

**ABSURD COMEDY AND HYBRIDITY IN YESILCAM CINEMA:
BAYTAN AND SUNAL FILMS IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL
CONTEXT OF 1970s AND 1980s TURKEY**



MEHTAP ÜNLÜTÜRK

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MA THESIS

RADIO, TELEVISION, AND CINEMA

YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY

JUNE, 2021

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal made ten absurd comedies between 1976 and 1986, coinciding with the declining period of Yeşilçam Cinema. The worsening economic situation and the lack of a solid foundation for the cinema industry led filmmakers to fast low-cost productions in the 1970s, which were harshly criticised in terms of content and form. At a first glance, Baytan-Sunal comedies seem to be merely for entertainment. A close analysis demonstrates that they address and criticise the societal issues of the era, through their satirical absurdity. This thesis aims to understand Baytan-Sunal films as products of Yeşilçam's hybridity. Through preventing an invisible and continuous storytelling which creates a realist impression, the hybrid aesthetics of the ten films in question works against the intention of the apparatus; hence, enhances the critical distance created by their absurdity. Within the turbulent socio-political and economic context of Turkey of the 1970s-1980s, the hybrid aesthetics of Baytan-Sunal movies highlight their absurdity in narrative structure, character choices and stylistic features. The absurd and hybrid aesthetics of Baytan-Sunal movies is a result of Yeşilçam's declining and Turkey's unrestful sociopolitical climate, with its unstable governments, declining economy, political polarization, and violence. In Baytan-Sunal movies, absurdities on the levels of narrative structure, character choices and stylistic choices, which are due to the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam Cinema, create a distance that allow for a meta-critical gaze (since they prevent immersive and relatable storytelling), although movies as such have been criticized for not being critical or educational for the public.

ÖZET

Natuk Baytan ve Kemal Sunal, Yeşilçam Sinemasının çöküş dönemine denk gelen 1976 ve 1986 yılları arasında beraber on absürt komedi filmi çevirdi. Kötüleşmekte olan ekonomik durum ve sağlam bir endüstriyel temelin eksikliğinin de etkisiyle 1970’li yıllarda Türkiye’de sinema sektörü, film eleştirmenlerinin biçim ve içerik açısından olumsuz yönde değerlendirdikleri düşük bütçeli yapımlara yöneldi. İlk bakışta, Baytan-Sunal komedileri yalnızca eğlendirmeye yönelik yüzeysel komedi filmleri olarak görünseler de, daha derin bir çözümleme bu filmlerin gerek tematik düzeyde gerekse temsil düzeyinde işleyen hicve dayalı “absürtlük” stratejileriyle toplumsal sorunları işlediğini ve eleştirdiğini gösterecektir. Bu tez çalışması Baytan-Sunal filmlerini Yeşilçam’ın melezliğinin bir ürünü olarak anlamlandırır. Hem Doğu hem Batı anlatı geleneklerinden etkilenen Yeşilçam melez bir sinema sayılır. Ele alınan on filmin melez estetiği, gerçekliğin rasyonel algısını yeniden üreten görünmez ve devamlılık ilkesine bağlı bir anlatıyı engelleyerek sinematik aygıtın niyetine aykırı çalışır ve bu sayede, absürt içerik ve anlatımıyla birlikte eleştirel bir mesafe oluşturur. 1970’ler ve 1980’ler Türkiye’sinin çalkantılı sosyopolitik ve ekonomik bağlamı içinde, Baytan-Sunal filmlerinin melez estetiği, filmlerin anlatı yapısı, karakter ve biçim seçimlerindeki absürtlüğü ön plana çıkarır. Bu tezin öne sürdüğü üzere, Baytan-Sunal filmlerinin absürd ve melez estetiği; Türkiye’nin istikrarsız hükümetler, kötüleşen ekonomi, artan politik kutuplaşma ve şiddet ile, o dönemki güç durumunun ve Yeşilçam’ın çöküşünün bir ürünüdür. Çalışmanın temel iddiasına göre sadece güldürme işleviyle tanımlanan ve eğitici olmadıkları iddia edilerek eleştirilen Baytan-Sunal filmlerinin Yeşilçam’ın melez yapısından doğan anlatı yapısı, karakter seçimleri ve biçim özellikleri üzerinden kurulan absürtlüğü, (kapsayıcı ve

özdeşleşmeye dayalı bir hikaye anlatımını engelleyerek) eleştirel bir bakış için mesafe oluşturur.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Özge Erbek Kara and Yeditepe University's department of Radio, Television and Cinema, for the opportunity conducting such a research.

I would also like to thank the Baytan family and my student Mehmet Natuk Köseoğlu who is Natuk Baytan's grandson, for the inspiration they provided me with, which caused the curiosity to begin this research on the absurdity of Baytan and Sunal films.

And finally, I would like to thank Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal, for the unique films they have produced together, without which this thesis would be impossible to write.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to research the absurdity and hybridity of the ten comedy movies made together by film director Natuk Baytan (1925-1986) and actor Kemal Sunal (1944-2000), within the context of Turkey and Yeşilçam Cinema in the 1970s and the 1980s. Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal made ten comedy films together between the years 1976 to 1986. Baytan directed these comedy films with absurd elements, and Sunal was the protagonist. Sunal played in eighty-two films during his career as an actor, so he made many films in collaboration with other directors too.¹ He is well known nationwide with his comedy films and characters he played in these films. The main difference between a Kemal Sunal comedy and a Baytan-Sunal comedy, though, is that Baytan-Sunal ones are absurd comedies. Absurd comedy, as part of the satire comedy tradition, is the kind of comedy that establishes humour through contingency and silliness. Misunderstandings, absurdities and abrupt happenings related to money and the mafia are common themes that can be seen in the films made together by Baytan and Sunal.

The ten films that will be analysed and researched in this thesis are the following: *Sahte Kabadayı / Fake Rowdy* (1976), *Sakar Şakir / Clumsy Şakir* (1977), *Avanak Apti / Ninny Apti* (1978), *Korkusuz Korkak / Fearless Coward* (1979), *Gerzek Şaban / Idiot Şaban* (1980), *Üç Kağıtçı / Humbug* (1981), *Yedi Bela Hüsnü / Seven Trouble Hüsnü* (1982), *Tokatçı / Swindler* (1983), *Atla Gel Şaban / Come, Şaban*

¹ Kemal Sunal (1998) stated in his master's thesis called "TV ve Sinemada Kemal Sunal Güldürüsü" ("Kemal Sunal Comedy in TV and Cinema" in English, translated by the author), that he made 81 movies, and he wished to continue his career as an actor for cinema and theatre (p. 2). Yet, he only manages to make one more film, *Propaganda* (Çetin, 1998) before he dies (Imdb.com, "Kemal Sunal", n.d.). As such, the number of films he plays in throughout his career add up to eighty-two in total.

(1984), *Tarzan Rıfkı / Tarzan Rıfkı* (1986). These films are all the films Baytan made together with Sunal. In these ten movies, absurdity appears especially at three levels: the levels of narrative structure, character choices and stylistic choices.

Absurdity on the level of narrative structure in Baytan-Sunal films can be analysed and understood with the help of Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory. Todorov (1969) argued that the character in a narrative goes through five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair the damage, resolution. Baytan-Sunal films begin with Sunal's character being in a state of equilibrium. The five stages are not always clearly separated in these films, but all start with equilibrium, which is disrupted in an absurd way, and then again restored in an absurd way. What makes this narrative structure absurd, however, is that the transitions between stages happen through unexpected misunderstandings or coincidences, instead of unfolding in a reasonable, realistic way. This narrative structure of the ten films by Baytan-Sunal is also one of the key differences from the classical realistic narrative cinema.

Baytan-Sunal cinema is drastically different than the classical Western narrative cinema. Here, the classical narrative cinema refers to the products of systematic cinema industries like Classical Hollywood, a kind of narration that is characterised by the aim of reproduction of reality through continuity and 'invisible' storytelling (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 2005). These are principles that ensure the comprehensibility of a film, and also provides the audience with an immersive experience which strives for a universal emotional appeal. Due to the use of absurd transitions from one stage of the narrative to the other, along with character choices and stylistic features, Baytan-Sunal movies distance themselves from the realistic narrative storytelling.

