

“A LIVING DOG IS BETTER THAN A DEAD LION”:
REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMAL OTHERNESS IN POST-1990s
INDEPENDENT TURKISH CINEMA

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Zeynep Şahintürk, certify that

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ABSTRACT

“A Living Dog Is Better Than a Dead Lion”: Representations of Animal Otherness in Post-1990s Independent Turkish Cinema

Due to their social and political implications, the various cinematic and narrative aspects of independent Turkish cinema have been popular subjects of critical study for many scholars. One specific focus that has characterized the general approach to these films has been a study of the representations of the “Other” and whether the Other was portrayed in a pejorative or celebratory fashion. This category of the Other has predominantly contained women, children, the economically disenfranchised, the religious Other, villagers juxtaposed with city dwellers, the socially outcast, and finally, animals. All these groups of Others have been the subject of close examination, except one abundantly portrayed group: animals. As this thesis will reveal, animal characters in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema have an equally essential function as any of these groups as they are portrayed both as direct extensions of the human protagonists, and as metaphors of how violence and power operate in society, victimizing human and animal subjects in similar terms. With the increasing attention Animal Studies have drawn and the visibility of animal characters in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema, this critical gap needs to be filled. Assuming such an aim, this thesis will focus on the ethical, aesthetic, cinematic, and narrative implications of how animals are portrayed in *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Distant, Times and Winds*, *The Yusuf Trilogy: Egg, Milk, Honey*; *Kosmos*, *Somewhere in Between*, *Jîn*, *Singing Women*, *Winter Sleep*, *Sivas* and *Frenzy* and conclude that they open alternative paths of reconciliation between the human Self and the animal Other.

ÖZET

“Sağ Köpek, Ölü Aslandan İyi”: 1990’lar Sonrası Bağımsız Türk Sinemasında

Hayvan Ötekiliğin Temsilleri

Bağımsız Türk sinemasının çeşitli filmsel ve anlatısal yönleri sosyal ve politik imalarından ötürü pek çok akademisyen ve film eleştirmeni için popüler çalışma alanları olmuştur. Bu çalışmaların bu filmlere olan genel yaklaşımını nitelendiren odak noktası ise yönetmenlerinin “Öteki” karakterleri nasıl betimlediği ve bu temsillerin olumlu ya da olumsuz olup olmadığıdır. Bu “Öteki” kategorisi özellikle kadınları, çocukları, alt sınıfları, dinsel açıdan “Öteki”leri, şehirlilerin zıttı olarak köylüleri, sosyal olarak dışlanmış karakterleri, ve son olarak da hayvanları içermektedir. Bağımsız Türk sinemasında kendini sıkça gösteren hayvan “Öteki”ler dışındaki tüm bu “Öteki” karakterler pek çok akademisyen ve film eleştirmeni tarafından yakından incelenmiştir. Bu tezin göstereceği gibi 1990’lar sonrası bağımsız Türk sinemasındaki hayvan karakterlerin, “Ötekiliği” temsil eden tüm insan karakterler kadar önemli bir fonksiyonu vardır; çünkü hem filmlerdeki insan karakterlerin doğrudan bir uzantısı gibi, hem de şiddet ve gücün toplumda nasıl işlediğini, hayvan ve insan karakterleri nasıl eşit derecede mağdur ettiğini gösteren metaforlar olarak temsil edilmektedirler. Hayvan Çalışmaları alanının gittikçe ilgi görmesi ve 1990’lar sonrası bağımsız Türk sinemasındaki hayvan karakterlerinin örneklerinin artıp daha görünür hale gelmesiyle birlikte Yeni Türkiye Sineması üzerine yapılan “Öteki” odaklı çalışmalarda bu eleştirel açığın kapatılması ve hayvan “Öteki”nin de incelenmesi önemlidir. Böyle bir amaç üstlenen bu tez çalışması da *Tabutta Rövaşata*, *Uzak*, *Beş Vakit*, *Yusuf Üçlemesi: Yumurta, Süt, Bal*; *Kosmos*, *Araf*, *Jîn*, *Şarkı Söyleyen Kadınlar*, *Kış Uykusu*, *Sivas* ve *Abluka*

filmlerindeki hayvan “Öteki”lerin temsilindeki etik, estetik, filmsel ve anlatısal anlam ve imalar üzerine odaklanarak bu filmlerdeki insan Benlik ile hayvan Öteki arasındaki iletişim ve uzlaşmanın sözel bir etkileşim olmadan nasıl sağlandığını inceleyecektir.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION:
REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMAL OTHERNESS IN POST-1990s
INDEPENDENT TURKISH CINEMA

With its many pivotal political, social and economic changes, including three military coups in three decades, Turkey has produced films of miscellaneous genres since the early ages of Turkish cinema, including but not limited to nationalist films, action, folk tales, melodrama, erotica, thriller, fantasy, and horror.¹ In the 1990s, a group of Turkish filmmakers that were self-conscious about making films with a primarily artistic concern rather than a commercial one started a new trend of films that has ultimately carried Turkish cinema outside its previously drawn and arguably cliché boundaries: New Turkish Cinema. Bearing resemblances and paying homage to the films of widely acknowledged art-house directors such as Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky, the films of New Turkish Cinema focused on a microcosmic vision of human existence rather than on grand narratives such as eternal love and invincible heroism. There are some other factors that distinguish New Turkish Cinema from previous cinemas, i.e. Yeşilçam cinema, with several defining characteristics. Firstly, according to Savaş Arslan (2011), with New Turkish Cinema, unlike Yeşilçam, *auteurship* started to have its distinct niche and audience outside the borders of mainstream cinema, which provided favorable conditions for creative young directors (p. 240). Secondly, due to the globalization of the film market, co-production started to take off and an international cast and crew, along with subjects

¹ The technical and narrative dynamics and implications of all these popular genres have been closely examined by scholars from various perspectives.

of international conflicts and ethnic minorities, which on their own rights dealt with identity politics, became popular among new directors who were now making films that could also speak to the “Others” across the border, especially the festival audiences.² Furthermore, in the early 1990s, the films of New Turkish Cinema had the economical and political baggage of a history of an increasingly globalizing Turkey torn between discourses, e.g. of Westernization and Islamicization³ and thus often featured clashing binaries between the city dweller and the immigrant from Eastern Anatolia, male tragedies and the suppression of women⁴, the rich and the disenfranchised in a country with a rapidly increasing population, the modern and the traditional, and the concerns of the *nouveau riche*, as noted by Arslan (2011, pp. 249-51). The way these films approached the Other, however, was different from previous films in that they, unlike Yeşilçam films that portrayed stereotypical Others, did not rely on a collective identity or nostalgia and instead highlighted the absence of a home and a sense of belonging, and thus the sense of a Self on which to build an Other was arguably already being shattered (Suner as cited in Arslan, 2011, p. 253). This new cinema proved to be a more personal cinema according to Dönmez-Colin (2008), and unlike in Yeşilçam, in New Turkish Cinema, “[o]rdinary people caught in daily problems constitute the heroes and anti-heroes” (pp. 8-9). Moreover, while Yeşilçam cinema did not contest strictly drawn limits of traditional power relations, New Turkish Cinema started to challenge these limits and thus artists felt compelled to “investigate past traumas, collective memory and the dilemmas of a society contesting its identity in a period of transition” (Dönmez-Colin, 2008, pp. 8-9). This approach ultimately defined the style of a new generation of directors that came to

² Savaş Arslan (2011) in *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History*, p. 247, and Gönül Dönmez-Colin (2012) in *Cinemas of the Other: A Personal Journey with Film-Makers from Iran and Turkey*, p. 9.

³ Arslan notes that some post-Yeşilçam films still portray such dualities by way of stifling the voice of the Other, especially popular nationalist films downgrading ethnic Others, p. 253.

⁴ As portrayed in Yavuz Turgul’s *Eşkîya* (1996).

represent independent Turkish cinema, receiving worldwide credit: Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Derviş Zaim, Zeki Demirkubuz, Reha Erdem, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Semih Kaplanoğlu, Kutluğ Ataman, and directors of the “Yeni Sinemacılar” (New Cineasts) group⁵, among others.

Due to their social and political implications, the various cinematic and narrative aspects of independent Turkish cinema have been popular subjects of critical study for many scholars, especially over the last decade.⁶ One specific focus that has characterized the general approach to these films has been a study of the representations of the “Other” in the films of these directors and whether the Other was portrayed in a pejorative or celebratory fashion. This category of the Other has predominantly contained women, children, the economically disenfranchised, the religious Other, villagers juxtaposed with city dwellers, the socially outcast, and finally, animals. All these groups of Others have been the subject of close examination for many film scholars, except one abundantly portrayed group: animals. As this thesis will reveal, animal characters in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema have an equally essential function as any of these groups that represent “Otherness” in view of the fact that they are portrayed both as direct extensions of the human protagonists, and as metaphors of how violence and power operate in society, ultimately victimizing human and animal subjects in almost identical terms. It is precisely this tenet embraced by the directors of these films that assigns the often underprivileged and/or unheroic protagonist of New Turkish

⁵ Serdar Akar, Önder Çakar, Sevil Demirci, Kudret Sabancı.

⁶ Gönül Dönmez-Colin’s *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging* (2008) and *Cinemas of the Other: A Personal Journey with Film-Makers from Iran and Turkey* (2012), Savaş Arslan’s *Cinema in Turkey* (2011), and Asuman Suner’s *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory* (2010) constitute the leading critical volumes written on New Turkish Cinema.

Cinema a new narrative dimension, i.e. a characterization with analogies to animal Others and not a Romantic hero, per se.

With the increasing attention animal studies have drawn as an approach to make sense of various texts as well as ongoing conducts in reality, and the visible presence of animal characters in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema, it seems urgent that the aforementioned critical gap of the study of Otherness in New Turkish Cinema is filled. Assuming such an aim, this thesis will focus on the ethical, practical, aesthetic, cinematic, and narrative implications of how animals are portrayed and/or utilized within the dynamics of these films. Despite the plenitude of animal representations in New Turkish Cinema, this study will explore particularly *Somersault in a Coffin* (Derviş Zaim, 1996), *Distant* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002), *Times and Winds* (Reha Erdem, 2006), Semih Kaplanoğlu's *The Yusuf Trilogy: Egg* (2007), *Milk* (2008), *Honey* (2010); *Kosmos* (Reha Erdem, 2010), *Somewhere in Between* (Yeşim Ustaoğlu, 2012), *Jîn* (Reha Erdem, 2013), *Singing Women* (Reha Erdem, 2013), *Winter Sleep* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2014), *Sivas* (Kaan Müjdecî, 2014) and *Frenzy* (Emin Alper, 2015). Building upon a discussion of the distinctive qualities of these films regarding their treatment of animals, this thesis will conclude that they open alternative paths of reconciliation between the human Self and the animal Other through non-verbal intimations.

The theoretical background that contributes to this study has been largely authored by philosophers and critics such as Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Jeremy Bentham, Peter Singer, Gerald Bruns, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Vicki Hearne, Cora Diamond, Cary Wolfe, Emmanuel Levinas, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Stanley Cavell. All these theoreticians discuss the ways in which the Self relates to the Other, and some of

them discuss it specifically in the context of animal studies. While Levinas, Foucault, and Agamben theorized on ethics and power relations in the context of human societies in particular, this study utilizes their theories in the context of how human characters interact with the animal characters in these films. As such, one common denominator that has informed this research is that a study of animals as Others necessitates a study of ethics and violence, and how people utilize, and at times consume, the animal Other as, for instance, food and/or companion. The existing literature on animal studies frequently draws parallelisms between how we treat animals and how we treat *human* animals, i.e. each *Other* (Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life*, 2008, p. 55, & pp. 125-6). Some even go so far as to suggest that eating meat and the industrialization of meat production are not too dissimilar to the practices during the Holocaust (*The Lives of Animals*, 2000, criticized by Cavell in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, 2008, p. 114). This discussion, as frequently highlighted by the authors of *Philosophy and Animal Life* (2008), generates the question of vulnerability and understanding the suffering of the Other, along with a philosophical debate on the inability of the animal Other to articulate itself in language, and mankind's domination over animals through naming and thus symbolically killing them, as Derrida (2006/2008) discusses in depth in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (p. 20). The films in question problematize such issues by making statements about biopolitics, gender, and speciesism and reflect on how some of the human characters consider animals to be inferior. One such contestation of speciesism is pertinently exemplified by the Headman's (Muttalip Müjdeci) meditation in *Sivas* that if a dog has been born a dog, s/he should not aspire to become a lion, and instead should serve his/her owners so as to deserve the food they give him/her.⁷ Considering the

⁷ 01:25:40 – 01:26:26.

provincial setting that defines the motives of the characters in *Sivas* to utilize their dogs to make money, it is obvious that the speciesism at work in this film is closely connected to the ways in which biopolitics operates. Contrastingly, it is vocalized in *Kosmos* by the eponymous character (Sermet Yeşil) that animals are in fact unmistakably similar to people and that they are part of the grand design of God as equals of human beings, which is why people should not impose upon them.⁸ These films thus offer various perspectives on how to approach the animal Other by redefining how these characters perceive their human Selves.

Following the introductory chapter that discusses the issues above, this thesis will feature three main chapters. The first chapter will discuss the issue of ethics, i.e. how the human Self relates herself/himself to the animal Other in the post-1990s independent Turkish cinema. Since a consumption of the animal Other prevails in most of the films discussed, by means of eating, skinning, violating, and ultimately, killing, it is this chapter where the diverging theories on animal abuse operate well in a discussion of the aesthetic and narrative choices of animal depictions in New Turkish Cinema. Along with the issue of whether animals can feel, think, speak, and thereby respond⁹, the first main chapter will also discuss the issue of whether/how animals can feel pain, whether/how their lives are (considered to be) of less value than those of human beings, and the implications of either permutation. Inasmuch as this study hopes to highlight the cinematic choices while approaching the animal Other as much as the narrative tropes of the directors of these films, certain theoretical concepts will function as literal references for the purpose of this research, such as the Levinasian concept of the “face” of the Other in a discussion of the close-ups of animal faces. These portrayals serve at once as an allegory for the

⁸ 00:25:20 – 00:26:16.

⁹ Respond, rather than react. See Derrida in *Zoontologies*, 2003, pp. 126-7.

development of the characters within the plot and the corpo/reality of the animal body in a literal sense. In *Distant*, for instance, the trope of a mouse trap becomes directly literal and functions as an indispensable narrative device in the film by juxtaposing one character's ethical connection to animals with the other's by way of mercy killing. In *Kosmos*, the eponymous protagonist is portrayed with the qualities of a bird as he can communicate outside of human language, or even arguably, outside the limits of human voice, and has the ability to soar. But at the backdrop in the highly atmospheric *Kosmos* are graphic slaughterhouse scenes in which animal carcasses are shot with close-ups, as if to refamiliarize the viewer with the otherwise invisible industry of meat production. In the equally complex case of *Somersault in a Coffin*, the protagonist Mahsun Süpertitiz (Ahmet Uğurlu) passes both as a hunter/killer of animals, first by fishing, then running over a dog with a car, and finally by skinning the peacock he earlier on kept as a pet. Throughout the film, however, Mahsun himself is directly referred to and visually portrayed as a "dog" and he also operates as a caretaker of animals when he takes the dog he runs over to the veterinarian and admires the peacock in a very tender manner before he kills it so as not to starve. In *Frenzy*, the protagonist Kadir's (Mehmet Özgür) brother Ahmet (Berkay Ateş) works for the municipality as an executor of stray dogs while Kadir assumes the function of a hound by sniffing out explosives in trash cans. In *Jîn*, the protagonist (Deniz Hasgüler) lives in the heart of nature like an animal, camouflaging from her antagonizers. In *Singing Women*, arguably as an escape from the hegemony of the men in their lives, the female characters communicate like birds, and it is implied that the lead character Esma (Binnur Kaya) becomes an animal, presumably a stag, in the film's increasingly spiritualistic finale. With such

analogies, these films take issue with (at times institutionalized) animal abuse by simultaneously problematizing how human beings are treated in society.

As the films discussed in Chapter 2 typically depict animal Others as substitutes of some human characters, such as women, children, and incapable men, an analysis of victimization and how the ethical dynamics, i.e. the relationality between human and animal characters, function differently in these films will be the primary focus. It will be revealed in this chapter that difference of any kind is seen as a threat to the Self and that it is significantly almost always the male characters that engage in violence against animals, presumably to assert their manhood. In *Sivas*, for instance, kangal dogs are put to fight against each other as a display of the virility of their “owners” and the cinematic language of this film heavily relies on a parallelization of dogs and masculine power. Likewise, in Yeşim Ustaoglu’s *Somewhere in Between*, a dysfunctional father and husband that abuses his family with his alcoholism (Can Başak) is called by other villagers to come and poison the dogs around their house so that they can get rid of the dogs’ howling and the barking at night, which is a form of violence that he presumably inflicts to reclaim his former potency. For the purpose of discussing such implications of biopolitics, ethics, gender, power, and violence against animals, this chapter will utilize the theories of Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Agamben, and Peter Singer and highlight how these films portray power as a unilateral imposition towards the animal by the human, at times by way of domesticating and training animals, at others by killing them. These issues seem to be especially provocative in any discussion of animal studies and it is crucial to do justice to these compelling instances as extensively as possible while tailoring an argument that challenges the existing anthropocentric perspectives, because the representations of animals in these films are already complex, and

although they are not necessarily about animal rights, these films never use animals as props. Instead, they depict animals as increasingly definitive agents of these narratives that question how power and violence operate in society by drawing analogies between human and animal characters.

