonic agency* emerges when certain sonic environments affect characters in a way that is only enough to sustain endurance to the hard affective conditions without offering pathways toward resolution, vitality, or transformation. It describes how the sonic environments in the New Cinema of Turkey do not mobilize grand narratives of resistance or systemic rupture; rather, they produce atmospheres that bind audiences into a stalled affective temporality. These soundscapes are defined with minor, coded affections, ambient noises, silences, and fragmented murmurs that neither console nor encourage. Instead, they speak to the audience's inherited cognitive maps that keep them in familiar patterns of alienation and emotional passivity. Rather than providing affective relief or opening new imaginative horizons, the sounds reinforce a mood of suspense and make the experience of disconnection feel natural and inevitable. Thus, *lateral sonic agency* captures the way sound operates as a subtle, persistent mechanism for navigating fractured and privatized realities that stops rather than revitalizing, hence confirms the precarious conditions rather than challenge them.

Subtly teaching audiences how not to imagine collective alternatives, these sounds ultimately seem to conform to the dominant affective conditions of neoliberal times by reflecting disconnection, individualism, privatization, and the myth of personal responsibility. The emphasis on emotional restraint, extended silences, and ambient austerity frequently serves as affective technologies that normalize structural crisis as personal misery. Thus, the auditory aspect of these films functions as a site of affective governance, where listening reflects and absorbs neoliberal ideologies. This reading needs to be nuanced, though. The collective may be privatized by these films' primary affective grammar, but it is not entirely eradicated. Films by Kaplanoğlu, Demirkubuz, or Erdem may contain "traces" of the repressed, such as unresolved tensions, dissonant tones, or sonic absences that haunt the surface of formal control, as some critics have pointed out (Gürbüz, 2024; Oğuz, 2023; Aydemir, 2023). One could interpret these acoustic remnants, the protracted drones, awkward silences, and fleeting glitches, as the echoes of lost temporalities, suppressed collectivities, or postponed dissent. Although they don't explicitly provide resistance, they do maintain a negative space where the audience might perceive the lack of the collective as a wound, a possibility, or a query. In this sense, post-1980 cinema's fractured sonic unconscious perpetuated neoliberal hegemony while maintaining its ghosts.

3.4.1 Case study: *Beş Vakit* (Reha Erdem, 2006). Reha Erdem's *Beş Vakit* exemplifies the general thematic and stylistic changes that the New Cinema of Turkey brings, with its fragmented and sparse sound world. The film's sonic environment is constructed to be reflective of the affective detachment of its characters from their communities. Unlike previous portrayals of rural life in Turkish cinema, which often used communal sounds to evoke a sense of collectivity, the sonic identity of *Beş Vakit* is minimal, almost to the degree that it creates echoes. Sounds such as chimes, floating leaves or wind reflect a general feeling of solitude and introverted states. These sonic choices can also be read as reflections of limited political agency in an age marked by alienation and atomization.

The film benefits from a symptomatic approach to listening that reveals what is missing or suppressed. The silences, sparse sonic textures and fragmented natural sounds seem to paint the atmospheres of the new countryside in a new Turkey, where

the lack of social bonds is both heard and felt, which feels particularly striking in a village traditionally associated with strong communal bonds. The only sonic sign that refers to community is the call to prayer; however, as Brandon LaBelle's (2010) notion of *acoustic territories* indicates, the call to prayer in *Beş Vakit* marks spatial and temporal boundaries rather than fostering a felt sense of inclusion or genuine belonging. Instead of signaling togetherness, the call to prayer in the film remains a formal signifier of tradition, one that no longer creates emotional or social solidarity. As explored by scholars working on the affective dimensions of space and cultural production (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011; LaBelle, 2010), sound can structure how people experience attachment or estrangement by influencing the way they feel connected or not to one another and to their environment. In *Beş Vakit*, the absence of such sonic interactions, other than minimal conversations and the mechanical repetition of the *ezan*, reflects a community in decline: intact on the outside but emotionally hollow.

In Erdem's films, this theme of alienation appears as a critique of civilization and its patriarchal structures. Civilization is represented by authoritarian, often patriarchal figures. In contrast, nature is portrayed as a potential refuge for innocence and resistance, mostly for children or childish characters represented as a symbol of purity and innocence, with naive features that do not fit the harsh conditions of reality. The orchestral music used throughout the film intensifies this thematic opposition.

With their resistance to the social orders imposed by civilization, these figures' sonic environments emerge as a counterpoint to the sounds of patriarchal authority. However, even this remains fragile and limited. Because Erdem is not interested in systemic transformation, he constructs temporary and precarious, fairy-tale-like spaces immersed in nature, innocence, and silence. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a flaw or failure: the film does not claim to offer structural critique or political resolution, nor should it be expected to do so. Instead, its affective power lies in its evocation of impossibility and transience, a poetics of resistance that is ephemeral rather than programmatic. The film's lack of interest in giving answers makes it possible for us to interpret its political unwillingness as compatible with the characteristics of the times. Unlike melodramas that constructed shared emotional

spaces and addressed conflict in collective terms, *Beş Vakit* retreats into private, almost utopian soundscapes that isolate resistance within the interiority of children or natural cycles. The absence of any structural antagonism or social articulation in these sonic spaces turns resistance into a mood rather than a mobilizing force, thus aligning with an individualized aesthetic of escape.

This film portrays rural life with an urban-centered understanding and uses the village as an allegory for existential isolation, almost like a theater set. While the characters struggle with personal matters and desires that reflect their social dissonance, the village serves, at times, as the reason for these internal crises. This depiction emphasizes its static and alienating qualities and positions the countryside as “other” for the urban audience. It shows the countryside as cyclical, if not stable, as opposed to the chaotic but at least progressive city life. This focus on individual emotional experiences rather than collective narratives works deftly to depoliticize the countryside in accordance with neoliberal ideology.



Figure 8. Beş Vakit.

The absence or dysfunction of sonic elements symbolizing common values, such as the call to prayer, also says something about the transformation of public spaces in the village setting. The main characters of the film are children who have to struggle with the problems they experience on their own. This individualization of life,

especially from childhood, which is supposed to be the most collective and lively period, is supported by a fragmented and static sound design. The state of indifference reflected in this sonic environment can be explained by Lauren Berlant's (2011) analysis of how neoliberal conditions erode the infrastructures of collective life and transform systemic crises into scenes of personal resistance. Berlant draws attention to the fact that in contemporary living conditions, individuals are increasingly forced to experience the structural violence and collective fragmentation they are exposed to as a private struggle. The minimal and static soundscape in the film makes this process audible, naturalizing a world in which the loss of social solidarity is a personal fate rather than a shared condition

The use of heavy string orchestral music is a sonic counterpoint to traditional representations of the countryside and world to distance the audience, whose sonic expectations of the visuals they see are distorted by these representations. This orchestration creates a sense of emotional detachment from the natural environment and emphasizes the dissonance between the characters' internal experiences and their external environment. The countryside begins to feel like a dreamlike space where almost everyone is on their own. The intense presence of music underlines the tension between individual isolation and socio-economic dynamics, reversing the village/city dichotomy in terms of sound: the music we are used to hearing in urban stories, performed with instruments normally associated with civilization and progressivism, now symbolizes the ontological loneliness of the children of the village.

This reversal seems to cause a spatial and spiritual disjunction. In this context, the orchestral sound becomes a disembodied soundscape, a sonic entity detached from the material fabric of the village and the environment, floating above the rural setting like an imported emotional regime. This sound does not emerge from the diegetic world, it is imposed upon it, reinforcing the sense that what is heard does not belong where it is heard, thus reinforcing the emotional and ideological alienation of the place. The audience interprets these sonic environments through pre-constructed sonic grammars of melancholy, privatized trauma, and nostalgic loss, making this already ideological alienation feel intimate and personal.

While *Beş Vakit* also relies on collective auditory memories of rural life, it recontextualizes them to emphasize the alienation of its characters. The natural sounds like the wind, animal noises, and the faint hum of daily activities remind us of the communal rhythms of past rural life. However, these sounds are presented in isolation, which brings a sense of nostalgia for a collective identity from the past. This is a rural space no longer defined by communal bonds or collective agency. It is marked by envy, alienation, and malevolence (Arslan, 2011). The ambient sonic cues operate below the threshold of narrative attention, tapping into the sonic unconscious of the audience that associates these sounds with unresolvedness and emotional estrangement. These sonic layers in *Beş Vakit* resonate with the internalized patriarchal structures and suppressed communal imaginaries.

The film activates a process of cognitive mapping through inheritance, in which the audience, especially urban middle-class audiences, refers to existing cultural and sonic grammars of rural life inherited from earlier Turkish cinema and popular culture to interpret the represented rurality in the film. *Beş Vakit* mobilizes familiar sonic cues (such as the call to prayer, animal sounds, and village ambience) that imply collectivity but strips them of their usual associations by creating sonic affects that hint at a lost sense of solidarity. Through this process of mapping, the audience enters a new process of synthesis: a shift from collectivist imaginaries of the rural to the atomized, individualized representations.

The acoustic profiling of the village in *Beş Vakit* encodes the rural environment with sonic cues heavy on silence, ambient nature sounds, and orchestration. Rather than assuming that silence inherently signifies backwardness, my reading focuses on how the film uses silence in conjunction with other sonic elements, such as nature sounds, minimal conversations, and melancholic orchestral music that references urban emotional codes to generate a specific affective atmosphere. This atmosphere presents the village as emotionally suspended, fragmented, and static. In this context, silence becomes part of a melancholic aesthetic in which the rural is framed as a space of timeless suffering, romanticized and depoliticized. Thus, the film does portray the rural 'backward' through a sonic profile that invites identification from urban

spectators who are conditioned by sentimental capitalism to consume suffering as an individual rather than a collective experience.

In, *Beş Vakit* the characters' dreams and struggles are shaped not by grand tragedies but by the slow, constant disappointments and erosions of everyday life. This reflects Berlant's notion of *slow death*, where the characters' hopes and resistances gradually fade away under the weight of mundane life, resulting in a quiet, melancholic acceptance. Thus, the film captures a profound sense of stillness and melancholy, illustrating how systemic pressures manifest as personal, internalized struggles over time.

In *Beş Vakit*, the children's dreams of a better life, escaping the confines of their village, finding love, or gaining recognition while providing a sense of hope, ultimately underscore the impossibility of fulfillment within their socio-economic and familial constraints, particularly in the neoliberal era. The sound design mirrors this tension: distant and fragmented sonic cues emphasize the impossibility of these dreams in an auditory landscape where connection and communal support sound out of reach. This sonic environment amplifies the futility of their fantasies and demonstrates how systemic barriers transform collective disintegration into personal matters.

The film's layered sounds also contribute to the ongoing shift of a sonic unconscious in the film's target audience, particularly in urban, middle-class audiences who are familiar with the traditional tropes of rural representation in Turkish cinema. These unconscious repetitive sonic motifs are driven by ritualistic sounds, and through the sound/visual dichotomy of the film that was not present in the earlier village films, the audience learns to identify alienation and emotional individualization with these sonic representations. These sonic clues are internalized in time and the representation of rural life as melancholic, static and with no political agency is gradually normalized. The repetition of such auditory codes among the films made during this period allows them to produce sonic emotional accumulations and an ideological atmosphere in which individual struggle and isolation are perceived as natural states of existence. In this way, the film contributes to the shaping of a new affective and unconscious sonic

grammar that encourages the audience to hear neoliberal alienation as an aesthetic norm rather than a political situation that needs changing.

3.4.2 Conclusion

The sonic dimensions of cinema in Turkey have never been just a backdrop; from the beginning, they have acted as active participants in the narration of the stories and, more importantly, the evolution of the country's socio-political state. From the early Republic's desire to forge a unified national identity to the fragmented, discordant expressions of the neoliberal era, sounds reveal the layered interplay of power, ideology, and resistance; they reflect the tensions, exclusions, and longings of a society trying to find its way in rapid modernization, authoritarianism, and capitalist transformation.

The synchronized audio technology and the use of standardized language in the Early Republic showed that cinema could be used for social engineering. The sounds were designed to support nationalist ideals. The exclusion of minority languages such as Kurdish, Armenian, and Greek and the avoidance of religious sounds such as call to prayer, was not accidental; it was a deliberate move to build a sonic identity of the nation. Thanks to the cleaned folkloric motifs as well as the controlled orchestration of the Western musical tropes, these early films reflected a national image of harmony while rejecting the real fractures of the modernization project. This acoustic construction of the *Türkü* was both symbolic and emotional: the audience was trained to feel unity, progress and national coherence through repeated sonic cues that normalized exclusion.

In the Yeşilçam era, sounds became more emotionally charged and more ideological. Instead of abandoning the desire to build a nation, the Yeşilçam transformed it into emotional terms. The emotional *Türkü*, the unified female voices, and the homogenized urban speech patterns worked together to create an ideological acoustic architecture that masked class conflict, gender oppression, and cultural erasure under layers of melodrama and romanticism. Sounds were invented, muted sounds were edited, and musical cues were activated in order to encode ideological

positions in the evoked emotions. These films taught the audience to listen to Turkishness coherently, even as they systematically eliminated the sound cues of disagreement, difference, or disorder. Cognitive mapping through inheritance was at work here: Instead of creating new ideological spaces, Yeşilçam reinforced familiar sonic grammars that enabled nationalist, heteronormative, and class-based meanings to be read and reaffirmed both emotionally and culturally.

The political cinema of the 1970s challenged this harmony by using sound as a tool of criticism. Films such as *Umut* (Yılmaz Güney, 1970) rejected the sonic harmony of Yeşilçam and instead employed fragmentary and noisy sonic environments. These sounds were not soothing; they were confrontational. The erasure of non-dialectical music, the emphasis on the organs of work, and the cacophony of popular unrest broke the ear of cinema and rewrote the listening habits of the audience. During this period, sound became the site of political struggle: a battleground where class consciousness, dispossession, and systemic violence could be heard. In these films, symptomatic listening is not voluntary; the non-compliance of sound had to be a tool of criticism. These sounds reinforced the silence of the Republic and, in doing so, shifted the record of cinematic ideology from emotional to structural.

The military coup in the 1980s marked the beginning of the reconstruction of sound. This was a sonic break as much as it was a political one. The opposition was silenced visually, discursively and acoustically. The sounds of the 1980s were governed through the systematic deletion of dialects, the silencing of protests, and collective public noise. Dubbing, through neoliberal cinema and television, made the sinking sound the sonic norm, while post-production practices rendered sound repetition ineffective as clean, manageable music. Arabesque emerged as a popular form of emotional expression for those who were excluded, and it also was sterilized or parodied for elite consumption. Films like Ertem Eğilmez's *Arabesk* took away the genre's unsettling power by using the emotional labor inherent in the genre as irony and placing it in the postmodern parody show. As Attali recalls, noise is a harbinger of change, but in this age, noise was tamed and instrumentalized in order to entertain the status quo without distorting it. In this era, ideologemes still functioned but often in ironic, melancholic, or meta-cinematic ways. In *Arabesk* (1989), the ideologeme is still

present (e.g., “reconciliation”) but is openly parodied or exaggerated, suggesting a growing self-awareness of their ineffectiveness. In *Beş Vakit*, the ideologemes may still attempt moral closure, but they are increasingly aestheticized rather than operational. Sound and silence in this period mediate detachment, not resolution

With these changes, cinematic sound began to embody the contradictions of neoliberal life. Films no longer promised unity or struggle, instead, they conveyed a sense of disillusionment. Silence and sparse ambient sound became the new norm of cinematic sound. Alienation was implied and aestheticized rather than expressed. These films offered surrender, not resistance. As Jameson observes, late capitalism replaces collective expression with personal pain. In the cinema of Turkey, this has become audible: footsteps echoing in empty apartments, whispers without dialogue, and an urban hum that never dissipates. The countryside, which in earlier cinema, particularly in the “köy filmleri” of the 1960s and 1970s, was depicted as a space of political struggle, moral clarity, or even potential liberation, has become a melancholic backdrop of existential apathy in contemporary films. In those earlier films, rural life was often a site where structural inequalities could be dramatized and collectivist ideals articulated. By contrast, contemporary representations strip the countryside of its political charge, turning it into an aestheticized setting for personal disillusionment. These sonic and visual choices do not just reflect emotion; they structure it. They teach the audience to hear isolation as normal, to perceive silence as maturity, and to internalize discontent as inevitable.

Even in the atmosphere of depoliticization, the sound dimension of cinema remains a contested terrain. The sonic unconscious, a term I use to describe the emotional residue of historical sound codes, continues to operate beneath the surface of the cinematic experience. These layers of sound memory do not disappear; they accumulate. They function as an infrastructure that organizes how the audience interprets silence, sound, music, and noise. Whether it is the voice of a dubbed hero in Yeşilçam, the echo of the call to prayer in a remote village, or the absence of sound in a contemporary auteur film, these traces remain. They haunt the present, in which the logic of control reigns, with the emotionality and repression of the past.

Therefore, the sonic dimensions in cinema of Turkey are coded with power, saturated with ideology, and alive with historical tension. They train, discipline, and condition the sensory space of the audience, especially those empowered in tightly controlled listening infrastructures. These sounds do more than reflect political and cultural histories; they do so by placing emotional codes in the fabric of the cinematic experience.

Taken together, the sounds explored in this chapter reveal more than just natural changes in developing aesthetic choices: they make hearable the gradual construction of a cinematic sonic unconscious for the nation shaped by political turmoil, social engineering, and economic transformation, just as Yeşilçam did with its own sound spaces. This sonic unconscious accumulating through repeated listening experiences, emotionally encoded sonic materials, and ideological neglect becomes identifiable through symptomatic listening as a methodological lens, listening to what had been repressed, distorted, or atmospherically submerged. Whether in the standardized voice of the Republic, the melancholic cadences of Yeşilçam, or the fragmented echoes of neoliberal despair, each sonic regime leaves behind traces that continue to resonate beneath the surface. Through the mechanism of cognitive mapping by inheritance, audiences learn to orient themselves not through new sonic grammars but by activating inherited auditory codes, such as nationalist music, dubbed voices and ambient silences, that feel natural precisely because they are ideologically naturalized. These familiar sounds are stored in the affective substrata of listening, forming a deep reservoir of habituated meaning that shapes how cinematic sound is heard, felt, and understood.

In this way, cinema in Turkey has both mirrored and internalized and circulated the country's sociopolitical convulsions acoustically. The sonic unconscious, then, is not only what has been repressed or silenced; it is also what has been inherited, repeated, and normalized: an archive of listening practices through which ideology whispers, echoes, and endures.

As we enter the contemporary period, sonic unconscious becomes even more critical. Contemporary films made in Turkey do not emerge in a vacuum; they are built

on decades of standardized sound practices, emotional conditioning, and ideological coding. In the next chapter, I turn to a selection of recent films that both reproduce and compete in these inherited sonic grammars to explore how this inherited sonic unconscious is reactivated, challenged, or reinforced in the context of intensified authoritarianism, digital transformation, and new forms of affective control. By listening to these films symptomatically, we can watch how contemporary Turkish cinema negotiates its auditory heritage: by strengthening or breaking the dominant emotional regime and by re-vocalizing those who have long been silenced. In both cases, the soundscape remains an area of ideological intensity, resonant memory, identity, oppression, and possibility.

If Yeşilçam and its afterlives contained political anxieties through sonic homogenization, emotional repetition, and affective containment, the post-2016 period reveals the breakdown of this containment. As the ideological structures that supported earlier cinematic soundscapes fracture, sound itself emerges less as a unifying medium and more as a site of polarization, disintegration, and political exhaustion. In the next chapter, I turn to a close analysis of five films from the post-2016 era to explore how sonic ideologies now operate in a landscape marked by resentment, pessimism, and the haunting remnants of previously coded sonic worlds.

Chapter 4

Sonic Entrapments in the New New Cinema of Turkey

Having traced the ideological genealogy of cinematic sounds in Turkey, in this chapter I move to a new phase in the cinematic history of Turkey and through a series of close symptomatic readings analyze how the sonic unconscious of cinema of Turkey manifests in the sonic dimensions of five alternative “art-house” films that were produced after the second half of the 2010s. These films use sound as an ideological site where repressed histories, political exhaustion, and unresolved contradictions are encoded.

The films analyzed in this chapter, *Kurak Günler* (Emin Alper, 2022), *Kaygı* (Ceylan Özgül Özçelik, 2017), *Sibel* (Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti, 2018), *Hayaletler* (Azra Deniz Okyay, 2020), and *Karanlık Gece* (Özcan Alper, 2022), pay extra attention to the sonic dimension and use the sonic dimension of the film as an additional potential narrational and ideological space. Here, sound provides more than atmospheric depth or affective detail; it functions to draw out the repressed sounds and their associations, transform absence into pressure, and reinforce the already existing political and social paralysis also through sonic forms. It is important to note that these films emerged within and helped reinforce a cultural economy shaped by platforms like MUBI and Letterboxd, which helped curate a taste-driven, listening-oriented audience. This cultural positioning matters, as it reflects a shift in how sonic meaning is constructed through listening protocols. They interpolate an audience who is educated enough to hear, and decode sonic codes. The films, therefore, require an audience with a certain level of cinematic reading, familiar with previous cinematic sonic grammars.

However, it is important to note that the audience is not always completely homogeneous, although it is considered to have a specific target audience. The way people engage with cultural products vary depending on their socioeconomic experiences and identities, both individual and collective. Therefore, the sound codes used in these films may generate different degrees of alignment, resistance or ambiguity depending on the audience.

It is also worth recalling that the audience's moral or affective mapping still mostly relies on the cues drawn by the listening regimes of earlier cinematic eras. Even though a new *structure of feeling*, in the sense that Williams speaks of, began to be felt in society, the sonic regime of Yeşilçam and its successors that enabled the audience to navigate between class, gender and national identity through specific sounds did not disappear all at once. As outlined in the previous chapter, New Cinema of Turkey started to destabilize these inherited sonic codes: Familiar auditory cues were strategically withdrawn, distorted, or negated, compelling audiences to confront unresolved political tensions without the listening frameworks that had previously rendered cinematic worlds coherent. Yet even this withdrawal is only understood in the absence of the internalized previous codes.

All of the five films share a common pessimism, insofar as they are all set up as allegories for the political atmosphere in Turkey. In the aftermath of the attempted coup in 2016, the authoritarian regulations that had intensified in the wake of the Gezi protests in 2013 had reached a climax, especially in the big cities. During this period, there was an increasingly visible despair that took hold of the urban middle-class population, such as artists and students living in metropolitan areas such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. This pessimism, resulting from a combination of increased censorship, criminalization of dissent, purges in academia and the media, and a more emotional climate shaped by repression and political fatigue, was also emotional and expressed through the emotionally withdrawn characters, slow narratives, and decay in the films analyzed in this section (İnceoğlu, 2021; Filizler, 2023). In many of these films, the villages are portrayed as sites of moral decadence, and the masses are portrayed as either complicit or passive, reduced to ideological stereotypes rather than subjects of political agency (Daldal, 2023). I argue that this new cinematic language reflects these tensions both narratively and sonically.²⁶

²⁶ This emotional pessimism has been identified as a defining feature of contemporary new political cinema in Turkey, particularly following the consolidation of AKP power. Yaren (2025) observes that films such as *Abluka* (Alper, 2015) and *Kerr* (Pirselimoğlu, 2021) are marked by dystopian allegories and a loss of faith in collective transformation, revealing a turn towards defeatism. For more, see Yaren, Ö. (2025). Posses and sinkholes: Crisis aesthetics in Turkish political cinema. *Studies in European Cinema*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2025.2489230>

Directors of the films also mention the increasing authoritarian atmosphere of the country in interviews themselves. For instance, Emin Alper explicitly talks about his motivation for *Kurak Günler* and adds that he had wanted to document and reflect upon the suffocating atmosphere of intensified oppression, highlighting the date July 15th, 2016, as a critical juncture (Saktanber, 2022). Similarly, Azra Deniz Okyay says *Hayaletler* was written as a response to the post-truth political climate and the normalization of authoritarian regimes (Okyay, as cited in Bant Mag, 2020). Özcan Alper's *Karanlık Gece* focuses on themes of collective complicity, too, by employing ambiguous sounds that resonate strongly within liberal, international festival circuits (Alper, as cited in Bant Mag, 2022). *Sibel*'s co-directors Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti also mention societal exclusion, oppression, and increasing stigmatization of the marginalized in a manner that emphasizes both universal relevance and localized specificity (Zencirci & Giovanetti, as cited in Gazete Duvar, 2019). Lastly, as the director Ceylan Özgün Özçelik says in an interview, *Kaygı* deals with themes of collective amnesia, manipulated historical narratives, and increased oppressive surveillance, articulated through psychologically intense, visually expressive, and metaphorically rich language (Özçelik, as cited in Bant Mag, 2017). Together, these films share a new cinematic vocabulary that blends sociopolitical critique with internationally accessible aesthetic forms, which makes them appeal to liberal, global festival audiences.