All ten movies start with a bizarre coincidence or a misunderstanding which changes the protagonist's (Kemal Sunal's character) life all of a sudden. According to the narrative structure of Todorov's theory, this would be the transition from the equilibrium stage to disruption. For instance, in *Sahte Kabadayı*, Kemal (played by Sunal) is mistaken to be the son of a wealthy rowdy in Istanbul, just because he was accidentally in the right place at the right time. Similarly, in *Avanak Apti*, the protagonist Apti (played by Sunal) is mistaken to be a famous rowdy from Urfa, Urfalı Apti, simply because he shares the same name with the actual rowdy, and he went to the music hall Urfalı Apti was supposed to go to. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, a misunderstanding caused by reports in a hospital being mixed up leads to Mülâyim (played by Sunal) believing that he will die in six months. He becomes fearless, although he used to be an oppressed coward man in his workplace. The disruption of the equilibrium happens not in a logical way, but in an absurd way because it is always caused by a misunderstanding or a coincidence, instead of a reasonable cause for trouble.

The restoration of the equilibrium also occurs unexpectedly and unrealistically. In Baytan-Sunal movies, the initial misunderstanding that disrupts the equilibrium always leads the protagonist to be involved with the mafia. Even though Sunal's character is always clumsy and unskilful, through a series of contingent events that make no sense, Sunal's character defeats the mafia. In *Sakar Şakir*, as he got into trouble in the first place, Şakir (Sunal) defeats the mafia men through his clumsiness, thanks to the coincidences it causes. *Gerzek Şaban*'s protagonist, Osman (Sunal), is saved through looking exactly like Seyfi, a rowdy. In *Üç Kağıtçı*, the protagonist is saved through the neighborhood believing he will die at a certain moment, but being loved by them which causes their forgiveness. As can be seen

from the examples above, the transitions between the stages of the narrative structure do not occur in a reasonable way, as would be expected from the realistic narrative cinema. In these movies, it is always the contingent coincidences that disrupt and restore the equilibrium. Hence, Baytan-Sunal movies are absurd on the level of narrative structure.

The second main reason for these films to be considered absurd is on the level of character choices. In all ten movies, Sunal's character, who is an ordinary man, abruptly gets into trouble with the mafia. Most often, Sunal's character does not recognise that he is in trouble until he faces the mafia, sometimes he even defeats them without knowing he is in real trouble. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, Mulayım, played by Sunal, gets into trouble with the mafia boss Abbas because he tries to die earlier than the six months that he thinks he has left. In *Tokatçı*, Osman (Sunal) sells the mafia boss Kara Erol bicarbonate instead of heroin and gets into trouble with him. Niyazi (Sunal) from *Atla Gel Şaban* is detained by the mafia when they discover his talent of guessing the horse race outcomes correctly. Unlike a realistic narrative, in these absurd films, it is the coincidences and misunderstandings that cause an ordinary protagonist to be in trouble with the extraordinary mafia characters. This indicates that the juxtaposition of ordinary characters with extraordinary characters and situations makes these comedies absurd.

The third level in which absurdity shows itself in Baytan-Sunal movies is stylistic choices. The invisible storytelling of the classical Hollywood narrative cinema, which strives for realism through continuity and smoothness of the storytelling, is not the storytelling attitude of Baytan-Sunal films. Rather, in these movies, the spectator is presented with blurry images, quick cuts, unrealistic movements, unusual angles and unrealistically choreographed crowds. These 'flaws'

prevent the smooth or unnoticed storytelling, which is key to the classical Hollywood narrative cinema. The stylistic choices in Baytan-Sunal movies, which may be read as flaws as well, tie together the absurd narrative and the absurd character choices. Discontinuity of the storytelling depends on the stylistic choices, which can be analysed as a way to support the discontinuous narrative structure. Continuity and invisible storytelling of the classical Hollywood narrative aim for a naturalized storytelling, which is supposed to be unnoticed, smooth and uninterrupted. In this kind of narrative, “the elephant in the room”, which is the fact that this story is told by someone, is not addressed. On the contrary, the stylistic choices of Baytan-Sunal films, which do not avoid mistakes or a discontinuous and unsmooth style, remind the audience of the presence of the filmmaker. These so-called “flawed” stylistic choices of these movies add another layer of absurdity on Baytan-Sunal movies.

To sum up, the ten Baytan-Sunal films are absurd mainly on three levels: the narrative structure, the character choices and the stylistic choices. The films made in collaboration by Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal arose within turbulent sociopolitical context of Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, in Yeşilçam Cinema, which is known with its unique and authentic production.

1. Yeşilçam Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s

Yeşilçam cinema could be understood as the Hollywood or Bollywood cinema of Turkey, in the sense that it is a national cinema with systematic mass production. However, in comparison to the cinema industries such as Hollywood, it has an authentic characteristic and development. The common usage of the phrase “Yeşilçam cinema” refers to the Turkish cinema from 1950s until the end of 1980s. During its

course, Yeşilçam Cinema has systematised a mass film production (Yıldırım, 2019b, p. 57).

Despite being the national cinema of Turkey, Yeşilçam is an ideocratic cinema industry in comparison to other national cinemas. As Nijat Özön (2013) argued in his book *Türk Sineması Tarihi: 1896-1960*, Yeşilçam was a fast-growing industry after the World War II, without a strong foundation. Before the war, the influence and importance of cinema was not known to the Turkish cinema industry (Özön, 2013, p.220). After the war, the industry has exponentially grown according to the statistics of number of movies made and the number of tickets sold. Nevertheless, this growth was not based on a strong foundation, mainly since the moneymakers of the industry did not invest their money back into formation of an established cinema sector. Next to this, the fluctuating politics and the censorship was also negatively effective on Turkish cinema. As a result of these economic and political circumstances peculiar to Turkey of the time, Yeşilçam cinema has developed not exactly as a well-established national cinema industry, but rather as a fragile one, since the infrastructure needed for it to be a strong one was not built alongside its growth (Özön, 2013, p. 225).

Although it lacks a solid foundation, the period from the end of 1940s until the 1960s, according to Yıldırım (2019), could still be understood as the constitution of a national cinema, with many films made without any government support or a well-equipped technological infrastructure (p. 58). This new-born cinema industry was in competition with strong rivals, namely the dubbed films from foreign cinemas like Hollywood. This period established a resisting industry against its powerful competitors. After this build-up, during the 1960s, new cinema movements, such as “social realism” or “revolutionist cinema”, and examples of auteur cinema emerged (Yıldırım, 2019; Coşkun, 2009). Yeşilçam had its golden age from 1961 to mid-1970s

(Hakan, 2016; Scognamillio, 1998; Suner, 2005; Yıldırım, 2019b), just before Baytan and Sunal started working together. Turkish Cinema industry produced more or less two hundred films per year, most of which were melodramas with similar plots (Özön, 1995). Up until the mid-1970s, Yeşilçam Cinema had its good days.