The second chapter will feature a discussion of how the human Self is visually and narratively identified with the bestial Other in New Turkish Cinema and the ramifications of a desire or an instance of becoming one with or resembling the animal Other. While mostly focusing on the question of alterity, especially pertaining to ethical, social, political, economical and inter-species differences, some of the critics mentioned above equally accentuate the potentiality of unification between the human being and the animal. The films discussed in this chapter function as a realization of that desired connection: idealized and nightmarish at once. While *Kosmos* glorifies instances of becoming-animal, for instance, the mice killed in *Distant* gain a gothic value as symbols of the aborted child of the protagonist Mahmut (Muzaffer Özdemir) and his ex wife (Zuhal Gencer Erkaya). As discussed in this chapter, the heterogeneous relationality between the human and the animal can be portrayed quite literally and organically, as in *Kosmos* via supernatural powers of soaring like birds, and animal characters morphing into human feet, and in *Sivas* via camerawork, or by means of visual and narrative analogies with the parallellisms drawn between animals and the female characters in Reha Erdem's *Jîn* and *Singing Women*; and in *Somersault in a Coffin*, where the protagonist associates his beloved peacock with his hopeless love interest (Ayşen Aydemir), himself being referred to as a "dog" several times; and in *Times and Winds*, where the young adolescent characters curiously enjoy the spectacle of dogs and donkeys mating, arguably identifying with them. The analyses of *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Sivas*,

Kosmos, *Times and Winds*, *Jîn*, *Singing Women*, and *Frenzy* will dominate this chapter due to the leitmotif of hybridization in them, which could be called the “hum/animal.”¹⁰ It will be concluded in this chapter that the way animals and humans are portrayed as extensions of each other renders them not as antagonistic, as discussed in Chapter 2, but as harmonious, and even complementary, characters, working together to expose how biopolitics operates in society against animals and disadvantaged humans as equally victimizing.

The third and final main chapter of this thesis is concerned with how these films, by means of exploiting certain film techniques, make narrative statements about the replacement of logos with non-verbal intimations as an alternative medium of interaction between the human Self and the animal Other. Giving specific details from the films, this chapter discusses how these sensory interactions between animal and human characters carry their subjects into “zones of liberated intensities,” as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986), in which signification becomes unnecessary at best (as cited in Bruns, 2011, pp. 62-3). This newfound liberation in turn leads the protagonists to the ethical standpoint from which they can now enjoy a “network of possibilities” to reconcile with their radical Others.¹¹ Since human language is rendered irrelevant in such a reconciliation, the politics of animal representation is a pervasive theme in these films. It is also in this chapter that the theme of childhood plays a pivotal role in demonstrating the bond between “innocence” (read “not yet characterized by civilization”) and nature, which is why most characters that communicate through their senses with or like animals are represented by children (*The Yusuf Trilogy*, *Times and Winds*, *Sivas*, and arguably

¹⁰ The term “hum/animal” has been previously coined and used in popular culture as well as by the eponymous foundation: <http://www.humanimaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/our-mission-and-values/>

¹¹ Derrida, “Eating Well”, 1991, pp. 116-7 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, pp. 73-4.

Jîn) and childish adults (*Kosmos* and *Singing Women*), who take refuge in the quietude of nature to escape the civilization that victimizes them. These characters are also significantly the only party that does not hurt the animal characters in these films.

The conclusion chapter will serve as a wrap-up of how all the theoretical and cinematic works have informed this thesis and in what ways this study hopes to have contributed to the existing body of criticism on New Turkish Cinema. It will be recapitulated in this chapter that the directors of these films have one very significant approach to the animal Other in common: they all delineate the animal Other as an extension of human beings. Derviş Zaim in *Somersault in a Coffin* and Reha Erdem in *Times and Winds*, *Kosmos*, *Jîn* and *Singing Women*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan in *Distant* and *Winter Sleep*, Kaan Müjdeci in *Sivas*, and Emin Alper in *Frenzy* even depict their human characters as very organically linked to animal Others in their respective films, which is why these films cannot really be categorized as films *about* animal rights per se. My conclusion chapter will thus discuss how in these films violence against people and violence against animals are not mutually exclusive and in fact function synchronously, and argue that although these films depict their human and animal characters analogously, they also challenge the existing anthropocentric approaches to animals by highlighting the possibility of a non-verbal reconciliation between the two species.

CHAPTER 2

ETHICS, ALTERITY AND ANIMAL OTHERNESS IN POST-1990s

INDEPENDENT TURKISH CINEMA

This chapter will specifically discuss ethics, alterity and animal otherness in post-1990s' independent Turkish cinema by highlighting the tensions in the relationality, i.e. the interaction, between the animal Other and the human Self in several aspects. It will be revealed that these aspects operate in such a way that the concept of masculinity becomes a central determinant of how violence against the animal, female, and child Others is contested by the directors of these films. Although considering the characterization of animal Others and female or children Others as *exactly* the same in these films would be a reductive approach, drawing parallels between suppressed and violated human characters and animal characters subjected to similar forms of abuse is an obvious constituent in all the films mentioned in this thesis. These films then seem to be making statements at once with regard to the human condition and how arbitrary violence dehumanizes the perpetrator, and the brutal nature of abusing or consuming the animal Others. It is ultimately crucial that these statements are made through a problematization of the performance of patriarchy and how male characters are prone to engage in violence. Drawing upon this central argument, this chapter will discuss the cases in point where characters kill animals for food, by accident, or on purpose; the functionality of animals, the pain that animals feel, training the animals, and animals as the sacred and / or ominous Others in *Kosmos*, *Sivas*, *Frenzy*, *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Times and Winds*, *Distant*, *Somewhere in Between*, *Winter Sleep*, and *The Yusuf Trilogy: Egg, Milk, and Honey*.

To begin with, it should be noted that the visual devices employed in these films operate to challenge the existing power and gender dynamics in the plot so that the directors secure the attention of the audience on the decisive points made. One such cinematic device is the manipulation of the close-up technique. The analysis of the close-ups in these films has been mostly determined by a Levinasian framework with respect to the “face” and pertains to four of these films in particular: *Kosmos*, *Sivas*, *Frenzy*, and *Somersault in a Coffin*, all of which feature close-ups on the faces of animals awaiting death. While the animals in question are, albeit vicariously, murdered by men who push their dogs to kill the opponent dogs in *Sivas*; in the other films listed above, animals die directly at the hands of their murderers, all of whom are significantly men. Thus, it seems that these close-ups beg the scrutiny of the audience on the vulnerability of the animal victims of these men who seem to take committing murder for granted and even get off on killing animals, as in the case of *Sivas* and *Frenzy*. It is ultimately up to the spectator to confront and contest this brutality by looking at the *faces* of these animals in close-ups.

Although Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1969) wrote specifically on the ethical relationality between *human* subjects upon the horrors of the Holocaust to theorize a new ethical model that assigns the Self not a totalizing and conscience-born responsibility but a pure responsiveness to the needs of an Other, the Levinasian theory of the face is relevant to the relationality between the human and animal characters in the films listed above (Critchley, 2002, p. 21). In this model the face of the Other is the source of justice and says “Thou shalt not commit murder” (Waldenfels, 2002, pp. 69-70). Accordingly, there is an asymmetrical and an untotizable relationality between the Self and the Other, and the Self is bound to follow the imperative of the Other (Waldenfels, 2002, p. 69). When this model of

approaching the Other is taken literally and within the visual context of these films, it could be suggested that the close-ups of the faces in *Kosmos* of the cattle being killed in the slaughterhouse,¹² in *Sivas* of the dogs being put to fight against one another to death, Doru the female horse on the brink of death,¹³ and the cattle in the barn waiting to be utilized or slaughtered,¹⁴ in *Somersault in a Coffin* of the peacock¹⁵ that awaits Mahsun's capture and her eventual sacrifice, and finally in *Frenzy* of the dogs that are mercilessly picked off with rifles by the municipality all call to question and beg our responsibility, along with our implied complicity, in allowing murder without being necessarily mindful of it. These animal faces thus reflect the often invisible suffering of the animal Other that has thus been made visible. Bearing thus in mind the arguably provocative slaughtering of the animal body for food, by accident, or on purpose as if they are thought of as disposable, and at best "functional" characters, the portrayal of these deaths demands critical inquiry, and the issue of biopolitics is especially relevant when discussing how power is exerted on animals in these films by male characters.

The concept of biopolitics has been predominantly defined within the context of the Holocaust and attempts to examine the power dynamics at work regarding the worth of life and the right to live given by a sovereign to a subject. Michel Foucault (1997) in *Society Must Be Defended* theorizes that biopolitics is a unilateral subjection and not a symmetrical exercise of power and it always entails a victimization of the less powerful (pp. 239-64). The following description of biopolitics by Foucault (1997) thus informs the approach of this thesis to the ethical tension in these films:

¹² 00:42:53; 00:55:58 – 00:57:00, 01:05:46 – 01:06:00, 01:14:15 – 01:14:20.

¹³ 00:20:38 – 00:20:43.

¹⁴ 00:17:25 – 00:18:42.

¹⁵ 00:38:20, 00:39:25.

The very essence of the right of life and death is actually the right to kill: it is at the moment when the sovereign can kill that he exercises his right over life. It is essentially the right of the sword. So there is no real symmetry in the right over life and death. . . . It is the right to take life or let live. And this obviously introduces a startling dissymmetry. (pp. 240-1)

This perspective when adapted to the “human versus animal” tension in these films proves essential in theoretically laying out how authority, which is specifically masculine, is exercised at the expense of disenfranchising the subjected Other. Especially in Kaan Müjdeci’s *Sivas* and Emin Alper’s *Frenzy* the lives of dogs are not only replaceable but it is also a distinctly masculine privilege given to their murderers to enjoy destroying the animal Other. In *Sivas*, the kangal dogs bred “specifically to fight” are so expendable that after a defeat on the arena, or if they in some way survive the fight with serious wounds, these dogs are left behind as abject bodies that have lost their potential to provide enjoyment *and* money to their owners. More specifically, dogfighting takes on a disturbingly erotic function, so much so that these men seem to derive sexual pleasure from the “performance” of their dogs against other dogs, and Aslan’s brother Şahin (meaning “falcon” in Turkish) even has sex, implicitly with a prostitute, after the glorious fight of Sivas in a dogfighting tournament, presumably to release the high testosterone his body produced during the sight of fighting dogs. Apparently proud of Şahin’s (Ozan Çelik) “victory”, the Headman of the village cheekily asks him: “It’s nothing like fucking a donkey, is it?!”¹⁶

Taking place in a small village in Yozgat, a Central Anatolian city in Turkey, *Sivas* depicts the process of the eleven-year-old Aslan (Doğan İzci) to adopt the eponymous kangal dog, upon which his father, brother, and his father’s friends take over and push Sivas into illegal dog fights to make money. In this unmistakably

¹⁶ 01:24:16 – 01:24:35.

patriarchal setting, Aslan is the only male character of the film to acknowledge the problematic aspect of pushing dogs into fights and is the only character who does not want to dispose either of Doru, the female horse who is about to die, or Sivas, who was abandoned by his previous owners in the first place after a savage fight in which he was badly defeated. Throughout the film, his “superior” male characters try to teach Aslan how to become a “man” with language. In such a scene where Aslan wants to replace his classmate Osman (Furkan Uyar) who will play the Prince next to Aslan’s romantic interest Ayşe (Ezgi Ergin) as Snow White, he is advised by his brother Şahin that he should strangle the “other” prince, and say “I’ll fuck you!”¹⁷ Director Kaan Müjdeci who also wrote the screenplay ventriloquizes his characters with an increasingly masculinist and violent vocabulary that critiques the machismo of the language used in that culture. Even his mother (Banu Fotocan), while vigorously bathing him¹⁸ after he adopts Sivas, asks Aslan in an “endearing” manner: “Are you my Aslan?”¹⁹ Have you become a man, now, my son?” to which he responds with a “Yes” as he peeps at her mother’s shaking breasts as she bathes him.²⁰ Thus the entire film revolves around the tension of masculinity and how it victimizes not only human, but animal characters as well. It is also revealed halfway into the film that there is indeed a subculture of hundreds of men bringing in their kangal dogs to an underground and illegal competition to fight other kangals only to earn their owners money and manly prestige at the expense of their own lives or well-being. In *Sivas*, power, which is of a specifically masculine nature, is thus attained by the biopolitical “right” to take the life of animal Others, and even the

¹⁷ 00:09:15 – 00:09:27.

¹⁸ Dominant as she may seem over her son in this scene, Aslan’s mother only perpetuates the masculinist vocabulary of their culture.

¹⁹ “Aslan” in Turkish significantly translates as “lion”, thereby reinforcing the patriarchal identity into which Aslan is expected to fit.

²⁰ 00:40:10 – 00:40:42.

“authorities” that are supposed to intervene in such an illegal act of murder are rendered completely impotent and negligent in the desired prevention of such a destructive epitome of biopower, as embodied by the policemen who stop the Headman’s car in *Sivas* to check if there is anything suspicious, but eventually let them go.

Aslan seems to be the only character in *Sivas* to acknowledge the pain his dog has to endure if he is to be fought with other dogs. It can be argued that he feels compassion thanks to his being closer to nature and yet, far from the realities of the utterly destructive machoism around him. Nonetheless, it is hinted at the finale of the film when Aslan says he never will put Sivas in dog fights again that he probably will not be able to determine that, just as he failed to keep Sivas out of the dogfighting tournament. Early on in the film when Ayşe asks Aslan why he does not want to get Sivas into fights, he responds “Why would I? It’s good enough if he protects me. Would you push our kids into fights if we had any?”²¹ Two minutes after this exchange, despite his voiced reluctance to get Sivas into dog fights, Aslan willingly does so to impress Ayşe by getting Sivas to maul the dog of Osman.²² Thus he perpetuates early on the same male violence that frustrates him throughout the film. A completely understanding approach to the animal Other therefore is impossible in *Sivas* inasmuch as the only hope in extinguishing this acidic patriarchal violence on animals rests on the shoulders of a little boy who himself boasts his “virility” off the strength of his dog. Nevertheless, the Headman has a clear conscience when it comes to utilizing Sivas, and explains his rationale to Aslan to justify their decision to keep pushing Sivas into fights by claiming that Sivas is innately a fighting breed, not a “Fino,” and that if he was born as a dog, he should

²¹ 00:48:20 – 00:48:32.

²² 00:50:30 – 00:51:50.

“know his place,” fulfill his duties, and (literally) fight for the people who feed him.²³

Considering that Foucault’s (1997) formulation of biopolitics refers to the “right of the sword” in the state level, it should be noted that the way the men in *Sivas* exercise their power on dogs operates on a micro level (pp. 240-1). Hence, they are not the sovereign subjects of biopolitics in a larger context, but are subjected to the power of the state by being economically disenfranchised. As such, their lives also belong to the sovereigns of the economy since they provide manual labour for middle and upper classes. Although it is not constantly vocalized, the financial deprivation of Aslan’s family is communicated subtly through significant details. For instance, Aslan’s father (Hasan Yazılıtaş) scolds Şahin for almost starting a fire because of the dung he put in the stove, possibly due to a lack of decent coal to burn for heating.²⁴ In another sequence, Aslan, out of an extreme resentment for Şahin’s attempt to sell Sivas, takes off his clothes and throws them at him, shouting “Go on! Sell these, too!”²⁵ which implies that it could be habitual for this family to have to sell their belongings for a need of money. The destitute setting of the village with shanties and underdeveloped roads further indicates the poverty in this environment. In their comprehensive research “Dogfighting: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity,” Evans, Kalich (Gauthier) and Forsyth (2007) aptly observe that dogfighting in the Southern United States is predominantly a working class sport and that “modern-day dogfight provides a symbolic battlefield” for validating masculine identities (p. 210). Such a class-related tension communicated through dogfighting seems especially pertinent to the kangal owners in *Sivas* who belong to the lower

²³ 01:25:40 – 01:26:26.

²⁴ 00:16:30 – 00:16:40.

²⁵ 00:55:21 – 00:57:07.

class, if not distinctly working class, since they seem to depend on an agrarian and livestock-oriented economy. Just like the dog owners in *Sivas*, the dogfighters in the abovementioned study are reported to be constantly seeking the invincible dog (p. 213). Also striking is the similarity between the two parties regarding the conjecture that “the actual combatants serve as symbols of their respective owners, and therefore any character attributed to the dogs is also attributed to the men they represent” (p. 213). In *Sivas*, this symbolism is not only valid in the arena where the men derive a pleasure off of their “victorious” dogs, but is also physically constructed when Aslan brags to his platonic crush who praises *Sivas*, telling her that the eyes of *Sivas* look like his own “with the pretty color.”²⁶

Pertaining also to the discussed economic condition of Aslan’s family and the entire village, another essential problematic of the subculture of dogfighting is insightfully underlined by the above-cited research by Evans et al. (2007) as follows:

. . . alternative opportunities (such as occupational success) for validating masculinity may be perceived by these working-class men to be less accessible, thus making a loss in the pit much more threatening in terms of their masculine identities. These males may already feel they are ‘losers’ in the game of life, and they may therefore be more inclined to rely on validating rituals such as the execution of cur dogs to keep from being stigmatized as ‘losers’ in this situation as well. (p. 215)

This conclusion reflects the urgency of addressing class issues if animals are violently exploited for expressing masculine identities, and this is why *Sivas* is not only a statement on crimes on animals but a contestation of the destructive forces of machoism that is so fragile as to depend on abusing animal Others.