This chapter builds on the conceptual foundations developed in earlier chapters: symptomatic listening, the sonic unconscious, and cognitive mapping by inheritance. These frameworks allow me to analyze the ways that sound encodes ideological traces and contradictions that the visual narrative often conceals. I deploy *symptomatic listening* to uncover dimensions of mystified meaning by treating sonic absences, distortions, and repetitions as signs of ideological clues. Then I use the concept of the *sonic unconscious* to explain how traumas and repressed social structures persist in and through the textures of sound. *Cognitive mapping by inheritance* refers to the way audiences locate themselves within these textures, making use of the sonic unconscious in order to decode what they hear, relying on sedimented sonic grammars, such as post-synchronized voices, sentimental music cues, or ambient codes, to make ideological sense of cinematic sound. In this chapter,

I demonstrate how post-2016 films rework these inherited grammars by selectively withdrawing, distorting, or mutating them. Similarly, I consider sound as a material and historical force that can both create and disrupt ideological consent. Through the analysis of these five films, I argue that art house cinema in Turkey has entered a new phase in which, like Yeşilçam, sound is used as an affective field and listening practices mediate the experience of social fragmentation. I treat this period as a new phase because these films use sound as an affective field to mediate social relations differently. They deploy their sound worlds in ways that seem to be affirming polarization rather than bringing resolution to underline harmony and cohesion.

4.1 Analytic Framework and Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative analytical method based on symptomatic listening and dialectical critique, drawing mainly from Fredric Jameson's dialectical criticism and Louis Althusser's concept of symptomatic reading. Rather than asking what sound means in and of itself, this method focuses on how sound reveals ideological contradictions, emotional tensions and structural errors that cannot be resolved within the dominant narrative or ideological surface of a film. Symptomatic listening extends Althusser's focus on the unspoken by paying attention to sonic gaps, tonal inconsistencies, background noise and acoustic excesses that signal ideological work in progress. Moreover, drawing on Jameson's view of cultural artifacts as social symbolic acts, I foreground the ways in which sounds convey political oppression, class antagonism or neoliberal anxieties through dissonance, repetition or silence. Refusing to reduce sonic elements to fixed interpretive codes, this method treats meaning as historically contingent and ideologically contested, where sonic details operate within a wider field of formal contradiction, emotional repression and narrative tension.

The methodological approach is applied in four interdependent analytical axes, each attentive to the different aspects of the political sonic unconscious.

Materiality: Explores the texture, fidelity and physical qualities of sound, such as lo-fi aesthetics or compressed sound, as ideological choices that both shape the

materiality of space in film and reflect underlying social conditions. It is used in order to reveal how the material qualities of sound encode class distinctions and infrastructural and technological inequalities.

Affect: Explores how cinematic sound generates bodily responses that simultaneously enhance narrative immersion and structure political affects. Affective analysis identifies sonic moments of stasis, tension, detachment, or overstimulation as affective echoes of unresolved social antagonisms.

Spatiality: Investigates how sound constructs or deconstructs cinematic spaces, whether public or private, intimate or surveilled, central or peripheral. This dimension emphasizes the capacity of sound to shape spatial perceptions shaped by state control, urban transformation, social fragmentation or exclusion.

Ideological Function: Looks at whether and how sound reinforces dominant ideological narratives, creating interpretive friction and stylistic dissonance. Sound is listened to symptomatically and reveals points in the film where ideological coherence breaks down or narrative stability is weakened.

The following films were selected for analysis because they deal with the themes of political violence, repression, memory and affect in post-2016 Turkey, by using the sound dimension of the film actively. They were selected for their overtly political claims and their allegorical approach at both visual and sonic levels. Using a comparative dialectical methodology, this thesis explores sonic patterns and differences between films that confront issues of authoritarianism, social fragmentation and ethnic or gendered silencing:

Kaygı (2017) by Ceylan Özgün Özçelik

Sibel (2018) by Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti

Kurak Günler (2022) by Emin Alper

Karanlık Gece (2022) by Özcan Alper

Hayaletler (2020) by Azra Deniz Okyay

Central to this framework is the method of symptomatic listening, adapted from Althusser's symptomatic reading and, in particular, Jameson's view of cultural artifacts as social symbolic acts. This method highlights the sonic manifestations of ideological tension by investigating how the use of sound communicates political contradictions that are not explicitly expressed in the film. Key concepts of the analysis include symptomatic listening, cognitive mapping by inheritance, and the sonic unconscious. These concepts frame a historically and ideologically coherent methodology that reveals how the use of sound constructs, reproduces, and at times subverts dominant emotional and political structures. Each of the concepts introduced in this thesis explores different dimensions of film sound, but they function as built upon interrelated layers. The concepts of sonic resentment and negative catharsis both operate in the domain of affect, but their orientations are different: the latter focuses on an affective process that films engage the audience in by systematically deferring emotional resolution, while the former refers to a specific outcome of negative catharsis, where negative catharsis is experienced as an affirmation of a particular contempt for a particular social group.²⁷ Cognitive mapping by inheritance refers to a method the audience uses unconsciously to locate themselves in the new sonic grammars they encounter in order to make ideological sense of them. Finally, sonic capitalist realism addresses the aesthetic and structural dimension of sound under neoliberalism, where algorithmic modulation and affective flattening influence what should be audible or meaningful.

In this chapter, I symptomatically listen to the sonic elements of the films, such as music, soundscapes, silences, and ambience, to explore how these films construct the complex sound worlds that accompany their stories. This raises the following questions: How does the sound dimension of these films mystify or reveal socioeconomic contradictions? In what ways do the sound techniques support or

²⁷ Catharsis, in its original Aristotelian sense outlined in the *Poetics*, refers to the purging of pity and fear through the experience of tragedy. This emotional catharsis has been understood not only as an aesthetic pleasure but also as a process of moral clarification and social reintegration. Catharsis presupposes the resolution of the narrative and the restoration of order, allowing audiences to process violence or injustice through emotional closure. As Aristotle wrote, "Tragedy, then, is the imitation of a serious and completed action...it accomplishes the appropriate purging [katharsis] of these emotions through pity and fear" (*Poetics*, 1449b24–28; Aristotle, 1996). In contrast, the films analysed in this section systematically prevent such a resolution, producing a state of suspended emotional impasse that I have called negative catharsis.

contrast the sociopolitical conditions they present? What role does sound play in affecting the audience's emotional engagement with these film worlds? The following table summarizes the main concepts used throughout this chapter (and the whole thesis) in organized form according to their analytical scope and ideological function. These concepts operate across affective, cognitive, and structural layers, helping to reveal how cinematic sound encodes repression, affirms resentment, and structures political affect in contemporary cinema in Turkey.

Table 2

Analytical Dimensions of Core Concepts in Ideological Sound Analysis

Concept	Analytical Layer	Primary Function
Sonic Resentment	Affective– Ideological	Encodes blocked political agency through sonic structures
Negative Catharsis	Affective– Spectatorial	Suspends emotional release to keep the audience in unresolved tension
Sonic Unconscious	Affective– Latent Ideology	Registers repressed ideological contradictions
Cognitive Mapping by Inheritance	Ideological– Receptive	Traces how inherited sonic grammars guide audience ideological alignment
Sonic Capitalist Realism	Structural– Aesthetic	Describes neoliberal data compression that limits audibility and narrows emotional range

4.2 Kurak Güler (Alper, 2022)

Set in a politically tense fictional Anatolian town named Yanıklar, *Kurak Güler* follows young prosecutor Emre, who is newly appointed to the town, as he gets stuck in a web of corruption, masculinity and political competition. The film explores social

tensions with minimal but effective visuality and with a tightly arranged sonic world. The sonic dimension is so carefully woven that every little ambient sound seems to contribute to a broader idea. In this analysis, I argue that the film's sonic dimension is a politically potent terrain that encodes resentment and repression.

Despite the film's small setting, it is clear that the town serves as an allegorical depiction of Turkey in a larger sense, suspicious events signifying the political unrest that director Alper also notes has escalated since July 15, 2016. Although allegorical, the events and the characters are extremely familiar to the film's intended audience since the plot positions the audience as situated within a specific ideological framework that leads them to easily identify the depicted politics.

4.2.1 Materiality: sound as scarcity. *Kurak Günler* paints a world that is dissolving in both a physical and moral sense, and it reflects this through both visuals and its sonic materiality. As an allegory of a corrupt Turkey, the film's sonic and visual identity is characterized by dryness, lo-fi textures, and an obvious absence of organic ambiance, which is noticeable since it is set in a village, which normally is supposed to be a vibrant and noisy place. This minimalistic sonic dimension of the movie feels as if it is also carefully curated to the littlest detail so that it fits onto the visuals perfectly and completes the allegory in a sonic way of political corruption, environmental decay, and infrastructural malfunctioning: a world where productivity and richness have dried up and left behind a hollowed-out sonic terrain: a big sinkhole.²⁸

The sonic representation of rural space in *Kurak Günler* relies on inherited sonic grammars that connects environmental scarcity with moral decline. This happens through the process of cognitive mapping by inheritance. This mapping occurs through the activation of already sedimented cultural associations, in this case drawn from the sonic memory of earlier rural representations in Turkish cinema. In Yeşilçam's "village films", the village often functioned as the symbolic emblem of the nation's

²⁸ Sinkholes are both acoustic and geological phenomena, and during their formation low-frequency acoustic emissions and seismic noise are generated which may emerge before the actual collapse. Because of their potential to indicate structural instability, these inaudible sounds have gained importance in geophysical monitoring. See Mikulski, M. and Mikulski, W. (2023) for additional details.

moral core and natural abundance and was associated with fertility, collective harmony, and the collective sounds of agricultural life. The village, in those narratives, was imagined as the site of moral purity, where the integrity of the nation was grounded in the soil, the seasons, and the communal labor. *Kurak Günler* inverts this familiar mapping by rendering rural space stripped of sonic vitality, natural ambiance and collective presence. Even in the outdoor scenes, the soundscape is barren: no children, no women, no changing weather, no movement. Instead, the land is physically and acoustically dry. Outdoor soundscapes underscore a kind of aggression attributed to the countryside through sonic cues such as gunshots and the evil laughter of “bad guys”, which reduce rural characters to caricatures of hostility and backwardness and position the town as inherently resistant to progress and modernity. This absence implies decay, but at the same time, retrospectively, evokes the moral and material abundance that was once audible and makes one feel aware of its disappearance. This way, the film taps onto the collective sonic unconscious, the emotional and ideological remnants of past representations that continue to shape how we hear and interpret the present. What is no longer heard, the sound of living nature and communal work, the timbre of water, becomes the ideologically charged sonic element in its absence, implying on an historical loss that transcends the narrative itself.

Water plays an important role in the film’s narrative, both visually and aurally. Throughout Yeşilçam and, of course, in general Turkish culture, water is associated with physical purity, abundance, and morality [*Susuz Yaz* (Erksan, 1963), *Diyet* (Akad, 1974), *Kuyu* (Erksan, 1968)], but the scarcity of water in *Kurak Günler* signifies the absence of all these symbolic values. In the few scenes where it is present, it is contaminated both materially and aurally. In terms of sound, since all the problems in the town revolve around a dispute over the water source, its absence creates an acoustic void, like a missing frequency in the sound palette that draws attention to what is no longer there. In the scene where Emre leans into the well in hopes of finding water (and therefore the possibility of hope and innocence returning), he only encounters vague, faint echoes. The sounds don’t belong to the water; they sound like the sonic ghosts of water. The film thus stages the desire to hear but what we can hear are just the echoes of a lost purity.

Such sonic withholding is pervasive throughout the film, especially in public spaces, mostly revealing the classed nature of spatial organization. For instance, the mayor's announcements are delivered through overamplified public speakers that emit static and background noise, acoustically signaling the infrastructural decay embedded in these spaces. The mayor's voice with an audible metallic quality, coming from the speakers cuts through the suffocating air, but the opposition candidates' announcements are lowered to the degree of a murmur. Here, power gains audibility and shows that in this town, sonic presence, just like water, is distributed unevenly.

The absence of communal sounds, such as children playing outside or the sounds of the outdoors in general, creates a silent topography in which even the smallest drip or buzz is meaningfully foregrounded in the sonic palette. The use of a minimal soundtrack also contributes to this emptiness. There is no musical punctuation, no crescendo, no sound that could signal resolution. Instead, monotonous electrical noises, echoes of footsteps and bureaucratic silences continue throughout the film, and causes a kind of sonic fatigue that creates an atmosphere of low-intensity horror.

The film constructs a world in which objects, people, sensations and emotions are dulled. The film assigns affective and ideological meanings to spaces through affective profiling: the mayor's office echoes with distorted authority, while empty rooms resonate with abandonment. The overwhelming feeling of scarcity is made audible through barren soundscapes, long silences, footsteps on dry soil, and the absence of music or long, meaningful dialogues. For example, the sounds of domestic rooms, such as a chair being dragged or a door closed, are very flat and isolating, as if they are only there to emphasize the lifelessness of the environment. This sonic architecture also is compatible with the broader post-2016 Turkish political condition²⁹, where the loudness of official state language masked the infrastructural damage, surveillance, and affective disorientation. In a similar landscape, in which only certain sounds can be heard (that of the government and, in the movie, the

²⁹ The failed coup attempt, on July 15, 2016, put Turkey in an unstabilized position. A long-lasting state of emergency was declared, and the government's control over the media, judiciary, and civil society was intensified through widespread purges, censorship, and legal reforms. An atmosphere of increased surveillance was also created over constitutional rights to protest and public discourse.

mayor's), sound may function to signal or hide crises as well as a terrain where what cannot be said begins to accumulate and echo.

The sonic dimension of the film is full of sonic remnants of a silenced social structure that sounds traumatized. These fragments point to the erosion of shared public life under politically stultifying conditions. Listening to them becomes lending an ear to the sonic unconscious of Turkey. The sounds of buzzing and crackling can also be read as traces of repressed contradictions waiting to be heard in an increasingly insecure social landscape. The minimal, fragmented sonic field seems to materialize the ideological effects of a regime that controls audibility. A sonic reflection of a regime that allows only certain narratives to circulate. Thus, the film creates an analogical connection between scarcity and ideology. By directing the audience to listen to the material world, to tune in to the sonic gaps and fragments that constitute the sonic identity of a decaying atmosphere, it teaches us to hear drought as ideology itself.

In *Kurak Günler* the absence of water, people, or the sounds of social life works as voids that embody social decay. These absences evoke a broader landscape of decadence, where specific sounds reflect moral exhaustion and institutional impasse, and corruption, repression and infrastructural degradation are encoded in minimal sound design (Filizler, 2023; Eraslan and Eraslan, 2024; Yaren, 2025). Both the visuals and the sound design are so stylized that the film feels like a fantasy in which the town is constructed as a frozen space of hostility. The depiction of the place as an uncanny entity detached from material conditions further underlines the film's aestheticized audiovisual abandonment.

4.2.2 Affect: The aesthetics of resentment. One of the most defining affective strategies of *Kurak Günler*, and one that exemplifies the broader emotional architecture shared by the films analysed in this study, is its systematic withholding of emotional release. Unlike classical narrative structures that lead audiences toward catharsis through the resolution of tension, typically via emotional climax or narrative closure, *Kurak Günler* suspends affective energy. The film replaces the traditional notion of catharsis with a form of emotional retreat, wherein tension accumulates

continuously without any resolution. An emotional organization in which the tension constantly builds up without any resolution structurally resists catharsis, and instead of leading the audience to emotional release, the film intensifies anxiety, increases despair, and offers no resolution.

This circular buildup of affect, never culminating in release, is most powerfully articulated through the film's sonic design. *Kurak Günler* does not employ thematic scores or expressive musical cues to guide or soothe the audience's emotional response. In contrast to Jameson's (1981, p. 79) theory of the ideologeme as a symbolic resolution of contradiction, *Kurak Günler* structures its sonic space around irresolution. It refuses to resolve tension into narrative closure, instead embedding contradiction into the form of sonic repetition, absence, and foreclosure. It constructs a dense field of sonic pressure through ambient noises, minimalist musical interventions, and long silences. The soundtrack consists primarily of low-frequency drones and extended ambient tones. These sounds do not dramatize scenes; rather, they weigh heavily on them, producing a sustained emotional gravity (Gorbman, 1987; Chion, 1994). These sonic elements squeeze the emotion into a claustrophobic predicament, creating what can be understood as an emotional impasse. This is similar to Lauren Berlant's (2011, p. 199) theorization of impasse³⁰ as a suspended state in which affect is held and prolonged without resolution. I refer to Berlant's observation in the context of the film as negative catharsis: a framework in which affect is constantly recycled and intensified within a closed emotional circuit rather than released. *Kurak Günler* thus represents a broader trend in post-2016 films where sound no longer provides emotional guidance, but instead traps the audience in tense situations that remain unresolved.

The visuals contribute to this impact as well. The omnipresent brown color dominates the mise-en-scène. It is not warm or nostalgic; it creates a claustrophobic effect, just like sound does, and doubles the impact of suffocation. Laura Marks (2000)

³⁰ While Lauren Berlant's *impasse* (2011), refers to a suspended affective condition in which no clear action or resolution is possible, an extended present marked by emotional and temporal stagnation; *negative catharsis* refers to a structural inversion of classical catharsis. Rather than providing release or transformation, negative catharsis intensifies emotional buildup without resolution, accumulating unrelieved tension. *Impasse* describes a broader experiential or temporal state; *negative catharsis* refers specifically to a narrative and affective mechanism in which emotional release is structurally foreclosed.

has described how color, like sound, can act haptically by reaching the audience through sensation rather than meaning. In this sense, the brown color of *Kurak Günler* is a constitutive of the general mood of the film: it emerges as an atmosphere that fills the screen and seeps under the skin and numbs the senses. The lack of or the very little presence of other colors fits into the emotional landscape: a very dry landscape that mirrors the state of souls and the monotony of social life.

Throughout the movie, things happen and plot proceeds the audience is not directed to a certain affective mode (as in melodrama or horror genres). On the contrary, it's as if they are expected to remain in a state of never-ending stillness. The scene in which Emre walks alone through the town at night exemplifies this; there is no music, just the sound of footsteps that echo lightly on the dry ground and the distant electrical hums. The town is empty and it doesn't feel safe, since this silence is uncanny, as if it is trapped and has been cut off from all intimacy, resonance, and a chance at liberation.

In another affectively charged scene, we hear the mayor's announcement coming through the crooked public speaker. But this sonic remark does not create any reaction among the townspeople. The voice is loud and grainy. The town hears the authoritarian voice clearly, but they remain hidden; in a way, the sound is unable to generate a reaction. The people are simultaneously forced to listen and not react. What we witness here is an affective condition with no direction, a feeling that cannot be discharged, trapped within the silence imposed from above. In this way, the film creates a sensory cage for both the characters and the audience.

As Vivian Sobchack (2004) argues, cinema is a format that is also experienced through the body. The brown cinematography that dominates the entire film, the slowness of the plot, and the suffocation of the sound world create an almost tangible experience of fatigue. A cinematic fatigue that mimics political fatigue: a state in which injustice is narrated through the inability to move. This bodily attachment is further intensified by what Lisa Coulthard (2007) calls *emotional silence*: moments when silence brings anxiety, tension and disorientation. Here, the affect is structured by absence, by a desire for something that refuses to be fulfilled. The emotional center

of the film lies precisely in these unrealizable acoustic gestures in a sound architecture that only brings absence. The audience knows what these emotions sound like because they have been culturally trained for decades to decipher the sound codes: chord patterns for mourning, vocal climaxes for conflict, and rich orchestrations for victory. *Kurak Günler* relies on these seated associations in a different way. It does not allow for climaxes, leaves conflicts unresolved, and offers no resolution. In the end the intensity of affect remains intact.

Throughout the film, there is an intense sense of surveillance and judgement arising from the interplay of visual and auditory elements (such as the sound of the car in the scene where Emre drives to the lake and the camera from far away creating an unsettling audiovisual pair). When paired with images that evoke stasis, the sound elements create an ambiguous affective atmosphere. This ambiguity results in a tense but aimless emotional state in which the body is always on guard. It is neither anxiety nor melancholy in the traditional sense of the word; it is something heavier and embedded in the sound itself. The vibration of a kind of repression that implies the self-evident moral righteousness of the film.

This affective morality prepares the audiences for an affirmation in the end. The affirmation of resentment towards the characters in the movie, it is fair to say that, is the only resolution the movie offers: a self-righteous feeling of resentment for the bad people of the world. The affective distance that is deliberately built between characters of the city and the characters of the town supports this affection. This distance is most evident in the scenes featuring the mayor's son, Şahin; his presence is constantly underlined by exaggerated, malevolent laughter if not a sinister grin, and gunshots echoing in the distance. These function as sonic clues that instruct the audience how to feel about whom. Şahin's loud laughter, exaggerated to the degree of absurdity, reflects a long-standing strategy in Turkish cinema that's deployed to hint at the character's villainousness, reminiscent of characters like Osman in *Susuz Yaz*, whose "bad guy" laughter has become emblematic of the concept of rural evil. But unlike *Susuz Yaz*, which emerged from a very different political moment and framed rural violence as an individual deviation, *Kurak Günler* deploys these sonic and narrative cues in a context where rural figures are already overdetermined by

contemporary liberal anxieties. In *Susuz Yaz*, Osman's violence was framed as a singular pathology, a personal greed that did not indict the entire village or rurality as a whole. By contrast, in *Kurak Günler*, the character of Şahin does not function as an individual antagonist. His actions and vocal presence come to stand in for a broader moral and social decadence attributed to the entire rural community. The sonic construction of rurality in the film reinforces this shift: the film presents a generalized atmosphere of complicity and decay that envelops the whole town. In this way, the rural is no longer portrayed as a space of potential transformation or ambivalence, but rather as an ideologically regressive space, which is posed as an enemy to modern liberal subjectivity. Even the choices of setting, such as the strategic use of silence during the tense encounters between Emre and the townspeople, suggest a heavy, unspoken complicity of these populations. These silences function as a threat, suggesting that violence or betrayal could erupt at any moment.

Most of the affective governance in *Kurak Günler* operates through what I call "negative catharsis," where tension builds up and is prevented from being released. But in some cases, a more radical affective governance is put to work: foreclosure. In these moments, resolution is short-circuited right away: judgment is made immediately, without the audience being given time to think through the characters and events. For example, the mayor's son's exaggerated "bad guy" laughter codes immorality. Similarly, the town's near-silence, especially in the evenings, traps the audience in an atmosphere where fatigue seems to be the only affective possibility. These two overlapping strategies, negative catharsis and affective foreclosure, overwhelm the film's regime of immobilization. Repetitive, monotonous music and low-frequency hums are foregrounded, and any attempt at harmonic resolution is prevented. This creates a kind of suspension that reflects the general political cul-de-sac in the film. The permanent silence, acoustic stillness, and muted voices are in line with a broader cinematic effect in which emotion is not expressed but embedded in form (Eraslan and Eraslan, 2024; Filizler, 2023). The film's sounds do not just shape atmosphere; they interpolate what I refer to as the imagined listener: a secular, urban subject whose affective coordinates have been shaped by political loss, cultural

marginalization, and a sense of moral superiority in the AKP era³¹. This listener is not an empirical audience member, it is an aesthetic construct, encoded within and interpolated as subjects by the sonic grammar of the film. As such, it resonates with Wendy Brown's (1995) theorization of the injury-based liberal subject: one that derives its political and moral authority not from agency, but from resentment, cultivated through a sense of dispossession and cultural injustice. In *Kurak Günler*, this imagined listener is sonically positioned to feel justified in their resentment, through the affective calibration of sound, and what is implied by the villainous laughter, ominous silences, and withheld resolution.