The period in which Baytan and Sunal made their films together, namely the 1970s and 1980s, was when Yeşilçam Cinema was declining. What caused this decline was the mainly the lack of financial support for the industry to become a well-established national cinema. As Asuman Suner (2005) argued in her book *Hayalet Ev: Yeni Türk Sinemasında Aidiyet, Kimlik ve Bellek*; the golden age of Yeşilçam and the lively economy did not feed back into the industry, but rather it made the producers and cinema owners rich (p. 31).² With the proliferation of televisions, the increased costs for production of coloured films, the economic crisis and the chaotic political atmosphere; the general audience did not go to the cinema so often anymore (Suner, p. 31). After the 1971 Memorandum, which was an ultimatum from the military that caused the government to step down (Ortaylı, 2019; Zürcher, 2017), the first impacts of the rising censorship for cinema were also felt. As an attempt for a solution for these ongoing problems, the filmmakers made low-cost sex films, which even pushed the women and children audience further away from theatres (Özön, 1995; Suner, 2005). Moreover, with the 1980 military coup, censorship on TV, cinema and radio was at its highest (Zürcher, 2017). This chain of events led the already fragile industry into an irrevocable crisis. The crisis persevered until the end of 1980s and caused a full collapse by the 1990s (Suner, 2005, p. 31). Despite the macro-level downfall, many directors found ways to keep making films during these dire times, out of the

² The original English translation of the book's title is *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*.

so-called “sex-films rush” movement (Suner, p. 32). Natuk Baytan was one of these directors, he made twenty-nine films including the ones he did with Sunal, from 1976 until 1986.³

2. Criticism Towards Yeşilçam Cinema

Baytan-Sunal movies, along with other popular blockbuster movies of Yeşilçam, were heavily criticised in terms of their content and stylistic choices. These criticisms cluster around three main claims: (1) Yeşilçam cinema did not focus on being educational or enlightening –this critique goes hand in hand with the criticisms about echoing the Eastern cinemas–; (2) Yeşilçam cinema imitates the Western cinemas without an adequate cultural translation; (3) The scenarios, acting, and art direction are poor quality –this was mostly due to the rapid and low-cost productions–

The first thread of criticisms of Yeşilçam Cinema focuses on these films being not educational, but instead just entertaining. This claim is tied to the demand that Turkish Cinema should be “increasing” the level of general culture of Turkish people. In the book *Türk Sineması: Toplumunu Şekillendirmenin, Toplum Tarafından Şekillendirilmenin Sosyolojisi*, edited by Kurtuluş Kayalı, Mert Daban gives an overview of how critics, especially critics with a sociology background, criticise Yeşilçam Cinema.⁴ A common remark made by most critics was that cinema is a very influential art form. As Daban (2017) paraphrased Tahir Çağatay:

³ In total, during his career as a film director, Natuk Baytan directed eighty films and series, and wrote scenarios for thirty-two films (IMDb.com, “Natuk Baytan”, n.d.). The twenty-nine movies he directed are highlighted above, since the period from 1976 to 1986 covers the period from the first film he made together with Sunal until the year he made his last film him and died.

⁴ The English translation of the book’s title is Turkish Cinema: The Sociology of Being Shaped by and Shaping the Society (translated by the author).

... since cinema addresses both our eyes and our ears, its power to influence people is high. Due to this, film and cinema has become an educational, illuminating and persuasive communication, as much as it is an entertaining one. (translated by the author; p.307)

Nusret Kemal Köymen had similar views. He argued that cinema is not just about entertainment, but it is also a means for nurturing and educating (Dabas, 2017, p.299). Köymen also claimed that the films produced in Turkey did not live up to these expectations. Similarly, Mahmut Tezcan made suggestions for improving the general situation of Turkish cinema. As stated by Dabas (2017), Tezcan's list of suggestions includes articles such as the government regulating the filmmaking industry through legislating the Turkish Cinema. Another article in Tezcan's list of suggestions is "protecting the good films against the bad ones through tax deductions" since "films are means of communication that accelerates the societal change and eases modernisation" (Dabas, 2017, p. 312-313). Evidently, many film critics saw cinema as a means of education for the people, and they were concerned with the general culture of the people, which they thought should be improved.

The second kind of criticism of Yeşilçam, is about the tension between the West and the East, related to the so-called "imitative" nature of this cinema. Mediha Berkes states that "films made with a poor mimicry do not reflect our societal and cultural texture", and adds that "instead of these imitative films, many films could be made which are concerned with our national culture" (translated by the author; Dabas, 2017, p.303). The mimicry of Yeşilçam films is criticised not only in relation to the Western cinemas that are imitated, but also the Eastern cinemas which are adapted and remade. Some Western films were dubbed in Turkish studios and adapted by adding Turkish folk music to these films and changing their names before they were

screened. Similarly, films from India and Egypt were remade or dubbed and screened in Turkish theatres. As summarised by Dabas (2017), on the one hand, Berkes was against the adaptation of the Western films because it would “ruin” the original. On the other hand, she belittles the Eastern films not only because they were imitated or adapted, but also because “these films which were well-liked in the Orient market, are in no way artworks that would set an example for us or make us envious” (translated by the author; Dabas, 2017, p.304). Here, it can be seen that the critic was not fundamentally against the imitation, but she looked down on the Eastern cultures, including the orientalisering of the Western films. Some authors such as Baykan Sezer also noted that many film critics of the time looked down on the Turkish spectators, by naming them as the “Anatolian audience”, hence they marginalized the average spectator from the film makers and the critics (Dabas, 2017, p.310).

The third cluster of Yeşilçam criticisms are about the poor quality of the films due to low cost and fast production. As mentioned above, Yeşilçam studios produced over two hundred films per year, at its golden age. These films were produced very fast and with little funding, and this resulted in the poor quality of some. In many movies, the props are not realistic, the acting is poor, and there are moments of desynchronization of the audio and the video. Dabas (2017) summarised Berkes’s views on this matter (through a critique of *Kerem ile Aslı*) as following:

... [Berkes] states that the scenario, the photography, the make-up, and the music was bad, but the acting was worse than all. She adds that the movements, expressions and the tone of the voices of the actors were like mannequins which were deprived of the meaning and expression of the people who think, hear, hence live. (translated by the author; p. 302)

Just as Berkes does, many critics of Yeşilçam belittle the mannequin-like acting, poorly written scenarios, bad music and art direction. These poor-quality productions are most often related to the producers' main purpose being earning money, as Berkes also observed (Dabas, 2017, p.305). In addition to these critiques, Yeşilçam cinema has been criticised for its violent sexist, nationalist and racist content (Kayali, 2017, p.3), for lacking planning (Dabas, 2017, p.300), and for not being able to nurture itself from a variety of sources (Dabas, 2017, p.315).

Even though Baytan-Sunal films were not most often directly criticized, they were grouped together with the movies that received the above criticism. Atilla Dorsay (1989), a notable Turkish film critic, in his book *Sinemamızın Umut Yılları: 1970-80 Türk Sinemasına Bakışlar* heavily criticized many directors from the era.⁵ In the quote below where Dorsay explained his choice of films and directors for his book, Natuk Baytan's name also appears, not in a complimentary way:

And during the making of this book, some films, some directors have not been even considered. This is, to some extent, a personal choice. Yet, if one acts with justice, let alone my personal choice, even though they have been very active during the 10 years, could anyone claim that the films of the following directors are even worth criticism? Nuri Akıncı, Mehmet Aslan, Yılmaz Atadeniz, Natuk Baytan, Mehmet Dinler, Ülkü Erakalın, Yavuz Figenli, Semih Evin, Oğuz Gözen, Sırrı Gültekin, Aram Gülyüz, Çetin İnanç, Oksal Pekmezoğlu, Yücel Uçanoğlu or Naki Yurter... Even they themselves may not claim that their films are worthwhile. (translated by the author; Dorsay, 1989, p.9)

⁵ The English translation of the title of the book is, *Hopeful Years for Our Cinema: Glances at 1970-80 Turkish Cinema*, translated by the author.

As can be understood from the tone of the author, some directors were not even seen as worthy of being criticised. According to Dorsay, one of these directors was Natuk Baytan, namely the director this thesis focuses on. Indeed, he was a productive director in the era, and his films do have flaws, as discussed below in detail for each movie. Nevertheless, this thesis aims to find another way to understand Baytan's films than as being 'not worthwhile for even being considered' to be included in the scholarship for Turkish cinema of 1970s and 1980s. Even though these films may not be seen by notable critics as worthy of criticism, it is still important to research them since they were present as part of the popular cinema of the era and were consumed by the cinemagoers of the time.