Making similar statements about violence in a male dominated society, *Frenzy* contests institutionalized violence in a form that is not too different from the practices of the group of dogfighters in *Sivas*. It is revealed at the beginning of

²⁶ 00:46:54 – 00:47:06.

Frenzy that the protagonist Kadir has been serving jail time for twenty years, and is approached by the head of the police force to investigate a series of arsonist and terrorist attacks in İstanbul under cover in exchange for his remaining two years in prison. He takes this offer and approaches his brother Ahmet as the first thing upon his bargained parole. He finds Ahmet in a depressed state of mind as the latter's wife abandoned him and took their kids with her. Ahmet attempts suicide but cannot bring himself to do it. The relevant part Ahmet plays in this film in relation to this thesis lies in the fact that he is a worker of the municipality whose job is to shoot stray dogs with two other men who do this, ironically, "for a living". The actual motives of these people in this systematic murder, however, is unknown to the spectator, arguably because its focus is the unseen practices of governmental animal control services. Nevertheless, it is implied that there is some public demand for the killing of the strays that causes the municipality to allocate its resources and workforce accordingly. In one scene, the municipality authority in charge of this slaughter speaks on television and lies that the process of avoiding canine-related problems is all carried out in a properly "humane" way, *definitely* without any murder, and that they are "only tranquilizing dogs, all according to European standards, and then safely placing these dogs in municipal shelters," which reinforces the notion that there is demand for such "regulations".²⁷

Very similar to *Sivas* in terms of the ways in which dogs are considered dispensable to the patriarchal system, *Frenzy* portrays a relationality with animals which is mostly composed of a violently destructive way, and not only showcases how biopower is exercised but also illustrates what Giorgio Agamben (1995/1998) discusses in his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, with the titular

²⁷ 01:12:02 – 01:12:22.

concept “*homo sacer*”, i.e. a person who cannot be sacrificed but can be murdered with impunity. *Homo sacer* is inherently a discrepancy insofar as it represents both sacredness and disposability. What defines it thus is exactly the arbitrary nature of its very existence, which is determined solely by the sovereign as such: “Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life” (p. 82). Even though Agamben (1995/1998) discusses this term for human subjects and, more specifically, with regard to how biopolitics operated within the Holocaust, the term *homo sacer* seems to relate aptly to the animal Others in these films treated as expendable lives the destroyers of which get no punishment. Particularly in *Frenzy*, the subjugation of dogs at the hands of the municipality underlines how the system eradicates the animal Other without any punishment. The reason for that is the dispensable nature of the dogs in this film characterized with the qualities of the *homo sacer*, of which the municipality systematically disposes. Since the abject bodies of these killed dogs cannot be a part of any symbolic act, such as a religious ritual, they are not considered to be worthy of sacrifice and hence cannot be sacrificed, but they are seen as disposable beings whose killers get away with this murder. Not only do these animal corpses not have any symbolic meaning, but they are ultimately piled on each other in landfills like garbage.

At first, Ahmet and his colleagues seem to be utterly robotic and desensitized while picking off the stray dogs one by one with their rifles. However, the lines begin to blur for Ahmet when he shoots a dog but is unable to kill it. This dog ends up howling at night near Ahmet’s house, and Ahmet gets so agitated and frustrated that it is implied that at first the howling could indeed be a product of his guilty conscience. When he tries and locates the dog, however, he cannot bring himself to leave the hurt dog outside and instead takes him in, at first with the purpose of taking

care of the dog until its hurt leg heals.²⁸ Such a repentant act on the part of Ahmet starts to represent a part of him that is utterly human and in a deservingly complicated way. He starts playing with the dog, whom he names “Coni”, and enjoys his time with this new companion who, arguably in a way that most human characters do not, appreciates Ahmet’s presence. But possibly knowing that his caretaker is also his victimizer, Coni takes the first chance to flee as soon as Ahmet leaves the front door open. When he comes back after a while, he gets beaten by Ahmet who blames and starts torturing the dog for coming back only for food and not for Ahmet’s companionship per se.²⁹

It could also be argued that the howling that Ahmet hears coming from outside his apartment could in fact be Ahmet’s inherent animality, his haunting other self calling out from his subconscious, potentially revealing his deep-seated aggression, or his own wounded self that he tries to suppress. With the absence of his wife and children throughout the film that defines his depression and causes him to ponder suicide, the film could be suggesting that he might have murdered his family and that Coni replaces Ahmet’s family. Another interpretation could be that even though Ahmet’s wife did not return home, potentially upon Ahmet’s abusive behaviour, Coni did. What is more, the fact that Meral (Tülin Özen), the wife of Ahmet’s friend Ali’s (Ozan Akbaba), keeps making and bringing Ahmet his favorite soup connotes the sexual undertones of food, and indicates Ahmet’s dependence on Meral to sate his bodily needs, not dissimilar to Coni’s dependence on Ahmet. But each time Kadir comes to visit Ahmet, and hears “Ahmet and Meral” presumably having sex, in Ahmet’s “reality”, he is alone with Coni and not with Meral, which further complicates the issue of animal treatment and points to the potential

²⁸ 00:35:27 – 00:37:18.

²⁹ 01:03:47 – 01:04:12.

schizophrenia that prevails in the entire film through the characters of Kadir and Ahmet.

The possible reading that Coni represents a human being for Ahmet is further reflected in his reaction towards Coni when he blames him for coming back only for his own interest as mentioned above. Instead of approaching Coni as a dog, i.e. an animal Other that cannot speak human language and deceive, Ahmet chooses to treat Coni like a person, and more specifically, one he deems to be inferior to himself (potentially like his wife). Within the context of animals and deception, Jacques Derrida (2003) interprets Jacques Lacan's (1966/2002) formulation of the lack of speech in animals as follows in "And Say the Animal Responded?":

According to Lacan, the animal would be incapable of . . . deceit, of this pretense in the second degree, whereas 'the subject of the signifier,' within the human order, would possess such a power and, better still, would emerge as subject, instituting itself and coming to itself as subject *by virtue of this power*, a second-degree reflexive power, a power that is conscious of being able to deceive by pretending to pretend. (as cited in *Zoontologies*, 2003, p. 130)

Disagreeing with Lacan (1966/2002) in this context, Derrida (2003) would argue that animals are in fact very much capable of deceit and that covering their traces is one such indication of this ability that proves their subjectivity.³⁰ Ascribing such an ability of deceit to Coni, Ahmet blames Coni for coming back only for his own interest, and not for Ahmet's companionship. This in fact is a projection of his own pretense in keeping Coni for his own interest, i.e. holding on to Coni as a companion in solitude, and not to merely keep him alive, as he himself is dependent upon Coni to stay human, and engaging in violence has dehumanized him enough. Correspondingly, as Ahmet's character is built in such a way that he spends more time at home with brooding thoughts of suicide and avoids human interaction,

³⁰ *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 2008, p. 39.

especially with his elder brother Kadir, his character development is communicated through the way he mis/treats Coni. It is implied that without Coni's presence in his house Ahmet probably would have committed suicide. Therefore, Coni keeps Ahmet grounded as a human being who is "needed" by an arguably less "potent" creature. Regardless, it is a disturbing experience for the audience to sit through the abuse Coni experiences at the hysterical hands of Ahmet, who upon the police pounding on his door goes as far as to bind the dog's mouth with a string so that he cannot bark. He then has a nightmare in which a group of dogs are running towards him at night, barking, as he is standing without his pants on.³¹ In the finale of the film, two bodies are carried out of Ahmet's apartment: one his own, and judging by its smaller size, the other possibly Coni's, wrapped in a blanket.³² It is therefore highly suspicious that Ahmet showed a pattern of violence against dogs and killed one more before he died himself in one way or another. All in all, *Frenzy* is a psychological thriller-drama with a Kafkaesque and atmospheric setting, and the "reality" for the characters is possibly the product of their schizophrenic tendencies, and is different for each. As such, Kadir's perception of Coni's howling as the erotic moans of Meral from the outside Ahmet's apartment may be the factual version of the diegetic reality. The potential schizophrenia that pervades the film thus reinforces the psychological function of the dogs which haunt Ahmet's nightmares due to his guilty conscience, and howl in Kadir's mind presumably in view of his psychosexual issues.

Another theme of interest that portrays a problematic approach to animal Others is the training of animals, and is ubiquitous in *Sivas* and *Frenzy*. The issue of training the Other is rendered an ethically problematic one in both of these films where animals are subjected to numerous acts of violence. Paul Patton (2003), in his

³¹ 01:15:47 – 01:16:00.

³² 01:41:37 – 01:42:00.

“Language, Power, and the Training of Horses” insightfully contests the various ways in which trainers claim to have trained their horses by stating that despite the use of the most ethically correct and nonviolent techniques, a relationship that is “fundamentally coercive” could not be purified of subjection (pp. 85-6).

Correspondingly, the issue of training the animal Other is perhaps problematized mostly in *Frenzy*, among all these films, as Coni the dog is beaten up when he “cannot” be trained. Apart from constantly being abused for his lack of toilet and territory training,³³ Coni is subjected to Ahmet’s abusive behavior which includes being sprayed with a water gun,³⁴ and when he does not “keep quiet,” Ahmet binds his mouth and keeps him as such for at least one full day.³⁵ Likewise, in *Sivas* the kangal dogs are treated violently by their owners and it becomes difficult to distinguish whether it is endearing or threatening when these men are training their dogs. Paul Patton (2003) concludes that “[g]ood training establishes a form of language that closes that gap . . . and enables a form of interaction that enhances the power and the feeling of power of both horse and rider” (p. 97). Such an ethical and nonviolent way of dismissing fundamental differences is mostly used by Aslan when he is training *Sivas*. The visual vocabulary of these training sequences by way of camerawork and close-ups also render these two characters as equals by manipulating the real life sizes of *Sivas* and Aslan.

Having discussed how *Sivas* and *Frenzy* reflect the ways in which masculinity defines and relies on biopower, and the relevance of Agamben’s (1995/1998) theorization of *homo sacer* within a predominantly male environment that exercises its power on the animal characters with impunity, it would be proper now to discuss

³³ 00:37:26 – 00:38:18.

³⁴ 00:47:56 – 00:48:45.

³⁵ 01:10:10 – 01:13:36.

Yeşim Ustaoglu's *Somewhere in Between*, a film about Zehra (Neslihan Atagül), a young woman who gets extramaritally pregnant with the baby of the truck driver Mahur (Özcan Deniz) passing by the small town Zehra lives in. After the night Mahur spends together with Zehra, he disappears without a trace, much to the disappointment of Zehra, who is already very much in love. Since Zehra cannot reveal this pregnancy to anyone, except for her best friend Derya (Nihal Yalçın) and her friend Olgun (Barış Hacıhan), who is in love with her, she hides it until she gives birth, only to kill her newborn (off camera). Zehra is then arrested upon the discovery of the corpse of the baby, and released to get psychological treatment, as she claims not to recall what she has done to her newborn. The film ends with Zehra's marriage to Olgun, who went to prison for beating Derya up as he held Derya responsible for Zehra's pregnancy. The relevance of animals in this film is due to Olgun's dysfunctional and alcoholic father Haydar, who is called to poison the stray dogs in the neighborhood, which he, despite bypassing his responsibilities towards his family, delightedly fulfills almost as a statement of masculine authority.³⁶ The dog that he kills in this sequence is significantly the mother of a puppy, and is killed in front of her baby. These two dogs symbolize firstly Haydar's wife and son, because his wife Meryem (Yasemin Çonka) leaves Haydar, causing Olgun a lot of pain; and secondly, Zehra and her newborn, as they are both victimized by the men. Olgun is extremely resentful towards his father due to the latter's awful manner towards his wife and son. But however furious Olgun may be with his terrible role model, he engages in the exact same form of violence with his father when he randomly shoots at stray dogs later on in the film out of sheer anger, which once again highlights how destructive and contagious violence against animals

³⁶ 00:44:00 – 00:46:00.

becomes, and how associable masculinity is with the destruction of *homo sacer*, which in this case is once again, stray dogs.³⁷

In Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Winter Sleep*, male anger is typically taken out on the animal Other, as well. Aydın (Haluk Bilginer), the protagonist of the film, is an opinionated intellectual who used to be a theater actor, now running his own hotel in Cappadocia. His detached wife Nihal (Melisa Sözen) and his sister Necla (Demet Akbağ) live in the same hotel in separate rooms, and their dialogue is mostly limited to breakfast conversations. While Necla joins Aydın in his study at times and communicates with him more often, Nihal's avoidance of Aydın characterizes the film. After a long sequence of arguments with Nihal, who wants Aydın gone from the house, Aydın is arguably unable to express himself to his wife, and instead goes hunting and shoots a rabbit dead, presumably to feel in control of something.³⁸ The same formula of declining male power attempted to be regained by murdering the animal Other can also be observed in *Somersault in a Coffin*, whose homeless and unemployed protagonist Mahsun tries to survive in İstanbul without a proper home or food. The first shot of the iconic peacock in this film that fascinates Mahsun is located in the historical site Rumeli Hisarı, İstanbul. In the background of this first shot of the peacock,³⁹ which is significantly framed with a close-up, plays a distinctly Ottoman music, presumably manifesting the nostalgic reflections on an imperial, arguably glorious, and overwhelmingly patriarchal nation.⁴⁰ These haunting artifacts of the past at the backdrop of the quintessential figure of the peacock, however, delineates not only a tension between the dismal reality of Mahsun, and thereby İstanbul, and the associations with the Ottoman past, but also a striking clash

³⁷ 01:24:00 – 01:24:22.

³⁸ 03:02:00 – 03:06:00.

³⁹ The peacocks in the film are exhibited as tourist attractions in Rumeli Hisarı as gifts from Iran to the then-Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel.

⁴⁰ 00:39:08 – 00:39:24.

between the imagery of a series of historically glorified male figures and the representation of the extremely meek and disenfranchised “underdog” Mahsun. Representing his unrequited romantic interest, the peacock then plays an utterly indispensable role in highlighting Mahsun’s impotence in the human world: he has an influence solely on animals and only through eventually killing and consuming them. As these epitomes from the abovementioned films suggest, the destruction of the animal Other is exhibited as an overwhelmingly masculine act, but the more violent the male characters are towards animals, the less empowered they seem, and ironically, the more “bestial” they become, as in the cases of *Frenzy* and *Somersault in a Coffin*.

Making parallel statements with regard to the exercise of power to the ones discussed above, these films also contest how people exploit the functionality of the animal Others. Even though animals are typically characterized by their service within the food chain as meat, portrayed mostly in *Kosmos*, animals in certain films represent other ways in which the human Self utilizes the animal Other. Accordingly, *The Yusuf Trilogy* undoubtedly stands out among the other films with its titular emphasis on various functions of animals, namely, providing *Egg*, *Milk*, and *Honey*. It should first be observed that egg as a figure represents a tension with its dual embodiment of life and death. Just like the sacrificed ram’s blood on Yusuf’s forehead presumably vitalizing him, the egg is in fact a dead / unborn animal that would have lived unless human beings had relied on it as a primary source of protein. Moreover, considering the titles of the *Trilogy*, it is remarkable that “meat” is not another film of this series. It is then imperative here to note that egg, milk, and honey are derived without their producers being slaughtered after their function, or at least, not after just one cycle of production. Instead, they are kept alive to produce more of

these products that their owners process to earn money, or simply, consume as food. Hence, there is still a form of exploitation at work here, albeit a comparatively indirect one; one that resembles slave-driving rather than murder. It is equally interesting that the functionality of animals operates on a microcosmic level in the *Trilogy* inasmuch as the owners of these animals, even though they are less potent than the state, are still the sovereign subjects of this biopolitical relationship, and get to choose which animals to kill or keep.

Representing the best epitome of the issue of using animals as workers, *The Yusuf Trilogy* delineates a personal history of the poet Yusuf (Nejat İşler) and starts with the most recent period in his life in his late thirties with *Egg* when he visits the village in which he grew up to attend his mother's funeral. Arguably in his least expressive self, Yusuf keeps other characters at arm's length throughout this first film of the series, except for Ayla (Saadet Işıl Aksoy), Yusuf's distant cousin his mother took care of while he was away. She and Yusuf seem to have a bond which is not voiced but is evidently experienced on both sides. The interaction between the two and their impending intimacy, which is delivered mostly at the finale in which they have breakfast together, significantly with dairy products like milk and eggs, thus characterizes *Egg*.