4.2.3 Spatiality: sonic claustrophobia. In *Kurak Günler*, the geography of the city is shaped also by the acoustic pressures that regulate movement, behavior, and perception. Through spatial sound design, the film constructs a world that is subject to surveillance and without refuge from corrupt authority. The sinkhole is one of the most striking spatial features in the film. While its sonic connotations are also very important, it is noteworthy for pointing to the corruption of the land and the moral order. Usually formed by the collapse of underground cavities, sinkholes produce subsonic low-frequency sounds before they appear. This makes them a sonic phenomenon as acoustic signals can serve as an early warning of structural instability (Mikulski & Mikulski, 2023). Since sinkholes cause rupture and destruction, their dual character also increases their symbolic significance in cultural narratives. As such, sinkholes may be read as both literal and metaphorical voids; their sonic traces resonate with broader themes of absence and presence across natural and cultural contexts.

³¹ This term adapts Ien Ang's (1991) concept of the "imagined audience," which she originally used to critique how media institutions construct idealized audiences through ratings and audience research. My use of "imagined listener" is not based on empirical assumptions or institutional projection, but refers to a sonic-aesthetic construct embedded in the film's ideological design. It describes the listening subject that is interpolated through affective, spatial, and narrative cues. For Ang's critique, see: Ang, I. (1991). *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.

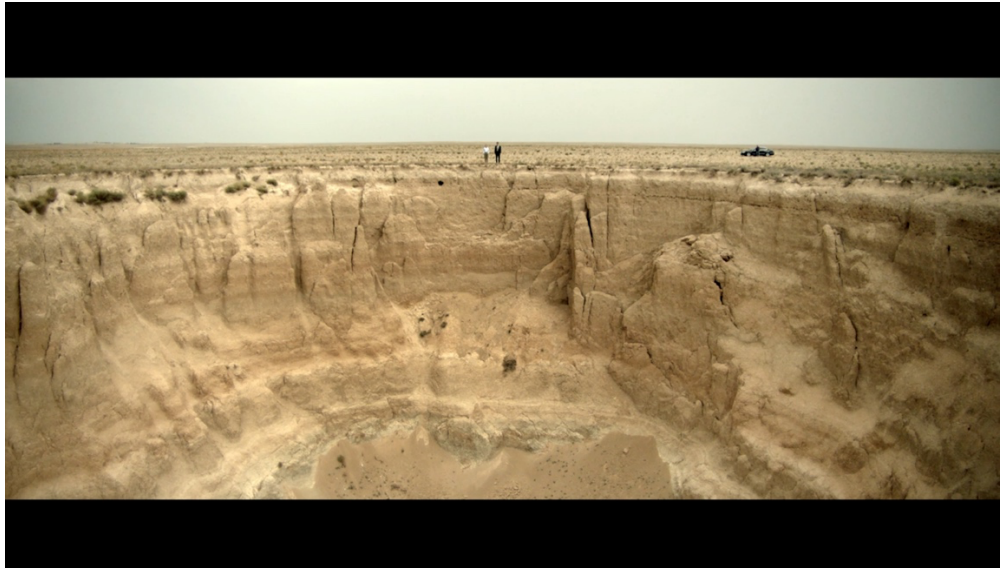


Figure 9. Kurak Günler.

The sinkhole is one of the most striking spatial features in the film. While its sonic connotations are also very important, it is noteworthy for pointing to the corruption of the land and the moral order. Usually formed by the collapse of underground cavities, sinkholes produce subsonic low-frequency sounds before they appear. This makes them a sonic phenomenon as acoustic signals can serve as an early warning of structural instability (Mikulski & Mikulski, 2023). Since sinkholes cause rupture and destruction, their dual character also increases their symbolic significance in cultural narratives. As such, sinkholes may be read as both literal and metaphorical voids; their sonic traces resonate with broader themes of absence and presence across natural and cultural contexts.

In *Kurak Günler* sinkholes symbolize the sociopolitical decay and the erosion of institutional and communal trust. Their sudden appearance without giving warnings parallels the sudden collapse of the system. The fact that they did give sonic warnings but they were so low as to be heard intensifies the analogy. Alper uses this metaphor to reflect the deeper tensions boiling beneath the surface. The ignored warnings of the sinkholes parallel the town's (read: Turkey) previous unwillingness to confront its dysfunctions. The sounds here perform a dual function: they deepen the suspense (Chion, 1994) and by being subtly ignored, they echo broader ideological dynamics of passive complicity and political blindness, aligning with critiques of how sonic environments encode sociopolitical tensions (Attali, 1985; LaBelle, 2010).

Once formed, however, the sinkholes become almost totally silent (Mikulski and Mikulski, 2023). In *Kurak Günler* the sinkhole's transformation from a sound-emitting premise to a silent void reflects the town's gradual corruption, underlined by its lack of water (i.e., cleanliness, purity). The void left behind evokes the normalization of the crisis as well as being the sole evidence of a collective crime. In one of the last scenes of the film As Emre and Murat flee from threatening figures; the sinkhole acts as a sonic trap. Its silence heightens the tension and signals unseen and unheard potential dangers. At this moment, the stillness of the depression evokes a kind of acoustic violence, a deadly absence that has absorbed all resistance and is waiting to draw in the last two people who symbolize justice and can bring change.

The town is depicted as a dense sound enclosure rather than a tranquil space rich in ecological diversity. Overlapping hums and vague murmurs abound in the air, creating an experience of spatial compression rather than opening. The town takes on an almost otherworldly character in the silence, where sound clarity serves as a disciplinary tool. One of the control technologies is the ubiquitous loudspeaker. In this way, every street, every shop, every house in the town hears the mayor's voice - transmitted with astonishing clarity. By intervening acoustically and forcing the townspeople to follow the ideological voice, the authority of sound penetrates even the most private areas of life. The whispers of gossip, sarcasm and judgment add to this network of sonic policing. Emre is trapped in this doubtful acoustics. Even when he is alone by himself, the sounds around him, dry leaves and mysterious footsteps, indicate an unseen social presence. Here, sound creates acoustic zones, marking areas of inclusion and exclusion (LaBelle, 2010). It's as if the town itself is a sinkhole that vaguely breathes. This spatiality is especially vividly illustrated in the scene where Emre sits alone in the government office and writes. The room is dark, and the ceiling fan is barely functioning. But what dominates is the sound: the distant feedback of a megaphone, the faint rustle of someone behind the door, and the static buzzing of the lights on the street.

The sound field extends beyond the visual frame and implies that power hides mostly in the auditory space. We do not actually see the real authorities, we just meet

people from their close circles, but the sonic realm is full of cues that tell us the authority is actually listening. Even alone, Emre is surrounded by ears. This collapse of public and private spaces onto each other is important because we see that homes don't protect the characters from external pressures; rather, they are full of holes through which the surveilling sound flows. The walls of the buildings resonate with uncoded meaning.

This spatial construction also speaks to cognitive mapping by inheritance. *Kurak Günler* invokes spatial codes from old rural cinemas, village squares, communal courtyards, and sound interiors, but these are now emptied of their old sound temperatures. In Yeşilçam melodramas, these spaces were often idealized with laughter, music, and the richness of collective sounds. Here, these same spaces become places of repressed tension, filled with resentment and implied accusations. For example, the courtyard scene in which Emre is drinking “rakı” (an alcoholic beverage specific to Turkey) with the mayor's son and his friend, which in earlier films might have been used to stage social gatherings or musical expression, is here treated as a trap for a future blackmail. The steps are dry, the air is dry, and all sounds seem to bear a trace of hesitation. The courtyard is no longer a place of community but a claustrophobic place where the transparency of sound serves for ideological exposure. The open space becomes the most surveilled space.

This results in a closed acoustic map, in which space is effectively tense. Unlike classical cinema, where the *mise-en-scène* supports narrative progression, here it resists it and keeps the characters in place by surrounding them with unspoken pressure. The spatiality of *Kurak Günler* creates sensation out of surveillance; it is what is heard, or feared to be heard, that defines the characters' relationship to space.

4.2.4 Ideological function: denial of sonic resolution. Rather than depicting the rural town as a place shaped by historical marginalization or infrastructural abandonment, the sound design helps transform it into a moral site of decay and imminent evil. In this way, the film relies on affective shortcuts, relying on the deep-seated representations of hostility with careful repetitions of sonic and affective cues that simply imply danger, corruption, and immorality. By relying on familiar AKP-era

stereotypes, religious hypocrisy, performative masculinity, and latent violence, the film's sonic world affirms this liberal imagined listener's anxieties and encodes resentment not as a social condition but as a moral essence in its sonic world of meanings. These auditory and narrative motifs resemble what Jameson terms ideologemes: symbolic units that historically mediated social contradiction. In *Kurak Günler*, however, they remain as aesthetic traces that restage contradiction without transcending it.

Nevertheless, the film suggests a shared affective condition between the rural and urban characters, but this appearance of mutual *ressentiment* is constructed through an asymmetrical framework. While urban characters like Emre and Murat are depicted with emotional nuance, moral ambivalence, and interior conflict, rural figures are framed through a series of reductive and sonically coded tropes. Their representation relies on a repertoire of familiar auditory signifiers such as exaggerated male laughter, echo effects, and the absence of ambient intimacy. These design choices actively construct rurality as a collective moral failure. The villagers are not treated as individual subjects capable of ethical complexity; rather, they are positioned as a homogenous and regressive threat.

This asymmetry becomes even more apparent when we consider the affective logic that underlies the film's sonic design. Drawing on the conceptual distinction, elaborated by thinkers like Max Scheler and Michael Ure, between *resentment* and *ressentiment*, this analysis interprets the film as distributing these two modes unequally. *Resentment*, a direct and potentially justified reaction to perceived injustice, is primarily attributed to the urban-secular characters such as Emre and Murat. Their disaffection is rendered with sonic cues that evoke moral ambiguity and emotional depth. In contrast, *ressentiment*, a repressed, moralizing, and affectively stagnant structure, is projected onto the rural characters, whose sonic portrayal relies on repetition, exaggeration, and affective reduction. Through this division, the film legitimizes urban resentment as a form of secular disillusionment while it frames rural resentment as irrational, regressive, and ethically illegitimate, what I conceptualize as *sonic resentment* (Ure, 2015, pp. 600–601).

This asymmetry is particularly evident in the film's sonic world, where resentment is transmitted through the sonic grammar. The repetition of villainous cues, stripped-down ambient spaces, and intensified vocal distortions make up their sonic identity in which ideological judgment becomes affectively encoded. Even if the film appears to maintain a more or less narrative balance in terms of hinting on a mutual moral instability, its sound design performs a subtler ideological operation. These sonic judgments emerge not through explicit dialogue but through what may be understood as the sonic unconscious of the film, which refers to the domain in which historically encoded meanings surface through non-deliberate auditory forms and create ideological effects beneath the level of conscious narrative intention.

This unconscious transmission is received and interpreted by the target audience who arguably share similar political concerns with the film, the particularly through cognitive mapping by inheritance. The audience do not decode these sonic forms in a vacuum. They position themselves through historically conditioned listening grammars shaped by previous exposures to cinematic representations of rurality. In this process, ideological transmission occurs not only between the director and character but also between sound and listener. What is heard is filtered through classed, spatialized, and politically inflected expectations that structure recognition. As a result, even in the absence of overt commentary, the film aligns the urban audience with a familiar affective position, one that recognizes and affirms the moral decline of rural life through inherited sonic codes. It doesn't construct new representations of rural subjectivity; it recycles and amplifies pre-established sonic grammars that equate rurality with ignorance and vulgarity. In this way, sound functions as an ideological relay through which resentment is encoded, directed, and legitimized. Moreover, it validates this as a justified response to the perceived political betrayal of the rural population. Thus, while the film acknowledges the emotional tension between the parties, it privileges urban resentment. This asymmetrical portrayal aligns with what Yaren (2025) identifies as a broader trend in recent political cinema in Turkey where rural characters are increasingly framed in reductive allegory and often coded as reactionary or morally corrupt, vindicating and reinforcing the resentment of the urban liberal audience under the guise of national allegory.

This representation strategy emerges as a reproduction of a current hostility towards the rural. The representation of the rural as pure, innocent and transformable in the past returns in this film and becomes the ground for the great sense of deception felt by the secular-urban subject now. Because evil is not a deviation attributed to the rural today, but is framed as natural that contradicts the morally pure frameworks of the village of the past. Therefore, such a moral decline for the urban characters is reinforced by current political ruptures, and by the destruction of the fantasy established by past regimes of representation. The new fantasy constructed in the film is a *secular self-criticism* that reckons with this “false belief”: The rural was never transformable, we were wrong. A kind of ideological resentment that comes with this diagnosis makes the representation of the countryside exclusive, and final. In this context, the film contains current rural-urban conflict, while bringing a revisionist reading of the cinematic history of this conflict.

In this context, the sound aesthetics of the rural characters, drawn with exaggerated laughter, cautious silences and threatening smiles, codes a structural affect: the aesthetics of resentment. Instead of considering the rural as a historically marginalized or economically excluded geography, the film reproduces it with arrogant, greedy and corrupt village representations; thus, it places it in a morally inferior position. Instead of questioning the material and historical conditions of the rural, this sound aesthetics operates a scapegoat logic that places all responsibility on it. By creating an insurmountable distance between the village and goodness, it offers an identity-based relief for the secular-urban audience. In this respect, the film codes the rural not as the subject of history but as an irrational obstacle to progress; it updates the ideological patterns inherent in the cinematic continuity of the center-province dichotomy. As Palancı (2024) and Filizler (2023) point out, this form of representation externalizes the rural area at both an aesthetic and political level, rendering it less of a historical agent and instead a political threat and an emotional burden.

From a Jamesonian perspective, *Kurak Günler* is an allegorical structure woven with contradictions; it functions as an auditory and visual expression of Turkey’s current political unconscious. The film dramatizes repression through formal deadlocks, narrative delays, and the intrusion of the auditory unconscious. Silences,

ambiguities, and tonal stability are, as Jameson (1981) puts it, signs of a historical blockage. They make visible the limits of what can be represented under current ideological conditions.

The film's unconscious is most evident in the themes of desire, repression, and lack of resolution. Emre's ambivalent and ambiguous behaviors are not explicitly expressed; but they permeate the affective texture of the narrative. This inexpressible state is felt on both visual and auditory levels. The attraction between Emre and journalist Murat evades direct representation; however, this escape is constantly marked through sounds. Muted breaths, disjointed speech, and tense pauses produce vocal ellipses in which meaning vibrates but is never fully expressed. These sonic gaps encode the unrepresentability of desire as both an aesthetic strategy and an ideological imperative, revealing that the repressed persists at both the content and the formal level. In *Kurak Günler*, homosexuality is moved into the sonic dimension, into timbre, silence, vocal hesitation, and spatial vibration (Dolar, 2006). This displacement itself functions as a particular mode of articulation, a way of signaling what cannot be said within the dominant symbolic order but is nevertheless made perceptible through the affective and material qualities of sound. The hushed tone of certain conversations, the loaded silences between Emre and Murat, and the charged atmosphere seem to be used as vehicles for something that cannot be named. Homosexuality is staged indirectly, transforming sonic ambiguity into a form of spectral articulation. Such an articulation reveals how cinema can make space for queer affects and desires, even, or especially, when under cultural and political pressures.

The film refuses to resolve legal, sexual or political tensions throughout. The arrival of Emre in town signals a possibility of change, but it does not go anywhere, on the contrary it makes things worse; mutual accusations are made, and alliances are formed, but the corrupt system remains intact. The audience neither affectively (as mentioned above) nor structurally experiences catharsis. The sonic form accomplishes what the content cannot express: this transformation is impossible, and that desire is suspended forever.

Instead of resolving the conflict or offering catharsis, the film proceeds in a structure that postpones resolution through narrative hesitation and sonic delay. This structure operates through affective compression, silences and unresolved tensions. The result is a repetition of an old national allegory that merges with ambient horror and formal deadlock, which can be an example of what has been described as a post-2016 “crisis aesthetic.” (Yaren, 2025; Filizler, 2023). The film becomes a sonic and visual map of thwarted transformation, echoing rather than transcending contradiction.

The ideological implication of *Kurak Günler* lies in what it cannot speak and what it refuses to resolve. The system remains ambiguous; the crimes are acknowledged but never punished. Emre’s contradictions are recognized but ultimately sealed in silence. Political critique is made through formal disintegration. This is how *Kurak Günler* replicates contemporary political life in Turkey: a space of contradiction and crisis, but resolution is not possible because no one dares to articulate the problem. It is a cinema of deadlock, where sound and images do not lift each other but fall down together into the sinkhole. However, it is through this deadlock that the film reveals its truth. In Jameson’s dialectical terms, *Kurak Günler* does not transcend ideology by overcoming contradiction; it holds on to it. It forces us to feel the structure through sonic delay, narrative stasis, and spectral recurrence. The political unconscious becomes audible in what the film withholds or refuses to conclude.

4.2.5 Conclusion: listening to the unconscious of decadence. In *Kurak Günler*, the sonic dimension speaks what the narrative cannot; it articulates a world in which resolution is structurally blocked. Symptomatic listening and the sonic unconscious reveal that desire, justice, and transformation here are either suspended and postponed or erased under a corrupt system. Throughout the film, we encounter a constant refusal of harmonic closure, musical climax, or narrative rupture. Instead, a sonic discomfort that shapes both the characters and the audience prevails. The absence of orchestral cues and the repetition of sonic silences come together to surround the audience in a loop of affective repetition.

In the film's final moments, the convergence of negative catharsis and what this dissertation names as sonic resentment materialize³². Emre and Murat confront the raving, villainous men of the village at the opposing edges of the sinkhole. However, the film stops there without a closure. No consolation of justice or the clarity of moral resolution happens. The sounds also refuse to resolve or explode. An echo of futility hangs in the air. A sense of seeing too much and hearing, hence knowing, too little. Justice seems acoustically impossible.

It is precisely this sonic refusal that makes the film's ideological stakes visible. The audience is invited to listen for what is repressed through listening between the lines. In doing so, *Kurak Günler* encourages its audience to hear the structure of repression itself, to perceive authoritarianism not as spectacle but as a persistent, unresolved, ambient condition, almost to the degree of naturalizing it. Thus, it refrains from direct political mobilization. Instead, it creates what I term a lateral sonic agency that is a suspended affect embedded in the fractures, where potential forms of agency circulate horizontally but do not get strong enough to channel into collective action. Because of this "just enough" sonic energy, the film cannot overcome the conditions it portrays but keeps them as fragile possibilities.

In the end, both the narrative and the sonic design of *Kurak Günler* seem to affirm the liberal middle-class anxieties about rural populations, social decay and authoritarian governance. The film's affective choices aesthetically affirm them and openly draw a line between good and bad without a critical reflection or structural complexity. This tendency fits into a broader dynamic in film criticism and reception, where symbolic capital is often granted to politically coded films that confirm existing ideological positions, even when they foreclose analysis (Yaren & Karademir-Hazır, 2018). While *Kurak Günler* dramatizes resentment through a sonic landscape of scarcity and decay, *Kaygı* moves the governance of affect to a sonically crowded urban setting. What is heard here is the cacophony of capitalist media, technological fragmentation, and gendered silencing of the voice. Both films refuse catharsis, but

³² I use the term "sonic resentment" to refer to the hostility and moral judgments which are perceived affectively through the sonic clues in the film, such as the repetition of silences, the "bad man" laughter, and sonic hollowness. I theorize this concept in full in the following Discussion and Findings chapter.

they do so by producing contrasting sonic architectures of crisis: one through acoustic drought, the other through sonic overflow.

4.3 Kaygı (Özçelik, 2017)

Written and directed by Ceylan Özgül Özçelik, *Kaygı* (Inflame, 2017) follows Hasret, a video editor working for a public news channel who keeps having the same dreams and flashbacks that point to a traumatic past. As she begins to search for answers by uncovering fragments of a repressed memory, she stumbles upon a violent political event that occurred in the 1990s. However, her attempts to remember are increasingly sabotaged by institutional denial and technological sound intervention. The film presents a world where sound works to destroy, suppress and crush memory, rather than help remembering.

4.3.1 Materiality: sonic capitalist realism. Right from its opening sequences, *Kaygı* hints that its sonic world will spread crisis, not ambiance. Hasret's world is full of sonic fragments, from news feeds, never-ending static transmissions, corrupted archival clips, and broken technological devices. These sounds function as sonic reflections of the ideologies that have been dominating the period in which the movie is set. The film positions media noise as a material force that covers everything in a way that is reflective of what I call *sonic capitalist realism*. Adapted from Mark Fisher's cultural diagnosis of *capitalist realism*³³, sonic capitalist realism describes a sound world in which even dissent is pre-recorded, looped, depersonalized, and absorbed into the system as background noise, and even the possibility of opposing voices has become unimaginable. It is not that the truth is silenced; it is drowned out, glitched, or rendered inaudible through repetition.

Hasret's voice is not totally cut off, but it is continuously swallowed by a media that makes ideological noise. Her crisis is not one of speech but one of not being heard.

³³ Mark Fisher's concept of capitalist realism refers to the widespread belief that capitalism is the only viable political and economic system and that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative. For Fisher, this condition is in culture, education, and everyday life, working to reinforce the status quo. See Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.

Where Yeşilçam might have avoided subversion by not scripting dissent at all, *Kaygı* stages dissent to show how it is sonically made impossible. The moment of attempted speech is not interrupted by a cut or visual distraction but by a surge of static, feedback, or glitch, all of which are embedded within the film's material sonic structure. This echoes Fisher's critique that capitalist realism allows even critique itself to be preemptively absorbed and defused. The sonic dimension of the movie becomes an agent of that ideological absorption, which constantly recycles the residue of dissent into gibberish media junk. The film's critique of institutional media is also made audible through an auditory field saturated with glitches, feedback, and drone-like loops that drown out speech and fragment memory. This aesthetic mirrors a media landscape where ideology operates not through censorship but through excess, by making truth unreadable in a sea of noise (Ergüç, 2022).

The film's sounds do not follow the usual structure of tension building and resolution; instead, they oscillate in a constantly rotating, exitless void. There is no musical crescendo leading to resolution, nor is there a leitmotif that marks the scenes or characters. They are replaced by repetitive murmurs and minimal electronic tones that evoke an unresolved technological anxiety. Hasret's internal struggle is externalized through beeps, clicks, hums, and tape interference; these fragmented and disturbing sounds represent her psychological disintegration in the form of an auditory dispersion.

When we bring together Schafer's (1977) concept of *schizophonic*, which describes the circulation of sound by breaking away from its source, and Tkaczyk's (2021) understanding of the "auditory unconscious", it becomes possible to read the auditory world of *Kaygı* as a haunted media space: a space where traces of state violence can still be heard. Hasret's struggle to reach the truth is shaped through her struggle against the auditory residues of a media machine that works with repetition and thus produces and maintains amnesia. This world is like an archive of broken pieces; every effort to produce meaning eventually turns into noise and drowns.

If *Kurak Günler* produces resentment through absence of sounds, *Kaygı* achieves a similar affect through sonic presence. The loops of disinformation condition

the audience to expect a moment of clarity, a confession, a breakthrough, or a sonic cue, but none of them arrive. Instead, the film leaves us in a state of negative catharsis again: the trauma is named but unresolved, the sonic codes of memory activated but never completed. What builds is a sticky dread, to borrow Sara Ahmed's (2004) term: an affect that clings to each scene, each loop, intensifying with every failed attempt at expression.



Figure 10. *Kaygı*.