Tunç Yıldırım (2019b) argued that for many of the 1960s and 1970s critics, who mostly have a leftist tendency, Yeşilçam has a pejorative meaning (p. 57). As explained in detail above, they criticise the serial mass production with not much new content, the mistakes made due to the fast and low-cost productions, and the popular melodramas with similar plots which are intended for the general audience. Some contemporary film critics also harshly criticise Yeşilçam today. For instance, Hasanali Yıldırım (2019) dispraised Yeşilçam through stressing the difference between having a national film industry and having a national understanding of cinema. He looked down on Yeşilçam to an extent that he claims that Yeşilçam has died, and he hopes for it to not be born again from its ashes. Yıldırım (2019b) claimed that Yeşilçam struggles through a paradox of imitating and promoting the values of European and Hollywood cinemas; while at the same time not realising that Yeşilçam was not able to get away from the Anatolian culture (Yıldırım, 2019b, p. 48). However, this bilateral character of Yeşilçam can be understood in other ways.

3. Hybridity as an Alternative Approach to Yeşilçam

As summarized above, film critics of the era tend to discredit Yeşilçam, so do some contemporary scholars. Baytan-Sunal films were also implicitly criticised in line with the above listed “faults”. A first glance at these ten films could make one think that their mere purpose is entertainment and that they were poorly made. They also have some elements which are characterized with the Western cinemas, which could be seen as imitation. This thesis sets out to find a way to understand these issues in a constructive way, rather than reducing them to valueless and faulty movies.

One way to look at the imitative and faulty aspects of Yeşilçam could be understanding it as a *hybrid cinema*. Film scholar Nezih Erdoğan (2019) claims that the formulation of Yeşilçam aesthetics was fuelled by a “hybrid” energy. Erdogan (1998) based this approach on how other Eastern cinemas, such as Egyptian and Indian cinemas were also seen as being hybrid by film critics who were theorizing these national cinemas. Yeşilçam cinema was hybrid, because it is a product of looking up to Western cinemas while being situated in an Eastern setting. Here, there are discrepancies not only between the technological developments of the Western cinemas and Eastern cinemas, but also between ideologies of two traditions. Stressing the mismatch between the ideology of the apparatus and the ideology of Yeşilçam, Erdoğan (2019) writes:

First and foremost, aesthetics must be seen in relation with the cinematic apparatus. The ideology of the apparatus is determined by the modernity characterising the 19th century, which is qualified as the “darkest century”, when the human subject was revolutionized by the Renaissance humanism that emphasises perspective. Not much scholarly work has been done on how a culture, which does not centre perspective in its visual expression traditions,

interrelates with the camera, that is fundamentally based upon the principles of perspective. Hybridity is dynamic due to its tensions. The main source of tension is mimicry. Yeşilçam cinema imitated other cinemas, and through this it made a difference in how it imitates. (translated by the author; p. 53)

Acknowledging Yeşilçam's tendency to imitate other cinemas in a unique way, Erdoğan offers to see Yeşilçam as an imitative yet hybrid cinema. Yeşilçam Cinema imitates the Western Cinema which it looks up to, that has the ideology of the apparatus as a central attitude, but also merges these impressions with its Eastern ways. As Erdoğan (1998) wrote, "Yeşilçam assumes a hybrid attitude: it presents us with a mixture of the narrative tradition based on shadow puppetry, miniature craft, arena theatre, etc., and the classical realism which is exemplified by Hollywood" (translated by the author). Yeşilçam cannot be reduced to its imitative nature since the mimicry is not as simple as it looks. Due to a tension that comes from the admiration for and inspiration from other national cinemas, but not being able to get out of the Eastern culture; the unique imitative nature of Yeşilçam is better be understood as a hybridity.

4. Thesis Problematic and Structure

This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between the absurdity of the ten films of Natuk Baytan made in collaboration with Kemal Sunal and the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam cinema. By taking an approach different than the pejorative understanding of Yeşilçam, this research attempts to identify the absurdity of these ten films and to question to what extent the absurdity of these comedies is due to the hybridity and vice versa, situating them within the context of the 1970s and 1980s Turkey. The time frame of this research is based on the period Natuk Baytan and

Kemal Sunal together made the ten films in question. The specific case study, namely the ten movies, are chosen because the collaboration of the director Baytan and the actor Sunal are distinct with the absurdity of their comedy. The duo made other comedy movies where they did not work together, but those movies are not absurd comedies. Baytan-Sunal movies have been considered as merely entertaining, yet in this thesis, they are approached in a different way. Hence, in order to efficiently and representatively research the relation of hybridity and absurdity in the specific context, the ten films are chosen as a case study. One of the main hypotheses of this thesis is that the absurdity of Baytan-Sunal movies is due to the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam. Thus, the research question of this thesis is as following: How do the absurdity in Baytan-Sunal comedy films relate to the “hybrid” character of Yeşilçam cinema within the socio-political context of Turkey from 1970s to 1980s?

One reason why this thesis will hopefully contribute to the ongoing Yeşilçam discussion within Turkish cinema scholarship is that Baytan-Sunal collaboration was not researched much, more specifically, there seems to be no scholarly research on these specific ten films they made together. Sunal’s comedy was researched extensively, including a master’s thesis written by Sunal (1998) himself. However, let alone the Sunal-Baytan absurd comedies, not much research has been done about Baytan’s films in general, apart from the work of the critics who discredit these movies, and a documentary on Natuk Baytan’s career (Yılmaz, 2007, *Yönetmen Natuk Baytan Belgeseli*). As can be seen in Atilla Dorsay’s (1989) criticism, for instance, movies like Baytan-Sunal movies, which are seen as merely entertaining were not studied seriously in detail, because they were not seen as even “worthy of criticism”. Rather, other movies such as films from the Golden Era of Yeşilçam, movies which belong to the social realism or revolutionist movements, and auteur films were studied

in detail. In *Fantastik Türk Sineması*,⁶ Giovanni Scognamillo and Metin Demirhan (2005) stated that along with the accustomed genres of cinema, a new marginal cinema (namely fantastic cinema) was created as Yeşilçam was being formed. Scognamillo and Demirhan (2005) also noted that these kinds of movies, were not taken seriously by the critics and they were not accepted as “cinema” (p. 8). This thesis incorporates itself into studies as Scognamillo’s, on movies outside the mainstream canon, such as fantastic movies like *Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam* (İnanç, 1982), films which were heavily criticised and discredited due to being different than the conventional filmmaking.

The way film critics of the era consider these films as “not worthy of criticism” can be understood within the framework of the distinction between popular culture and high culture. In his book *Türkiye’de Popüler Kültür* (Popular Culture in Turkey), Ahmet Oktay (1995) distinguished between folk culture, popular culture, and high culture. According to this classification of cultures artworks belong to, popular culture productions are motivated by targeting and addressing the consumer, whereas high culture productions are driven by the creativity of the artist, and they address the audience who is willing to put in the effort to understand the artwork (Oktay, 1995, p.21). It is this very distinction between high culture and popular culture that pushes films like Baytan-Sunal films outside the canon which the film critics of 1970s and 1980s were interested in. However, as noted by Oktay (1995) citing Lowenthal, when a high culture production finds its way into the popular culture (such as Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, as it happened in Turkey), it is not always received in the way the author intended. Eco’s novel was deeply ingrained with societal criticism, yet the popular culture audience, or the “public” read it as a

⁶ The English translation of the title of the book is, *Fantastic Turkish Cinema*, translated by the author.

“simple detective novel” (translated by the author; Oktay, 1995, p.19). This instance among many demonstrates that even if the criticism which is intended for the emancipation of the public is creatively and carefully planted in the artwork, the group of people that this criticism is for may not have the tools to understand it as intended.

Looking from the point of view of analysing artworks, as Meltem Erinçmen Kanoğlu (2006) argued building on Lowenthal’s work on popular culture, when an artwork is understood as ‘popular’, it is possible to see that the intention is to answer to the needs of a bigger mass than the high culture audience (p.32). Hence, this kind of artwork is not made for an individual detached from the public, but rather it is for the society. This means that when analysing a popular culture product, a critic should not judge it by the standards of the high culture product, but rather see it as an “exchange between the public’s requests and the authority’s imposition on public” (Erinçmen Kanoğlu, 2006, p. 32). Seeing Baytan-Sunal films through this lens, it could be said that while the authority imposed censorship on any societal criticism in cinema, the public demanded laughter. Within this context, the producers of the ten absurd comedies served comedy and laughter to answer the demand of the public, without much thematic criticism as enforced by the authority, but together with some subtle interspersed moments of critical references and a meta-critical gaze through absurdity and hybridity, as argued by this thesis.