The second film of the series, *Milk*, gives away more about Yusuf than *Egg* does and encompasses his young adulthood in the village where he grew up. *Milk* mostly delineates Yusuf's (Melih Selçuk) relationship with his mother (Başak Köklükaya) and their life in the village without a paternal figure. The title of this film refers to the milk that Yusuf and his mother produce and ferment into cheese so that they could sell it at the local bazaar. It is obvious that milk is their foremost source of income and that it is a financially challenging period for the two. Hence their cattle

which provide them with the milk assume an essential function in enabling their owners to survive. An essential theme in *Milk* is that despite the family's obvious dependence on animals, to Yusuf it is arguably traumatic to encounter the fact that the animals with which he associates his pastoral life are at times slaughtered so that food could be provided. One epitome of this contention is the sequence in which Yusuf, while wandering at the reeds, hears a gunshot and tracks down a hunter whom he believes has presumably killed the family of an isolated chick, and attempts to hit the hunter behind his back with a large rock but cannot bring himself to do so.⁴¹ Instead, he catches himself an enormous fish in the lake and awkwardly hugs it for a few minutes, thus ultimately killing his "prey". It could be suggested that, as arguably is the case with *Somersault in a Coffin* and *Winter Sleep*, this prey is not so much a source of food than a declaration of masculine power over a living creature, if not a woman. Then it is Yusuf's initiation into "manhood" by choosing the hunter's path than to refuse it. In the following sequence, Yusuf has brought home the fish in his arms, and is bewildered at the sight of his mother mundanely engaging in a considerably violent act on an animal. Even though he himself is initially proud of his fish-catching, or as can be argued, his sexual awakening, he starts to sulk disappointedly when he sees what his mother is doing. This scene is increasingly expressionistic in its representation of Yusuf's response to his mother's action for, at first, he sees his mother with a serene expression on her face doing an off-screen housework, smiling at her son, which is soon reciprocated by the latter. However, as the camera eye representing Yusuf's perspective tilts down, the audience sees what Yusuf's mother has been doing: plucking the feathers of a dead goose. When Yusuf sees this, his serene smile wanes and he gets really uncomfortable by the sight of a

⁴¹ Although the hunter's face is not shown, it is implied with the image of the same type and color of car parked nearby as the one driven by the man who wants to marry Yusuf's mother, that these two may be the same man, which further complicates Yusuf's urge to hit him with a large rock.

typically unrepresented aspect of eating meat, and he drops the fish in his arms.⁴² It is necessary to note at this point that Yusuf in *Egg* feels upset by the sacrifice of a goat. Towards the end of the film, Yusuf and Ayla try and locate a place to buy a sacrificial ram from upon his mother's bidding for her funeral, and Yusuf's reluctance in this matter is visibly communicated. After they find the ram, they take it to the cemetery where his mother was buried, and the ram is religiously sacrificed. In a very ritualistic manner, it is slaughtered and the butcher smears the ram's blood upon the forehead of Yusuf, which he several times tries to wipe away, as if it has stuck there forever.⁴³

In *Honey*, the last film of the series which covers the childhood of Yusuf, animals have a more immaterial function than in *Egg* and *Milk*. If *Egg* represents the urbanization of Yusuf, and *Milk* his rustic surroundings slowly crowding with civilization, *Honey* surely depicts his idyllic past with a lush arboreal background full of fauna and flora. It is the most atmospheric film of the series and, as importantly, features Yusuf's father (Erdal Beşikçioğlu) and his special bond with his son. With his increasingly worried mother (Tülin Özen), Yusuf (Bora Altaş) finds out through the end of the film that his father who is a beekeeper died on his way to collect the honey their bees produced. Thus his father's absence, as much as his brief presence, dominates the film's premonitory ambience. In this film as well, the eponymous animal product is the main source of income for the family. Nevertheless, animals take on an almost psychological role as the extension of Yusuf's father in the shape of wild birds that Yusuf "communicates" with, and this analogy is bolstered especially after Yusuf finds out about his father's death and runs off to the woods following the cries of the wild birds. This is similarly felt by Yusuf's mother when in

⁴² *Milk*, 01:25:00 – 01:30:00.

⁴³ *Egg*, 01:15:00 – 01:19:00.

Yusuf's dream sequence they are out in the woods looking for Yakup. At the finale, Yusuf, too, resembles an animal when he is sleeping in the pastoral, almost heavenly deep forest under a tree. Therefore, *Honey* equally highlights the atmospheric function of animals as a psychological extension of people while representing the tension of how destructive life dependent on animal produce ends up being for Yusuf's family.⁴⁴ It is then fitting to argue that the discomfort with the slaughter of the animals that people consume is a theme in *Egg*, *Milk* and as briefly vocalized, in *Kosmos*. By demonstrating these uneasy responses of human characters to the slaughtering of the animal characters, it is plausible that these directors are attempting to refamiliarize the audiences with the existing procedures of meat and dairy production.

Adding another dimension to the abovementioned functions of animals which dominate the entire film with their capacity to provide food and income for people, *Winter Sleep* introduces a new function of animals: a decorative one. Aydın, with the aim of keeping his new adventurous guest at his hotel interested decides to buy a horse for the hotel, and as he himself states, for a purely decorative purpose.⁴⁵ The capturing scene of this horse, however, depicts it in pain and Ceylan chooses to show the captured horse panting, clearly tormented by this forceful confinement, right after the scene where a little boy collapses under the stressful condition of being forced by his uncle Hamdi (Serhat Kılıç) to apologetically kiss the hand of their landlord Aydın for breaking the glass of the car in which he was driving.⁴⁶ The horse and the little boy İlyas (Emirhan Doruktutan), moreover, are not only very much alike in their postures in these shots; both wet with sweat and water, and rendered inactive,

⁴⁴ Considering the specific example of bees which live in colonies, beekeeping also resembles colonialism and the "sins" are likewise visited upon successive generations.

⁴⁵ 00:03:10, 00:05:00, 00:06:00 – 00:08:00.

⁴⁶ 01:02:00.

positioned on the ground; they are clearly subjected to violence as well. As the plot unfolds, it is revealed that Aydın's wife Nihal has been feeling patronized by Aydın in every move she makes, resenting her financial dependence on him, her isolation from the outside world, her confinement in Aydın's hotel in Cappadocia, and that she thus became estranged from him through the years. In addition, his sister Necla becomes annoyed with his writings in the local newspaper for his elitism and detachment from lower classes, his Romantic nostalgia for a village life he does not really know much about, and his musings as to how villagers need more civilization and manners. Hence, both women in his immediate family challenge his condescending attitude towards themselves and to the other characters in the film, most of whom are not as financially privileged as Aydın. When Aydın asks Nihal what she accuses him of in their relationship she replies as follows:

Of course I married you willingly. . . But you're an unbearable man. Selfish, vengeful, cynical. That's why you are to blame. . . Actually you are a well-educated, honest, fair man. . . . But sometimes you behave like you suffocate, patronize, humiliate people with these virtues of yours. It feels like in your honest way of thinking you hate the whole world. You hate believers because you think it is a sign of underdevelopment, ignorance. But you also hate nonbelievers because you think they don't have any faith, any ideals about anything. You blame the elderly for being backward, conservative and because they don't think freely; on the other hand, you don't like the young because of their free thinking, their detachment from traditions. . . . But you also hate the public because you suspect everyone you stumble upon is a thief, a burglar. It's almost as if there's no one you don't hate. Oh how much would I love to see you just for once defending a case that could really inconvenience you. . . ⁴⁷

Even while they are having their most intimate dialogue throughout the film quoted above, the couple's extreme alination from each other is visually emphasized by their being filmed in shot-reverse-shots, isolating them both in their own frames, rather than in the same shot, which could arguably feel more natural to the eye of the audience. With the check-out of the previously mentioned hotel guest, and the

⁴⁷ 02:10:24 – 02:11:45.

sequence of this sour argument he has with his wife, Aydın eventually sets the beautiful horse free. While he is doing that, he gently pats it first, as if to compensate for something he could have done while watching the horse's painful capture for his own selfish purposes, i.e. to keep his customer interested.⁴⁸ It is interesting that the horse could stand in for his wife Nihal, whom he indirectly captivates by monitoring her constantly, and allegedly causing her to spend her "best years" under his thumb trying to cope with his difficult ways, a problem in their relationship for which she blames him. Criticizing Aydın's intellectualism as a form of elitism that implicitly boasts economic superiority at several points, the plot is designated in such a way that the horse seems to represent both Aydın's regrets with regard to his pretentiousness, and the way he has treated his wife. It could then be concluded that Aydın's firstly possessive and then apologetic approach to this horse is concurrent with his relationship with Necla and Nihal, who incidentally have similar sounding names as they seem to enact the female figure that challenges Aydın.

When the functionality of animals is in question, the issue of the pain of animals should assume an equally prominent role in an analysis of these films. Bearing an early theoretical epitome of animal studies, Jeremy Bentham (1789) contended in *Principles of Morals and Legislation* that regardless of the fact that animals cannot speak, or as presumed by some, think, they should not be tormented. As he famously suggested, "The question is not, Can they reason? Nor Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?" (as cited in *Zoontologies*, 2007, p. 9). Despite the differences in their portrayal of the victimization of animals, *Kosmos* and *Distant* meditate in similar terms on whether animals can feel pain. In *Kosmos*, it is emphasized that one common denominator between animals and humans is our

⁴⁸ 02:21:00.

shared mortality, when *Kosmos* responds to a teacher scared of the stray dogs (Sabahat Doğanyılmaz) barking at her and angry at whomever released them, as follows:

They're strays. And their predicament is the fault of man, ma'am. For in the place of judgment, wickedness is there and in the place of righteousness, iniquity is there. In fact, what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts. One thing befalls them. As one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath. Man has no advantage over beasts, ma'am, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust and all return to dust.⁴⁹

This "let live" statement of *Kosmos* resembles Peter Singer's (2007) utilitarian approach to animals within the limits of ethics in that he also contends that "... subjects-of-a-life have inherent value in precisely the same way as we do. They have preferences, and they have a welfare" (p. 17). Moreover, this notion of man and animal as equally entitled parts in the face of the great design of a god is prevalent in *Kosmos* and will be discussed in the following chapter in depth with its visual and narrative features. What is important to note now, however, is another perspective in the same film which presents a much more nihilistic take on the pain of animals. When Neptün (Türkü Turan) asks her father Yahya (Hakan Altuntaş) looking at the cows entering the slaughterhouse, "Do they know they're going to die when they come here?" the latter replies, "Of course they do. They're even glad they're going to die. This place means release for them."⁵⁰ Accordingly, there is no great design and therefore people are justified to slaughter these cows not only for their own purposes but to end the alleged suffering of these animals as well. Interestingly enough, Reha Erdem spends more film reel on the butchering of the cattle in slow motion and close-ups, as opposed to the much shorter, "sterile", and off-screen suicide scene of the teacher in a long shot that distances her from the audience,⁵¹ potentially to

⁴⁹ 00:25:20 – 00:26:16.

⁵⁰ 01:24:43 – 01:24:53.

⁵¹ 01:41:10 – 01:41:45.

refamiliarize the audience instead with the brutal realities awaiting these supposedly already-suffering animals.⁵²

In *Distant*, the acknowledgement of the suffering of the animal Other takes the form of mercy killing. The film depicts the contention between Mahmut, a middle aged photographer who has a specifically urban lifestyle, and his cousin Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak) who is visiting from the village in which Mahmut was born, to find a job in İstanbul. Mahmut is evidently unsatisfied with his own life, and is anything but welcoming towards his cousin. Their distance from each other in such physical proximity, and Mahmut's apathetic attitude are thus befittingly symbolized by the literal image of a mouse trap. Whereas Mahmut sees the squeaking mouse that eventually gets caught up in the trap as an abject body and throws him into the garbage, Yusuf, just as Aslan in *Sivas* does about pushing Sivas into fights when his relatives pressure him into doing it, feels ethically challenged by this choice. Seeing a cat approaching its "hunt", i.e. the fluttering mouse in the plastic bag still alive but hurt, Yusuf hits the bag on the wall to kill it and shoos the cat away.⁵³ While this sequence arguably antagonizes Mahmut, however, there are various images in the narrative that draws analogies between Mahmut himself and the mice in the trap. The first one is visually expressed when Mahmut gets caught up in the trap himself and hurts his foot.⁵⁴ The next analogy is a more subtle one that is hinted in the following scene when Mahmut's ex wife Nazan tells him that she does not blame him for the mutually agreed upon abortion of their child.⁵⁵ The mice that Mahmut purposefully kills thus seems to represent their aborted baby and his seeming indifference to it, which further antagonizes his character.

⁵² 00:55:58 – 00:57:00.

⁵³ 01:31:00 – 01:32:00.

⁵⁴ 00:42:00.

⁵⁵ 00:44:00 – 00:48:00.

Having discussed the ruminations of these films on engaging in violence against animals, it is now essential to examine how animals are sacrificed as the sacred and the ominous Others. As stated earlier on, *Egg* features a religious sacrifice of a ram which highlighted Yusuf's discomfort with associating himself with the murder of an animal, albeit (or especially?) a religiously sanctified one. In *Milk*, on the other hand, snakes, which are seen three times in the film: once in the beginning and twice after the first half, are highly premonitory. The film itself starts off with a grotesque sequence with a snake being almost exorcised out of a young female villager hanging upside down from a tree. This ritualistic prelude of the film can be traditionally read as a psychoanalytical rather than an actual fear of an awakening sexuality, bearing in mind the following scenes where the snake revisits the film. It is also mentioned in Dönmez-Colin's interview with the director Semih Kaplanoğlu (2012) that boiling milk is believed to be and used as a repellent against snakes, which helps the director combine elements of rural peculiarities with the psychological symbolism of milk and snakes (pp. 152-3). The second instance where the snake enters the plot is with his unwelcome presence in Yusuf and his mother's kitchen, upon which she calls a snake "whisperer" who checks the house for snakes but cannot find any. Although Yusuf sees the snake later on in the house, he does not kill it regardless of his mother's wish to do so on sight. It seems that the extremely phallic trope of the snake serves as a typical representation of evil and the original sin that caused the literal Fall in the film's prelude and thus needs to be disposed of, and then came to signify the anxiety of Yusuf's mother concerning her son's blooming sexuality, and finally conveyed Yusuf's willingness to accept his imminent psychosexual transformation, which is supported by another phallic symbol in the

next scene with the huge fish he catches in the lake, representing another animal sacrifice made as an assertion of masculine power.

With each of its shots resembling a painting with imagery that depicts animals as extensions of children, Reha Erdem's *Times and Winds* also features a sequence where a goat is sacrificed as a token of thankfulness to God for sparing the family's baby. The film captures the coming of age period of three child protagonists in a slow rural life in which nature serves as a better shelter than parents. This bond they have with nature and animals is specifically why the sacrifice of the goat is a traumatic spectacle for the children. The actual slaughter scene is off camera. Instead, a close-up shot on the goat's flowing blood is shown, and the performer of this slaughter is Ömer's imam father (Bülent Emin Yarar), whom Ömer (Özkan Özen) was strongly urged to push off the cliff in the previous sequence, but did not.⁵⁶ In the sacrifice sequence the other child protagonists Yakup (Ali Bey Kayalı) and Yıldız (Elit İşcan) are covering their eyes so as not to see the violence inflicted by the former's father on the goat, and the audience is made to visually relate to the children's point of view with the off-screen slaughter. In *Egg*, too, Yusuf's discomfort with the sacrificed ram's blood smeared on his forehead manifests that animal sacrifice as a ritual does not necessarily deliver transcendence, but leaves an uncanny trace on the human being that killed the animal Other. While Ömer, Yıldız, and Yusuf feel uncomfortable at best about such sacrificial acts, in *Times and Winds* the mother smiles while her baby's forehead is smeared with the goat's blood, because sacrificing animals such as sheep and ram in the Islamic belief is supposed to have replaced human beings from getting sacrificed for Allah, as stated through Hz. İbrahim's example. It is also traditionally believed in Islam that smearing the

⁵⁶ 01:27:25 – 01:27:55.

blood of a sacrificed animal on the forehead of a person is meant to protect the person's blood from spilling. Hence, there is a replacement of animal blood and human blood in this ritual. While the former dies, the latter survives. It can thus be argued that Yusuf's uneasy response to the sacrificed ram stems from the fact that he has willingly grown out of the village culture that does not lose touch with its traditional beliefs, and more importantly, exploited animals for its financial purposes and indirectly brought about the death of his father.

Giorgio Agamben (1995/1998) contends that biopolitics constantly needs "to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside" (p. 131). This definition suggests that power over life automatically entails a destruction of the Other whose life is deemed less valuable than the powerful Self, and all these films portray the compelling implications of the inability of human beings to co-exist with animals without damaging them. If the animal characters represent the "outside" and the human characters the "inside", these films depict the impossibility of these two thresholds to be seamlessly separated. Instead, whenever the human characters impose upon the animals, they become "wilder", i.e. more animalistic, to further complicate such a formulation of "inside" and "outside". This could arguably be why Aydın feels so uncomfortable with his capture of the horse as to set her free. Likewise, Ahmet possibly senses the negative transformation he goes through with his shooting of stray dogs and hence decides to make amends by taking care of one. But as communicated through plot development, both characters always already inhabit a wild self, or what they wish to deem "outside", which is why they both keep hurting animals after their repentance, respectively the rabbit and Coni. It could then be inferred that the "outside" is inherently "inside",

causing the disempowered human beings both to exert violence on animals as soon as they regain power, and to identify with them.