In Ahmed's conceptualization, this sticky fear is not an incidental emotional residue but rather a politically productive force that accumulates in certain bodies, spaces, and atmospheres. In *Kaygı*, the audience is trapped in a loop of unheard memory, in addition to longing. The media noise that drowns out all attempts to make sense of things, constantly prevents their resolution. In this affective blockage, the promise of narrative revelation and political critique is also postponed, and this can be interpreted as a kind of *impasse* (Berlant, 2011) in which the repeating glitches become sonic and ideological clichés. This configuration of sonic impasse is not purely a narrative tool but an epistemological problem. The audience is denied both closure and cognitive orientation. *Kaygı* performs what Berlant calls the aesthetics of the impasse, where the affective experience is not of climax or catharsis but of repetition, and deferred meaning. In this sense, *Kaygı*'s sonic realism is also a critique of the liberal promise of revelation and healing. What is instead offered is endurance. The film crafts

a sonic structure of feeling that captures a collective mood of fatigue and epistemic erosion. The affective landscape is not one of surviving not overcoming.

This dynamic echoes Wendy Brown's (1995) concept of *haunted sovereignty*. Brown theorizes that late liberal states are haunted by their own democratic ideals: since they are unable to deliver them, they are compelled to stage their ruins again and again. In *Kaygı*, this spectral repetition is rendered sonically. The static, looped voices, and corrupted media artifacts are not simply broken, they are ghostly. They point to promises that were never fulfilled and to a political order that survives only as an echo of itself. What we hear in the background is not just ideological clutter, but the afterlife of democratic speech. In this way, *Kaygı* participates in a broader sonic imaginary of haunted liberalism. The sonic overload becomes a symptom of an authority that can no longer convince. The film's sonic realism thus functions as a spectral one, an auditory landscape haunted by the remains of both political promise and public memory.

Similar to the well scene in *Kurak Günler* in which the well is always devoid of water, the tape recordings and devices used by Hasret in *Kaygı* promise proof but they bring nothing but dissolve. In both cases, the truth, beneath the surface, is audible but seems either delayed or distorted and therefore meaningless. This common structure, the voices heard without confirmation, shows how these films construct sonic narratives that impose political paralysis through sonic means.

Sound also reinforces a gendered ideology of repression. While the institutional male voice is heard clearly, Hasret's speech is frequently muted or clouded with mechanical sound, interrupted by feedback, or only heard partially. Her attempts to speak, to remember and to accuse are undermined by the same tools she uses to try to uncover the truth. Her workplace becomes a hostile acoustic space because the media technologies that were meant to preserve memory actually become instruments of its erasure. This form of gendered sonic containment contrasts sharply with Yeşilçam's female vocality, which was sentimental but legible. Hasret's voice is neither. She is illegible by design.

As with *Kurak Günler*, the sound world of *Kaygı* does not offer escape or resolution either. It creates a chaotic auditory archive, a set of frequencies that refuse to translate into truth. It seems to be demanding a new listening practice: not listening to expect clarity, but listening to attend to the sounds of failure, repetition, and repression. This is where sonic capitalist realism becomes most acute. It is not just that ideology is reproduced sonically. It is that ideology is the noise, the glitch, the sonic fatigue itself.

This sonic pattern of news cycles, broken devices and droning frequencies reflects a media environment that silences dissent before it even begins to speak. Hasret's epistemic crisis is reinforced through technological sounds that mystify rather than illuminate trauma. Similar to Fisher's (2009) logic of capitalist realism, this sonic field forbids alternative futures by sweeping dissent into the background noise (Ahmed, 2004; Ergüç, 2022). *Kaygı* embodies an acoustic reality in which the truth is no longer silenced but transformed into indifference. Through this mechanical, cyclical and decaying material soundscape, the film constructs a sonic experience that enacts and critiques the conditions of cognitive, political and historical amnesia.

4.3.2 Affect: sonic disintegration. While *Kurak Günler* was built on sonic absence, *Kaygı* creates a world of affective sonic excess. Hasret is searching for information but never finds it. Her journey unfolds as a sustained and unsuccessful attempt to confront the unsymbolizable, what Lacan defines as *the Real*. This confrontation happens mostly in the sonic realm: sounds of fire flames, glitching broadcasts, distorted voice recordings, and the constant hum of malfunctioning devices. These sounds are symptomatic of something that never reveals itself. According to Ergüç (2022), *Kaygı* frames *the Real* as a sonic disruption that never stops returning. This failure in reaching it breaks both the coherence of the narrative and Hasret's subjectivity. Sound enacts trauma's impossibility, by interrupting every attempt to articulate memory through the Symbolic.

From this perspective, *Kaygı* constructs a sonic unconscious of itself, where technologies which were meant to preserve memory (tapes, recordings, news archives) instead become the very media of repression. Each sonic loop or glitch acts like

Lacan's *objet a*, a partial object that magnetizes desire but never satisfies it, trapping Hasret (and the audience) in a cycle of delayed recognition. This creates negative catharsis on the part of the audience, as the affective pressure accumulates toward repetition and disintegration. Hasret's voice is not silenced, instead it is clouded by mechanical noise, buried under the institutional broadcasts, or distorted into a glitch. As Ahmed (2004) suggests, affects can "stick" to objects, and in *Kaygı*, unease and dread cling onto every looped sound, every failed playback and intensify with each failed attempt to speak or remember. This accumulation of "sticky" affects without release constructs a listening regime in which resolution becomes structurally impossible. Uğuz (2023) complements this analysis by framing Özçelik's sonic and spatial tactics as a form of "dişil nazar," a feminine gaze that disorients both the visual and sonic regimes. The film's overlapping soundscapes, echoing interiors, and ambient oppression produce a feminist aurality that is disobedient, non-teleological, and politically saturated. If Yeşilçam gave women voices that were sentimental but legible, *Kaygı* gives us a female subject whose voice is illegible by design, existing in a sonic regime that mirrors the gendered structure of women's epistemological abandonment.

Following Jay Beck's (2008) work on sonic corporeality, Hasret's subjectivity also shifts bodily. As her voice is drowned out by static, it is her breath, the scrape of her cloths, and the noises of her body that she begins to speak with. In the absence of symbolic clarity in which language is untrustworthy, the body becomes the medium of resonance, where trauma echoes through sonic textures. These bodily sounds do not comfort or clarify, and in this layered acoustic environment, the political becomes physiological, and listening itself becomes a site of ideological violence.

The interrupted sounds coming from sound devices in the film, the repetitive and non-diegetic music accompanying almost every scene, the noisy gentrified city fragments, and the gradual disappearance of Hasret's own voice in this cacophony almost force the audience to participate in an oppressive listening regime. However, no matter how intensely one listens, this sonic chaos never resolves. Instead, the audience is left in a state of pessimism and anxiety that never reaches emotional clarity. Here, sound does not function as a carrier of emotional narratives or symbolic resolution.

As *Kaygı* fragments the narrative through sound, silence itself is forced to bear the burden of political and emotional failure. This is a symptom of the fact that silence can no longer offer refuge because it is already overflowing with unactualized affects. Therefore, it represents not serenity and peace, it represents failure and exhaustion. As *reflexive spaces of impotence* that Mark Fisher (2009) suggests to describe the passive withdrawal normalized under systemic failure, the silences of the film become spaces of repression. They are suffocating because there is nothing left to say, and because what is said is already distorted or forgotten. Thus, every silence signals the stagnation of historical memory and political activity, filling the cinematic space with the heavy residue of the unspeakable.

The scene where Hasret listens to an old tape in the hope of finding clues to the truth is an example of this. The scene begins with the promise of clarity with a legible voice coming from the tape. But what the voice speaks becomes increasingly distorted as Hasret keeps rewinding the tape to listen again, and her face reflects numbness. The effect of silence is materialized in the failure of the tape to reveal the truth. The slow-burning frustration of realizing the violence of the system and that it will not be solved permeates the sonic environment.

While the audience expects a resolution or a sonic rupture in the film with the promise of genre, narrative and previous cinematic codes, *Kaygı* avoids offering such catharsis. There are no musical cues that signal any kind of clarity; Hasret's voice is gradually drowned; affect is prevented from turning into action. What we are left with is a hum that refuses to stop, a breath that never normalizes, and an ever-repeating glitch. This is affect as ideological suspension, which demands a form of listening that does not liberate. It is not the fear of what might happen but the exhaustion of knowing that will not happen. In this way the film leaves both the characters and the audience sonically contained, affectively weakened and historically abandoned. In this way, *Kaygı* contributes to an understanding of how affective sounds in contemporary cinema in Turkey operate to entrap and to grind down the audience rather than offering resolution and relief. The film teaches us to listen for voice, but for its gradual

disintegration. It offers not an ethics of witnessing, but a soundscape of affective futility, a listening that hurts and repeats in circles.

Kaygı confronts the audience with the weight of political and historical decadence that refuses to be told. Nevertheless, this sonic strategy does not restore narrative stability; instead, it brings an atmosphere of exhaustion and latent culpability. This insistence on this strategy reveals the film's disbelief toward the audience's interpretive capacity. This distrust keeps the narration from allowing ambiguity; from the smallest sounds to each image, every available resource is mobilized to insist on meaning. Through this over-narration, a sonic density forecloses the possibility of everyday interpretation. Nothing is allowed to simply sound; each sonic element is amplified, symbolically charged, and emptied of ordinariness. This over-articulation of affect, in which sounds can no longer breathe, constructs a disorienting and, most importantly a didactic atmosphere. Every sonic element is already overly meaningful; ambiguity is represented but not allowed to stay ambiguous, every sound is foreclosed, and the audience is instructed rather than invited. While Uğuz (2023) interprets this as a feminist break from conventional cinematic grammar, the saturation of affect risks turning the film into its own ideological enclosure.

4.3.3 Spatiality: sonic politics of surveillance. *Kaygı*'s urban soundscape is an infrastructure of paranoia, which seems to be designed to fracture reality. The city is planned not as a coherent entity but as a moving set of sonic ambiguities: elevator noises, television parasites, footsteps in the corridors, disembodied calls and blinking multimedia. These is the acoustic profiling of alienation, where every space, however private, seems acoustically infiltrated, temporally broken and ideologically guarded.

Spatially, the film resists continuity and coherence. Instead of using sound to define a fixed diegetic space, the film relies on rupture and overlapping to produce disorientation. Hasret's universe is full of overlapping sound fields; the sounds of the street leak into her apartment, the sounds of the state fill her office, and the sounds from her past invade her dreams. Nowhere is free from the noise; the boundaries between inside and outside, between safety and danger, collapse.

Home traditionally represents a refuge in realist cinema, but here Hasret's apartment does not offer that. Her most intimate moments are sabotaged by faint echoes from neighbors, broken appliances, or indeterminate droning that suggests the outside is always pressing in. The walls do not isolate; they transmit. Here, the distinction between public and private is not just blurred; it is sonically dismantled. Every supposedly internal space carries the residue of an external ideology: the looped sound of broadcast trauma and erased memory and the noise of surveillance technologies.

This spatial condition is very gendered too. Hasret's vocality is always precarious and is frequently filtered, partial, or over-coded by environmental noise. When she speaks in her own apartment, the acoustics are echoic; her voice is absorbed by the room itself. When she is silent, though, the silence doesn't belong to her; it is enforced by the scene: a silence that signals submission to a sonic order that does not permit deviation. Hasret listens constantly to tapes, to media loops, and to her own interior echoes, not to confirm truth but to be acknowledged. But the ear that listens back, the institutional, bureaucratic, patriarchal ear, is always deaf to unsanctioned frequencies. Her listening is therefore unreciprocated, structurally trapped in an ethical *impasse*. When her voice diverges from the dominant narrative, it is not countered; it is muted, distorted, or simply not registered. In this sonic regime, the privilege to be heard is evidence of one's complicity.

This acoustic spatialization reveals that the city is no longer a democratic space of multiplicity or encounter. It is a space of sonic governance where sound regulates what counts as speech, presence, or dissent. The sound, particularly in interior spaces, is designed in a way that produces alienation. What remains is a form of listening that trains subjects to hear everything and recognize nothing. Rather, sound functions as a classed auditory norm that filters what counts as intelligible and legitimate sound. Hasret's sonic disobedience fails to register because it does not align with the dominant acoustic expectations, reinforcing what sound theorists such as Jennifer Stoeber and Brandon LaBelle have described as *ideological acoustic coding*, a form of acoustic profiling where dissident frequencies are rendered as unintelligible or threatening, and sonic subjectivity is shaped by dominant power structures.

Hasret's increasing dissociation, confusion, fatigue and inability to locate herself within the city do not result from her psychological state alone. She is also triggered spatially and sonically. It is as if the city has turned into an echo chamber of controlled noise. Stairwell sequences, liminal spaces between public and private, are particularly important in this sense. It is as if the city has turned into an echo chamber of controlled noise. Stairwell sequences, liminal spaces between public and private, are particularly important. They are typically treated as spaces of transition, but in *Kaygı* even these liminal spaces are not allowed to offer any relief. The spaces in the film do not lead characters into movement; they press them into stasis. The spatial audio regime also produces a condition of *negative catharsis*. Instead of being violently repressed, the subject is kept in a condition of catatonia, where spatial dissonance and sonic withholding internalize affective paralysis. The refusal of space to offer feedback or legibility turns into an atmosphere of unresolved tension and suspended articulation, sustained by the ideological saturation of the soundscape. This immobility and the refusal of sonic release also point to negative catharsis. The film blocks the possibility of emotional resolution not through loud interruption but through slow, accumulative muting. The soundscape becomes a mode of control, by making all expression structurally inaudible.

Through a dense sound architecture, *Kaygı* constructs an urbanity of alienation in which the self is constantly repressed within a spatial regime that blocks memory, opposition or healing. The film shows that listening is about where we are situated, who is deemed authorized to listen and what kind of spatiality listening makes possible. In *Kaygı*, spaces are so closed onto themselves that they do not produce echoes rather they absorb sound. This stands in contrast to Brandon LaBelle's (2010) concept of the *acoustic commons*, which imagines sound as a shared space for collective listening and collective action. *Kaygı*'s soundscapes, however, operate in a privatized, one-way and ideologically pre-coded manner. The film's spatial aesthetics exclude the possibility of an acoustic common, instead they stage an affective economy in which fear, fatigue and suspicion are unequally distributed across gender and political positions (Ahmed, 2004). Moreover, as Fredric Jameson (1991) noted in his analysis of late capitalist space, such environments produce a kind of cognitive

disorientation, a loss of the capacity to map. Hasret's spatial entrapment is thus temporal: it echoes Fisher's in implying that the future is no longer imaginable, the past inaccessible, and subjects are trapped in an ever-resonant present.

4.3.4 Ideological function: erasure and the sonic body. The ideological intention of *Kaygı* is already out there from the beginning in its warning on media manipulation and historical amnesia, but when the sonic dimension is also instrumentalized in transmitting this message with all of its influence, this very insistence reveals a certain distrust toward the audience's interpretive capacity, withdrawing even the possibility of emotional identification. There is a resentment embedded in *Kaygı*, a distrust toward conservative and "bigoted" Islamist figures but also a distrust toward the audience as well, who are seem to be positioned as incapable of independent recognition without excessive prompting. Claudia Gorbman's (1987) concept of the *inaudible soundtrack* is useful here, referring to film music that functions ideologically by remaining unnoticed. What is inaudible in *Kaygı* is the all-encompassing sound itself, which is so pervasive that it results in weariness instead of political mobilization.

Hasret's trauma is not personal or psychological; it is ideologically orchestrated. The state, the media, and society are sonically encoded as mechanisms of containment. The cacophony of television broadcasts, the constant hum of media loops, and the mechanical presence of analog technologies all work to drown out the female voices. Hasret's voice is often delayed, decayed, or looped, and when she finally begins to talk about her past, the system, both technologically and narratively, refuses to accommodate it.

Wendy Brown argues that contemporary forms of sovereignty are no longer based on confident claims of authority; instead, they are shaped by a ghostly attachment to a past time when sovereignty seemed complete and unquestionable, and by a permanent sense of loss. In this context, sovereignty operates not through a direct demonstration of power, but through a melancholic nostalgia for a past sense of control. In *Kaygı*, Hasret's inability to speak is a symptom of the repression of a ghost authority that operates through absence and refusal. Her forced silence reveals the state

no longer rules through overt repression, but through silence based on inaction. The film reproduces this affective structure on the auditory plane, immersing the audience in the same inaudibility and cognitive closure. In this respect, the silences in *Kaygı* are particularly telling; like all the sounds in the film, silence is charged with a historical violence. The scenes of hallucination or paranoia reflect a radical aesthetic of silencing, marking what has been destroyed. These silences function like erasures, the sonic equivalent of censored documents or written off titles.

The scene where Hasret recounts her dream to her boyfriend Mehmet is a powerful example of how sounds and visual techniques are used to reflect the collective refusal to listen and confront past traumas. When she shares her dream with Mehmet, her voice is clear at the beginning, and this allows the audience to connect with her vulnerability. However, as she goes on, a non-diegetic sound gradually rises and suffocates her voice. This auditory trick mirrors the systemic silencing of uncomfortable truths in Turkey's history. Her face begins to blur simultaneously. This audiovisual disappearance of Hasret is also a comment on her gendered invisibility to her close environment. She speaks, but the conditions of her voice are constantly interrupted by ideology. The monotonous electronic sounds in the background symbolize the forces that silence voices that attempt to dig into memory. This surrounds the audience in an atmosphere of tension, which also reflects Hasret's psychological disintegration and the cultural denial of traumatic events.

This moment can also be read through Jay Beck's (2008) theorization of bodily foley. As Hasret's voice dissolves, the sounds that emerge from her bodily movements fill the sonic space: the sound her mouth makes when opening and closing, the scrape of her clothes, and her breath shift the center of attention, from her narrative agency to her sonic vulnerability. It's like she's trying to speak through her body, which has now become a site of resonance that her trauma echoes. This is where the concept of acoustic profiling becomes significant. Hasret's voice is not just silenced; it is replaced by bodily sounds that are sonically marked as feminine, fragile, and unstable. This process maps onto what I define as gendered acoustic profiling: the inscription of sonic characteristics onto female characters in ways that render their voices less authoritative and more susceptible to erasure.

Furthermore, the soundscape operates as an affective medium that produces “sticky affects.” These are emotions that adhere to objects and bodies over time, making it difficult to cleanse the people and the environment of them. In *Kaygı*, fear, suspicion, and fatigue stick to every ambient hum and analog whirl. These sticky affects do more than mark Hasret’s environment as one of constant threat, they implicate the audience in a sonic atmosphere of paranoia. This stickiness ultimately transforms sound into a tool of ideological containment that paralyzes. The film’s overwhelming sound design constructs such a structure, in which memory, loss, and suppression coexist as ordinary affective conditions. Hasret’s detachment from her colleagues and loved ones, and her inability to communicate effectively, evoke not only personal trauma but also a broader cultural impasse. This is not simply the story of a woman being silenced it is an allegory for the exhaustion of political agency in an environment where nothing can be fully heard or acted upon.

Throughout the film, no one listens to Hasret. At her workplace, her coworkers and superiors dismiss her, interrupt her, or treat her concerns as insignificant. Those who are supposed to care for her, like Mehmet or her friends, express their concern through aggression, shouting at her instead of offering empathy or understanding. This constant shutting down of her voice illustrates a societal refusal to engage with discomfort or vulnerability and reinforces Hasret’s isolation and contributes to the insistent sonic pressure on the audience that didactically tries to teach them. This leads us to the epistemological isolation at the heart of the film. Hasret is not simply isolated in her apartment or her newsroom. She is structurally isolated from recognition. She speaks, but no one listens. Her trauma is not even rejected; it remains unheard.

Kaygı problematizes the conditions of audibility. Who gets to speak? Who gets heard? Who controls the volume, the frequency, and the channels of transmission? Hasret suffers from censorship but also negligence, suggesting that to speak without being heard is its own form of ideological violence. However, despite its very alert critique of media manipulation and authoritarianism, *Kaygı* falls into the margins of authority itself. Through the intense use of symbolism, suffocating sound

manipulation, and recreating the very conditions that silence Hasret and immersing the audience in them, the film becomes its own prison and own guardian.

4.3.5 Conclusion: witnessing the sonic absence. Through its sonic identity, *Kaygı* taps into the sonic unconscious of contemporary Turkey. It is not a cinema of speech that relies on the training based on previous dialogues in classic cinema. It relies on what has been silenced. It activates the audiences' sonic grammar just to update it with new cues. In the film, the ideology is hidden in silences, not the dialogues; it is filled with the weight of erasure, oppression, and delayed recognition. While classical cinema uses silence to evoke immanence or calm, *Kaygı* uses it to evoke loss. It is the sound of the real, of unheard resistance, of memory in motion. These are not holes in the soundtrack, but structures of dissonance designed to resonate with absence. The silence here is an affective residue, carrying the imprint of political erasure and suspended justice.

Hasret's descent into epistemological and emotional isolation is mapped by the progressive fragmentation of the sound field. At the beginning of the film, media noise is overwhelming, hyper present, cyclical, and destabilizing. But as her paranoia grows, this saturation turns into austerity, leaving behind a landscape in which the voice no longer communicates but floats, or holds back. What used to mean information now communicates only anxiety. What used to mean stagnation now suggests abandonment. This sonic minimalism corresponds to what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls *impasse aesthetics*, a condition where no action is possible, but affect lingers. Hasret's world becomes a slow zone of delay, where sound neither confirms nor resolves, but only accumulates weight. Rather than being a sign of emptiness, silence becomes a scene of ideological struggle, where affect cannot be discharged, and memory cannot be verified.

Wendy Brown's (2001) notion of *haunted sovereignty* also resonates here. The sovereign subject appears hollowed out, dispossessed of agency, and instead haunted by what was once possible. In *Kaygı*, Hasret navigates her trauma through ghostly traces of a public sphere that has collapsed. The possibility of empowerment is already blocked. The film therefore embodies a political mourning, where the desire for justice

just keeps on echoing in the void where nobody is there to listen. This layered absence, made of silence, glitch, and failed signal, constructs a soundscape of negative catharsis. It refuses release. It refuses transformation. But in doing so, it witnesses. In the absence of audible protest, the film produces a testimony through the very failure of speech. In this way, *Kaygı* makes audible the structure of feeling (Williams, 1977) of its time through the dissonant, the muffled, and the drowned sounds of the system.

4.4 Hayaletler (Okçay, 2020)

Hayaletler takes place in Istanbul during a single day affected by an electrical blackout. The story revolves around the lives of four characters but focuses on Didem, a teen dancer who lives in the slums and who is in search of creative freedom. As the blackout disrupts the characters' daily routines and collapses infrastructure, their paths cross in this dystopian city. This portrayal of Istanbul is different from classical narrative cohesion. Instead, it reminds us of what Cantaş (2023) identifies as the logic of minor cinema: a space of deterritorialized characters where sound and image do not guide but disorient the audience. In this film, sound, which is characterized by surveillance and gentrification, becomes a point of connection that unites these characters, but not through harmony, through dissonance and noise.

I look at *Hayaletler* through three sonic dynamics that help structure the ideological and affective landscape: how compressed sounds produce affective neoliberalism and emotional flattening, how class differences are spatialized through differentiated sonic intensities, and how a certain sonic uncanny haunts the city with the return of morphed urban sounds. I argue that *Hayaletler* weaves the multi-dimensional stories of characters from different class backgrounds together through the help of these sonic strategies.

4.4.1 Materiality: the fragmented city. In *Hayaletler*, the material conditions of urban life are encoded through sound, which does more than just accompany the image. The immobile hope and the unenthusiastic attempts at communication that dominate the movie are emphasized by the film's layered sound world, which is made up of compressed construction noise, sporadic sirens, and fragmented urban ambience.

These sounds imply ideological fatigue, social precarity, and infrastructure breakdown that translates into an overall suffocation.

The city is mapped along the broken communication between characters, the invisible borders between neighborhoods, and the cellphone visuals that cut through the plot at times, which create an overall fragmentation, and the film's sonic identity reflects this style as well. Amplified dominant noises (e.g., construction, sirens) next to barely audible marginalized echo Jonathan Sterne's (2012) idea that data compression is a sonic and socio-political operation that silences marginalized voices while amplifying dominant noises (such as sirens and construction). The film replicates the flattening of local identities in favor of sanitized urban progress by reducing auditory diversity, which is a reflection of the dynamics of neoliberal urban development. This process of data compression mirrors the dynamics of neoliberal urban development: the film replicates the flattening of local identities in favor of representing the crooked urban progress. The sound field becomes material in which uneven power relations are heard but felt simultaneously.