The distinction of popular culture and high culture assumes that the public is oppressed and that they *need* to be awakened, through awareness of the oppression. When a widespread system -such as capitalism, for instance- that affects everyone including the so-called “public” is criticized by intellectuals who identify as members of the high culture, this kind of criticism has a top-down attitude. The aim is to make

the public aware of the oppression they face, yet the high culture artwork does not use the language spoken by the public. This means that if a high culture production makes a top-down criticism of a system which oppresses the public, these opinions cannot be pushed down their throat, since they will receive it as they like, especially because they are not familiar with the language of the deeply ingrained criticism that has to be analysed. However, if the criticism were planted into popular culture productions, which is more highly likely going to be consumed by the ‘public’, then there would be more chance that the public will receive the intended message. Hence, a subtle criticism through popular culture productions may even be a better way to reach out to the public. This is the second reason why Baytan-Sunal films are to be studied. The ten absurd comedies in question have many momentary critical references, next to the meta-critical distance created by absurdity, as will be further discussed. What is true for the high culture productions, namely that the public may not receive it as intended, is true for the popular culture productions like Baytan-Sunal films. However, the chance that the intended societal criticism will be received is higher with films like Baytan-Sunal comedies, since these films are made in a form and style that the general public is familiar with. In any case, as in Goethe’s *Faust*, the theater manager says,

“One can only conquer the masses by showing many cases. Everyone will choose something by and for themselves from this accumulation. One who shows many things will have given something to everyone, and everyone will leave our house happy” (translated by the author, cited in Oktay, 1995, p.17).

The theater manager’s intention here is to make sure his popular culture production will be consumed by as many as possible, in order to make the most profit. However,

what he says is true for a critical production too. A creative will never know how the audience will receive their artwork. Yet, as in Baytan-Sunal films, with the limited resources they had, if they plant criticism along with comedic features in a movie, the audience may as well receive the criticism while they are being entertained. Therefore, this thesis embraces an approach which does not dismiss the popular culture products as ‘non-critical’, but rather sees the critical potential in these productions, which are actually closer to the target of the societal criticism, namely the general public. As argued in this thesis, Baytan-Sunal movies criticize subtly and in a meta way through absurdity.

The narrative, stylistic and character choices of Baytan-Sunal movies are analysed to be absurd, as well as hybrid. The absurdity prevents the audience from an immersive movie experience, and instead creates a distance for the spectator. As in the absurd theatre and cinema traditions, which are discussed extensively below, the absurdity of Baytan-Sunal films, through creating such a distance, allows for a critical gaze. Due to the mismatch between the Western ideology of the apparatus and the Eastern ideology of Yeşilçam within the given sociopolitical context of Turkey in the 1970s and the 1980s, the hybrid nature of these films add a layer to this critical distance, since it amplifies the absurdity, by making the characters non-relatable, and the storytelling non-realistic.

The third reason why this thesis focuses on Natuk Baytan was that he was a productive director of Yeşilçam Cinema, who made over 80 films during his career, and even won awards with some. Along with many other films featuring Sunal and Baytan separately, these films they made together are still well liked and watched by the Turkish people, as they are still part of popular Turkish Cinema.

A fourth and final reason for the choice of subject is that today's directors, such as Onur Ünlü and Tolga Karaçelik, increasingly make absurd comedy films (Ceyhan, 2019). An example from recent Turkish cinema which juxtapose situations in an absurd way, could be the black comedy movie *Album* (2016) directed by Mehmet Can Mertoğlu. This film is about the ordinary life of a married couple who adopt a child and create a photo album to "prove" that the baby is their natural child. The together presentation of the opening sequence of a cow's birth that comes right before the fake pregnancy photos of the family in an aquarium, is one of the absurd juxtapositions seen in this movie (Ince, 2018, p.55). Onur Ünlü's 2013 film *Sen Aydinlatirsin Geceyi* (*Thou Gild'st the Even*) serves as another example, which combines an extraordinary plot and absurd juxtapositions. This film is about worries and troubles of a town's people with supernatural powers. The reason why this film is absurd but not just a fantasy film, is that the absurdity comes from not the unusual abilities of the town population, but the juxtaposition of the ordinary lives with the extraordinary abilities, as argued by Ceyhan (2019, p. 698). These recent examples show that Turkish Cinema has again incorporated absurdity, also on the levels of narrative structure and character choices. Hence, discussing Baytan-Sunal films and the 1970s and 1980s tendency to include absurdity in cinema while in dire straits, may shed light on the absurd films of today's Turkish cinema.

In order to answer the research question, this thesis uses narrative, character and stylistic analyses as research methods, within the broader methodological framework of historical, sociological and genre analyses (Özden, 2004) for exploring the absurdity and hybridity of the Baytan-Sunal movies. The author viewed the ten films twice, firstly for making notes on the similarities and differences, and drawing a preliminary research question and main keywords, afterwhich a literature review was

conducted. Following the literature review, the research question was finalized, and the films were watched for the second time for a detailed analysis of the narrative, character and stylistic choices in relation to the notions absurdity and hybridity.

This thesis comprises of four main chapters. Following the introduction chapter and the literature review on absurd comedy and Yeşilçam cinema, the third chapter attempts to situate the absurd and hybrid aspects of Baytan-Sunal films within the context of 1970s and 1980s cinema, and the socio-political and economic situation of Turkey at the time. The fourth chapter deals with why and how the Baytan-Sunal films are absurd comedies and aims to identify the hybridity within the ten films in question. The main argument which this thesis aims to prove is that in Baytan-Sunal movies, the absurdity on the levels of narrative structure, character choices and stylistic choices, which are due to the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam cinema, create a critical distance (since they prevent an immersive relatable storytelling), although movies as such have been criticized for not being critical or educational for the general public.

CHAPTER 2: ABSURD COMEDY AND YEŞİLÇAM

1. Yeşilçam as Genre Cinema and Comedy Genre

a. Genre Cinema and Comedy Genre

A film genre is a category of film that adheres to genre-specific narrative elements and a set of conventions associated with that specific genre. For instance, most of romantic comedy genre films would share a fundamental narrative pattern where two lovers meet, fall in love, face a conflict, followed by a resolution of the conflict when they come together in the end. In addition, they would have similar form as each other, where there are many shot-reverse shot dialogues, etc. The word *genre* has a French origin, which means type or kind (Altman, 2000).

In “Cinema and Genre”, Rick Altman (2000) argued that even though the Hollywood industry has a hegemony over genres, genres are significant for understanding any national cinema. As such, they are significant means for criticism for Yeşilçam cinema as well. Altman claimed that genre acquires three main roles, namely production, distribution, and consumption. These roles can also be seen in the light of the following five elements of genre spectatorship:

In the process of generic spectatorship, we can recognize the following elements: (a) Generic audience that is sufficiently familiar with the genre to participate in a fully genre-based viewing; (b) Generic rules and conventions, methods of film construction and interpretation consistent with generic norms; (c) Generic contract, i.e. implicit agreement between genre producers and genre consumers; (d) Generic tension, built into genre films, between actualisation of generic norms and failure to respect those norms, often in favour of an alternative set of socially sanctioned norms; (e) Generic frustration, the emotion generated by film's

failure to fulfil generic norms. All these features and their application are subject to historical change. (Altman, 2000, 180)

Altman (2000) also offered to understand genre as semantic and syntactic. The former refers to the films belonging to the same genre sharing a set of common semantic or linguistic characteristics; and the latter refers to the formation of alike methods of coherence of the semantic components. Altman (2000) also observed that genres “undergo a slow process of semantic and syntactic coordination and standardisation” rather than coming out the blue as defined forms, thus their patterns are subject to change as history unfolds.