If, as reflected in these films, animal cruelty is perpetuated in a vicious circle, a new ethical model that at once celebrates alterity and eliminates the strict lines between the overwhelmingly patriarchal Self and the animal Other is urgently needed. It would then be fitting to conclude this chapter with the following proposition from Wendy Doniger's (2000) "Reflections" on J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* that perfectly captures such sensibility:

One could, though Coetzee and Elizabeth [Costello, Coetzee's character] do not . . . argue that animals themselves understand the feelings of other animals, that they themselves have compassion. Dogs and horses certainly do, as anyone knows who has seen their deeply troubled reaction to the sight of a wounded animal of their own or a closely related species. Our empathy cannot be limited by our physical, any more than by our mental, capacities. Elizabeth could feel what a corpse felt; amputees experience pain in the absent limb, the phantom limb. Surely we, too, can experience pain in our paws, in our tails, in our fetlocks and pasterns, perhaps even, if we are truly talented, in our fins and scales. (pp. 103-4)

Focusing on how human characters are identified with animal characters, the next chapter will discuss how in these films such empathy can invalidate the differences between the two species through the representation of human protagonists with animal-like qualities.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTIFICATION AND HYBRIDITY: THE HUM/ANIMAL IN POST-1990s

INDEPENDENT TURKISH CINEMA

Having analyzed the themes that determine the ethical dynamics of alterity and the approach to the animal Other as radically different from the human Self in the post-1990s independent Turkish cinema, it is now essential to focus on another compelling aspect of these films, namely, how character identifications and cinematic conflations that maintain images of human - animal hybridity are portrayed in representing the interaction between the human and animal characters as complementary. This chapter will attempt at showcasing the relevant examples from the given films and analyze their visual and narrative implications with regard to the treatment of animals as not radically Other but as analogous to the human Self, organically or metaphorically. To exemplify, there are aural and narrative parallelisms drawn between child characters and animals in *Times and Winds*. These child characters curiously enjoy the spectacle of dogs and donkeys copulating,⁵⁷ discovering sexuality through identification with animal characters.⁵⁸ What is more, animal abuse and child abuse are concurrent in this film: the boy who steals nuts gets beaten “like an animal” as one of the villagers observes in scrutiny.⁵⁹ Also, the crying of a baby and the bleating of a goat follow one another in consecutive scenes and establish an aural unity.⁶⁰ More overtly, Uncle Halil (Köksal Engür), the medical doctor of the village, also operates as a veterinarian, and helps a cow successfully

⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Aslan enjoys watching Sivas copulate with a female dog, presumably with a similar enjoyment through identification with the animal Other (00:58:30 – 00:59:11).

⁵⁸ *Times and Winds*; 00:32:00 – 00:35:00, 01:06:00.

⁵⁹ 00:47:00 – 00:48:00.

⁶⁰ 01:21:00 – 01:21:36.

deliver right after his visit to a “human” patient.⁶¹ These films mostly treat their human protagonists who are analogous to animals as victims of various kinds of violence. Therefore, a discussion of how power relations in these films are portrayed plays an equally formative role in this chapter as the previous one. Unlike the previous chapter, however, the focus will be to analyze how in these films having characteristics similar to an animal’s can also be depicted as a liberating and desirable theme despite the existing pejorative undertones that accompany it. Thus the animal Other, contrary to the examples discussed in the previous chapter, is not always depicted as the Other, but as a constituent of the human characters, as well. As prescriptive as these films may prove in such direct portrayal of animal Others as reflections of human characters, they also indicate a pervasive concern among their directors to contest violence as an asymmetrical and destructive display of power; whether its victim be human or animal. Bearing thus in mind the theoretical framework of the previous chapter, this one will not only discuss the visually and narratively constructed parallelization of human and animal characters but also their interrelation as harmonious, or at least complementary, beings. While some of the human characters in these films desire to unite with the animal Others as in the cases of *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Kosmos*, and *Sivas*, *Jin* and *Singing Women*, some are depicted as involuntarily akin to their animal counterparts in *Frenzy*, *Kosmos*, *Distant*, *Winter Sleep*, and *Times and Winds*. In either case, however, the correspondences between animal and human characters are granted an immense focus and screen time by the directors, which suggests that they are in fact statements that contest the traditional (and filmic) approaches to animal and human Others alike.

⁶¹ 00:43:42 – 00:45:40.

It would be fitting to start chronologically with the earliest film of interest to this thesis, *Somersault in a Coffin*, where the identification between human and animal characters prevails as the ultimate narrative trope and is mostly represented through the notion of the desire to bond with the (animal) Other. As mentioned earlier, the peacock is a visual trademark of the film, and is emblematic of the ever unattainable romantic desire of the protagonist Mahsun Süpertiz inasmuch as it functions as a substitute for Mahsun's unnamed love interest, a heroin addict who sleeps with men in exchange for money. What is notable here is that Mahsun visits the peacock after his awkward encounters with his romantic interest and it is suggested that these visits compensate for his inability to communicate his affection to her.⁶² The intercuts between 00:42:20 – 00:42:34 that show Mahsun stroking the peacock and the woman's head alternately in his daydreams are especially telling in that to Mahsun, the peacock surely is an extension of his desire for the woman, if not a fulfilling substitute for her. After this sequence, Mahsun starts his first dialogue with the woman upon which he revisits the peacock, once more accentuating the latter's representative function. The identification of the peacock and Mahsun's love interest, however, culminates in a remarkably tragic point at which Mahsun, out of starvation, slaughters the otherwise decorative peacock, skinning and cooking it to eat, but not before he takes it with him around the city and rides the bus with it, presumably to compensate for his solitude, just like Ahmet. This consumption of the animal Other that stands for his desire for the woman is thus an integral twist to the film, because whereas Mahsun cannot "consume" (read "consummate") his platonic love with his romantic interest, he can, in theory, "consume" the body of the peacock. But significantly, just before he is able to eat its meat, the caretaker of the

⁶² 00:38:24 – 00:41:00.

Rumeli Hisarı stops Mahsun, beating him violently. Mahsun is finally unable to attain, or consume, either of his loved ones.

In addition to personifying the peacock, *Somersault in a Coffin* is also abundant with animalized portrayals of Mahsun, who is alternately referred to or portrayed as a dog several times; surviving, eating, and living like a dog. When interrogated by the police, Reis (Tuncel Kurtiz), the fatherly head of the group of fishermen, which includes Mahsun, is asked to turn the latter in. Reis replies, “I just give Mahsun some allowance to get some food to nibble on,” and adds that he does not want him as another son.⁶³ Two minutes after this dialogue comes a sequence in which Reis is giving Mahsun advice about survival: he has made certain arrangements to help Mahsun pay his debts, eat, and sleep in a safe place. While Reis is informing Mahsun of the said arrangements, the camera makes a close-up on Mahsun’s hands breaking the pastry he is eating into pieces.⁶⁴ Recalling the fact that the homeless Mahsun is stealing cars to find shelter to sleep in to survive the cold, this exchange between Mahsun and Reis assumes a narrative function that renders the former as an “underdog” protected by his keeper, i.e. Reis. The imagery of the film furthers such an analogy in another sequence where Mahsun reminisces in a flashback how he was beaten by the police in jail, with his legs tied up very much like an animal’s, once again indicating the parallel nature of animal and human suffering.

Significantly enough, dogs seem to be the most habitually portrayed animals in close proximity to the human characters in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema. Another remarkable example of it is unquestionably *Sivas*. In terms of

⁶³ 00:17:58 – 00:19:50.

⁶⁴ 00:20:40 – 00:21:22.

treating the film's two protagonists as physically analogous, the close-ups in *Sivas* assume an immensely significant function in drawing a visual and narrative analogy between the titular dog and Aslan. In fact, close-ups and the camerawork, especially in the first encounter of these two, are notably dynamic and the screen renders Sivas and Aslan as organically parallel, if not equal, characters in terms of size and proportion by means of dynamic camerawork and narrow angles that portray both as the dominant image filling almost the entirety of the relevant frames.⁶⁵ During an interview at a screening (7 October 2015), director Kaan Müjdecı referred to the abovementioned function of the camerawork as a series of choices that attempted at visually associating Aslan and Sivas as an epitome of a potential metamorphosis of a child into an animal and how, if at all, Aslan could evolve into the "ideal" existence, i.e. the animal, rather than a "man".⁶⁶ As previously elaborated on, however, Sivas comes to represent Aslan's "becoming a man" within the socially constructed formulation by his unwilling complicity in the male "entertainment" of abusing animals, rather than his wish to bond with his dog, and hence it is suggested that Aslan ends up failing in establishing a complete identification with the mentioned "ideal" canine existence as a gesture against the working codes of masculinity in his society.

Released a year after *Sivas*, *Frenzy* approaches canine existence at once as an allegory of dehumanization and a statement about biopolitics. Focusing on the allegorical aspect of this film, it could be observed that apart from Ahmet, his colleagues, and their relationality to dogs, another explicitly drawn analogy between human and canine characters in the film is the fact that Kadir is referred to as an "*it*"

⁶⁵ 00:31:12 – 00:35:50.

⁶⁶ Post-screening Q & A Session with Kaan Müjdecı at TBWA Agency, Etiler - İstanbul. Reported by Zeynep Şahintürk. (7 October 2015).

(Turkish word for “hound”) by the police officers that offer him parole in exchange for an undercover job. At one point in particular, Hamza (Müfit Kayacan), one of the superiors in the police mocks Kadir’s sniffing of a chemical ingredient in a bottle, turns to his colleagues and says amusedly that “it would have been just the same if [they] had gotten a dog to do their job.”⁶⁷ With his binding agreement to work for the police force in exchange for his release from jail, Kadir is rendered meek and obedient towards his superiors, or “owners”, demonstrating an arguably typical behaviour of a dog. Furthermore, since his job entails literally sniffing garbage for potential explosives, his animal-like state in society is reinforced as a definitive trait of his character. But ironically, as his brother kills dogs as a worker of the municipality, Kadir has to attend secret trainings to develop a sharp sense of smell to be even able to function as a dog. He is ultimately replaceable by a dog in his profession and, just as Mahsun Süperitiz, is rendered another “underdog” by means of his social and economic status. As such, the image of the dog utilized in *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Sivas*, and *Frenzy* as a pivotal character serves as an apt narrative device to reflect power dynamics: the men who “regulate” dogs are portrayed as sovereigns that get to decide whether to kill or to keep, and those who are visually or metaphorically similar to dogs, Mahsun, Aslan, and Kadir respectively, are characterized by subjugation and obedience. This trope of dogs as symptomatic of suppressed human characters is prevalent in Reha Erdem’s *Kosmos*, as well. This film recounts the arrival of the eponymous character in a snow-covered small town in Kars, professedly in search of love. It is soon revealed that he has supernatural abilities to cure people, at the expense of causing more chaos. Juxtaposing human beings with animals in similar but more compelling terms,

⁶⁷ 01:23:52.

especially through its plot, film editing, and sound design, *Kosmos* features a profuse amount of images of becoming-animal, which is a definitive concern for the film. Therefore, the narrative and visual analogies drawn between animal and human characters are increasingly prevalent as the plot unfolds, and these instances with such parallelization are alternately subtle and obvious. The first of this series of analogies is the visual and aural parallelism drawn between cawing crows and the protagonist Kosmos' laughter between 00:09:20 – 00:09:25 when the shot of a cawing crow perched on a tree accompanies Kosmos' off-screen caw-like laughter, with the crow presumably responding to the latter's caw with its own. This sequence serves to initiate the audience to a character that has superhuman qualities to heal the sick and resurrect the dead, but simultaneously bears features that are of bestial, i.e. non-human, nature.

The second animal analogy in the film that serves to portray Kosmos as a feeble member of society, is drawn visually in the sequence in which a soldier forces Kosmos on the ground, violently questioning him, and the close-up shot of the forearms of a dog standing on snow is shown like an extension of Kosmos, as these two characters would have the same point of view lying or standing in the same proximity to the snow-covered ground. In the meantime, the dialogue is still heard off-screen with the shot of the dog in focus.⁶⁸ Right after the shot of the dog comes a close-up shot of a cow's eye blinking in slow motion, as if the cow is also an actively observing character in the film.

Another point at which animals are portrayed as analogous to human characters and vice versa in *Kosmos* is designated through camerawork and consecutive editing, as epitomized in the sequence starting with the forward tracking

⁶⁸ 00:16:00 – 00:16:22.

shot of a running duck followed by the lateral tracking shot of the limping woman (Korel Kubilay) walking with her cane,⁶⁹ providing the audience with a sense of movement, and arguably progress, experienced in dissimilar terms by human beings and animals. It is thus significant that the sequence ends with the woman being “discovered” by her sister inside the car that picks her up from the street and thus limits her already constrained mobility, while the duck in contrast is probably able to keep running in the previous shot. In other words, the limping woman who is depicted as visually parallel to a duck is “caught” by her able-bodied (read “more potent”) sister against her will, which reiterates that power dynamics between human characters also define the analogies between animals and subdued human characters in *Kosmos*, as well. If she had been a duck indeed, the limping woman could possibly have had more freedom to move around. Unlike her, Kosmos climbs a tree with the agility of a four-legged mammal, enjoying an enhanced form of mobility thanks to his beastlike traits.⁷⁰ It could thus be argued with regard to this shot, and that of the running duck, that becoming-animal is portrayed as desirable in this film, specifically due to the flexibility that characterizes it. This flexibility could be interpreted as a literal capacity to move easily that Kosmos and Neptün benefit from by soaring inside the house, or to express oneself freely outside the constraints of human language, as Kosmos and Neptün do with their cries and caws. It should be noted, however, that becoming-animal for Kosmos is not the same as it is for other characters like Neptün, as the former inherently holds animal-like characteristics rather than grow into them *and* possesses a supernatural power to heal. Nevertheless, when the boy Kosmos “fixed” gets fatally ill, residents of the village accuse Kosmos of killing the boy and the police start chasing him. The sequence of Kosmos running

⁶⁹ 00:28:14 – 00:28:48.

⁷⁰ 01:16:51 – 01:17:09.

away is intercut with shots of a group of running ducks and back to Kosmos again, and then to the previously shown close-up and slow motion shot of a cow inside the slaughterhouse.⁷¹ These intercuts give the audience a contrasting sense of despair and vulnerability experienced by animals and human beings alike, albeit not in a symmetrically victimizing way: while the slaughterhouse animals get butchered, Kosmos manages to flee the village at the finale when in trouble. Regardless, one may very well view Kosmos to be the embodiment of hum/animal, that is at once neither human nor animal in the “proper” sense, and yet, both. It is precisely his inbetweenness that facilitates him with a mobility to evade the juridical system by habitually relocating when his current surroundings want to punish him. Even though he adapts to his new town as a member of society, at least for a while, his animal-like self seems to call him into the wilderness, and ultimately disturbs the “quietude” of civilization. Accordingly, it would be pertinent to bring to the table Gerald Bruns’ (2011) discussion of Agamben’s (1995/1998) following description of *homo sacer* as analogous to the figure of the werewolf:

What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city. That such a man is defined as a wolf-man and not simply as a wolf (the expression *caput lupinum* has the form of a juridical statute) is decisive here. The life of the bandit, like that of sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and a passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both without belonging to either. (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1998, p. 105 as cited in Bruns, 2011, p. 33)

Reminding the reader of Kosmos’ ambiguous and even cathartic function in the society that Reha Erdem depicts, Gerald Bruns (2011) comments insightfully on the above-cited quotation: “What is interesting about the werewolf is that, outcast though

⁷¹ 01:49:46 – 01:50:27.

he is (if “he” is the word), he remains internal to the order that banished him as the limit-concept of its anthropology. He marks the ‘threshold of indistinction and passage between animal and man’ to which human beings and animals are always exposed” (pp. 33-4). Correspondingly, it becomes necessary to regard Kosmos as a symptom of (human) society itself: he likewise has qualities of an inbetween werewolf both in the “sacred” sense, especially due to his superhuman (or non-human) healing powers that portray him like a “prophet”, as vocalized in the film by the fellow coffee house frequenters; and in the “bandit” sense, because he is chased by the police several times in the film, once as a consequence of his lack of an identity card and what it typically “guarantees”, i.e. proof that shows him as a “man” belonging to human society, and at another point, because he allegedly caused the death of the young boy he had “fixed.”⁷² Nevertheless, this society, albeit a small one, relies on and utilizes Kosmos as a healer of otherwise incurable diseases before eventually discarding him, just as Agamben (1995/1998) and Bruns (2011) observed of the werewolf figure.

The most climactic scene that highlights Kosmos’ heterogenous nature is the sequence in which Kosmos and Neptün, his love interest with whom he can significantly communicate with cries and caws and panting,⁷³ paint their fingers with red nail polish and start levitating inside the house like birds.⁷⁴ It seems like upon Kosmos’ reflection on animals and humans being similar creatures within a grand design, and Neptün and her father’s discussion of the grim fate of the animals in the slaughterhouse, the red nail polish that Kosmos and Neptün put on before they start soaring inside the house poses as a visual reference to the earlier slow motion shots

⁷² Significantly, Kosmos manages to rid the teacher with whom he gets sexually involved of her headache and later on in the film she commits suicide, once again representing the dubious quality and permanence of Kosmos’ powers to heal.

⁷³ 00:55:06 – 00:51:31, 01:09:00 – 01:10:24.

⁷⁴ 01:22:10 – 01:23:59.

of the slaughtered animals bled to death. Accordingly, *Kosmos* and *Neptün* could be argued to represent the ethical stance that the plot and the cinematography of the film want to establish: that it is urgent to approach the animal Other with a different sense of time (slow motion shots) and perspective (close-ups). Such an approach would be an arguably liberating one that dissolves any strictly drawn limits between what is human and what is not.