This dynamic is further highlighted when fragile dialogues in gentrified neighborhoods are interrupted by long silences. These silences carry the aural traces of displacement, violence, and the erasure of collective memory. The sound field contains echoes of imposed transformations and erased socio-historical legacies, leaving behind only sterile structures and ghostly traces of life. In contrast, the cacophony of sounds in peripheral areas recorded from a distanced perspective, a sonic chaos woven with sirens, howls, and distortions, defines the margins as both uncontrollable and ideologically pre-coded spaces.

The neoliberal subject is constructed by repeatedly confronting institutional decay, insecurity, and the burden of individual responsibility (Brown, 2015). In *Hayaletler*, this process takes place with the direct and significant contribution of sound. The film presents a city shaped by the logic of optimization, where only certain bodies are audible. The characters living in the city center, especially the artist figure, are accompanied by softer and more balanced soundscapes that make them narratively readable, reminiscent of the process that Althusser defines as the hailing of subjects

into intelligibility. In contrast, peripheral figures such as the Syrian migrant or main character Didem are accompanied by a fragmented and often incomplete, distorted, or incomplete sonic world, which implies the structurality of the refusal of their right to be audible; thus, the conditions for being a subject are denied. The difference in sound design between these two groups reveals that neoliberal urban regimes establish a spatialized ideology of subjectification through selective audibility.

More broadly, the sonic environment of *Hayaletler* reflects how different urban zones are differentially interpellated through sound. The peripheries are saturated with police sirens, helicopter blades, and distorted protest chants, which act as sonic cues of control and unrest. These are not just ambient noises but active ideological forces that hail residents into positions of suspicion, disposability, and permanent unrest. In contrast, central areas are enveloped in ambient hums, background music from cafés, and softened traffic tones, projecting a controlled, gentrified affective atmosphere that interpolates its inhabitants into stability and legibility. When characters move across these zones, their sonic legibility shifts. Their voices may become clearer or more muffled depending on their location, reflecting how space itself modulates interpellation. This reveals a spatial ideology in which urban zoning produces and regulates subject positions through differentiated sonic grammars.

In *Hayaletler* sound functions as a material force. It divides the city with its sonic borders and bears witness to the stresses of urban compression and demonstrates how the very structure of sound, what is heard, what is muted, and how it is blended, can bear the burden of exclusion.

4.4.2 Affect: neoliberal dread and compressed feelings. The affective landscape of the film emerges through a series of unrealized drives, such as repressed desires and interrupted urgency. The sonic world of the film, similar to previously analyzed productions and functions as a space of concentration full of crowded signals that offer no solution. Throughout the film, the audience is denied a stable emotional state. The sonic signals come without reward: the distant screams that the plot does not follow, the ringing of a bell connected to silence, the breath before a conflict that never happens. These moments create a persistent and sticky unease. *Hayaletler*

creates an environment in which emotions do not dissolve or dissipate but cling to the atmosphere and create layers of sticky affects that accumulate throughout the scenes.

This refusal of affective resolution can also be understood through the concept of negative catharsis, where emotional tension is held and circulated rather than released. Instead of offering closure or purification, the film amplifies an atmosphere of impasse, in which emotional release is endlessly postponed. In *Hayaletler*, the anticipation of movement, of being heard, of achieving connection, is persistently frustrated by sonic and infrastructural failures. The film sustains this affective impasse through a stuttering repetition of buildup without payoff.

The sound design of the film reflects a system in which affective variations are flattened, in accordance with Jonathan Sterne's (2012) theory on data compression as an ideology. Sterne argues that data compression is a technical and ideological process: it is a technological device that mimics and works according to the main motivation of neoliberal capitalism, namely optimization. By compressing the dynamic range, eliminating the "excesses," and giving priority to the most "efficient" type of information, compression naturalizes a world in which loss is normalized, inaudibility is tolerated, and emotional richness is sacrificed for the sake of easy circulation. In this logic, not every frequency, not every nuance and not every texture deserves to survive; only the most "useful" sonic elements are preserved. *Hayaletler* embodies this ideological structure in its sonic dimension. WhatsApp voice messages are muted, the intercom buzzes through conversations, and ambient noise replaces personal speech, constructing an affective environment where signals are already fragmented before they arrive. There's a constant flow of communication, but most of them end without mutual understanding. The city compresses affects into short, transmittable impulses, optimized to flow through broken infrastructures. Under this regime of optimized gentrification, anything feels disposable.

These affective compressions function as political acts. One could argue that the film sonically punishes inefficiency, fragility, and hesitation, the affective traits of the urban poor. Audibility here thus comes off as deserving to be heard, as in being ideologically worth the voice. This sonic overload of the city in the film also resonates

with what Sterne (2012) describes as the ideological function of compression, wherein emotional intelligibility is sacrificed for the sake of circulation and control. The sound design flattens variation and compresses affective range, just as neoliberal economies compress labor, temporality, and social energy. The audience hears the texture of the repetition of crises: sirens that lead nowhere, voices without owners, and intercoms that communicate nothing. This is sonic capitalist realism, not as style but as everyday noise.

The affective failure of infrastructure is also key. In one scene during the electric outage, layers of city noise, including barking dogs, ambulance sirens, children shouting, and humming generators, come together to create a cacophony that hints that the city is no longer able to carry affection because it is already filled with things that are not said but show themselves as signs. The effects of this cacophony are shown mostly on the character of Didem, whose desire to be a dancer and be recognized is consistently ignored by spatial and sonic interruptions. Her enthusiasm is shut down by failed music cues, sudden cuts or the intrusion of meaningless notifications. In a scene where she is rehearsing her choreography, the beats strike, the light flickers, as if the sounds refuse her presence. This city seems to have no room for continuity; the only remaining things are disturbed emotions and attempts.

Hayaletler also doesn't fulfill the classic identification expectations. By keeping the audience at a constant distance by not presenting guidance through music, the movie lingers on the promise forever. There are few auditory cues for emotional connection. Instead, the film insists on a form of listening where meaning seems to be hidden inside the sound blocks, distorted or erased. The characters call out, but the system, and often the sound mix, refuses to let them be heard. This affective refusal creates a disorientation in the audience's cognitive mapping by inheritance. Since audiences have been trained, through Yeşilçam and its melodramatic afterlives, they expect sonic cues of resolution, moral legibility, or redemptive emotion. *Hayaletler* plays against this grain. It activates these inherited expectations through pacing, gesture, and scenario but does not fulfill them. It suspends them and leaves them in a state of delayed recognition. The mapping fails because the sound refuses to trace it. Crucially, this affective obstacle does not work equally across characters. The

characters that live in the slums suffer the most fragmented sonic experiences. Their voices are often subsumed beneath environmental noise or technological failure, while institutional voices, recorded announcements, sirens, and directives cut through clearly. Affect, in this sense, is classed. The film conditions us to feel unevenly, to recognize how certain bodies are permitted to express distress through singing, protesting or dancing while others are reduced to background tension.

This uneven distribution of affective legibility can be understood as a classed affective impasse. The very structure of feeling that *Hayaletler* conjures, frustration without object, motion without trajectory, is experienced differently depending on the character's positionality within urban capitalism. Some inhabit the noise as crisis; others as ambiance.

The sonic condition of the movie overall can be explained as affective neoliberalism, in which emotional legibility is tied to institutional access, and disempowerment is encoded in the sonic clues. As in *Kaygı*, there is no resolution, only a circulation of sonic affect through broken devices and glitching structures. But where *Kaygı* locates this holding in trauma and memory, *Hayaletler* situates it in a neoliberal regime of temporality in which crisis is heard over and over, emotion is flattened by hopelessness, and hence sounds become tools of endless transmissions of unfinished meanings. *Hayaletler* doesn't offer the audience catharsis or coherence either, and it doesn't present the characters a chance to change their lives. Both the audience and the characters are placed in a position of delay by the feelings of never arriving, never fully hearing, never fully mapping, and never fully feeling. Thus, *Hayaletler* is a film that haunts through affect, using sound to create an atmosphere where nothing settles and everything disintegrates.

4.4.3 Spatiality: cartographies of sonic inequality. In *Hayaletler*, the city is under a dense and irregular sound layer. The film constructs Istanbul as a fragmented sonic landscape in which counter sounds, spatial disorientation and irregular audibility are the signifiers of the division between neighborhoods. Instead of offering a coherent and navigable soundscape, the film pictures a fragmented and stratified urban space.

Drawing on Barry Truax's (2001) distinction between hi-fi and lo-fi soundscapes, the film shows how sonic clarity is an unevenly distributed privilege in the city. In traditional soundscape theory, hi-fi environments are those in which sounds can be heard clearly, which are usually associated with wealthy areas, while lo-fi environments are characterized by layers of noise that make it difficult to distinguish individual sounds.

In *Hayaletler*, clean and audible high-fidelity sound spaces are almost nonexistent except for hotel rooms. In contrast, the city's outskirts and slums are overwhelmed by lo-fi density, where the sounds of gentrification and infrastructural failures create a cacophonous sound field. In wealthy interiors, sounds are often isolated and echoes are clean. These sonic characteristics signify stability, legibility, and institutional recognition (Chion, 1994; James, 2019). The characters who inhabit these spaces are heard at full frequency, implying their recognition by the system (Stoever, 2016). On the other hand, working-class and other marginalized characters live in spaces full of overlapping speeches, distorted audio, and noise (Thompson, 2002), which are represented as this neighborhood's sonic identity. The characters' voices are often fragmented, cut by interference or drowned out by noise, which makes them less audible or less readable in dominant listening regimes. In these spaces, the likelihood of being heard is significantly low, and this is reflective of the wider socio-political inequalities that underlie cinematic soundscapes.



Figure 11. *Hayaletler*.

This sound difference operates as a form of acoustic profiling in which clarity, audibility and access to spatial orientation are ideologically structured. Within Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *symbolic violence*, the uneven distribution of sound intelligibility reproduces structural exclusion: some sounds can be heard clearly and fully, while others are erased, fragmented or drowned out by urban noise. The sound universe of *Ghosts* is not limited to the representation of space alone; it also offers a political mapping of what is audible, understandable and recognizable in the neoliberal city.

The fragmented sonic landscape depicted in *Hayaletler* should also be read in the context of the effects of neoliberal urban transformation on the scale of Istanbul. Since the early 2000s and especially after the 2010s, Istanbul has been radically reshaped through market-oriented governance forms, real estate speculation and security-based spatial regimes. This transformation has led to the dissolution of shared urban infrastructures and the reorganization of social life around the axis of circulation, consumption and privatized control, as defined by Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of the *abstract space of capital*. This restructuring has left deep traces on the visual, physical and the sonic level. The erosion of collective infrastructures such as affordable housing, community centers and public transport has undermined the coherence of urban sound, leaving in its place an acoustic landscape woven with zones of disorientation, overstimulation or isolation.

In this context, intelligible sound becomes a privileged and privatized resource rather than a universal right. High-fidelity zones, usually reserved for commercial or elite interiors, offer controlled acoustic environments that provide filtered sound access and are controlled by principles of order and intelligibility. These spaces are auditorily isolated and characterized by spatial calm, conceptual clarity, and the functionality of sounds. In contrast, marginal neighborhoods are besieged by low-quality sound intensity, constant mechanical hum, construction and traffic noise, and overlapping conversations. This produces acoustic blur, disorientation, and auditory invisibility. As Barry Truax (2001) emphasizes, such dense and disordered soundscapes silence certain forms of being by making individual sound distinction

impossible. Similarly, Jonathan Sterne (2003) argues that audibility in neoliberal auditory culture is structured according to principles of utility, manageability, and emotional manageability.

This arrangement results in what can be termed auditory dispossession. While some voices are acoustically centered and heard at full frequency, others are consistently distorted, cut, or buried within background noise. This inequality is ideologically encoded, reinforcing what Bourdieu (1984) calls symbolic violence, the internalization of structural hierarchies as natural or deserved. In *Hayaletler*, this violence operates through silencing, saturation, interference, and spatial fragmentation. These techniques reflect how neoliberal urbanism governs by organizing space visually and by conditioning who and what can be heard.

The film, then, performs the disintegration of collective sonic space as an affective outcome of neoliberal governance. The collapse of mutual audibility and shared sonic legibility reveals a deeper erosion of social solidarity. What the audience hear is an intentional political arrangement of what is to be heard. The result is a city in which voices are scattered across disconnected acoustic zones. In this way, *Hayaletler* sonically maps the consequences of neoliberalism, where being heard is not shared right, it has become a stratified privilege.

It is important to note that the film does not mingle directly with these topics. The transitions between spaces are themselves charged with sonic differences. When a character in the environment enters a more regular space, their voice does not immediately become clear. On the contrary, it appears to be distorted in tone and poorly recognized. This creates a kind of sonic alienation: a mismatch between body and environment, between sound and spatial code. Even physical access to these spaces does not guarantee auditory recognition and presents audibility as an ontological condition, which complicates the myth of public participation.

This mismatch between spatial movement and sonic recognition suggests an underlying affective economy of what this study calls sonic resentment. Even when characters traverse different social spaces or gain physical access to sites of relative

privilege, their voices often remain muffled, distorted, or aurally displaced. The sonic field seems to register their presence only partially or with delay, as though the soundscape itself carries the memory of prior exclusions. This is not just a technical artifact or aesthetic choice but a political symptom: the sound design encodes a history of marginalization, whereby the voice of the socially dispossessed is structurally misrecognized, even in spaces that appear to offer mobility or inclusion. This misalignment between physical access and sonic audibility articulates a deeper form of resentment. It is not expressed through overt emotional expression but is embedded in the acoustic infrastructure of the film. Drawing on Berlant's (2011) concept of "impasse" as a prolonged affective condition where movement fails to produce transformation, the film's sonic environment captures a similar form of stasis. The characters move, but they are not heard. This stagnation in sonic recognition enacts a form of affective entrapment that this study conceptualizes as sonic resentment: a residual and reactivated sense of injury inscribed into the very conditions of speech and audibility.

Watching *Hayaletler*, one must navigate a network of differentiated acoustic access, where clarity, silence, and intelligibility are both narrative and ideological tools. This corresponds to what this study calls cognitive mapping by inheritance: the audience brings their expectations shaped by previous forms of cinema, expecting a solid readability, but is confronted with a world in which recognition is no longer guaranteed, neither for the characters nor for the audience.

This configuration of sound defines social class not through clear markers such as dialect or musical genre, but through patterns of audibility, interruption, and acoustic access. Some characters can express themselves in environments where their voices are heard clearly and fully (take the LGBTİ band Korospular's singing scene in which a group of people sing together loudly in a safe space, for instance); others must navigate spaces where speech is filtered, overlapped, or acoustically compromised. These inequalities reflect spatial inequality as well as constitute it. Social class and spatial discrimination are expressed through the degree of sonic legibility permitted: everybody's voice is clear, and everybody's voice is structurally weakened. In *Hayaletler*, spatial inequality also depends on the distribution of sonic ability. The

acoustic space of the city does not encourage collective resonance; it disperses and fragments it, resulting in a space of disordered and unstable disconnections.

In *Hayaletler*, the distribution of audibility is spatially fragmented and ideologically foreclosed: the sonic map offers no exit route, only recursive returns to noise, distortion, and lost signals. This reflects a sonic capitalist realism, where even sound's emancipatory potential is absorbed into a system of ambient disorientation and controlled misrecognition.

4.4.4 Ideological function: sonic hierarchy. In *Hayaletler*, sonic clarity implies class. Access to audibility implies a higher social class, while acoustic fragmentation symbolizes exclusion and precarity. Two scenes illustrate this dynamic. In the first, Didem attempts to call the municipality on the phone about the power outage. Her call goes through, but it cannot pass beyond the waiting list with automated musical loops. The call is technically established, but communication is impossible. This breakdown demonstrates the impossibility of dialogue in the context of collapsing neoliberal infrastructures: the state is present as a signal, but not as a listening entity. In another scene, we see a young migrant speaking in Arabic, but the scene is not subtitled or dubbed. His speech is left unintelligible by intention, which makes his presence irrelevant. Here he speaks in a system that is not interested in understanding him. In both cases, the voice is not rejected; it is structurally ignored, blocked, or erased in an uninterested environment. This kind of acoustic erasure, where voices are never meaningfully heard, can be described as a politics of noise: an ideological condition in which communication fails because it is overwhelmed.

In *Hayaletler*, meaning is lost in sonic chaos: sirens, helicopters, and overlapping announcements that accumulate ad nauseam. While Sancar (2023) does not focus on sound directly, his reading of the film highlights how its depiction of urban life under neoliberalism is structured by interruption, disorder, and failed connectivity. These structural breakdowns, technological, institutional, and affective, form the atmospheric basis for the film's ideological critique, and can be heard as well as seen. These breakdowns are not random but emerge from broader neoliberal urban transformations that prioritize privatized infrastructures, increase surveillance, and

fragment public space (Yılmaz, 2021; Özyürek, 2006). In *Hayaletler*, these shifts are rendered audible: privatized zones such as luxury interiors are characterized by sonic clarity and isolation, while public or marginalized zones collapse into sonic excess and communicative failure.

Extending Claudia Gorbman's (1987) *inaudible ideology theory* to the cinematic use of sounds helps to understand this dynamic. The ideological content of *Hayaletler* is conveyed through the sound's ability to include and exclude people. The gentrified spaces are presented with clear sounds, often expressed in isolation or in control. The peripheral characters, on the other hand, live in dense and irregular soundscapes filled with broken machine errors, construction, and other noises. The obvious spatial and political codes of oppression express the sound capitalist realist condition in which even sonic forms of dissent are not allowed or recognized as imaginable. Sound is always in circulation, but its meaning is always suspended. Distortions and cuts are indispensable parts of the auditory landscape as ordinary features of communication.

The overall sonic atmosphere of *Hayaletler* also reminds of the uncanny. As Freud (1919) describes, the uncanny implies the return of the familiar in an altered and alien form. In the film, this structure is shifted to the sonic register: once familiar, the city is now unrecognizable. Because of the gentrification and the visual clutter it left behind, but also because of the absence of expected auditory cues. Familiar sounds such as traffic, announcements, and street chatter are replaced by broken radios, directionless sirens, and undifferentiated drones of helicopters. These are not mere markers of material collapse but symptoms of political dislocation too.

The sonic uncanny is particularly hearable in the peripheral areas of Istanbul. These spaces are stained by excessive reverberation, distorted amplification and a messed-up sound source. Their sound instability results from their position in the neoliberal urban order. These are spaces where listening fails because of the refusal to lend an ear in order to render the overcrowded sonic populations intelligible. The peripheries of the city are noisier, but most importantly, they are structurally incoherent, audibly coded as excessive, and politically illegible.

Hayaletler's overall narrative aesthetic, characterized by emotional, spatial, and sonic fragmentation, also resonates with the affective codes increasingly valued in European festival and streaming economies. Within these circuits, as Shohat and Stam (1994) point out, representations of the "other" are often consumed not for their critical force, but as spectacles reaffirming Eurocentric fantasies of stability and progress. Huggan (2001) and Elsaesser (2005) argue that representations of political and infrastructural decadence in peripheral contexts like Turkey tend to be consumed as commodified affective products in Western contexts, which reassure their own presumed modernity through these representations. As Berlant (2011) suggests, these audiences structure themselves around attachments to fantasies of resilience and superiority, even in the middle of real-life, visible crises. In this way, the collapse of cognitive mapping that *Hayaletler* creates in its local audience, a collapse of emotional, spatial, and political coordinates, is simultaneously received by global audiences as familiar aesthetic grammar of the "failed other," offering recognition not through solidarity but through reaffirmed distance.

While the film critiques neoliberal collapse, the way it represents it still remains inside the frameworks it seeks to expose. For instance, *Hayaletler*'s treatment of migrant figures risks reproducing a structure of sonic othering. Migrant women are entirely absent from the soundscape and narrative, and male migrants are only given minimal voices in their languages that are treated as not worthy of translation. Their sonic status, either as muteness or ambient threat, reinforces dominant secular-liberal imaginaries in which non-conforming bodies and voices are present but not listened to.

The film portrays the collapse of urban infrastructure, but it also risks aestheticizing the poor and marginal. Peripheral spaces are profiled by an atmospheric unease. The strangeness, when applied exclusively to spaces already marked as socially peripheral, reinforces the anxieties of urban liberalism, this time not by showing the periphery as a political threat, but by making it sound unstable and emotionally inaccessible. As a result, the film's sound world falls into ambivalence. It reveals structural inequalities and the dissolution of communication links, but its representation excludes those who are already marginalized the most. This exclusion resonates with a sonic form of capitalist realism, in which even aesthetic attempts to

critique systemic inequalities remain bound by the very sonic hierarchies they seek to expose (Fisher, 2009). *Hayaletler* illustrates the impossibility of radical sonic rupture within the neoliberal soundscape, where disconnection becomes not resistance but normalization the formal rejection of narrative resolution mixes with real-world exclusions, and the aesthetics of disconnection risk confirming the very exclusions it seeks to reveal.

4.4.5 Conclusion: listening to ruins. *Hayaletler* constructs Istanbul not simply as a backdrop for urban decay, but as a sonic landscape marked by fragmentation, excess, and failure. Its compressed auditory layers, broken loops of communication, and irregular noise patterns form an environment in which meaning becomes untransmittable, recognition becomes structurally impossible, and listening itself turns into an anxious labor. The sonic strategies that signal dysfunction also risk aestheticizing the very marginalities they attempt to critique. By continually drowning marginalized voices in interference, or presenting their speech in unreadable frequencies and untranslated languages, the film often reproduces the same dynamics of erasure that constitute the urban experience it seeks to represent.

In this context, the sonic uncanny emerges as both a symptom and a technique. The return of the familiar in altered, disfigured auditory forms unsettles the audience's orientation, undermines sonic legibility, and refuses the comfort of narrative closure. Yet this same estrangement can also operate as a distancing device. The dissonance, though politically suggestive, at times becomes a mode of abstraction. Sonic instability risks becoming a stylistic gesture, one that foregrounds collapse without fully confronting its uneven material consequences. The film's refusal of coherence may resist dominant auditory norms, but it also risks rendering dissent illegible, an aesthetic that estranges through sonic opacity and disconnection.

In this sonic terrain, listening becomes an act of political discernment. To listen to *Hayaletler* is to be confronted with what is structurally filtered out, what disappears into ambient layers, or what fails to resonate within the auditory field. It calls for what this thesis terms symptomatic listening: a mode of attention attuned to what glitches, what disappears, and what resists incorporation into narrative clarity. Under conditions

of sonic capitalist realism, as theorized here, disintegration is not an exception but a dominant mode of mediation. Auditory malfunction no longer signals the failure of the system; it is the system's operative logic. The circulation of voices without legibility, of signals without reception, indexes a broader ideological condition in which representation no longer ensures recognition, and where communication is saturated with affective impasses.

Despite this gloomy auditory landscape, *Hayaletler* does not suspend the possibility of critical thinking. On the contrary, by bringing the deterioration of the recognizability of the voice to the stage, it directs the audience to question how access to clarity, echo and audibility is produced within an ideological framework. The film clearly demonstrates that not being heard is not an individual deficiency but rather the result of a structural and systematic organization. It depicts an acoustic regime in which intelligibility is attributed to certain spaces and bodies, while others are blurred in auditory blur, background noise and confusion. This uneven distribution is directly related to neoliberal restructurings (Sterne, 2012; Thompson, 2002). Thus, the film transforms listening from a passive form of reception into a field of ideological intervention. The audience is invited to hear under what conditions discourse is made possible or impossible.

Despite this climate of sound fatigue, a residual field of activity related to hearing persists. By staging moments of rupture, interruption and distortion, the film may open up questions about whose voice becomes audible, in what way and under what limits. Listening can be interpreted not only as a practice aimed at capturing meaning, but also as a way of sorting out noise, following the trace in silence and confronting the acoustic hierarchies established between sound and residue, meaning and noise, center and periphery. In this context, listening to ruins operates as a critical method that evaluates sound forms woven with absence, decay and acoustic deviations as politically meaningful symptoms. The sound universe in the film maps a city where repressed social contradictions are not resolved, but only made audible through cracks and breaks. In such a world, listening requires following those that are never made audible, sounds that are fragmented and deprived of their integrity, in other words, listening to acoustically structured social inequalities.