Siegfried Kracauer (1997), in his book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* pointed out the ambiguity of genres by underlining the long-established tension between form and content:

... each content includes form elements; and each form is also content. (Hence the legitimate ambiguity of such terms as “comedy,” “melodrama,” and “tragedy”; they may point to the peculiar contents or the formal aspects of the genres they designate or cover both of them indiscriminately.) (Kracauer, 1997, p. 215)

As claimed above by Kracauer, the form and the content of a genre film are inseparable, they feed back into each other.

On the other hand, some scholars like Thomas Sobchack (1975), quoting Geduld and Gottesman’s earlier work, noted that a genre is purely about form, and completely separated from the subject matter (p.196). Sobchack had a different take at genres than the common understanding of genre cinema. Rather than separating genres into groups like comedy, drama, thriller etc; he suggested to take all fiction films as one genre, where the commonality is the offer of an orderly world and a

classical world view. Still, he stuck with Geduld and Gottesman's strict separation between form and content, meaning the genre is distinguished from "subject matter, themes and techniques" (Sobchack, 1975, p.196).

Despite the dispute on whether genres are just a "kind" based on merely form, or form *and* content; there is a consensus among most film critics that genres face historical change. In her book *Popüler Sinema ve Türler*, Nilgün Abisel (1995) noted the change witnessed in genres with the changes in the cinema industry throughout the history, especially emphasising the fusion of several genres into a new version of popular films as a genre (p. 9).⁷ She argues that although this consensus was mainly explained through a post-modern tendency, it is rather due to the economic politics of the American cinema industry. Especially in the period between the 1970s and the 1990s, as a significant percentage of the cinema audience was lost to the television industry; cinema industries attempted to homogenise the cinema audience through targeting all kinds of spectators through referencing many different genres at once.

To sum up, even though genres -types or kinds of films- change in time; at a given time, a genre has conventional form (and arguably content) to meet the expectations of the audience, while at the same time failing to fulfil all expectations due to the constant changes in a given genre, and because of the creation of novelty. Comedy as a genre also fulfil these criteria of creating expectations for the audience, fulfilling and failing them and constantly changing.

The word comedy is defined as "a play, film or TV show that is intended to be funny, usually with a happy ending; plays, films and TV shows of this type" in Oxford Learner's Dictionaries ("Comedy", n.d.). Similarly, Cambridge Dictionary ("Comedy", n.d.) defined the word as "a (type of) film, play, or book that is

⁷ The English translation of the book's title is *Popular Cinema and Genres* (translated by the author).

intentionally funny either in its characters or its action”. Different from a tragedy, a comedy usually has a happy ending as mentioned in the definitions. Artworks that are comedies are usually meant to be funny and aim to entertain. The Greek origin of the word is *kōmōidia*, which is a combination of *kōmos*, meaning “revel”, and *aoidos* meaning “singer” (“Comedy”, Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). The root of this word implies that it is a song meant for the pleasure of the listener. In his thesis about his own comedy in cinema and television, Sunal (1998) also mentioned that the etymologic meaning of the word comedy corresponds to something as “a merry song” (p.3). In everyday life today, though, the common use of the word is closer to the dictionary definitions above.

In *A Companion to Film Comedy* Horton and Rapf (2013) give an overview of observations on comedy that go beyond cinema and television in six points:

1. *Comedy is a way of looking at the universe, more than merely a genre of literature, drama, film or television ...*
2. *Comedy is a form of “play” that embraces fantasy and festivity ...*
3. *Comedy and tragedy are near cousins whose paths often cross ...*
4. *Comedy implies a special relationship with and to its audience ...*
5. *In the world of the truly comic, nothing is sacred and nothing human is rejected ...*
6. *Comedy is one of the most important ways a culture talks to itself about itself.* (Horton and Rapf, 2013, p. 2-4)

As can be seen above, various opinions on comedy agree that it is very important, as a way of seeing the world and as a cultural concept. Especially the sixth point Horton and Rapf make is relevant to this thesis, since this project aims to situate the comedy

films within their contemporary film culture and socio-political atmosphere of Turkey at the time, and reading them as creating a critical distance through comedy.

b. Comedy Films in Yeşilçam

Yeşilçam Cinema is a genre cinema. It is dominated by genres like other national cinemas such as Hollywood, however, it has its own unique genre history. Turkish cinema history is commonly separated into two main periods: The theatre-makers period -from the beginning until roughly 1950s-, and cinema-makers period - from the 1950s on- (Özön, 2013; Coşkun, 2009). What marks the separation of the two main periods mentioned above is the tax reduction for making films that was introduced in 1948 (Coşkun, 2009, p. 17). Yıldırım (2019b) noted that the first decade after 1948 tax reduction was the period Yeşilçam systematised its mass production style. Hence, he argued that this period was the constitution period of Yeşilçam as a cinema (Yıldırım, 2019, p. 57-58). Therefore, it would only be possible to speak of genres in Yeşilçam films starting the cinema-makers period.

Before 1950s, movies seen in Turkish cinemas were mostly dubbed European and American movies (Kaya Mutlu, 2010). Later, as more cinema companies were founded and number of films made increased, Yeşilçam Cinema was formed in the Yeşilçam street in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. The films made in this era ranged “from melodramas to comedies, action and adventure to fantastic and superhero films” (Kaya Mutlu, 2013, p.131). Melodrama was the dominant genre, in terms of number of productions and demand (Kesirli Unur, 2015). Savaş Arslan (2012), in *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* notes that genre films were the film producers’ solution to cope with the socio-political and economic issues at the time (p. 127). As discussed above in the introduction, in the 1970s and 1980s, the absence of a strong

foundation for the industry (due to the lack of investment back into the industry), the economic crisis within Yeşilçam which was mainly caused by this, and the proliferation of television, resulted in the “downfall” of Yeşilçam as a national cinema (Özön, 1995; Suner, 2005). The industry, which was struggling to survive had to look for cheaper solutions, such as sex movies or other popular low-cost productions. Hence, after the golden era of Yeşilçam ended in the mid-1970s, melodrama as the dominant genre has left its place of prevalence to sex movies (which caused the cinema to lose its general audience and get even more censorship), social realist movies (which were made by the effort of the directors without much help) and most importantly for this thesis, popular comedies.

Comedy, as a film genre, is commonly understood as a broader genre, or a “meta genre”. In the “Comedy and genre boundaries” chapter of their book *Laughing Matters*, White and Mundy (2017) refer to

comedy as a meta-genre, suggesting that it lacks the structures that define other genres. Although it is perhaps true that ‘pure’ comedy never existed, comedy has been particularly adept at exploiting the potential of crossing borders between and within genres, in creating hybrid forms which combine comedy with other dramatic or generic elements. (White and Mundy, 2017, p. 132)

As explained above, comedy is one of the “genres” that further blur the border between genres which are already blurry and which constantly change (White and Mundy, 2017; Altman, 2000). This is because there seems to be no such thing as pure comedy, and by often being attached to other genres, comedy makes genres more permeable. Since it is a meta-genre that constantly undergoes changes, it is not possible to pin down traits of the genre that can be seen in every comedy film, yet

there are common occurrences in many comedy films. Examples to these could be a happy ending, and the general aim to entertain the audience by making them laugh. Of course, this does not mean that comedy as a genre is always merely for the entertainment, since there are many critical comedy films.