Three years after *Kosmos*, Reha Erdem released *Jîn* and *Singing Women*, both of which share with *Kosmos* similar premises regarding the ways in which human beings relate to animals. *Jîn* recounts the journey of the titular seventeen-year-old Kurdish guerrilla who escapes from her group into nature to visit her sick grandmother. On her journey, she is forced to battle two men who attempt to rape her and another one that offers to have sex with her in return for a bus ticket. In this film, the companionship the eponymous character has with animals comes with the mutual space they inhabit. It is striking that animals are portrayed at once as symbols, extensions, companions, and indifferent spectators of *Jîn* and her journey. Therefore, Erdem's choice of animals for the relevant sequences should be noted. The film opens with separate shots of a mantis, a turtle, a deer, and a lizard, respectively. This analogy is particularly prevalent in one sequence where the shots of *Jîn* and a lizard both camouflaging on a rock are edited consecutively, instigating a visual and narrative parallelism between the two characters.⁷⁵ While the mantis and the lizard signify the priority of camouflage for survival in nature, just as *Jîn* does with her earth-toned uniform, the turtle with its anatomical features stands at once for her homelessness and her being always already at home. The presence of a turtle recurs in the film where *Jîn* has just escaped the detention room of a local police station and

⁷⁵ 00:25:20 – 00:25:35.

is off on the road again, hitchhiking. At this point, she sees a turtle walking towards her that once again alludes to her paradoxical state of homelessness and being innately at home within nature.⁷⁶ The reoccurring image of the stag in the film,⁷⁷ on the other hand, seems to insinuate Jîn's fertility, especially bearing in mind that in some Pagan and Wiccan beliefs the antlers of deer symbolize "the fertility of the God" (Wigington, 2016).⁷⁸ All the animals in the film thus have an indispensable function in the characterization of the protagonist and her journey. Towards the end of the film, for instance, Jîn comes across a donkey in the woods while hiding from the soldiers. This scene is similarly emblematic of her affinity with fauna inasmuch as she is positioned laterally in a medium shot, crawling on the grass, and the donkey enters the shot facing Jîn and almost greets her with its bow. Jîn smiles at the donkey, frees it from its saddle, and then, as she approaches it, spots a wound on its right foreleg. She bandages its wound and removes its reins, and sets it free. As she starts walking on steep mountains, bombs start exploding, and although Jîn is able to survive them, she discovers that the donkey has been killed in the bombing. Her only companion has thus now become a carcass; an abject waste of the ongoing war, and Jîn is left all alone again. In this sequence of explosions, Erdem's camera eye does not focus on the bombs or their crash, but rather on how the bombing affects all animals in the setting: an insect, a centipede, and the said donkey, respectively.⁷⁹

Reha Erdem stated in the If İstanbul Premiere post-screening Q & A that Jîn was the most challenging film he had made because it was the closest one to reality due to its subject matter. He added that before her identity as Kurdish, Jîn is a

⁷⁶ 01:17:25 – 01:19:14.

⁷⁷ 00:15:40 – 00:16:00.

⁷⁸ <http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/mabontheautumnequinox/p/StagSymbols.htm>.

⁷⁹ 01:21:40 – 01:24:54.

woman.⁸⁰ Literally meaning “woman” in Kurdish, Jîn’s name already marks her with her femininity, albeit in a non-sexual way. She is instead portrayed more as a school girl that never was than an adult. While she is studying Geography from a textbook in Turkish she stole from a villager’s house, she significantly spells the question “Which part of Turkey do you live in?”⁸¹, which highlights the predominant function of the politics of space that define Jîn’s presence in the world, i.e. the part of Turkey that Jîn inhabits which has been marked by ongoing political conflict that characterizes her and the landscape in which she is ultimately entombed. It is thus her given name that underlines Jîn’s harmony with nature, as she is the only character in the film to not disturb the lush mountains full of greenery and the animals that inhabit them. The men in the film, on the other hand, see her either merely as a terrorist to be killed on sight, or a sexual commodity to be conquered and consumed. All these considered, it could easily be observed that with her red headscarf and her journey towards her sick grandmother through the woods, she is delineated as a reimagining of Little Red Riding Hood and is eventually sacrificed before she reaches her destination by the Big Bad Wolf that is represented by the men. At the end of the film, characters off screen begin firing guns at her, trying to pick her off as if they are hunting an animal. She first climbs a tree with an almost feline agility, but falls from it when they shoot her and dies. As she is drawing her last breath in the final sequence, stylistically positioned like a character from a painting with her arms and legs stretched out symmetrically, most of the mammals she came across in her journey; the stag, the bear, the donkey, and the lynx, start walking towards her, and almost ritualistically, gather around her body.⁸² Hence Jîn,

⁸⁰ If Istanbul Premiere Post-screening Q & A with Reha Erdem, reported by Banu Bozdemir. <http://www.banubozdemir.com/en-zorlandigim-film-jin-oldu/> (19 February 2013).

⁸¹ 00:38:00.

⁸² 01:49:22 – 01:52:50.

arguably without any choice, ends up being a part of nature as a victim of civilization and patriarchy. With the ominous soundtrack here and the subsequent sound of a gun fire or bomb explosion which darkens this final sequence, it is implied that the animals surrounding Jîn are also under the threat of the men who killed Jîn, i.e. the “woman”.

Despite the political figure she represents, Jîn does not kill anyone, nor does she physically hurt any, except for defending herself from the rapists and stealing food and clothes (and the Geography book) for survival.⁸³ She even carries a wounded soldier (Onur Ünsal) into her own cave to save him, bandages his shotgun wound on his left leg,⁸⁴ just like she bandages the foreleg of the donkey early on. After the soldier heals enough to walk back to his troop, he leaves Jîn’s cave. It could nevertheless be inferred that despite his seeming appreciation and wish to reciprocate Jîn’s generosity, it could be this soldier who caused the killing of Jîn in the end, once again adding to the antagonistic portrayal of the men in the film.

Similar to the expression of repressed reactions of the protagonists through the animals in *Winter Sleep* and *Frenzy*, it could be argued that Jîn’s true reactions against the sexual harassment by the employer who gives her a manual job at the field is expressed by the horse which whinnies agitatedly at this man (Sabahattin Yakut) when he makes a sexual suggestion to Jîn saying, “Come by after dinner tomorrow.”⁸⁵ While this man attempts to rape Jîn in a following sequence, the horse once again starts whinnying frantically, protesting as an eyewitness this violent sight.⁸⁶ It is reinforced with this characterization of the horse that Jîn is more

⁸³ This, however, does not mean she never engages in a unilateral violence: see next chapter for a discussion of her conflict with the bird.

⁸⁴ 01:32:02 – 01:47:00.

⁸⁵ 00:59:09 – 00:59:35.

⁸⁶ 01:02:28 – 01:02:42.

affiliated with animals in nature than with other human beings. She sleeps on the rocks of a mountain at the beginning of the film after she escapes from her group, camouflaging herself in the night under the full moon. Later on, she sleeps comfortably in a tree, like a bird.⁸⁷ Thus, acting like an animal in nature provides her with the comfort of camouflage, albeit not for very long. Befittingly, civilization is depicted very pejoratively throughout the film. Her motives for escaping from her group is never explained, but probably stem from her reluctance to engage in any more violence and her desire to be independent from any given code. When she is wearing earth-toned clothes, she is safe; but when she starts wearing the colorful clothes (sharp red and blue) that she steals from the “civilization”, she starts to be threatened by almost all the men she encounters. Likewise, in the finale, she is picked off when she is wearing her bright blue shawl, possibly because she stands out in the myriad of colors that nature features, with predominantly green earth tones.

Bearing a striking resemblance to *Kosmos* and *Jîn* in terms of its cinematic employment of animal characters, Reha Erdem’s *Singing Women* recounts the slow life on the Princes Islands which the characters of the film refuse to leave despite the preemptive calls for evacuation before an imminent and potentially destructive earthquake. Just as *Kosmos* and *Jîn*, *Singing Women* does not fall short in portraying its character with bestial qualities, especially the protagonist Esma, who befriends Meryem (Deniz Hasgüler) upon finding her in the woods at night, assaulted by a man. Esma is the middle aged yet childishly light-hearted caretaker of the house of an elderly man Mesut (Kevork Malikyan) whose son Adem (Philippe Arditti) is on the verge of divorce because of his compulsive cheating, stealing and lying. The film starts with Esma walking in the woods and surviving an almost deadly strike of a

⁸⁷ 00:11:53 – 00:12:34.

falling tree. It is soon revealed that she is a firm believer, as she feels thankful to Allah for being spared. The film continues with the second pivotal character Adem's discovery of his deadly disease⁸⁸ and how it affects the lives of his wife Hale (Aylin Aslim) and his father. From early on in the film, Esma's character is depicted as an idiosyncratic one, naive and playful at the face of adversity. She thus makes Meryem laugh with her quirky ways to cheer her up, and Esma, Meryem, and Hale soon become good friends and develop a female camaraderie that almost resembles a witch coven. Two things these women have in common is that they all carry the burden of the men in their lives and that they have all been sexually harassed by Adem. As the plot unfolds, Mesut's doctor friend (Vedat Erincin) convinces Meryem to marry him, and let him "take care of" her. However, she grows unhappier each day and is attacked by an unknown man in the woods. Through the end of the film, Esma is accused by Mesut of cohabitating with a man that she is in fact not siblings with. He berates her for lying, and fires her. The women in this film thus "sing" to express themselves outside the order of the men so suffocating for them, physically and mentally.

The animals that inhabit *Singing Women* are mostly the horses on the island which are dying of an unknown disease and with which people are told to avoid contact, and there is a direct correlation between Esma, Meryem and Hale and these horses. Each time these three women sing in nature, for instance, the shot is followed by shots of horses, usually in close proximity to the women, watching them as spectators, or lying dead.⁸⁹ Moreover, the framing of the horses positioned as if part of the same body is another pertinent point, as one such shot firstly follows the shot

⁸⁸ The film's alternative title is "Adam's Cry".

⁸⁹ 01:20:35 – 01:21:35.

of Esma and Meryem positioned symmetrically as companions playfully speaking,⁹⁰ and then follows two consecutive shots of Hale singing seated on a sofa and Meryem singing, lying down on one.⁹¹ As such, the film communicates a parallelism drawn between these horses threatened by an unknown lethal disease and these three women abused by the men in their lives.

Similar to the bird-like cries of Kosmos and Neptün, Esma and Meryem of *Singing Women* also communicate by cuckooing to each other in the woods,⁹² wearing twigs as antlers, with shots of horses in the background. The antlers and the symbol of the stag have an immensely formative function in the film, as they seem to refer to no one else but Esma herself. Firstly, Esma claims to have seen a stag twice in the forest even though people disbelieve her. Secondly, hanging as a trophy on one of the walls in Mesut's house is a pair of antlers, presumably of a stag Mesut hunted back in the day. Esma's employer thus is depicted as her captivator symbolically from early on. Furthermore, when she is looking for Adem who got lost in the woods and got everybody worried because of his poor health, Esma starts praying and begging Allah to give her a sign on her path. It is exactly at this moment that the film grants a full shot of a stag making himself seen to Esma in the woods, and with his spiritual might leads her to an unconscious Adem.⁹³ With an almost superhuman strength, Esma carries Adem back home, and it is only one example of her superhuman powers, as she, exactly like Kosmos does, has resurrected the dead body of Adem before, and started a new Genesis story: a feminine one.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, it

⁹⁰ 00:26:00 – 00:26:33.

⁹¹ 01:47:00 – 01:47:46.

⁹² 00:27:40 – 00:28:08.

⁹³ 01:42:00 – 01:42:43. Esma asks Adem: "Did you fall?" arguably as a reference to the religious Fall of Adam in this forest that resembles the Garden of Eden.

⁹⁴ 01:25:30 – 01:26:22.

cannot be argued to be an entirely different creation myth since Esma prays to Allah, and when she is asked how she resurrected Adem, she replies: “I just prayed.”⁹⁵

The reborn Adem resurrected by a female giver of life is a transformed man regardless. He is not selfish anymore and instead tries to help others. He tries to track down the woman (Sema Keçik) who is desperately looking for her missing (or presumably dead) sons, claiming that he is one of them, but cannot find her. Instead, he finds a white horse on the ground, dying of two lethal wounds inflicted due to its disease. Adem says he wants to learn everything from the eyes of the horse, and tells the horse that he has been “blind to [her] and [her] pain,”⁹⁶ and touches the wounds on her, upon which Emin (Nebil Sayın) sanitizes Adem’s hands.⁹⁷ Then Adem falls sick again, and this time Esma starts to ponder if she has done the right thing by reviving him in the first place. Visiting him in the room where he is lying in his bed, Esma kills Adem (apparently by suffocating him) while Adem, Meryem, Hale and Esma are all embracing each other. Mesut comes into the room and sees the dead body of his son. He accuses Esma of killing Adem, takes his rifle and runs after her to kill her. Mesut’s beloved dog Samba, whom he ostensibly loves more than his own son Adem, attacks Mesut to prevent him from killing Esma, but Mesut shoots his dog dead and keeps running after them, at which point he is crushed by a falling tree. Fire starts in his house and Meryem and Hale are now peacefully laying on the grass. Hale says “I’m not afraid anymore” and Meryem replies: “Neither am I.” Then, they hear a sound that resembles Esma’s singing, but also a cuckoo bird. At that point, they see a stag with antlers revealing itself in the darkness of night, as an implied reincarnation of Esma. The stag seems to be approaching the two women

⁹⁵ 01:26:39.

⁹⁶ Reminiscent of the Levinasian face and the ethical stance it begs (1961/1969).

⁹⁷ 01:35:25 – 01:37:25.

who respond to the off-screen cuckooing of Esma's voice with their own. Having identified herself with the stag early on in the film, Esma seems to have finally become it. This final sequence is followed by the narrator's epilogue as follows, and explains Esma's ethereal presence with spiritualist vocabulary:

God has certain children whose hearts are filled with the luminous purity of Divine love. Although on occasion they are said to fall into sin, God never abandons them. These children are a solace to all living creatures in their life on earth. And their time is known.⁹⁸

With the themes of supernatural healing, resurrecting, and being at home with nature like an animal, *Kosmos* and *Singing Women* (and to a certain extent *Jîn* thanks to her healing of the donkey and the soldier) can be regarded as parts of a Reha Erdem saga, contesting violence against animals and human beings as concurrent. While *Kosmos* is not granted a sacred position at the end of the film and is forced to leave, however, Esma is described as a sublime being that brings nothing but grace and joy. This seems to be why, just as in *Jîn*, Esma as the heroine of *Singing Women* is represented by the stag that symbolizes fertility and constant rebirth, significantly unlike *Kosmos* who is associated with crows that denote death and immortality.

Even though Esma seems to derive her supernatural powers from God and nature, stating that she herself was made by Allah and that she resurrected Adem by praying only, she is depicted as a witch several times in the film, with her extensive knowledge of how to utilize herbs for certain purposes, her organic bond with nature, her ritualistic exchanges with Hale and Meryem, and finally, her cape. Likewise, the fantastical privileges of *Kosmos* to soar and climb tall trees like an animal could be argued to portray him like a warlock, if not a werewolf. Accordingly, a possible reading of Esma's and *Kosmos*' supernatural abilities could be constructed with Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) theorization of the figure of the sorcerer:

⁹⁸ 01:52:47 – 01:53:09.

It can be said that becoming-animal is an affair of sorcery because (1) it implies an initial relation of alliance with a demon; (2) the demon functions as the borderline of the animal pack, into which the human being passes or in which his or her becoming takes place, by contagion; (3) this becoming itself implies a second alliance, with another human group; (4) this new borderline between the two groups guides the contagion of animal and human being within the pack. There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being intrinsic, in other words, anomic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, p. 247 as cited in Bruns, 2011, p. 64)

Taking into consideration the fact that the minoritarian group in focus in *Kosmos* seems to be animals, and especially those who await death by institutional slaughter, *Kosmos* embodies the figure of the sorcerer described above who makes an alliance with animals, laying bare the naked truth of industrial livestock production, and portraying the otherwise invisible aspects of animal products industries. Similarly, through the end of the film, a celestial object, presumably “another satellite” falls down on the village, and people start rushing to see it. Right after this sequence of people walking in the streets comes a sequence that starts with the camera tilting up with a close-up on, once again, the hind legs of a dog.⁹⁹ It is followed with a shot of two dogs panting in slow motion and their portrayal is of no less importance than that of people, especially considering the fact that unlike the long shots of these people in regular motion, these animals are shot in close-ups and in slow motion as if to dominate the film more than the human characters. Moreover, the antithetical filming of the teacher’s suicide in a long shot and that the death of the animals in the slaughterhouse in close-up shots discussed in the previous chapter seems to point out that witnessing the death of animals is more urgent than witnessing the death of humans, which is a taboo, because our endurance as the audience to sit through the

⁹⁹ 01:31:03 – 01:32:00.

death of the animal Others is almost put to test. Reha Erdem seems to propose by bringing the audience to an intimate proximity to dying and suffering animals that watching (and letting) animals die should not be more bearable than watching people die.