4.5 Sibel (Zencirci & Giovanetti, 2018)

Directed by Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti, *Sibel* (2018) tells the story of a mute young woman who communicates using the traditional whistling language of her hometown³⁴. Living in a village called Kuşköy (Bird Village), in the city of Giresun, in the Black Sea region, she is frowned upon and constantly watched by her community because of her symbolic difference, hence she often hides and works in the woods, where she meets a man on the run. As the two gradually get to know each other, the film explores themes of communication, marginalization and female agency. At first glance, *Sibel* appears to resist the oppressive gender norms of her village, but her resistance is ultimately framed as individual, empowering and exceptional, which I argue makes her a perfect representation of the neoliberal subject through the instrumentalization of gender: by adapting Sibel's marginalization into an aestheticized narrative of personal empowerment, the film ultimately reaffirms the very structures it seeks to question.

4.5.1 Materiality: the sonic texture of gender. The materiality of the sound world of the film is defined by its minimalist texture. Instead of immersing the audience in layered music or ambient intensity, the film relies on a sonic world based on the limited sounds of the forest. This sonic reduction too works to encode the ideological conditions of survival under patriarchal and neoliberal individualism.

Sibel's whistle is at the heart of this material minimalism as her main means of communication. Technically, the whistle is higher in pitch than the quieter space of the film. Its volume, timbre and repetition separate it from the other sounds of the village and the forest and foreground it within the acoustic palette. When it is foregrounded and underlined that way, the whistle becomes a symbol of Sibel's uniqueness, it becomes a tool of empathy.

³⁴ The whistled language (kuş dili) used in the Black Sea region was recognized by UNESCO in 2017 as an item of Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, in the film, its symbolic function is detached from communal identity and reframed as an isolated, individualized mode of expression (Çelik, 2022).

The film emphasizes Sibel's unique quality by the use of diegetic silence and bodily proximity. A large part of the film's sound field consists of Sibel's footsteps, her breath, the rustle of her clothes, and the sound of water ponds. These details sound very close to the body. Sibel's subjectivity is constructed by these material sounds of her survival. Her fast breathing after a chase, her whistle echoing in the forest, or the friction of her movements inside trees become the main vectors of affect. These textures are the sonic signs of constant effort at surviving, a material form that Berlant (2011) might call *slow death*, the physical price of persisting in unchanging structural conditions.

Sibel's whistle, in this context, poses a challenge to the established norms regarding the female voice in cinema. Traditionally, female voices in cinema are coded as emotional, melodic and clear; this functions so that the audience can easily recognize the voice and emotionally locate it (Doane, 1980). However, Sibel's whistle is positioned against these codes: it is sharp, emotionally ambiguous and does not produce a fixed meaning. As Çelik (2022) points out, this ambiguity reinforces the character's 'deviation' status, because the issue is not that Sibel does not have a voice, but that her voice cannot be recognized by normative conventions of feminine audibility. Sibel's vocal presence consciously rejects the symbolic value attributed to the melodic and emotionally intense female voice, that is, vocal capital. The whistle thus becomes a form of resistance against compression on both technical and emotional levels; It disrupts the reduction of voice to gendered aesthetic codes and the normative order that operates on readability and recognizability.

While Hasret's voice in *Kaygı* is suppressed by corporate media noise and political amnesia, Sibel's voice is illegible. Hasret's silence emerges as a result of suppression; the space saturated with propagandistic sounds makes it impossible for her to speak. In contrast, Sibel communicates with an alternative vocal regime that society does not recognize and refuses to hear. Her silence is a silence produced by exclusion. This opposition makes possible a powerful dialectic regarding the representation of the female voice: Hasret becomes inaudible due to the oversaturation of the soundscape; Sibel, on the other hand, remains audible yet incomprehensible because her voice does not conform to the dominant auditory codes. These two figures

point to different ideological strategies in the suppression of the female voice: Hasret's voice is surrounded by paranoia, erasure, and digital collapse; Sibel's is aligned with nature, animality, and non-normative forms of communication. While Hasret's acoustic universe collapses with digital echoes, media noise and traumatic repetitions, Sibel's sound space is interrupted by sharp and emotionally slippery outbursts that suddenly emerge from natural silences. Hasret bears witness to the loss of her voice; Sibel bears witness to the deviation of her voice.

In keeping with this emotional minimalism, the film's ambient sounds are simple and not very varied. The forest is generically alive with the sounds of birds, insects and wind; the village is silent. The open wilderness allows Sibel's whistles to echo across the spaces; the village, on the other hand, functions as a space of repression, absorbing individual voices and thus freedoms. This reflects the ideological limits of space and gender: freedom only exists in untamed territories, while social spaces are sonically domesticated. In scenes where Sibel's whistle is heard only as a sound without her physical presence, such as when she watches others from a distance, this sound reinforces her position as both an observer and an outsider. What emerges is a sound structure in which material existence is reduced to isolation. Despite this, within this isolation, the whistle continues its performance, which can be defined as a lateral auditory activity. It moves horizontally in the sound space of the film, creating a relational form of power that rejects demands for legitimacy. In this framework, Sibel's whistle is both a survival strategy and a political expression of existence beyond the limits of audibility.

4.5.2 Affect: affective isolation. The film's heroine is Sibel, and her subjectivity is built through a soundscape of emotional isolation. Her whistled language is both not a means of communication and also a sonic symbol and tool of her resistance. However, this resistance is not directed towards structural transformation. It is rather coded as personal, internalized and autonomous. Her defiance is affective, not collective; it is expressed by sound but not supported by political alliance.

The overall sonic identity of the film reflects and reinforces this isolation. The village is full of murmurs, whispers, and nonverbal cues that point to a tightly

monitored and emotionally oppressive social order. Sibel's whistling, on the other hand, contrasts this unintelligible murmur with high-frequency clarity. This way, technically, the film foregrounds her voice by careful microphoning and getting rid of frequencies of ambient sound that might interrupt her voice when she whistles. At a few key moments, such as when she whistles in the forest or on the village hills, her voice is the only sonic presence on screen that can be fully heard and understood. This sonic separation reinforces the emotional architecture of neoliberal exceptionalism: Sibel's voice, though not conventional, is foregrounded by the narration, as if it's the only form of empowerment. Although she seems to be a part of the forest and nature, her voice always is at the top of this sonic variety, not in a harmonic collectivity within nature. She is heard clearly not because she speaks for others, but because her phrasing is presented as unique, emotionally intense, and symbolically important.



Figure 12. Sibel.

This foregrounding is especially evident in the scene where Sibel encounters a group of women and begins to argue with them. As the women talk over her in a crowded cloud of words, Sibel interrupts with her whistle that suddenly changes the sound mix. As the women's low murmurs fade, Sibel's whistle comes to the fore. This scene is important because it labels the village women as complicit in patriarchy, so this conversation does not bring solidarity or rupture. On the contrary, the whistle

serves as an aesthetic punctuation that emphasizes Sibel's extraordinary character without disrupting the dynamics of the group. The women hear but do not respond; they continue to exclude her because they are the system. In this context, Sibel's resistance becomes a highly emotional and affectively charged demonstration of resilience that appeals to the liberal sensibilities of its target audience. It is presented as powerful because she is different, not because her battle catalyzes collective change. Her whistle language is a symbol of her difference, but, though powerful, it is also the reason she is isolated, and this separation is allegorical. Sibel's life is presented as heroic, but the film refuses to place it in a common history of gender struggles.

The film's aesthetic choices also reinforce this narrative of liberal heroism. The soundtrack avoids using traditional music during emotional moments and focuses on natural sounds such as breath, wind, and whistles. This minimalist sonic world amplifies the affective stickiness of Sibel's empowerment and at the same time empties it of political specificity. The audience is invited to identify with her but without worrying about the conditions that lead to her isolation. Her resistance becomes a promise of liberation not because it leads to change, but because it portrays her as an emotionally fulfilled and empowered person despite the structural conditions she has undergone.

Another striking example of this affective atmosphere is the forest scenes where the fugitive man is hiding. In these scenes, the ambient sound thickens with birds, wind and leaves, but Sibel's whistling still dominates the mix. This sonic focus associates her with the romantic figure of the spiritually free individual who communicates through intuition, nature, and individual talent. The political consequences of her silence, exclusion, rejection, and struggle are now replaced by an aesthetic of natural purity and sonic expressive authenticity. The forest does not resonate with solidarity; on the contrary, she seems to control it as her personalized and specialized sonic universe.

Thus, the affective power of Sibel's sound lies not in what it changes, but in how it is staged: as a stylized performance of resilience, without any collective resonance. The affect loops back to the spectator, who is positioned not as a participant in her

struggle but as a consumer of her audibility. In this way, Sibel encodes neoliberal subjectivity through affective sound design as well. The whistle becomes not a call to action, but a brand. The real people that it communicates is the external audience already conditioned to recognize isolation as virtue, endurance as authenticity, and individual struggle as sufficient. This affective design also aligns with what this thesis defines as negative catharsis: an emotional build-up that offers no release or transformation but reinforces impasse. Sibel's whistle dramatizes her isolation with sonic clarity, but this clarity doesn't result in rupture. Instead, the emotion is absorbed by the form and returned to the spectator as aestheticized intensity. The film does not ask the audience to engage politically, only to feel empathetically. This is crucial for understanding how Sibel's affect becomes depoliticized.

Sibel's mode of sonic resistance can also be understood as a form of *lateral sonic agency*, a term that combines Berlant's (2011) notion of *lateral agency* with Brandon LaBelle's (2018) theory of *sonic agency*. While Berlant identifies lateral agency as affective survival within impasse, LaBelle foregrounds how sonic practices can generate spaces of refusal, interruption, and fragile subjecthood. Sibel's whistled language embodies this contradiction: it is an act of sonic individuation that gestures toward resistance but is ultimately enclosed within an aesthetic of exceptionalism. Rather than destabilizing the symbolic order, her voice resonates within its margins, recognized, even celebrated, but never responded to.

4.5.3 Spatiality: acoustic profiling of enclosure. The spatial organization of the film is closely tied to its sonic structure. Acoustic boundaries that reinforce gendered hierarchies and social exclusion also produce space. The village is not just a surveillance site; in the distribution of audibility, an ideologically scripted sonic environment reflects the distribution of power.

In the film, the sonic identity of the village is constituted by the sounds of labor and ambient silence in nature and in the home. However, this silence is not peaceful because it reflects social enclosure. Conversations take place in whispers; emotions are suppressed; dissent is not voiced. This is a classic example of what Barry Truax (2001) describes as a lo-fi soundscape, where the intensity of environmental noise

masks individual signals, reinforces collective cohesion and reduces acoustic visibility. In *Sibel*, lo-fi functions ideologically, coding feminine and social spaces as spaces of inaudibility and surveillance.

Sibel's whistling language, which cuts through the crowds of voices, stands out in this silence. It resists the muted sound profile of the village and extends into the forest and beyond. However, this reaching out is also a kind of sonic exile. The whistle's clarity, brightness, pitch and lack of prominence in the sound design mark it as the other. Moreover, in order to be heard, it must be separated from the acoustic environment of the village. His voice can only be heard through displacement. As Çelik (2022) notes, Sibel's use of the bird language is technically recognized regionally. But for the sake of the plot, this recognition is portrayed as disinterest. Instead, her language is represented as a mark of sonic isolation.

This is especially observable in the scenes where Sibel moves back and forth between rooms in her house. The kitchen, the corridors and the bedroom turn into sonic dead ends that don't even echo. Sibel's whistle seems almost useless in these spaces. The acoustic architecture of the village center (read civilization) rejects her frequency. In contrast, in the forest, her voice resonates and becomes alive; here her whistle is heard clearly, and the forest responds, but this response should not be read as empowerment. Rather than offering a political refuge, the forest only works as aesthetic harmony. Sibel's voice, which sounds different from everyone else's, is lost by being absorbed into a myth of difference. In the forest scenes, Sibel is either always alone or shown in struggle. The forest makes her acoustically legible within the fantasy of rural isolation and feminine brutality, which in fact confirms her marginality.

The film identifies Sibel with nature, and her ability to survive and communicate in the forest is portrayed as almost animalistic. The fact that Sibel lives in such a transgressive space far from the human domain makes her uncanny and frames her as an ambiguous figure within the symbolic order of the village. Sibel can only be recognized by them when she adapts to the voice codes of civilization, that is, the villagers, and this recognition, paradoxically, heralds the loss of what makes her special and does not promise empowerment. On the contrary, it would place her in

another gendered position of vulnerability, that of other women who already bear the burden of patriarchy. In *Sibel*, the promise of individual recognition ultimately masks the persistence of systemic discrimination.

The acoustic profile of the spaces in the film is constructed to encode presuppositions about who belongs where, who can speak and who can be heard. *Sibel*'s voice wanders around the village and can be heard in the hillsides, ruins and forests outside the village boundary. While the whistling language that makes *Sibel* different from everyone else may be seen as a form of personal empowerment, I argue that this framing in this film risks romanticizing isolation as liberation. Instead of proposing a real community or structural transformation, the film imagines female agency on the margins, suggesting that voice and difference can only exist outside the social order, not within or against it. The scenes through the ending reinforce this affective geography. When *Sibel* returns to the village after the confrontation with the people, she is still ignored. The sonic profile of the village is indifference. May be this is how the village is designed. The film does not offer narrative transformation; it offers stasis and frames it through acoustic isolation.

While *Sibel*'s whistle is aurally clear, its spatial placement within the village soundscape marks it as peripheral. Her voice is not drowned out by noise but rather positioned outside zones of mutual recognition. Even when audible, it fails to belong. The acoustic environment allows her to be heard only in marginal or transitional spaces, hillsides, ruins, and forests, not in central or communal spaces. This spatial dislocation shows that audibility is not enough; for a voice to matter, it must be intelligible within the dominant symbolic order. In *Sibel*'s case, space grants her sound passage but withholds resonance.

The film emphasizes this logic through sound design choices that divide space by gender. Male voices, especially those of her father and the village elders, are deep and loud. They echo through hallways and open squares. But women's voices are always in the background, whispered, or ambient. *Sibel*'s whistle is the only female voice that can travel across this distance, but then the whistles are not even seen as human, let alone as a language. In this way, her voice cannot break the symbolic barrier

between private female space and public male space as well; it can only establish a third one: an affective periphery.

In this way, *Sibel* maps its geography not through movement alone, but through patterns of audibility and inaudibility, inclusion and exclusion, echo and silence. Space is built from gendered and ideological sound codes that place each subject in a position of hierarchy of recognition. The soundscape thus becomes an instrument of discipline.

4.5.4 Ideological function: the aestheticization of difference. The ideological function of *Sibel* is hearable as well as visual, with its careful organization of sound and silence. At the center of the film lies a contradiction: while Sibel's voice is hyper-audible, clearly mixed, foregrounded, and uninterrupted, her political condition remains almost unchanged. In the end she may not be all alone as she was at the beginning, but she is also never heard in any transformative sense. Her sonic presence is emphasized in order to construct a figure of neoliberal resilience, not collective resistance.

Sibel's whistled language is framed as a form of empowerment. Yet this empowerment is very individualized. Her whistling does not come off as a challenge to normative language; it feels like a stylized performance of nonconformity that is only interesting because it is exceptional. In this sense, her voice operates as a form of what might be called a "curated audibility," a sonic position in which the subject is allowed to speak, but only insofar as their speech makes them as unique, affectively intense, and ultimately non-threatening to the collective order. This ideological framing reflects the logic of neoliberal individualism, critiqued by scholars such as Brown (2015) and Dardot and Laval (2014); here, structural problems are reframed as problems of personal harmony. Sibel is unable to demand inclusion, recognition, or change. Instead, her insistence and emotional expression are presented as sufficient responses to the gendered violence and social exclusion she experiences.

The film's sound design reinforces this ideological structure by giving special treatment to Sibel's whistle (it precedes every sound, more precise and louder than all sounds). The fact that the other characters know and understand the whistling language

but use it very little isolates her both in the narrative and in the soundscape. It is as if Sibel's presence is permitted on the condition that she uses an incomprehensible and limited language. In this way, this uncanny person can only wander around the symbolic order or be admired from afar. This framing reflects what Çelik (2022) describes as the film's broader investment in emotional neoliberalism: Sibel's audibility is possible not in order to destabilize the symbolic order, but because it makes her readable as a heroic exception. The village never adapts to its sonic grammar; instead, its recognition is aestheticized, cut off from any possibility of collective resonance or response. For example, Sibel's whistling is perceived as a source of discomfort by male officials or chatty villagers, even by her own sister. This discomfort temporarily disrupts the atmosphere but cannot have a political impact. The power dynamics remain unchanged, and the community always returns to normal. These moments reinforce differences rather than opening up space for general disagreement or suggestive conflict. Sibel's marginality, therefore, remains a motif of acoustic diversity that does not destabilize structures.

This ideological loop is further reinforced by the film's subtly operating representational paradox: Sibel's whistle is technically understandable and emotionally highlighted; yet her exclusion is still framed as an inevitable situation. The audience is led to accept this exclusion not as an unjust situation but as a natural consequence within the film's aesthetic logic. Difference is so stylized and emphasized that the film transforms incomprehensibility into a virtue, a form of privilege. This aestheticization of sonic exceptionalism produces a representational impasse: the village's refusal to interact with Sibel is legitimized by the assumption that her voice is already "outside." Thus, the film unwittingly presents the community with the conditions that will justify its own practice of exclusion. It is as if to say: She cannot be heard because she is not like us. However, in real life, the problem for many women is not that they are incomprehensible; it is that they are systematically unrecognized even when they are clearly heard. Sibel's whistle is not chaotic or ambiguous; is a structured, regular and recognizable voice within the narrative universe. The community understands this but chooses not to respond. In this context, the film becomes a silent accomplice in legitimizing exclusion through its aesthetic strategy. It glorifies Sibel as a romanticized figure of difference;

however, this romanticization replaces a structural critique and renders invisible the material-political reasons for exclusion.

The film's sound design, in this regard, becomes an alibi for non-recognition: she is audible, so the system is not to blame. Her speech is heard but not interpreted, accepted but not engaged. This illustrates Judith Butler's (2004) argument that intelligibility is a condition for social recognition. Sibel, though technically audible and emotionally expressive, is placed outside the symbolic economy of the village precisely because the film renders her unintelligibility not as an ideological failure of the social, but as an innate, even poetic, condition of her character. What remains unasked is what would happen if a woman were fully intelligible and still denied. That possibility, the most common one in patriarchal societies, is foreclosed by the film's aesthetic logic.

The film's focus on individual liberation can openly be interpreted in the scenes where Sibel meets other women from the village. Instead of being presented as potential allies, these women are portrayed as guards of patriarchal norms. Their conversations seem to be consisting only of gossip and hushed whispers that are articulated behind Sibel. The sound mixing makes their voices an ambiguous but ubiquitous background texture. These voices are not friendly; they don't want to create dialogue. They are the ordinary women of the small town that do nothing but gossip. This is a very cliché representation of women from rural areas. When Sibel intervenes with her whistle, she may acoustically interrupt the gossip, but the confrontation has no effect. The women's murmurs will repeat until the ending. The film doesn't present any possibility of solidarity between women. Instead of imagining a shared voice or a collective politics of enunciation, it isolates Sibel as an exceptional case. Her voice does not disrupt the system of gendered exclusion; it confirms her distance from other women whose voices are defined as socially conservative and unworthy of political attention. This dynamic reinforces the neoliberal community of the lone protagonist and, in doing so, excludes the possibility of horizontal feminist critique.

Sibel's voice seems to be heard only because of its strangeness. Her difference is emphasized in order to position her as an interesting exotic bird or an object of admiration. In addition, her individualized empowerment reflects neoliberal tendencies in which resistance is aestheticized and privatized. In line with McRobbie's (2009) work on post feminism, the liberated female figure is celebrated in the film as a success story, but this representation seems to be done precisely to avoid structural criticism. Our heroine is a strong, self-sufficient, and provocative woman, but the success of the character's liberation, like Sibel herself, is conveyed as an isolated event, disconnected from the system. The film does not even offer the possibility of a world in which others would adapt to her, respond to her call, or share her rebellion. The voice is seen and appreciated by the film's form but ultimately remains unchanged, as it is.

This heroic narrative of the film is also strengthened by the absence of counter subjects. There is no relational base for Sibel's whistling; it never returns as an echo or causes a meaningful response. The environment does not respond. Even the forest, rich in life and sound, does not respond. This absence is ideologically significant. While the film seems as if it's presenting a universal story that may symbolize the condition of the women round the globe, ultimately it situates its expression as a closed loop of a non-threatening personal that conforms to the limitations of neoliberal storytelling. *Sibel*, therefore, is a sonic portrait of the neoliberal heroine whose voice is allowed to sound only as long as it is aesthetic and contained. Her resistance is both dramatized and becomes a symbol of privatized toleration rather than collective transformation. Her voice is not mobilized by solidarity. The result is not silence but controlled audibility in which political potential is translated back into affective intensity, and the spectacle of survival replaces structural critique.

4.5.5 Conclusion: the containment of resistance. By not underlining the need for collective transformation, *Sibel* legitimates the conditions in which individual sonic difference is praised as an aesthetic effect. From whispered gossip to whistles, from soft rooms to rugged forest trails, the film organizes audibility around individuality rather than solidarity. Sibel's voice is emphasized as a signal of righteousness to resonate and consume its intended audience directly. Thus, the film situates itself in a

larger cultural logic that celebrates individual resistance while ignoring the possibility of structural interrogation.

In the end, the film operates in a regime of sonic neoliberalism in which diverse voices are permitted only under the condition that they pose no real threat to dominant structures. Sibel does not erase the protagonist's voice; it elevates it by stripping it of relationality and enclosing it within a framework of survival, spectacle, and affective distinction. The film asks us to listen closely, but only within the limits of recognition without response and difference without disruption. In this way, Sibel reflects a politics of sound in which the capacity to be heard becomes a mode of containment rather than transformation. The sonic environment expresses Sibel's alienation, but more importantly it performs it, sustains it, and aestheticizes it. Resistance becomes a sound to be admired, not joined.

4.6 Karanlık Gece (Alper, 2022)

Karanlık Gece (2022), by Özcan Alper, is set in a remote Turkish village sitting in silence of the trauma of a past violent crime. The protagonist, Ishak, who has been away for years, returns to the village to see his dying mother. His return triggers uncomfortable memories both for himself and for the inhabitants of the village. Gripped by his guilty conscience, Ishak sets to retrace the events, but in doing so, he encounters a strong affective barrier that is made of collective silence. His friends and neighbors refuse to speak; they refuse to remember. The film's sonic world, which is full of tension, reflects this refusal. *Karanlık Gece* is not a mystery to be solved by tracing the clues; it is the story of encountering a psychic wound mapped by sonic secrets. It is immersed in an intense sonic atmosphere, where complicity, guilt, and repression are encoded by silence.

4.6.1 Materiality: the sonic weight of violence. The materiality of the sounds in *Karanlık Gece* is constructed around the walking of the guilty bodies on dry land, the resentment that settles when they see each other, and the breaths that the audience feels on the back of their necks. Jay Beck's (2003) theory of foley realism is central here: the tactility of footsteps, the friction of jackets against bodies, and the labored

breathing of men create an audible surface of violence, even in moments of stillness. Masculinity becomes audible in assertive bodily presence. The texture of the soundscape becomes a sign of power.

Drawing on feminist sound theorists such as Kaja Silverman (1988) and Mary Ann Doane (1985), who have studied how male dominance is manifested in the medium of sound, which is conceptualized as sonic patriarchy in some circles, and how sound, especially in cinema, is a site of ideological inscription, in *Karanlık Gece* men's speech and body noises dominate the acoustic space; heavy boots, authoritarian voices, and the sounds of masculine presence overwhelm the sonic dimension. In contrast, women, already few in number, are marginalized in terms of sound as well: they are often shown indoors or removed from the screen. Femininity is not completely absent but remains ornamental or ambient. The film therefore treats sound as a site of dominance where women's absence is felt.