The satirical comedy tradition, by nature, has been inseparable from societal criticism ever since its origins (Ramage, 1974). Baytan-Sunal films are also incorporated in this long-established critical tradition which ranges from literature to cinema, as argued by this thesis. Comedy films can be critical in diverse ways, either directly or indirectly. On the one hand, their criticism could be more direct and thematic, such as in irony or satire. On the other hand, they may be indirectly and formalistically critical through creating a distance (which is also tied to the satire comedy tradition), like in Baytan-Sunal movies. Regardless of the content of something that makes a person laugh, laughter can be seen as evolutionarily being tied to a relief from fear of an authority, as argued by Albert Rapp (cited in Ararat Halis, 2013). Laughter serves like an antidote against a potency which rules through fear (Ararat Halis, 2013, p. 380). As there is an inherent connection between laughter and standing against something, unlike the dominant belief amongs the film critics of 1970s and 1980s, one could consider comedy as never being merely for entertainment. As such, in order to be critical through comedy, an artwork does not have to directly and thematically address societal issues, since comedy is essentially a critical attitude. As this thesis will be exploring, Baytan-Sunal comedies are primarily critical through the distanced gaze created by their hybrid and absurd aesthetics, hence not mainly through a thematic treatment of socio-political issues. However, they do have instantaneous satirical references to the problems of Turkey, as jokes, which hint at the intentionality of the meta-critical distance they create. In Baytan-

Sunal films, this togetherness of the absurd meta-critical distance and explicitly critical moments show that these films can be analysed as part of the inherently critical satire comedy tradition.

Ever since its formation as a national cinema, Yeşilçam comedy films have had a relation with criticism, or lack thereof. In his article “The Social Criticism Perspective on the Turkish Comedy Cinema between 1960-1990”, Murat Ünal (2018) reviewed Yeşilçam Comedy Cinema in terms of its relation to criticism. He argued that in the 1960s and 1970s, the movies of the time which begun to address societal issues were going back and forth between two attitudes: “a hegemonic docility” and “a cautious criticism” (Ünal, 2018, p. 22). Although critics have mostly considered movies as Baytan-Sunal films to be “merely for entertainment”, Ünal’s approach to the critical attitude of comedy films of the time seems to be more accurate, or more relevant for this thesis. Baytan-Sunal films also generally have a “docile” attitude towards societal issues, especially in terms of the subject matter of the movies. However, the critical distance created by the absurdity and hybridity, which will be argued throughout this thesis, and some quick and subtle instances of “cautious criticism” also show that the sole purpose of these movies is not just laughter. Ünal (2018) also argued that Yeşilçam Cinema witnessed a more tangible and pronounced kind of critical voice in the 1980s. This tendency is also present in Baytan-Sunal films, as towards the 1980s, traces of a more accentuated isleyis of societal issues can be seen, along with the critical distance created by absurdity.

Kemal Sunal comedy has been an integral part of Yeşilçam Comedy cinema, throughout the period between the 1970s until the 1990s. As Sunal (1998) himself claims in his thesis on Kemal Sunal comedy in Turkish cinema and television, his films have always had a relationship to the sociopolitical context of the given time,

including the films he made in collaboration with Baytan. Ranging from Hababam Sinifi series and Saban films which are based on character humour, to tragicomic movies, Sunal movies are “anarchist” in the sense that his character does not look for a place to hold on within the given order (Sunal, 1998, p. 26). Instead, his protagonist creates a comic effect based on enjoying anarchy against the potency, and this enjoyment is not only for him but also for his audience. In this sense, even if his movies do not seem to be political on the surface, they are deeply ingrained with his contemporary societal issues. Sunal (1998) compares his Şaban character to the Ilyas Salman’s mannered character. While Salman’s protagonist is an earnest victim who is ruled by shame regarding his rural background and represents the belief that an alternative order is possible, Sunal’s Şaban ostracizes the values (such as shame) imposed on him by the dominant order (Sunal, 1998, p. 26). Therefore, through his recklessness, he creates an anarchic and political comedy. This reading of his comedy cinema also shows that his movies are never comedy merely for entertainment, despite being criticized as such. Similarly, movies of Baytan-Sunal collaboration also go beyond the entertainment through the critical distance allowed for by their absurdity and hybridity.

Since comedy is best considered as a meta-genre as mentioned above, absurd comedy, which is the dominant genre of Baytan-Sunal movies, can be considered as one of the many types or sub-genres of comedy.

2. Absurdity and Absurd Comedy

The word “absurd” in English originates in the Latin word *absurdum*, which as Cornwell (2006) states, “literally means out of deafness” (p.17). The original meaning of this word implies that absurdity, in an etymological sense, is closely tied

with misunderstandings. Common dictionary definitions of the word “absurd” are tied to irrationality, meaninglessness, or not being harmonious with reason or propriety; whereas the everyday usage of the word has a meaning related to ridiculousness or silliness (Cornwell, 2006, p.17). Hence, a first definition of absurd comedy could be as follows: *a ridiculous or silly comedy that is out of harmony with reason or propriety.*

Absurdity has been present in various forms of art throughout the history. Regardless of whether it is a genre by itself or just a sub-genre, the absurd appears in numerous kinds of art, from architecture (Silber, 2007) to literature (Cornwell, 2006). Elements of absurdity in art can be traced back to the ancient Greek literature, as far as recorded art history is concerned. An example to this would be Aristophanes’ absurd comedy plays (Cartledge, 1990).⁸ This thread of the theatre of the absurd later appears in the existentialist absurd theatre, which came about after the second world war. This theatre was established during the World War II, because the harsh socio-political environment led to a lack of meaning. Best known examples are works of Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet (Esslin, 1961). The philosophy behind the Theatre of the Absurd is existentialist philosophy, where any essence prior to existence is denied, and life has no essential meaning. Thus, this theatre is based on a fundamental meaninglessness. Absurdity in these plays occur when “man is ‘stripped of the accidental circumstances of social

⁸ According to Cartledge (1990, p.33), most interpreters of Aristophanes’ theatre ignore “a crucial source of the humour in those fantastic flights of imagination” that is, Aristophanes’ consciously incongruous juxtaposition of the everyday and the extraordinary. A central ingredient in the humour of Aristophanes’ women, in other words, is the mingling of the commonplace with the absurd, the mythical with the down-to-earth, and it is the delicate task of balanced modern historical interpretation to try to disentangle the one from the other”.

position or historical context, confronted with basic choices, the basic situations of his existence” (Hinchliffe, 1969, p.10). What is meant by “accidental” here is that connected to the denial of any essence before existence. In contrast, for Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, for instance, every being has an essence prior to their existence. All the other characteristics, like the colour of someone’s eyes, or how many children they have, are “accidental”. According to the Theatre of the Absurd movement, however, since there is no necessary essence to fulfil, whatever a human being turns out to be is their own doing and thus, accidental, instead of necessary.

Michael Bennet (2015, as cited in: Simor, 2020), identifies four “common threads” of absurdist literature, namely:

- (1) experimentation with language (generally, working against “realistic” language); (2) tragicomedy is the genre; (3) frequently, though not always, experimentation with non-Aristotelian plot lines (where, often, the plots take the structure of a parable); and maybe most outwardly noticeable, (4) the literary works are set in “strange” (i.e., Kafkaesque, surreal, and ridiculous) situations”. (Simor, 2020, p. 5)

These four features of the absurdist theatre and literature ensure a feeling of alienation in the audience, which is allowed by the strange situation created by the language and the happenings. This feeling of alienation is supposed to be highlighting the accidentality of whatever happens in the world, and thus has an existential background. The horrors of war have caused this loss of meaning in the 1950s on, which is the basis for the core belief of existentialism, namely that nothing is essential or necessary.

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, who is one of the pioneer thinkers of the existentialism movement, believes that absurdity is rather contingent than silly

(Cornwell, 2006, p.17). In the discipline of Logic, contingency is contrasted with necessity. If a truth is necessary, then it could not have been possibly false. If it is contingent, however, even if the proposition turns out to be true, it is not necessarily true by logic. For instance, “a is a” is necessarily true, but “a is b” could be true, if in a given situation a is b. In this sense, an absurd entity does not follow necessity, but instead, it could be occurring by contingency. Thus, absurd comedy is better to be defined as a *contingent* comedy that is out of harmony with reason or propriety.