If Esma in *Singing Women* is the sorcerer as prescribed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), it needs to be reminded that in comparison to Kosmos, she is more vocally affiliated with a source of power, which she defines as God. She also seems more potent than Kosmos, who desperately witnesses the death of the boy he had saved, and flees the village before the police catch him, whereas Esma becomes (or possibly shapeshifts into) an animal when under the threat of being captured. Moreover, when compared to Kosmos and how his becoming-animal lays bare the practices behind industrialized meat production, Esma's becoming-animal perhaps has a more extensive function than Kosmos', i.e. to liberate women from the violence of men, thus taking away the fears of Hale and Meryem by shedding her own human skin and becoming a stag. Hence, the minoritarian group Esma liberates by becoming-animal is not animals, but women, reiterating Reha Erdem's scrutiny of the human condition by drawing analogies between human and animal characters. Although the image of the stag is typically identified with fertility, it is also striking that it is a male, and not a female figure, considering how singing functions as a liberation for the women in this film. One explanation for the choice of a male animal for Esma's reincarnated self could be that as she dies or shapeshifts, she comes to embody both the male and the female, and thus seems to refer to a pre-Genesis era that precedes any differences between genders and species. Considering the film's spiritualistic meditations on temporality, it is perhaps thanks to her ability

to thus bend time that Esma is rewarded for the “luminous purity of Divine love” in her heart.

Finally, it should be concluded from the examples discussed in this chapter that in establishing a parallelization between human and animal characters, these directors seem to be underlining that both parties are forced to suffer through an overt violence exerted upon them by other “human” characters. The only exception to this formulation is *The Yusuf Trilogy*, in which there are two apparent correlations between human and animal characters: in *Milk*, Yusuf could be argued to be metaphorically linked to the big fish he hunts, with his budding sexuality and the phallic shape of the fish in mind; and in *Honey*, there is a direct interconnection between Yusuf’s father and the hawk as the former’s embodied version, especially after his death. Thus, the narrative analogies drawn between animal and human characters in the *The Yusuf Trilogy* function on a more metaphorical and atmospheric level in comparison to *Kosmos*, *Jîn*, *Singing Women*, *Somersault in a Coffin*, *Sivas*, *Frenzy*, and *Times and Winds*.

CHAPTER 4

NON-VERBAL RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE HUMAN SELF AND THE ANIMAL OTHER: AN ALTERNATIVE TO ANTHROPOCENTRISM

- *“French Aie, Italian Eh, American Whoops are phrases. A wink, a shrugging of the shoulder, a taping [sic] of the foot, a fleeting blush, or an attack of tachycardia can be phrases. – And the wagging of a dog’s tail, the perked ears of a cat? – And a tiny speck to the West rising upon the horizon of the sea? – A silence? . . . – Silence as a phrase. The expectant wait of the Is it happening? as silence. Feeling as a phrase for what cannot now be phrased.”*¹⁰⁰

Jean-François Lyotard

Building upon the discussion of the issues in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema with regard to its treatment of the animal Other at once as radically different from and remarkably parallel to the human Self, the final main chapter of this thesis will examine the ways in which the human and animal characters in these films “communicate” without language as constructed by human beings. Instead, rather than engaging in a fantastical dialog as would befit an animated or comedy film, most human and animal characters in post-1990s independent Turkish films acknowledge each other’s existence within a series of sensory intimations that foreground mutual respect towards the existence of the radical Other. With his supernatural abilities of soaring like birds, and his propensity to express himself to Neptün in a non-verbal constellation, which is mostly in cries and caws, Kosmos is portrayed with evidently bestial qualities; but he cannot be told to interact with animals per se. Aslan, on the other hand, despite his lack of the said abilities of

¹⁰⁰*The Differend*, 1988, p. 70 as cited in *Animal Rites* by Cary Wolfe, 2003, p. 56.

Kosmos, does communicate with Sivas, and it is the primary concern of the film that the pair attempt to maintain their mutual agreement not to hurt but to accompany and protect each other. Likewise, Jîn communicates with a bear she encounters, and although she is first scared of it, she then realizes that they both are in the same danger of being bombed, and starts talking to the bear to soothe it. Such moments of synchronicity and kinship between animals and humans in these films render the previously discussed victimizing binaries of species, gender, class, and age irrelevant, and provides the human characters with a chance to relate to the animals sympathetically, or at least, with an insight into the lives of animals. These instances of non-verbal communication between human and animal characters (and nature, in a more extensive context) serve both as an aesthetic device that sets an alternately threatening and tranquil atmosphere, and as a narrative element that is pregnant with a resolution of the tension in these films. This chapter will hereafter endeavour to explore how an anthropocentric approach needs to be, and is, contested to facilitate an alternative representation of communication that underscores the possibility of replacing logos with sensory interaction through cinematic portrayal in the post-1990s independent Turkish film, especially in *Sivas*, *Egg*, *Honey*, *Jîn* and *Singing Women*. Besides analyzing interspecies communication in these films, this chapter will extend its focus from animals to nature, and consider how some human characters in these films, namely *Honey*, *Times and Winds*, *Jîn* and *Singing Women* become one with nature *like* animals, and belong with nature rather than with civilization and people. Accentuating the prepubescent nature of these human characters, such a reading will aim to delineate how the theme of childhood functions as a constituent in approximating humans to nature, which typically remains outside predetermined social codes, and more specifically, logos.

Instigating a series of theoretical oppositions, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953/2001) famously suggested that “[i]f a lion could talk, we could not understand him.”¹⁰¹ Several theoreticians including Cary Wolfe, Vicki Hearne, and Jacques Derrida have since taken issue with Wittgenstein’s approach and blamed him of being utterly “humanist” while contemplating the potential animal language. Similar to Lyotard’s (1988) musings on animals and language quoted above, Vicki Hearne (1987) assigns a lot of meaning to the “silence” of the animals: “The reticence of [Wittgenstein’s] lion is not the reticence of absence, absence of consciousness, say, or knowledge, but rather of tremendous presence of all consciousness that is beyond ours” (as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, p. 45). Drawing upon these theorizations, Cary Wolfe (2003) summarizes that precisely because speaking and subjectivity have long been associated and were simultaneously denied to animals, “[f]or [Stanley] Cavell, our tendency to see [this] reticence of Wittgenstein’s lion as a lack of subjectivity is symptomatic of nothing so much as ‘our skeptical terror about the independent existence of other minds’ – a terror that is, in a certain sense, about our failure to be god. . . .”¹⁰² Such an approach that contests the human desire for sovereignty over other species by way of language proves ultimately refreshing in a study of post-1990s independent Turkish cinema inasmuch as the issue of biopolitics determines most of the interaction between human and non-human animals. If animals are considered markedly different from human beings *because* they cannot recount their experiences, the fact that some of the human characters in these films who hold back from other human beings reflect their true selves onto animal Others at times proves to be extremely problematic as it also causes some of them to impose no inhibitions

¹⁰¹ *The Wittgenstein Reader*, Anthony Kenny (Ed.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 213 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, p. 44.

¹⁰² Vicki Hearne, *Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 233 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, p. 45.

on themselves, especially in the case of *Frenzy* when Ahmet indulges in his sadistic self by torturing Coni. If the dog could speak, could Ahmet still bring himself to torture him despite the possibility of being told on? In a similar vein, within the more systematic scope, would the municipality still murder the dogs in the city if the public had been informed (by dogs?) about the fact that these dogs are not “humanely regulated in European standards”?¹⁰³ Likewise in *Somersault in a Coffin*, Mahsun feels comfortable with approaching the peacock in a way he cannot his romantic interest and ends up killing the former. Is it because he is assured that the peacock will not *reject* him? Once again, the politics of representation through language gains high value, and simply being one’s true self in the company of an animal Other does not necessarily deliver reconciliation or peace of any kind to the animal Other.

In these films, it is chiefly through bypassing language through non-verbal *exchange* rather than a unilateral imposition on the animal Other that power dynamics become irrelevant, and a possible reconciliation between the animal and human characters is sustained. Considering *Sivas*, for example, the codes of masculinity so victimizing to some of the human characters, mainly the child protagonist, as much as to the animal characters throughout the film cannot in any way penetrate into the moments of bonding between Sivas and Aslan. Their first interaction in the woods should be remembered in particular with respect to such a non-linguistic communication. Moreover, while biopolitics is of utmost importance in a discussion of our access (and lack thereof) to animal languages, the question of whether animals inherently *have* language or not remains an integral one that should be addressed. In his above-cited study, Cary Wolfe (2003) sharply critiques the

¹⁰³ 01:12:02 – 01:12:22.

theories on animals not having a language in his chapter “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal” (2003), and observes the complex nature of animals and the faculty of speech which, he argues, needs to be taken into consideration before a complete refusal of language to animals. To that end, Wolfe quotes Derrida’s (1991) astute premise on the matter as follows:

[T]he idea according to which man is the only speaking being, in its traditional form or in its Heideggerian form, seems to me at once undisplaceable and highly problematic. Of course, if one defines language in such a way that it is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, *are themselves not only human*. It is not a question of covering up ruptures and heterogeneities. I would simply contest that they give rise to a single linear, indivisible, oppositional limit, to a binary opposition between the human and the infra-human. (“Eating Well”, 1991, pp. 116-7 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, pp. 73-4)

It will be presented here that it is through this “network of possibilities” as construed by Derrida (1991) that the films of interest to this thesis investigate the issue of communication between animal and human characters. To exemplify, in the abovementioned sequence in *Sivas* that depicts the first exchange between Aslan and Sivas in the woods, and significantly takes a good few minutes rather than a fleeting moment, Aslan calls out to a recently defeated and fatally wounded Sivas, trying to “talk” to him, and despite his lack of human language, Sivas gives bodily *responses* to Aslan by means of growling so as to, presumably, mark his territory and *express* his comfort level with Aslan’s intrusion to his space. What is definitive in this interaction is that his response *does* enable the dog to communicate himself to the boy, not only because the dog can *produce* a message but also because the boy *understands* him. Furthermore, the film portrays their communication in this pivotal

scene as such that it seems that Sivas is not simply giving a *reaction* to a stimulus, i.e. Aslan's insistent approach to him, but is indeed warning the latter of the consequences in case he invades Sivas' space any further, seemingly for the sake of both parties. *Observing* Aslan's persistent decision to not leave Sivas' side with the hope of getting him healed, a wish the film grants shortly after, Sivas seems to start appreciating Aslan's presence and calmly coils up in his corner.¹⁰⁴ It is notably through this inceptive agreement of co-existence that the film's plot comes into being; i.e. through an amicable one to one interaction between the human and the animal not as Others unintelligible to one another, but as beings in *dialog*.

In a similar vein with *Sivas*, the first dialog Jîn has with animals is delivered because of their shared space. In this scene, Jîn is hiding in a cave-like hollow to keep herself safe from the bombing and shooting and sees a brown bear that starts walking towards her and cowers in the small cave right across her. Jîn is alarmed by this encounter at first but then sees how equally scared the bear is, puts her rifle down, and says to the moaning bear: "It's over. It's over. Don't be afraid." and rolls an apple towards the bear, which it gulps instantly.¹⁰⁵ When the bombing ceases, she says "Bye bye!" to the bear, and leaves the cave. These characters meet again later on, and Jîn says to the bear light-heartedly: "Sorry, friend. I have no other apples left."¹⁰⁶ Such dialog, however, does not always provide immediate solidarity, as evident in *Jîn* and *Honey*, and at times depicts an apathy on the part of animals and nature, if not antagonism. Despite the abundance of instances that represent Jîn and the animals that accompany her in the woods as comrades, it should be noted that nature can be interpreted as equally indifferent to Jîn's distress, not only due to the

¹⁰⁴ 00:31:12 – 00:35:50.

¹⁰⁵ 00:34:30 – 00:36:08.

¹⁰⁶ 00:41:10 – 00:41:26.

extreme long shots and aerial shots rendering Jîn an incredibly small constituent of an often hostile and at best threatening landscape, but also because it fails to shelter her in the end, despite her efforts to camouflage within it.¹⁰⁷ What is more, throughout the film, Jîn takes shelter in small caves that resemble a womb, arguably of Mother Nature. The absence of her own mother, however, permeates the entire film. During her long journey, Jîn calls her mother twice: first when she has stolen foods, clothes, and the textbook from a villager's house, then after she has let go of the Turkish soldier she fixed. She tells her not to worry and that she is on her way, but the audience witnesses that Jîn is in constant need of a safe haven where she can take shelter without a second thought; somewhere like a mother's womb. The caves she hides in, however, do not necessarily keep her safe from the many predators. To exemplify, she is approached by a lynx while in her cave, but the lynx does not harm her, as a mutual acknowledgement of spatio-temporal co-existence.¹⁰⁸ In another sequence, Jîn climbs a remarkably tall tree to take the eggs of a bird guarding her home. The bird starts crying out to prevent Jîn from stealing her eggs without any success, and continues her cries when a group of soldiers come walking towards the tree, as if to tell on Jîn. However, she stops crying as soon as one soldier starts singing, perhaps because she understands that Jîn, a fellow female prey, can also be hunted by these men. As soon as the soldiers leave, however, the bird resumes her cries, still protesting Jîn's intrusion to her home.¹⁰⁹ With this scene, the fact that Jîn is ready to and does engage in a unilateral violence is emphasized, as she consumes

¹⁰⁷ 01:26:21 – 01:26:39.

¹⁰⁸ 01:27:24 – 01:27:55.

¹⁰⁹ 00:16:19 – 00:19:21.

the unborn baby of a bird, even if it is for survival, and nature reacts antagonistically to her.¹¹⁰

By the same token, *Honey* does not provide an unproblematic companionship between human beings and animals. As noted earlier, *Honey* is the most atmospheric film in the *The Yusuf Trilogy* and is concerned mainly with the youngest period of the trilogy's titular protagonist in which he is living with his parents in a cabin at the heart of a forest, enclosed with extravagant vegetation and naturally, animals of many kinds. Not all animals, however, are in friendly contact with Yusuf, for several reasons. First of all, Yusuf's father Yakup, whom he adores, is a beekeeper and the film starts with the latter wandering in the woods with his horse, checking for honey in the beehives he has installed. Later on in the film, the same horse accompanying Yakup with the beekeeping startles Yusuf in the dark by whinnying at him¹¹¹ from the back in the underlit barn where Yusuf is sitting in solitude.¹¹² In the quietude of the barn at night, the audience becomes as startled as Yusuf by the presence of the horse, but it arguably comes as a pleasant surprise that could potentially create a scene of bonding between the two. Yet, as the scene unfolds, it seems that the horse is not necessarily willing to accommodate Yusuf in his home, since when the latter offers him a bucketful of water right after this interaction, the horse not only refuses to drink from the bucket but also knocks it down, soaking thus Yusuf's schoolbag, and casually starts eating hay, ignoring Yusuf. In the next scene, Yusuf is standing by the fireplace, cheerlessly drying his notebook in his hands. He has been driven out

¹¹⁰ Moreover, the fact that she is carrying a rifle also represents her hostile side she could easily reveal.

¹¹¹ 00:31:00.

¹¹² Likewise in *Sivas*, the cattle in the barn are filmed as silent but contemplative characters in the dark with close-ups.

of the barn due to his seemingly unknowing intrusion into the home of the horse, which after all is utilized by the family for practical purposes.

Another group of animals that could be considered unfriendly towards Yusuf is simultaneously the most essential characters of *Honey*: bees. As discussed in Chapter 3, the bees help Yusuf's family make a living - until they stop making honey near the family's house, which makes Yusuf's father go about seeking honeybees elsewhere, deeper into the forest, eventually causing him to get lost only to be found dead a while after. Catriona Sandilands (2014), in her essay "Pro/Polis: Three Forays into the Political Lives of Bees," which recounts the abilities of bees to *communicate* democratically within their colonies, and the degree of human exploitation and industrialization of bee products suggests that human welfare is interdependent on the welfare of honeybees and that bee politics unequivocally intersect with human politics. Accordingly, she comments on the urgency of assigning political agency to bees as follows:

As Jacques Derrida argues in "And Say the Animal Responded?" many other-than-human beings can not only disrupt and catalyze but also be seen to respond: including *bees*. . . . [i]t may be that other-than-human creatures like bees are quite capable of experiencing their own equality and inequality *as such*, that they are capable of communicating in a way that presents a "world" to their interlocutors, and that human beings have no excuse whatsoever not to consider bees' responses through a lens that would allow us to see them as *participants* in political struggle rather than as objects to be represented. (2014, p. 159)

What Sandilands (2014) calls in the same essay "anthropoapio equality", i.e. the ideal equality between human beings and bees to perform "our struggles for multispecies justice" by way of benefiting from mutual interest, however, is absent in *Honey* (p. 165). It is rather that bees are imposed upon and utilized as objects of a business. More importantly, it is not expressed in the film why bees have stopped producing honey nearby this family's house or whether they are dying out, but it is

most likely that there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of bees due to people's intervention to the environment, mostly for economic reasons.¹¹³ Life without bees, however, as confirmed by numerous studies, is inconceivable - which is why, bees as a communicating group of agents with subjectivity, as Sandilands (2014) imagines, can be viewed as antagonistic characters in *Honey* that perhaps, as an embodiment of nature, bring about the death of Yakup, because he could be identified from an ecocritical perspective as a slave driver by virtue of his job. It can thus be concluded within such a reading simply that "Nature gave, and Nature hath taken away." Yet, nature eventually compensates for the death of Yakup and provides the boy with a suggested metaphysical contact with his deceased father.