This acoustic imbalance is also imposed on the audience through the listener's positionality. The film constructs a sonic regime that determines what can be heard, where and by whom. The camera frequently leans on İshak's point of view; however, the sound breaks away from his subjectivity, extending beyond the visual frame and creating a displaced listening experience that transcends the subject. This disjunction attributes a spectral auditory position to the audience: echoes from off-screen, distant murmurs, fragments of sound that carry the tension of space are presented to the audience in a way that the character cannot directly access. Yet, this access is not total; sound both reveals and limits, both opens and inhibits. Within this regime of sound, the audience is brought closer to the material layers of guilt but is held at an unstable point between complicity and critical distance. The film does not establish the affective tone of repression and denial only through sound; it also ambiguates the direction of responsibility by restructuring the spatial distribution of audibility. In this context, listening becomes not just a perceptual activity but a politically framed action. Proximity to trauma, gendered forms of silence, and the systematic absence of response make listening itself an ideologically structured problematic. Auditory experience is determined by what is allowed to be heard, what is suppressed, and what is rendered inaudible.

This sonic imbalance is reinforced by the absence of non-diegetic music. Like the other films analyzed in this chapter, *Karanlık Gece* avoids the use of traditional indices of emotion or resolution. There is no orchestral or melodic element that could emotionally guide or soothe the audience. Again, no resolution is given; instead, an oppressive silence, a rural eeriness of haptic noise, and an empty sonic ringing prevail. Affective states are also established with a sound field that is conveyed not through expression, but through the compression and restriction of the material and the psyche, as in other films. The guilt İshak carries is also not dramatized through speech; it is embedded in the noise of his movements, which then makes the practice of Foley the affective index of trauma.

By employing a compressed and spatially estranged sonic environment, the film enforces what could be called an acoustics of complicity: the audience becomes attuned to what is not spoken, to what is not confessed, and to what is always already present in the texture of the sound. This immersive form of listening draws the spectator into a conflicted sonic terrain. *Karanlık Gece* does not simply tell a story of guilt, it materializes it through sound, situating both character and listener within a regime of partial hearing, uncertain response, and suspended resolution.

4.6.2 Affect: the uncanny silence of denial. This silence intensifies as the narrative approaches the trauma. The fact that as the tension increases, the sound fades is actually an indication of something. It is the silence of the unspoken emotions that accumulate, saturate the environment and cling to the remaining influence over the town so that each inhabitant feels the inner distress. The village is almost crushed under the weight of the unacceptable, where the voice clings to the edges of unexpressed knowledge and each suppressed voice.

If interpellation is the mechanism that hails subjects into ideological positions, in *Karanlık Gece* the villagers are hailed by silence; it is almost the condition of their existence. They are hailed by a hush that, by obeying its command, they accept their complicity. This refusal to speak is also needed in the maintenance of a social order that is based on denial. Silence is both the evidence of collective guilt and the cement

that glues the town. This is particularly evident in the moments when İshak tries to confront those around him about the crime, where the words spoken are quickly absorbed into a whirlpool of silence. The sound mixing in these scenes is sparse: ambient noise is reduced, background music is silenced, and the acoustic space is narrowed to focus on what is not said. Silence seems to mimic amnesia and emotional emptiness. In one of the most poignant scenes in the film, we see İshak walking through the deserted streets of his hometown at night. The soundscape is limited to the dull hum of ambient night sounds, the tinkling of wind on metal, the creak of a distant door, and the barely audible sound of a puddle. This scene is almost a symbol of the weight of silence, collective guilt, and İshak's alienation that will permeate the entire film. The sparse ambient sounds resonate with the cumulative atmosphere of flight, shame, and moral exhaustion that envelops the village. Thus, the near-silence functions as a sonic condensation of the film's larger depiction of collective oppression. The tension and sonic traces always make themselves felt, and although in a very ambiguous way, they continue to eat away at the sonic expectations through intensity that refuses to leave without acquiring some confession or at least expression.

These silences are not empty. They are filled with what this thesis describes as sonic resentment: the ambient atmosphere of passive-aggressive hostility that accumulates when shame is repressed rather than resolved. The withheld confessions and muttered judgments function as a low-frequency aggression that vibrates through the soundscape. These sonic textures embody the guilt and then the hostility toward the guilt itself. This dual role of silence as affective density and blockage, marks the limits of listening itself. Silence is not a neutral void but a politicized site of meaning's suspension. This resentment is not vocalized, but it is acoustically felt, as awkward silences, delayed reactions, door slams, and rustling discomfort.

This uncanny use of silence also transforms this rural area into a place of unease. Yeşilçam cinema once framed the village as a space where social bonds were also sonically confirmed through folk music, collective labor and shared noise, but in *Karanlık Gece* the opposite occurs. The village is silent as it is claustrophobic. There is almost no sign of life. Familiar auditory cues such as cicadas, market chatter, or domestic noises are suppressed or absent; instead, a dense sonic uncanny reign: the

subtle dissonance between what one expects to hear and what is withheld. Silence is no longer a pause; it becomes a signal, a charge, an accusation.

In fact, even the most touching scenes are marked by stillness. The sound effect of guilt is conveyed all the way through the sonic texture of hesitation, the creaking of doors, and the noises from the forest. These sounds and the guilt they hold, build onto each other all through the film and put the audience in a state of negative catharsis that circulates, intensifies, and incorporates itself into the landscape. As with previously mentioned films, *Karanlık Gece*, too, holds affective discomfort as a structural mode rather than mobilizing catharsis. As LaBelle (2018) notes, sound often points to what escapes capture, what remains. The silence of *Karanlık Gece* lingers, it stains and marks the village as a space haunted by acoustic traces of what will not be said.

4.6.3 Spatiality: a map of complicity. Like *Karanlık Gece*, the rural village is represented as an ideological and moral siege. The aesthetics of sound as a whole create an environment where oppression is pervasive. This village is like an entity that feeds on speech, digests it, spits it out and disperses it throughout the geography, thus rendering its source unfindable.

The film maps out a sonic closure through its use of narrow alleyways, low ceilings, thick air, and interior shots. In these spaces sonic reverberations play a key role; footsteps echo too loudly, everyday gestures sound louder and more anxious, and voices disappear too quickly into walls or they fade away. These acoustic textures give the environment an atmosphere of being hidden from listening and echo the voices of a precaution that silences the characters before they begin to be watched. In other words, the sound architecture of the film has declared not the individuals but the entire village as a material entity as guilty in advance and constructs the soundscapes in a way that mimics the affective paranoia that dominates the village: to speak is to accept guilt.

This paranoia is not abstract. It is sticky. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective stickiness, the silence in *Karanlık Gece* attaches itself to space. It stains walls, hangs from doorways, clings to alleyways. The geography is saturated by

silence in such a way that even when characters move through space, they remain entangled in its affective charge. Silence here is not absence; it is a spatial boundary, a material residue, a mode of constraint.

By depicting the village as uncanny, both spatially and emotionally, the film almost draws on the mythological and fearsome rituals of rural settings. Instead of invoking supernatural beings, however, *Karanlık Gece* bases its horror on social complicity and historical amnesia. It focuses not on ghosts or demons, but on the inherent violence of small-town life, hidden in its traumas and silences, with an assumption of its own innate demonism. The horror springs not from what is visible, but from what is collectively characterized by what it rejects: the normalization of violence, the ease of forgetting, and the passive acceptance of authoritarian structures.

And it is precisely in this depiction of the village that the film departs from Yeşilçam-era representations, in which the village functioned as a site of emotional clarity and social morality. Yeşilçam melodramas often staged the countryside as a sanctuary of authentic values and the ethical essence of the nation, in opposition to the corrupt city. In contrast, *Karanlık Gece* presents a profoundly disappointed portrait: here the village is a symbol of surveillance, complicity, and moral decay. It is a portrait that rejects any cathartic relief or pastoral idealization, implying the collapse of the national investment in the concept of the village.

The sound world of the film is also a sonic arrangement that makes it impossible for those who reject it to live here and reinforces the affective state of the village's transformation from a moral exemplar into a prison. What we seem to be hearing as a oral harmony, reveals itself to be the acoustic remains of guilt, escape and repression: very loud footsteps, long breaths held, and silence that falls very quickly after someone speaks. The village is no longer a symbol of morality; it is now a symbol of moral decay. The uncanniness becomes heavier when familiar visuals appear without their associated sounds. The conventions of rural Turkish cinema that show markets, dining tables, and forest paths, and the absence of ambient life are striking. The expectation of a shared noise, a collective conversation, or any gathering fails. This constitutes the acoustic profiling of the village. Spaces that should express warmth or openness are

instead filled with silence or a distorted ambient sound. The absence of certain frequencies becomes a sign of oppression in itself.

Nevertheless, silence operates like a sonic border: when it ends, the boundaries of the village also seem to dissolve. Yet even in the forest, which may seem like an escape, the characters remain estranged. The forest does not speak in an intelligible language. Unlike the forest in *Sibel*, where unintelligibility signifies a kind of lateral sonic agency, a personal mode of resistance and relational survival, the forest in *Karanlık Gece* is affectively evacuated. It is dense with sound, but empty of recognition. In *Sibel*, the forest echoes back; it listens, it receives, it resonates with the protagonist's attempts to inhabit a non-normative sonic space. It functions as a fragile but intimate acoustic partner. By contrast, the forest in *Karanlık Gece* offers no such reciprocity. It is acoustically thick yet emotionally mute. Sounds persist, birds, leaves, rustling, but they carry no meaning, no warmth, no anchoring. This is especially embodied in Ali's father, who walks into the forest seemingly trying to hear something, perhaps a voice, a trace, a moral echo, but hears nothing that he can comprehend. The forest extends the alienation of the village by other acoustic means. What *Sibel* codes as sonic alterity, *Karanlık Gece* renders as moral void. Both forests are sites of unintelligibility, but only one allows that unintelligibility to become expressive. The other swallows it.

This reprofiling is made clearly manifest in the film's use of the forest as a recurring site of psychological tension and moral ambiguity. *Karanlık Gece* depicts the forest as an affective trap. It is noisy but emotionally and politically bare. The characters move through it as if in a haunted area. The forest is not silent at all, but its sounds lack meaning or connection and contribute to an atmosphere of alienation and distance. This disconnection is also felt affectively: it deprives the protagonist of any connection to the place and the people and positions him in a sonic landscape that forbids any confession or compromise.

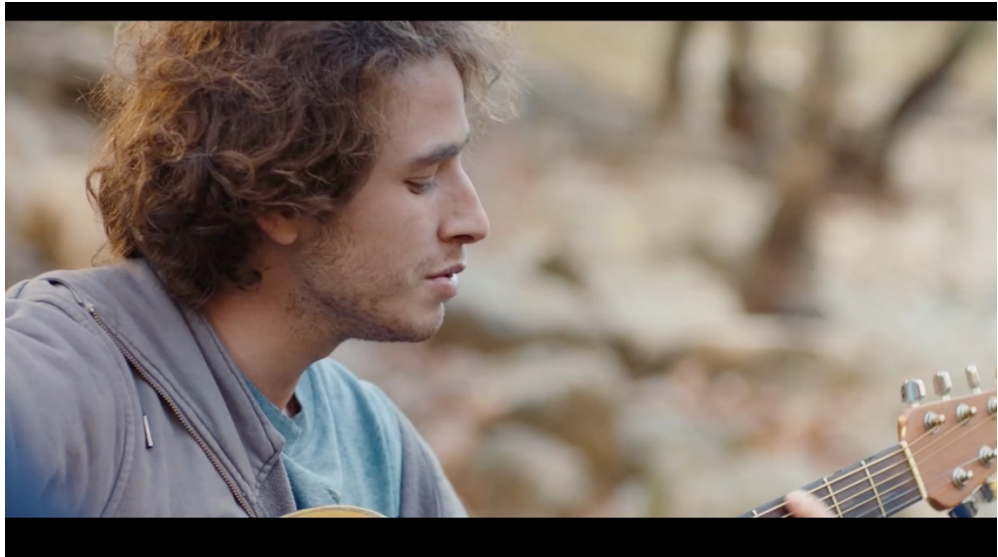


Figure 13. *Karanlık Gece*.

We encounter one of the representations of this spatial and sonic distinction in the scene about music between Ali (who has come to the village from Kadıköy for a job) and İshak. The scene begins with the feeling that the village's prejudice against foreigners is about to be broken down slightly, and the characters attempt a sonic heterogeneity by playing music together with instruments symbolizing their own cultures. Ali plays the guitar, a sonic indicator of urban secularism, while İshak accompanies him with his "saz", a symbol of the countryside. For a brief moment, a fragile harmony seems to have formed. However, this is very short-lived, and their very inherent incompatibility immediately becomes apparent. This superficial sonic attempt cannot overcome the deep hostility. The scene seems to be there to confirm the idea of the village as evil in itself that the film already assumes. The harmony quickly dissipates, and the depth of the social cracks becomes apparent. In this way, the film encodes not only the spatial and social divisions but also the doomed fate of harmony between different life worlds.

4.6.4 Ideological function: the ethics of audibility. The ideological concern of *Karanlık Gece* lies in its sonic refusal: the refusal to resolve, calm, or verbalize trauma. Instead, trauma is skillfully concealed in silences and in the material spaces that these silences actively shape. The film portrays the entire village as guilty in İshak's image. The fragmented moral potential that remains within İshak remains unrealized, leaving the contradictions intact. The village is not the backdrop to an event that has occurred

but an accomplice who conceals the culprit and the evidence by burying them in silence. And in this way, the silence that the village imposes on everyone and everything becomes structured, burdened, and disciplined.

Karanlık Gece falls into the cinematic orientation that Yaren (2025) defines as “crisis aesthetics”; this cinema, shaped in a permanent state of national emergency, constructs despair on a structural level through formal contractions, spatial compressions and cyclical temporal constructions. Alper’s orientation towards impasse and the provincial microcosm becomes an allegorical representation of the social bonds dissolved by the state’s monopoly on violence, in a way that evokes Jameson’s theory of *national allegory*. The film presents, in Yaren’s words, a “condensed landscape” in which political possibility no longer revolves around concrete action but around traces of traumatic memory and collective lynching images. This landscape is the visual and auditory form of a nation suspended between the ghost of the past and the paralysis of future imagination.

Here, sound becomes not the companion of the action but its limit. Silence isolates, ambient noise implies, and tonal dissonance prevents confession. In this context, sound functions as a malevolent force that formally reflects moral dilemma. The film avoids presenting a clear ethical position, as crime is no longer a burden borne by the individual, but an abstract ambient effect, an atmospheric phenomenon. İshak’s breath comes into play where words fail; it establishes a kind of non-discursive expression through bodily vibrations. In this breath, the audience feels not only the weight of the crime but also the surge of conscience reverberating in a body where discourse has collapsed.

This subdued sound structure is consistent with Jameson’s idea that ideology seeps not directly from content but from formal tensions. The aural landscape of *Karanlık Gece* echoes, suppresses frequencies, acoustic gaps woven with dense silences, and circles around an unnamed trauma. Sound operates as a form of remembrance; memory is evoked by the resonance of space. The result is a listening practice that invites concentration rather than analysis, drawing the audience into a constant emotional unrest rather than interpretation.

In the film, the sonic practices of Ali's family who arrive in the countryside after his disappearance present cinematic traces of a layered auditory positionality that evokes Dylan. While Robinson develops this framework in a settler-colonial context, this analysis adapts the core insight, that dominant listening practices obscure alternative epistemologies, to the classed and spatialized dynamics between urban and rural formations's critique of *settler listening*. In this context, the framework in which Robinson defines the suppression of indigenous knowledge systems by colonial listening styles enables a reading of the asymmetrical relationship that urban modernity establishes with rural soundscapes in the film. The urban listening positionality emerges here as a listening position whose sensory access and epistemological claims are embedded in spatial power structures, which pretends to understand what it hears. In this sense Ali's family's arrival in the countryside is framed as alienation. Especially in the scene where the father figure enters the forest and tries to listen carefully with hopes to catch a clue of his son. This contact assumes a disruptive function. The acoustic texture of the forest exposes the limits of urban listening habits. The sounds do not offer guidance, they are dispersive; not informative and disappointing. The father listens but cannot understand what he hears because what is audible in the rural soundscape is beyond his sonic, moral and cultural habitus. This perceptual failure is the breaking point of the fantasy of superiority that urban modernity establishes itself over the rural. The listening of the urban subject is mostly meaning-oriented and focused on representation; he listens with a goal. However, the sounds he encounters suspend representation.

The urban listener bumps into his own epistemic limits as he tries to integrate it into auditory regimes of signification. This limit is revealed in the sounds that, even if heard, cannot be recognized or categorized. This form of listening produces a critique of colonial knowledge regimes and underscores a critical ideological distance (Robinson, 2020). This incapacity to grasp rural sonic textures exposes the privileged positions that overlook the rural context. Their positionality frames rural life through a reductive and consumptive perspective and ignores its nuanced complexities, particularly the communal silence around the traumatic event. Although it's most likely indented otherwise, I argue that the urban characters' sonic incapacity

reproduces ideological blindness through masking and thus perpetuating the rural community's complicities. It reveals how these urban listeners fail to access the profound social truths within rural soundscapes; their auditory engagement remains superficial, enabling them to maintain their distance and escape accountability for historical material and structural violence.

In sum, applying the concept of urban listening positionality, developed through inspiration from Robinson's settler listening, helps illuminate significant ideological divides manifested through sound and listening practices in *Karanlık Gece*. This approach provides a powerful lens to understand how urban auditory habits reinforce hierarchical, cultural, and epistemological barriers, thus highlighting the profound ideological tensions between urban and rural experiences.

This intersects with the idea that listening can be a way of bearing witness to trauma, but here the witnessing is not directed towards a clear narrative, but towards an unresolved violence that remains in the sound. In the film, sound traces the repressed, but rather obscures it rather than clarifies it. When Ali's father stands in the forest and says "I can't hear anything," he actually voices the weight of what cannot be heard. This silence is not a void, but rather a density that overflows with meaning but cannot be spoken. The inaudible is the form of the repressed. Here, the boundaries of audibility that LaBelle calls *acoustic zones* become visible: for the urban subject, the forest is placed outside the audible. Sounds that can be heard but cannot be deciphered are part of cultural memory. The film constructs the forest's sonic structure as a site of resistance. As the urban listener tries to penetrate this structure, he encounters a shift in meaning that only deepens. Interpretation is not possible; what remains is only sonic unrest. Sound stands at the edge of meaning production and forces the audience to wait at this edge.

The forest in *Karanlık Gece* appears as an auditory space that displays the nature of sound that avoids meaning rather than producing meaning. Unlike the forest in *Sibel* which becomes a shelter that acoustically strengthens the protagonist, the forest in *Karanlık Gece* is constructed as a closed, resistant and disorienting space. While *Sibel*'s whistle language functions as an aesthetic layer that affirms the protagonist's

difference, in *Karanlık Gece* the sound no longer carries relationality; it does not guide, and does not carry meaning.

In *Karanlık Gece* forest is the space of a collective crime, hiding repressed trauma and an unspoken history. It no longer speaks; silence is heard not as a void but as the permanent vibration of the repressed. Ali's father's statement that he could not hear anything while walking in the forest can also be read as a symptom that shows that meaning can no longer be established through sound. This moves away from the narrative of liberal individualism and towards the auditory aesthetics of collective losses that cannot be put into words.

This sonic closure draws both the film characters and the audience in. The film places the audience in a listening position that does not promise clarity or resolution. While in *Sibel* the audience is positioned as a witness who hears and appreciates the emotional frequency of the character, in *Karanlık Gece* this position is dissolved. The sound of the forest is incomprehensible, its vibration disturbing; the sound does not produce an explanation but an uneasiness. What Brandon LaBelle calls *acoustic zones* is reversed here: the forest is no longer a space where meaning can be established, but an epistemologically closed volume located at the edge of interpretation. This universe of sound, which remains affectively intense but conceptually silent, distances the audience from conventional narrative expectations and exposes them to an experience where meaning cannot emerge.

In this context, the forest of *Karanlık Gece* does not offer healing, does not establish emotional closeness, does not identify with nature. On the contrary, it resonates with the inability to pronounce the crime, and the unresolvability of the trauma. Thus, the film fixes both the characters and the audience in a disturbing state of not knowing rather than empathic witnessing.

4.6.4 Conclusion: silence as structure. *Karanlık Gece* treats sound neither as an atmospheric background nor as an element that completes the narrative. On the contrary, sound here functions as a substructure; through sound, the film constructs a structural landscape of repression, denial and social complicity. The sonic plane

becomes a formal counterpart of the repressed: silences, irregular breathing, crackles and an unrhythmic distribution of ambient sounds make one sense of what is missing. The withdrawal of emotional signals, the structuring of sound as a means of producing unease rather than an explanation, transforms the film into an auditory experience that reveals the affective texture of guilt and denial.

In this context, the film applies Jameson's proposal to read the ideological structure of cultural texts through formal contradictions to the sonic dimension. The ideological position of *Karanlık Gece* emerges precisely in the contradictions in this layer: the sound pretends to say something but says nothing; there is an echo of the repressed but no representation; the auditory tension intensifies but is not resolved by any narrative resolution. However, this contradiction does not open up a potential space, as Jameson suggests; the film processes this contradiction not as a creative dynamism but as an emotional paralysis. The audience is held in an auditory plane where explanation, causality and emotional closure are suspended.

It is precisely here that *Karanlık Gece* strays on the borders of sonic testimony: sound carries trauma without representing it, offers the audience an ethical encounter. Sound is no longer a passive carrier of meaning, but the encounter itself with the repressed. This is also a cinematic counterpart to the negative catharsis: the film intensifies the affective trace of the trauma, heightens the tension, but offers no relief or explanation. Catharsis is not a release here, but the stubborn return of the repressed that condemns the listener to a deadlock.

4.7 Conclusion

In five films examined in this section, sound enhances or reconfigures the political critique of the films beyond what their stories express directly. The political repression, social exhaustion, and ideological disintegration that these films allegorically or indirectly portray become directly and emotionally audible. However, through aestheticized paralysis, emotional overload, and symbolic oversaturation, this intensity runs the risk of reproducing the conditions they aim to expose.

The films' sonic strategies mediate political feelings through affective coding: absence and silence in *Kurak Günler*; noise and digital cacophony in *Hayaletler* and *Kaygı*; isolation and selective hearing in *Sibel*; and silence and suppression in *Karanlık Gece*. All these sound worlds produce political exhaustion, repressed anger, and a directionless emotional resonance. Rather than offering the possibility of structural transformation or collective action, these films fall into individual paralysis, ethical hesitation, and affective closure. This pervasive impasse may be indicating the concern for cultural economy of critical acceptance. As Yaren and Karademir-Hazır (2018) point out, in Turkey's polarized cultural sphere, the value of a film is often reduced to its political legibility. In this context, films that aestheticize moral collapse or allegorically circulate national trauma without offering structural analysis may gain liberal-critical approval as a display of "political courage" in the post-2016 era. Thus, allegorical ambiguity is not a limit or deficiency; on the contrary, it evolves into an aesthetic strategy that becomes cultural capital.

The melodic tropes that once functioned as ideologemes in Yeşilçam, transforming contradiction into coherence, survive here only as residues. The ideologeme is now emptied of its reconciliation. Instead, these films produce unresolved contradiction as form: silence without speech, music without harmony, and space without sonic anchoring. This signals a fundamental transformation in the ideological function of sound, which is no longer a medium of resolution but rather a site of suspension and repetition.

The fundamental question that remains is whether these sonic structures open up spaces for collective listening. Do they train us to endure oppression without reimagining its collapse? When listening to the sonic unconscious of Turkey's contemporary cinema, what is ultimately heard is not the voice of authoritarianism per se. Rather, it is the question of whether we see transformation as a possibility worth listening to. The next section elaborates on these findings and maps their continuities, ruptures, and possibilities for re-articulation, asking where these sounds fit within the larger ideological landscape of contemporary cinema in Turkey.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This final chapter revisits the core research questions posed in the introduction and draws together the key conceptual findings of the thesis. The central inquiry of the study asked, how does sound function as an ideological apparatus in the cinema of post-2016 Turkey? This question was supported by four sub-questions:

- In what ways do sonic strategies such as ambient noise, silence, distortion, or musical absence express political deadlock or moral ambiguity?
- How do these sonic strategies activate inherited listening habits and ideological formations?
- What ideological effects are produced by the affective and spatial organization of sound?
- Do these strategies constitute a rupture with earlier sonic regimes in Turkish cinema, or do they work through modification and repetition?