What should be noted at this point is that Yusuf is having problems with articulation and stutters at times while speaking. He is only starting to read and write and he is not doing very well at school, resorting even to deceit by showing his teacher the homework of his deskmate as if it is in fact his own. Although he cannot read without stammering, Yusuf's teacher eventually gives him the success badge for reading, and makes the class applaud him.¹¹⁴ At another point, upon the sight of his father affectionately communicating with a boy of his age, Yusuf starts running into the woods angry and jealous of his father, until his mother stops him and asks him: "Where are you running to, my son? Go on, dear, tell me." to which he replies in a stammer: "Ba. Ba. Ba. Ba."¹¹⁵ It is telling that in his stutter, Yusuf is most probably trying to say the word "Baba" (meaning "Father" in Turkish), and that he just saw him, but could also be trying to utter the word "Bal" (meaning "Honey" in Turkish) or simply be using *another* language, one that belongs to animals, one of bleating. He

¹¹³ At one point, Yusuf has a dream in which he is standing under a tree and a handful of bee corpses falls into his hand from the hive installed in the tree. (01:05:20 – 01:05:32)

¹¹⁴ 01:29:00 – 01:31:00.

¹¹⁵ 00:38:00 – 00:38:37.

is evidently not comfortable with using human language, and when he speaks it, it is to recount a dream full of idyllic images that belong once again to the realm of nature:

Yusuf: Dad, I saw a dream. I was sitting under a tree. The stars –

Yakup: Shh. You shouldn't tell your dreams out in the open. Whisper it into my ear.

After Yusuf tells his father this dream in whispers, the latter cautions him in a serious, deep voice: “Don't tell anyone your dreams.”¹¹⁶ Upon this exchange, the two leave the cabin and Yakup frees their hawk Camgöz, which has been watching over him inside the cabin while he was sleeping. Hearing the caws of the now off-screen Camgöz that has been set free, Yusuf runs after it as if to respond to its cries. In the same vein, when he finds out about the death of his father, Yusuf goes off to the forest and tries to locate Camgöz, which accompanied his father in his journey into the forest, as if to seek his father embodied by it.¹¹⁷ In addition, several times in the film after Yakup's death, bees enter Yusuf's classroom where he is doing poorly and he is occasionally framed with bees around him throughout the film, further evoking the sense of a reincarnated Yakup and his reassuring presence even after death. Besides, the way Yusuf and Yakup interact (while the latter is alive) is mainly by whispering, which is also very significant since they *prefer* whispering to talking in a regular pitch. Finally, through the end of the film where the women are holding a religious gathering, Yusuf is outside and in the backdrop of buzzing insects in the woods, their voices sound more like murmurs, and more characteristically, like bees,

¹¹⁶ 00:08:15 – 00:08:54.

¹¹⁷ 01:31:00 – 01:35:00.

but also like Yusuf and his father communicating.¹¹⁸ As such, bees in *Honey* are consistently portrayed as extensions of Yusuf and his (prematurely broken) relationship with his father. An interesting narrative choice on the part of the director Semih Kaplanoglu is that the way Yusuf finds out about his father's death is through observation rather than a direct conversation, as he overhears from a distance the gendarmerie reveal Yakup's death to his wife.¹¹⁹ Throughout the film, his observational skills and his unusual lack of a childish loquaciousness contribute to the cinematic aesthetics as well as the plot, allowing the film an arguably poetic lack of human voice replaced by blissful sounds of nature that characterize the film. Yusuf's presence, in other words, does not disturb nature, and he is portrayed as much as an animal as a child in the way he listens (to the sounds of wilderness), observes (people and events), and touches (trees and water). His employment of his senses to learn things instead of speaking or asking questions about them, as a child of his age could be typically expected to, defines Yusuf's close contact with nature.

Likewise, Esma, Meryem and Hale in *Singing Women* communicate with cuckoos and sing songs that they improvise on the spot rather than talking in long, constructed sentences.¹²⁰ The lyrics of their songs usually parody reality, but also highlight the supremacy of nature over everything that suffocates the women. One such example is their rhyme that goes "The wind blows, the wind swirls, dust swirls into the eyes of bad people"¹²¹, and the other is "The most comfortable bed is the sea. The widest is the sea. As long as it isn't cold. So what if it's cold?!", a rhyme after which the women start squawking like seagulls, with their arms stretched out like

¹¹⁸ 01:16:47. In another scene, the voices of Yusuf's classmates sound identical to the buzz of swarming bees. (00:40:18)

¹¹⁹ 01:31:25 – 01:31:50.

¹²⁰ One example is "The Tiger Song" (00:40:26 – 00:41:08), which is disrupted by the sound of a gunshot, followed by the sequence about Mesut's hunting trophies.

¹²¹ 01:04:56 - 01:06:43.

seagulls, with actual seagulls in the background, and they finally dive into the sea with their clothes on, holding hands and playing under the water.¹²² It seems like singing in the film functions as a rejection of using language as it is. Instead, Esma, Meryem and Hale express themselves more comfortably outside the given language and use animal sounds and rhymes to interact. At the end of the film, it is through this comfort that Meryem and Hale can communicate with the transformed (stag and / or cuckoo bird) body of Esma.

By the same token, in his illuminating work *On Ceasing to Be Human*, Gerald Bruns (2011) discusses insightfully the pertinence of discarding all significations to become (one with the) animal and quotes Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) from their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as follows:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities *where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds*, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. Kafka's animals never refer to a mythology or to archetypes but correspond solely to new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 13 as cited in Bruns, 2011, pp. 62-3)

Such “zones of liberated intensities” that are freed from totalizing significations are reached through a dismissal of logos and an adoption of non-verbal interaction instead. Accordingly, Yusuf's stammering could be considered as a symptom of the abovementioned sentiment regarding the “content freeing itself from the signifier that formalized him,” because by denouncing or being simply unable to clearly articulate human language, Yusuf can enjoy the possibilities in this “world of pure intensities” such as contacting his deceased father as suggested through the sensory

¹²² 01:28:59 - 01:29:52. Beds are also significant symbols of the discomfort that these women feel in their realities and it is vocalized in the film that all three women sleep in uncomfortable beds.

mediation of nature; namely, of hawks crying, bees and insects buzzing, and animals calling to him from the lush forest, and the comfort with which nature provides him by embracing his small body with its (her?) generously idyllic, arboreal nests. Yusuf is thus always already closer to nature, perhaps *because* he cannot speak human language at ease. The issue of verbal in/articulation in *Honey* thus perfectly embodies Derrida's (1991) argument that it would be absurd to simply define language as a capacity solely "reserved for what we call man."¹²³ Perhaps his father talked to Yusuf in whispers and cautioned him against telling anyone about his dreams because he knew using language as prescribed by society, i.e. logos, would ruin Yusuf's organic bond with nature, and hence, his interaction with his (dead) father.

Having become a thematic trait, there is only one party in post-1990s independent Turkish cinema whose being at home with nature delivers them a sense of belonging without damage to nature and animals: children, and more specifically, sleeping children. In *Times and Winds*, *Honey* and *Jîn*, the child protagonists sleep in nature at several points posed as animals, undisturbed by otherwise unfavourable sleeping conditions such as sleeping in daylight, outdoors, among thorny leaves of plants and on hard rocks (*Times and Winds* and *Jîn*)¹²⁴ and chilliness (*Honey* and *Jîn*). At the end of *Honey*, Yusuf sleeps like an animal in a pastoral, even heavenly, place under a tree in the depths of the forest. The almost organic harmony of his small body with that of an embracing nature is remarkable and arguably paints a cinematic poem.¹²⁵ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the children in *Times and Winds* similarly walk away from their homes into nature and take refuge in it by sleeping on its (her?) rocks and plants.¹²⁶ In his essay "From *Beş Vakit* [*Times and*

¹²³ Derrida, "Eating Well", 1991, pp. 116-7 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, pp. 73-4.

¹²⁴ 00:31:50, 01:24:35 – 01:24:55.

¹²⁵ 01:35:00 – 01:37:00.

¹²⁶ 00:13:41 – 00:14:02, 01:20:56 – 01:21:08, 01:24:35 – 01:24:56.

Winds] to *Kosmos: Becoming Animal in Reha Erdem's Films*", where he discusses also the spatio-temporal relationships in the relevant films, Ali Deniz Şensöz (2011) aptly observes the following regarding the scenes in which the children fall asleep in nature:

These scenes repeat after children experience a teenage trauma: exploring sex, faced with (sic) violence, falling in love, smoking a cigarette. We see them asleep, we see them grow up. Also the costume design in these scenes creates a different layer of meaning. In all of these scenes the costumes children wear are the same color as the space where they fell asleep. At first, one cannot easily differentiate the child from nature; after the camera movement ends and we see the whole body, we understand a human being is lying on the soil or grass. These children become an organic part of nature when they grow up, and at the same time they look half dead, as if in a vegetative state, which is directly related to the description of people's lives in this village.¹²⁷

Even if such epitomes of becoming one with nature may stem from a trauma in *Times and Winds* as Şensöz (2011) argues, it could be inferred that these children and Yusuf in *Honey* can eventually experience a cleansing bond with nature regardless, while adult characters rarely can. As such, childhood is delineated in these films as the only period in which a human being can enjoy being accommodated by nature by not harming it.

In a similar vein, as *Milk*, the second film in the *Trilogy*, suggests, the filial bond between Yusuf and his (dead) father has been broken presumably with Yusuf's initiation into adulthood and the concomitant loss of childhood. It is not until an exchange between Yusuf and another animal in *Egg* that Yusuf's long-lost bond with nature, and thereby his father, can be retrieved. Throughout *Egg*, the protagonist, now in his late thirties, seems apathetic to all events happening around him, including the death and the ensuing funeral of his mother. The sequence followed by

¹²⁷ Retrieved from <http://icsfilm.org/essays/from-bes-vakit-to-kosmos-becoming-animal-in-reha-erdem-films/> (14 March 2011).

the finale, however, breaks this apathetic façade and his presumably repressed grief, with the agency of a kangal dog. This scene begins with Yusuf walking amongst sheep in a remarkably pastoral setting in the evening, which is disturbed by a kangal dog toppling him, barking at him in a hostile manner. The night shot after this one implies that a certain amount of time has passed, and the fact that Yusuf experiences epileptic seizures throughout the *Trilogy*¹²⁸ suggests that he has had a similar attack upon being knocked down by the dog. Interestingly, the dog now seems to be protecting the unconscious Yusuf, whom he initially antagonized, and is barking and growling at cars and the threatening animals in the pitch dark woods. A while after Yusuf regains consciousness, the dog approaches him and starts growling towards the woods again, covering Yusuf. Dumbfounded by the experience, Yusuf's eyes, which also function as the camera eye, become fixed on the dog's large paws that look decidedly clutched to the earth. Then follows a close-up on the dog's face and a mid shot of both characters facing and *looking* at each other. With Yusuf sat down on the ground, the dog seems much loftier and clearly stronger than Yusuf, but not in a threatening way. It may not be the most friendly exchange between an animal and human character among these films, but the dog's presence near Yusuf does not seem to be simply a gesture of indifference, either. Instead, the dog has taken the effort to protect Yusuf in his own territory rather than chasing him off of it or attacking him. When Yusuf wakes from his sleep, he is clearly unharmed, and *belongs*, in a way, to and with the dog, which is arguably why, right after they look at each other face to face, Yusuf starts sobbing loudly and uncontrollably, emoting genuinely for the first time in the whole film only in the company of this hefty dog, who happens to be male and could very well be regarded as analagous to Yusuf's

¹²⁸ A disease inherited from his father Yakup, as revealed in *Honey*, the final film of the *Trilogy*.

father protecting him from danger in the wilderness in his serious demeanor in *Honey*.¹²⁹ Significantly, this cathartic moment makes the final statement on Yusuf's confrontation with his repressed emotions (*Egg* recounting the oldest Yusuf in *The Yusuf Trilogy*) and is followed by the finale in which Ayla, Yusuf's female companion, hands him a chicken egg, softly and shyly smiling in the process.¹³⁰ Yusuf takes the egg in surprise and puts it on the breakfast table set for the two of them. The "couple" then start having breakfast silently, eating honey and dairy products such as butter, timidly smiling at each other when their eyes meet, and it is with this breakfast scene that the film ends. If Ayla's gesture of handing Yusuf an egg is taken to be an extension of her apparent and hitherto unconsummated desire for him, this finale is literally expectant with the birth of a romantic/sexual relationship, which could be a narrative choice to express that the now adult Yusuf needs a maternal (read: reproductive) woman outside of his mother willingly offering her companionship to him throughout *Milk* and *Egg*, and that such a union is rendered possible through an emotional outburst upon his encounter with this animal Other who unmistakably guards him against danger. As such, the tension that comes with Yusuf's emotional detachment throughout *Milk* and *Egg* is only resolved when Yusuf has arguably substituted his need to reunite his broken family with these similarly shielding and warm interactions delivered by the kangal dog and Ayla, hence symbolically starting his own family.

¹²⁹ 01:22:12 – 01:26:00.

¹³⁰ 01:27:53.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed how the selected films of post-1990s independent Turkish Cinema problematize the ways in which human characters relate to animal characters, and the implications of each inter-species contact. While it could be suggested that these are statements about animal rights, they in fact seem to underline more comprehensive subjects. Although *Sivas* could be viewed as a film about the culture of animal abuse at first glance, for instance, it is easily just as much about the male characters in the film and the way they assert their masculinities by way of commodifying and violating the animal Other as it is about the titular dog. Therefore, it would be a perfunctory approach to argue that these films are concerned solely with the ethical relationality people have with animal Others. It should instead be noted that these films are equally self-conscious about making statements about the human condition by associating the human Self with the animal Other. While the film reel they spend on animals and their approach to ethics and animals vary, these directors make a similar cinematic and narrative effort to delineate the violence inflicted on human beings and on animals as concurrent. But some also suggest a new way to relate to the animals: becoming one. In his chapter “Becoming-Animal: Some Simple Ways” in his *On Ceasing to Be Human*, Gerald Bruns (2011) succinctly describes how Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) define “becoming-animal,” a description much favorable to the characterization of Kosmos:

In the terms of art that Deleuze and Guattari characteristically use, becoming-animal is a movement from major (the constant) to minor (the variable); it is a deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous *legion* whose mode of existence is nomadic or, alternatively, whose “structure” is rhizomatic rather than arborescent, that is, restless,

insomniac, or in flight rather than settled, upright, or at one with itself and at peace with others . . . It is a movement from molar to molecular combinations, from unity to complexity, that is, from organization to anarchy, which is the mode of being of whatever is uncontainable within an order of things. . . .” (2011, pp. 61-2)

This “nomadic”, “restless”, and “rhizomatic” existence not only encapsulates but also liberates alternative forms of existence (human/animal/prophet), and the *raison d'être* of Kosmos’ presence seems to be to fulfill this project of deterritorialization proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) by calling into question the limits of human existence with his hybrid nature, especially considering his musings about humans and animals being equal actors in a grand design and his problematization of how humans exercise power on animals.¹³¹ In a more self-reflexive way, the “rhizomatic”, i.e. the typically non-linear and open-ended structure of the plots of all the selected films is representative of the endless semantic permutations of the process of “becoming” in these films.

In the readings of *Honey* and *Egg* proposed in Chapter 4, the interactions Yusuf has with bees and the dog respectively seem to foreground not necessarily a *literal* inter-species dialog but metaphorically represents Yusuf’s need to feel protected by a male guardian, i.e. a father figure, which furthers the argument that these films treat the animal others not chiefly as animals as they exist in nature, but mostly as extensions of human characters and allegories of psychological, political, and social tensions. An anthropocentric reading of these films would propose that these instances of human - animal interaction are only fleeting moments with no more function than providing insight into the psyche of the human protagonists. Animals surely embody certain anxieties and wishes of the human characters, as they do in *The Yusuf Trilogy*. But considering all the screen time these directors have

¹³¹ The title of this thesis, “A Living Dog Is Better Than a Dead Lion”, is taken from one of such musings of Kosmos’.

allocated their animal characters, it would be counterintuitive at best to ignore how central animals are to the films on their own accord, not only through their narrative agency but through the cinematic aesthetics of their physical existence, as well. The political backdrop of the presumably forced relocation of bees and the sound design heavily dependent on the *voices* of bees and other sounds of nature in *Honey* perfectly justify the indispensable role of animals as equally essential as human characters.

This thesis has finally attempted to analyze the tension of not according animals any language, and discussed the instances where language ceases to be a barrier blocking interspecies communication and is replaced by non-verbal possibilities that enable a sincere interaction between humans and animals.

Wittgenstein (1953/2001) in all his literalness with his lion example could have had a point that we cannot understand the “meaning” of Sivas’ growls, but we can agree on our incapacity to fully decipher what Sivas could be conveying. That said, these films make it very clear that these animals are indeed communicating with their human companions, albeit with a “language” that we human beings cannot claim to understand or master. This is when these films introduce a constantly evolving sensory form of conversation, a new ethical approach, a “network of possibilities” as Derrida (1991) formulates,¹³² that successfully proves logos to be irrelevant for human – animal communication.

¹³² Derrida, “Eating Well”, 1991, pp. 116-7 as cited in *Animal Rites*, 2003, pp. 73-4.

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