Building on the theoretical framework laid out in Chapters 2 and 3, this chapter synthesizes how the five films analyzed, *Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, *Sibel*, *Hayaletler*, and *Karanlık Gece*, reveal a shared sonic grammar characterized by what I have termed sonic resentment, negative catharsis, and cognitive mapping by inheritance, all of which operate within a broader sonic unconscious. These concepts converge to show that sound, more than just a narrative supplement, has become the privileged site through which political deadlock, class tensions, and affective exhaustion are both encoded and aestheticized.

Before moving into the synthesis of findings, it is important to recall the epistemological orientation that underpins this study. While this thesis engages with a broad range of theoretical traditions from psychoanalytic film theory and sound studies to affect theory, it maintains a commitment to understanding of cinematic sound as an ideological and affective medium. My aim in this study has been to explore how sonic forms organize ideological contradiction and emotional exhaustion under specific historical and political conditions. Affect is approached as a socially patterned and

ideologically loaded intensity that helps to manage or defer contradiction. The concepts of *sonic ressentiment* and *negative catharsis*, for instance, theorize how sound encodes stagnation, moral repetition, and affective containment when resolution fails. In this study these are not abstract terms, they are historically situated tools that emerge from the aesthetic logic of the films themselves. In this regard, theory functions as a responsive practice of listening to the formal contradictions of sound, where affect and ideology converge.

5.1 Sonic Ressentiment and the Aestheticization of Paralysis

A common tendency in all the films analyzed is that they refuse resolution, both narratively and sonically. Instead of constructing narrative arcs that lead toward ethical regeneration or political awakening, these films dwell in atmospheres of impasse, disorientation, and repetition. In *Kurak Günler*, the strict sonification of evil through lo-fi ambient textures, distorted public announcements, and exaggerated male vocalizations equates political corruption with a deeper moral and sonic degeneration. The scarcity of water marks a depletion of affective and ethical vitality. In this framework, the film encodes *ressentiment*, in its sound world. The town, when it does speak, only confirms the inevitability of moral failure. Rather than functioning as a vehicle of collective reflection, sound becomes a medium of ideological closure. Here, what I call *sonic ressentiment* operates through what Michael Ure (2015) identifies as the moralization of affect in contexts where ressentiment replaces structural critique with stagnant moral judgment.

In *Kaygı*, this logic of sonic ressentiment takes the form of epistemic confusion. The protagonist's effort to reconstruct memory and truth is constantly undermined by the unreliability of the sonic environment. Her voice is consumed by glitches, media noise, and interference, evoking a deeper ideological *impasse*: the impossibility of making sense within a political regime that produces forgetfulness as its dominant sonic regime. Sound here becomes a weaponized atmosphere of forgetting, where the aesthetics of distortion function as a sonic epistemology of erasure.

Sibel stages resentment through a gendered sonic contradiction. The protagonist's whistled language, though central to the film's sonic identity and marked as unique or exceptional, ultimately fails to secure social recognition. While her form of sonic expression is framed as admirable and even empowering, it is simultaneously rendered unintelligible and incompatible with the normative sonic order of the village. This dissonance reflects the limits of neoliberal individualism: difference is aestheticized but never collectivized. In this setting, *sonic resentment* emerges as a structure that aestheticizes exceptionality without enabling structural transformation.

In *Hayaletler*, the atmosphere of resentment is diffused into a sonic excess that saturates the urban landscape. The density of digital noise, alarm sounds, echoes of protest, and infrastructural breakdowns overwhelms rather than mobilizes. Here, sound becomes the trace of unresolved crisis, an archive of signals without social reception. What dominates is not expressive clarity but a noise of misalignment. While this may not always translate into *resentment* in Nietzsche's pathological sense, it still signifies a suspended relation to collective agency: the political is heard as fatigue, not as momentum.

Finally, *Karanlık Gece* constructs a sonic world in which silence becomes the medium in which violence is kept. The village's silence as a whole and their refusal to speak emerges as complicity. In this context, silence is a form of affective containment, a defensive shell that protects guilt from becoming audible. The lack of sonic diversity and the tension this silence embodies, imply the foreclosure of moral transformation. Sound, or lack thereof, functions to cut the village's ties to history and other spaces, and freezes it.

Across these films, *sonic resentment* functions as an aesthetic logic that replaces political imagination with moral repetition, public reckoning with privatized despair. Drawing on Ure's distinction between legitimate socio-political resentment and moralizing resentment (2015, pp. 600–601), we can say that these soundscapes do not merely reflect disaffection; they stabilize it, aestheticize it, and make it culturally resonant for audiences who are already interpellated through familiar registers of pessimism and loss.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson defines ressentiment as an ideologeme that represents historical contradictions in a moral way. According to him, this emotion, even if it does not resolve contradictions within collective narratives, makes them symbolically visible and manageable (Jameson, 2006, p. 188). In this framework, ressentiment represents the repressed anger of a certain class position within the narrative by transforming it within an ideological framework and offers a closed solution proposal to the contradiction. While preserving Jameson's framework, this study establishes a difference between *ressentiment* and *resentment* based on the distinction made by Max Scheler. According to Scheler while ressentiment is a repressed, indirect and untransformable form of anger, resentment is a direct and justifiable response to a certain injustice. The films examined distribute these two forms across the two class and cultural positions: while ressentiment is associated with rural, repressed figures devoid of collective transformation, resentment becomes audible through characters more relatable to secular, urban audiences. This distinction reveals a representational hierarchy: whose anger is coded as legitimate and audible, whose as repressed and incomprehensible. In this case, ressentiment, which Jameson defines as an ideologeme, no longer produces a symbolic solution; on the contrary, it becomes a structure of closure in which class and cultural inequalities are also reproduced at the auditory level.

These films appear to embrace realist aesthetics, but in fact they construct emotionally organized worlds that function as almost mythological narratives. In *Kurak Günler*, class conflicts and ecological crises are reframed through metaphorical structures that transform political problems into moral conflicts. *Kaygı* portrays media amnesia as a personal and abstract trauma, not as a historical instrument of control. *Sibel* presents social exclusion from the perspective of individual resistance, separating it from any collective or systemic struggle. *Karanlık Gece* transforms structural oppression and political silence into unresolved violence as an existential burden. In each case, the films construct carefully orchestrated, emotionally engaging, but ultimately depoliticized "mythological realities."

The narratives embody what Fredric Jameson has described as “the reification of realism” in late capitalism; a situation in which realism no longer mediates contradiction, but becomes a fixed genre of familiar emotional codes and symbolic patterns. Jameson identifies this as a return to romanticism, however, the films analysed here construct narrative forms that displace historical contradictions through moral allegory, emotional repetition, and aesthetic closure which altogether give them a mythical quality. These mythic formations intensify emotional tension and confirm *resentment* as a legitimate and enduring worldview. Through sonic and visual cues that mobilize inherited cultural grammars, they produce negative catharsis and rather than opening a space for political understanding, and aestheticize *impasse* and render material problems as emotionally compelling and morally grounded. The result is a form of realism that simulates recognition while eliminating the conditions for criticism and transformation.

5.2 Cognitive Mapping by Inheritance and the Sonic Unconscious

These sonic strategies the films use are derived from the sonic grammars inherited from the past. As discussed in Chapter 3, from dubbing to melodramatic orchestration, cinema in Turkey has a rich archive of standardized sonic grammars. In all of the contemporary films analyzed in this study, these inherited grammars are invoked only to disappoint. The expected sonic cues, such as musical resolution or vocal warmth, are withheld, and the audience is forced to find their way through this absence with the cues that emerge from this absence.

This is where the concept of cognitive mapping by inheritance becomes critical. Trained by years of sonic repetition in a cinematic history that associates certain sounds with moral or emotional clarity, audiences detect ideological disturbances in the absence or distortion of these sounds. Because these films create new sonic maps by subverting or inverting old ones, the audience experiences ideological contradiction as sonic disorientation as well as content.

The sonic unconscious works through this distortion, where previously repressed sounds such as echoes, glitches, absurd ambiances, and tonal inconsistencies work

hard to speak. These sonic states reflect political contradiction without explicitly articulating it. Because they do not offer the audience spaces for reflection, these sonic states end up aestheticizing oppression. The unending sounds are the ghosts of those who have been historically silenced and now return fragmented, bearing the weight of unresolved trauma.

5.3 Formal Contradiction as Ideological Form

This study has argued that ideology in film becomes legible through formal contradiction per Fredric Jameson, in the sonic dimension in this case. Sounds that do not resolve, voices coming from alienated bodies, and ambiances that do not match the visuals all point to ideological contradiction. Whereas the seamless orchestration of sound and image often functions as an aesthetic shield that conceals rather than reveals contradiction. Layers of sound and image are so aligned, so carefully calibrated to create atmospheric immersion, that they leave little room for perceptual dissonance. For many audiences, this formal consistency prevents critical engagement: if nothing is out of place, there is no “noise” to provoke doubt, friction or questioning, so it feels comfortable. As a result, even if the content seems to refer to social crisis or ethical tension, its aesthetic treatment transforms the experience into something emotionally self-sufficient. The normalization of sonic environments through repetition, tonal predictability and ambient smoothing creates an emotional stability that conceals systemic fault lines. Instead of registering political contradictions, the audience is often led to feel that everything is coherent, that the dissonance lies elsewhere. What could function as a rupture is placed against the background of ambient continuity, so that the contradiction becomes aesthetically illegible.

The five films demonstrate that contradiction itself has become a genre of post-2016 cinema in Turkey. They do not provide narrative closure or emotional catharsis. Instead, they stage affective conditions of political repression: resentment without revolt, mourning without loss, and sound without voice. formal strategies produce an aesthetic of failure, failure to heal, inability to remember, and failure to resolve that paradoxically becomes the condition of ideological recognition. In this context, recurring motifs that once operated as ideologemes, symbolic forms

that resolved contradiction through cultural familiarity, are now emptied of their mediating function. What once functioned as an ideologeme capable of symbolically resolving contradiction now appears only as self-righteous aesthetic gestures.

These findings point toward a new politics of listening. To listen symptomatically is not to decode meaning but to attend to its impossibility. The thesis has shown that post-2016 cinema in Turkey uses sound as formal site of contradiction. Listening becomes a critical practice because what is heard is incomplete, withheld, or uncanny. In this way, symptomatic listening becomes a political attitude: an attunement to contradiction, to what is not said, and to what resonates despite being silenced. These films demand to be listened to differently, to recognize that what we hear (or fail to hear) is not accidental but ideological.

5.4 Ruptures and Continuities Across Turkish Cinema

The findings also point to certain continuities and ruptures in the broader historical trajectory of sound ideologies in Turkish cinema. Even though the 5 main films analyzed here show a sonic grammar specific to the post-2016 context, this does not necessarily mean a sudden rupture from the previous eras. On the contrary, these films have complex relationships with the past cinematic sonic regimes, which continue to shape the audience's listening habits and expectations. This dialectical relationship between the historical and the contemporary sonic forms explains the concept of cognitive mapping by inheritance.

Contemporary films mobilize the sonic unconscious of the cinema of Turkey through intentional silences and the alteration of inherited grammars. The voice-body separation, sonic assimilation, and class-coded sonic aesthetics that define Yeşilçam's sound regime continue to haunt the current sonic space: their absence is staged as affective absence or spectral remnants in the midst of which the audience maps itself to interpret meaning.

Similarly, the smoothing logic of *mise-en-bande* persists in the subtle ambient flattening of festival-oriented aesthetics, where sound design privileges atmospheric

coherence over rupture, thereby reinscribing certain norms of audibility and emotional legibility.

However, these 5 films also underline a certain rupture from the previous line. By foregrounding sonic contradiction and negative catharsis as central aesthetic strategies, they disrupt the traditional harmonizing role the sound played in previous eras. Whereas earlier cinematic eras used narrative closure, musical catharsis, and affective containment to offer resolution, post-2016 films embrace non-solution. The sonic field becomes a political and affective cul-de-sac marked by silences that resist narrative assimilation, disruptions in the sonic continuity, and incompatible textures.

At the same time, a new trend has emerged: Compared to New Cinema of Turkey's minimalistic approach to sound, these newer films exhibit an instinct to mobilize sound effectively. However, unlike Yeşilçam's openly agitative sounds, this new trend works almost under the radar, through the tightly controlled acoustic profiling, strategic silences, and the use of contemporary electronic music. This points to a significant change: While New Cinema mostly avoided overt political themes and adopted a distanced, individualized storytelling, New New Cinema follows an increasingly engaged stance in terms of politics. Yet, this engagement itself is mediated by allegories, the aesthetics of slow cinema, ambient minimalism, or affective restraint in international festival films (Nagib, 2011). Two ideological codes are particularly striking here: First, a political distance mode in which the state is rarely targeted, instead in which violence and injustice are expressed through the lived experiences of individual characters as in *Kurak Günler*, *Hayaletler* and *Kaygı*. Second, a reliance on *allegory*, where allegorical strategies enable filmmakers to navigate censorship and avoid direct confrontation (e.g., *Karanlık Gece*, *Sibel*). These aesthetic and ideological conventions shape the narrative structure and visual style of the movies and also deeply inform the sonic dimension.

Some continuities are also observed throughout the decades. A significant example is the sonic representation of rural space. In films from the earlier period such as *Aysel*, *Bataklı Damın Kızı* and also in later examples like *Susuz Yaz*, rural life in Turkish movies is rarely represented by authentic folk music; instead, Western

classical music, Turkish art music or even European avant garde compositions have been used to frame the rural as a space to overcome and aestheticize. Films like Kurak Günler, *Karanlık Gece* and *Sibel* reproduce this tradition. They avoid localized sounds in their rural portrayals, and follow the tradition of the sonic assimilation of the rurality by using Westernized sounds such as long drones and ambient music. This ongoing insistence on the sonic assimilation of the rural emphasizes the unresolved tension between national representations and transnational cinematic codes.

However, there is a deep rift in the way sounds integrate the political perceptions of these areas. Despite their ideological limitations, old village films retained an optimism and belief in transformation, often reflected in the sonic dimension through musical resolutions or emotional uplift. In contrast, these films are characterized by a deep pessimism towards in their sound worlds. This historical rift is also reflected at the level of ideology, particularly through the changing function of narrative and auditory patterns. Fredric Jameson defines ideologeme as “the smallest intelligible unit in the collective discourse of social classes.” It binds ideological content to narrative form and makes class struggle understandable through symbolic condensation. In realist fiction, ideologemes often appear as recurring narrative or discursive patterns that offer clear solutions to social contradictions. These include notions such as “benevolence” and “philanthropy” that constitute the resolution of social texts and they help transform the narrative into manageable symbolic configurations that seem complete or morally coherent. In the 5 main films discussed here though, ideologemes are present but they operate under different conditions. They mark ethical or political positions such as memory, silence, or civic duty, but they do not initiate transformation within the narrative. Their function is limited to the form rather than being dynamic. They stabilize meaning without generating narrative momentum. Instead of offering symbolic resolutions, they create a framework in which unresolved tension becomes the dominant affective experience. The films retain the surface structure of ideological clarity, but the narrative frameworks never progress toward resolution. As a result, the ideologeme shifts from a mechanism of containment to a sign of historical deadlock, revealing that the strategy of containment no longer operates through symbolic resolution but through aesthetic suspension. This contributes to what I describe as negative catharsis, and the sonic environment in these films reinforces this structure.

Flattened vocal registers, ambient noise, and repetitive patterns of speech contribute to a sense of suspended agency. The ideologeme becomes part of a larger structure of sonic resentment, in which political blockage is rendered as an aesthetic and auditory condition. These failed closures do not include contradictions only in affective form, reinforcing a sonic landscape defined by suspension and exhaustion.

Jameson notes that realist narratives often manage class and historical contradictions by channeling them into symbolic forms that either resolve or defer transformation (Jameson, 1981, pp. 84–92). The films analyzed here do neither. They do not mobilize utopian imaginaries of emancipation, nor do they offer symbolic resolutions that stabilize meaning. Instead, they organize sound and narrative around the aesthetic suspension of contradiction. What is foreclosed is not the presence of political tension, but the capacity to articulate that tension as a project of change. The resulting impasse is not accidental; it becomes the formal structure through which disillusionment is experienced. Rather than resolving sonic resentment, these films sustain and recirculate its affective logic through sonic forms that emphasize blockage, repetition, and emotional fatigue. In this sense, the listening experience affirms the listener's disaffection, but it doesn't mobilize it toward critique, rather encloses it within an aesthetics of recognition.

This logic extends to the spatial imaginaries as well. Both urban and rural areas are represented as untransformable, any potential attempt at change is thwarted through unresolved tonalities, hidden rhythms or sonic atmospheres of terror. The village is no longer a site of potential healing, but of inevitable traps. As in *Hayaletler*, city spaces are likewise static and obstructive. In these films, sound reinforces a worldview of disillusionment and paralysis.

5.5 Critical Reflections, Situated Listening, and Future Directions

This thesis has argued that in the political and cultural landscape of post-2016 Turkey, sound in cinema is not incidental or decorative, but functions as both a material and affective expression of ideological contradiction. Sound is positioned as an active agent in the production and recirculation of ideological perception. The

aestheticization of power by film sound, its coding of impasse and its rendering of the repressed audible make it a direct carrier of the political. In this context, I argued that sound in Turkish cinema is an essential component of the ideological framework rather than a narrative-supporting tool, through concepts such as *sonic ressentiment*, *negative catharsis* and *cognitive mapping by inheritance*.

I have argued that middle-class ressentiment and the coding of political *impasse* have been aestheticized as individual affects. However, this argument may evoke doubts about the risk of homogenizing the audience. While the sound work in films such as *Kurak Günler* and *Karanlık Gece* seem to operate as sensory mechanisms that confirm secular-urban concerns, how different class or regional audience positions perceive these films are not within the limits of this study. The project does not focus on how everyone hears these films. Its main concern is how sound is encoded to interpolate a particular “imagined listener.”

Influenced by Ien Ang’s (1991) concept of the “imagined audience,” which refers to the audience as a constructed figure rather than an empirically generated audience, I use the concept of the imagined audience in the context of cinematic sounds. As developed earlier, the thesis focuses on how cinematic sounds construct and speak to a subjectivity through socially classed, and culturally coded listening habits. In this context, the imagined audience refers to the assumed audience that is anticipated and positioned by the sonic strategies that shape the film. The concept serves as an important theoretical tool for understanding both how sound operates within ideological frameworks and what emotional positionings are produced and promoted through the film.

On the other hand, some will find this study as overly pessimistic about the transformative potential of art, as it emphasizes an ideological closure reinforced through sound. It can also be argued that emotional intensity, ambiguity, and sonic indecipherability may indeed trigger critical thinking rather than aestheticizing pessimism. Such criticisms are certainly valid. However, this study has its own theoretical and analytical framework. Within this framework, many variables such as the political atmosphere in Turkey at the time the films were made, the conditions of

production, the class positions of the directors, the legacy of previous sonic regimes, certain aesthetics that are in fashion, and the global cultural context have been taken into consideration. The method of the study aimed to analyze the dialectical relationships established between these variables and to analyze how the films in question constructed a sonic world at this specific historical moment. Therefore, the conclusion emerges both from the intrinsic characteristics of the films, and also from the analysis conducted within this multi-layered contextual structure.

All listening is situated. As someone shaped by a specific class, culture and spatial experience, my relationship to these films cannot be objective. Influenced by feminist and post-colonial scholars such as Mohanty (2003), Robinson (2020) and Stoeber (2016), listening for me is both a political act and reflective of one's habitus and relational proximity to the sound object. Hence, the methodology of symptomatic listening emerges from a situated interpretation within a shared structure of feeling of the zeitgeist. The films themselves may not be sharing the same motivations or political orientations. But they share a common tonal and sonic atmosphere that produces a sense of paralysis, unresolved tension and moral ambiguity. In this sense, the thesis follows a trajectory closer to grounded theory and critical cultural analysis, where theoretical frameworks emerge from the demands of the object itself.

If I had adopted a more quantitative method based on reception-based audience analysis or content coding over a large sample, the findings would probably have been more generalizable. However, such an approach would not have been compatible with the main concern of this study, which is ideological contradiction and the connection it establishes with affective intensity. Instead of measuring ideology through content or classifying the messages represented, I aimed to listen to how the sound processes contradiction at a formal level. In this context, symptomatic listening is not an analysis tool imposed on films from outside, but rather a method that derives from their own sonic contradictions.

In other words, this approach assumes that the relationship it establishes with the object of criticism is a mutual interaction. Symptomatic listening is a form of criticism that creates a friction between the formal organization of sound and theory, and

generates intellectual possibilities from this friction. The method takes shape in a dialectical relationship between theoretical understanding and the material and emotional dynamics of films. A listening practice that is attentive and sensitive to the formal tensions carried by sound reveals the formal conflicts in which sound embodies ideology. Therefore, the method itself is transformed in the process; its critical sensibility is reshaped by coming into contact with the aesthetic resistance of the films. While this situated form of criticism foregrounds my own listening practice, questions of circulation and reception remain equally important. Moreover, while this thesis discusses the ideological weight of sound forms, it does not fully address how these films might be consumed or reinterpreted in transnational or festival circuits where listening practices might differ. Future studies could examine empirical audience research, in-depth interviews, or comparative studies to support or question the conceptual claims made here.

Raymond Williams's concept of *structure of feeling* provides a fertile ground for theoretically framing the findings of this thesis. According to Williams, a *structure of feeling* is a collective state of feeling that emerges at a specific historical moment but has not yet been fully articulated into hegemonic ideology, and that resonates in everyday experience. Although these emotions are not explicitly articulated, they create political intuitions and fractures at the transformation points of social formation. From this perspective, it can be argued that the contemporary films analyzed in the thesis, *Kurak Günler*, *Kaygı*, *Hayaletler*, *Sibel* and *Karanlık Gece*, together embody a *structure of feeling* of this historical period marked by crisis and uncertainty on a sonic level. These films make the audience experience the themes of political deadlock, urban violence, class resentment and secular loneliness through the formal tensions on the sonic level. Sound becomes the primary carrier of affective politics and the form of crisis in contemporary cinema of Turkey in which emotions are shaped, interrupted, and recirculated.

Emphasizing listening as conditioned by histories of dispossession, belonging, and embodied proximity, the idea of *positionality in listening* further informs my method (Dylan, 2020). Yet, positionality is not exclusive to myself as the analyst. Directors themselves also listen from distinct positionalities. Directors behind *Sibel*,

Karanlık Gece, and *Kurak Günler* carry their own sonic sensibilities into rural or peripheral settings which inevitably influence how they perceive and represent these spaces sonically and culturally. Thus, directors, audiences, and analysts alike operate from situated, non-objective positions, each projecting their histories onto the cinematic sound object. Acknowledging this shared positionality opens up a productive and effective analytical approach. Since neither the directors nor I claim objectivity, this makes my analytical engagement both legitimate and methodologically viable. My work, therefore, adopts a politicized, situated way of engaging with cinema. In this approach, sound is considered a powerful ideological tool shaped by positionality.

We can ask the following questions: How do we hear the now? Which voices are still heard in times of crisis and exhaustion? Which silences are ignored, and which are felt? The answers would depend on the time and space but they will definitely point to sonic emotional labor constrained by ideological forces, and restricted by sonic norms. In an era where politics is overly visualized, the sounds that are muted may be the most ideologically powerful. Hence, listening requires labor too; to stay with the contradictions, silences, and repetitions.

This thesis has demonstrated that sound in post-2016 cinema of Turkey bears a fundamentally ideological job embodying political paralysis, moral dilemma, and aesthetic limitation. Concepts such as sonic resentment, negative catharsis, and cognitive mapping by inheritance have been developed to understand how sound encodes these contradictions. While reflecting the core crisis that stands in the middle of the films, these sounds also ensure its constant repetition. Although this crisis is mostly aestheticized rather than solves, it is also possible that sound strategies have the power to trigger critical listening through making contradictions audible. Hence, symptomatic listening works as both an analytical tool and a practice that allows us to experience cinema in a different, political way: not for resolutions and conformity, but for ruptures and inconvenience.

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