French philosopher Albert Camus (1955), who is also an existentialist like Sartre, writes about absurdity in relation to the Greek myth of Sisyphus, in his famous essay called “The Myth of Sisyphus”. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is punished by the gods, and he is bound to carry a rock up a mountain until the end of his existence. Just as he reaches the peak of the hill, the rock falls over the edge to the other side, and he has to carry it up again. This endless vicious cycle of Sisyphus is used by Camus as a metaphor to demonstrate the absurdity of the human condition. According to him, absurdity lies in the juxtaposition of the human need for finding meaning in life and the “unreasonable silence” of the universe, which does not respond to this need. This is because as Sartre, Camus also argues that there is no essence or inherent meaning to life. In Camus’s understanding of absurdity, our existence is absurd, and thus accidental and contingent. The idea that if something is not reasonable, then it should be absurd is a common thread seen in absurdist approaches of Western philosophy.

Absurdity is a theme seen in cinema and television as well. Most commonly, absurdity is part of avant-garde cinema, yet it is rarely seen in narrative cinema (Simor, 2020). The absurd in narrative cinema appears in various forms. Some may be considered as such because of their absurd plots, for instance the television series

Arrested Development (Howard, 2003-2019). In this series, which is made in five seasons over sixteen years, the Bluth family, who are involved with fraud and treason crimes, tell lies over lies to each other and everyone else, which cause them to be in absurd situations merely based on misunderstandings and coincidences. On the other hand, some absurd productions may be labelled as such due to their absurd juxtapositions. An example to this is above mentioned film *Album* (Mertoğlu, 2012), where absurd situations are created through unusual happenings in unusual settings. Another example would be Romanian New Wave cinema, which is known for its black absurd humour. In movies which belong to this movement, the plot is not necessarily absurd, but the absurdity of systems like a stagnant bureaucracy is shown through absurd juxtapositions (Simor, 2020). This kind of absurdity in cinema is more subtle than the absurdity of the Theatre of the Absurd, where the situations, dialogues and happenings can all be absurd. This kind of complete absurdity on all levels, which is also seen in Baytan-Sunal films, has a close connection with creating a critical gaze, also in the Theatre of the Absurd.

A third kind of absurd cinema is comprised of a combination of the contingent plots and unusual situations. *Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi* (Ünlü, 2013) is an example for this kind of an absurd film, which combines an extraordinary plot and absurd juxtapositions. Baytan-Sunal movies mostly fall under this third kind, as will be argued further in this thesis. The events occurring in these films are contingent, mostly dependent on misunderstandings or accidents rather than necessity, and the absurdity is fueled by unexpected characters in unexpected situations. The unexpectedness and unrelatability of such artwork also highlight the contingency of absurdity.

What the understandings of absurdity in all the art forms listed above have in common is *irrationality* or *contingency*, with some sort of relationship with silliness. When the absurdity of existence is brought to surface by an approach as such, this opens up space for a critical look at the status quo. This criticism is not necessarily one that directly addresses societal issues but one that draws attention to them through mainly a formalistic approach. Although most often comedy and criticism come together by a thematic treatment of problems in a society, absurd comedy serves for a different kind of meta-criticism on a narrative and stylistic level. In Baytan-Sunal films, although the comedy seems to be merely for entertainment, through its absurd aesthetics and treatment of sociopolitical issues of Turkey at the time, a critical distance is created. This critical gaze is twofold: both through a formalistic distance and via touching upon thematic elements in a satirical way. In Yeşilçam Cinema, this absurdity is closely tied to hybridity of this cinema.

3. The Hybrid Character of Yeşilçam

As briefly discussed above in the Introduction chapter, the notion “Hybridity of Yeşilçam” refers to a crossbreed between the Eastern and Western traditions of storytelling and filmmaking. This characteristic of Yeşilçam is prominent in terms of how it is distinguished from the Classical Hollywood narrative cinema, which is characterised by its invisible and continuous storytelling. Yeşilçam is heavily influenced by Western cinemas, the main one being Hollywood. However, at the same time, the industry has been penetrated by Eastern Cinemas like the Egyptian Cinema, through dubbed versions of their films and also through influences in terms of storytelling techniques.

Yeşilçam had its unique way of adapting or imitating the Western movies, and importing them into a cultural context of Turkey. Quoting Savaş Arslan, Kesirli Unur (2015) states that

when Yeşilçam encountered with the illusionistic, three-dimensional realism of Western cinema, it realized that achieving its dream to make films equal in quality with Hollywood was impossible. As a response to this disappointment, Yeşilçam “produced Turkified tactics to register this Western medium in Turkey. Thus, though it did not follow the conventions of Hollywood cinema, it produced an ambivalent world of dreaming and mirroring, doubling and transforming”. (Kesirli Unur, 2015, p. 548)

Due to the limited budgets and production opportunities, and because of being a latecomer to the cinema scene, Yeşilçam simply did not have the means to create works that could compete with Hollywood productions. Also, due to its lack of a strong economic and infrastructural foundation, Yeşilçam’s striving for being like Western cinemas have been a challenge for it. Hence, the filmmakers found a solution of creating a unique imitation that merges the Western ideals and the Eastern context.

In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*,

Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson carved out the main characteristics of the narrative cinema of Hollywood. According to Bordwell et al (2005) the Classical Hollywood narrative -which is also referred to as the classical narrative cinema in this thesis- have two principles at its core: invisible storytelling and continuity. Through a flawless technique and a smooth editing which is dependent on the continuity principle, these narrative films strive for an “invisible” storytelling. Here, invisible means unnoticed, since the aim of the Western classical narrative is to naturalize the

storytelling, and create a forgetful moment for the audience, so that they can be immersed in the film. Yeşilçam Cinema is influenced by this narrative tradition, yet it is bound to its Eastern situation as well. Since the narrative tradition of its geography was not in line with the Western ideals of continuity and invisibility, which is tied to the intention of the cinematic apparatus, Yeşilçam cinema ends up being a crossbreed of its own tradition and the Western tradition it looks up to. This discrepancy is at the core of the hybrid character of Yeşilçam.

In the article “Doğu Anlatı Gelenekleri ve Türk Sinemasının Aidiyeti” (Eastern Narrative Traditions and The Belonging of Turkish Cinema in English, translated by the author), Mustafa Sözen (2009) deliberated on the differences of the Eastern and Western ways of thinking and how these reflected on the narrative traditions. Although Sözen’s analysis highly generalised both the East and West expression traditions, he rightly pointed out a contrast of tendencies between the two narrative traditions. Sözen (2009) said, for the Eastern traditions:

In all the structures that could be generally considered as within the boundaries of [Eastern] storytelling, one would not encounter the ‘causality’ factor which constitutes the spine of Western drama. On the contrary, there is a structure built upon the ‘surprise’ factor. Western dramatic fiction necessitates the causality bond in the series of events; in other words, events develop in a certain direction, unfold and arrive at a conclusion. Whereas the Eastern story moves from one surprise to another with sudden moves and unfold into new events with transitions that a Western thinking mind would not be able to make sense of. A necessary connection of an event to another that follows it is not something to be deemed important. (translated by the author; Sözen, 2009, p. 134).

Sözen (2009) adds that unlike the Western fiction, in Eastern stories, realism cannot be fit within the common understanding of the notion. As a result, the hybrid thinking can be reduced to neither Eastern nor Western ways of thinking.

Sözen (2009) also points out the difference between the Western deductive thinking and Eastern inductive thinking:

Whereas the Eastern cultural circle's way of thinking is closer to induction, the Western cultural circle thinks in terms of deduction. Another difference is that Western philosophy has a diachronic structure. This understanding accepts that everything happens in a successive, consecutive, separate, in separate spaces, and in separate times. On the other hand, the understanding of time in Eastern philosophy is that everything happens simultaneously, in one whole multi-centered space. In other words, according to this understanding, there is a synchronicity of the space-time structure. (Sözen, 2009, p. 134)

Here, there is a clear distinction between the Eastern and the Western ways of thinking. In the hybrid mind though, there is a *clash of the Eastern and the Western mindsets*. For instance, in Baytan and Sunal films, which are the case studies of this thesis, although events that happen at the same time led to misunderstandings, at the same time, the misunderstandings rise from the thinking that believes the following: *because this event was followed by that event, there must be a causal connection*. Yet, to the audience, it is clear in the hybrid film scene that this event is not the cause for that event, they just happened to be successive. Nevertheless, the hybrid cinema of Yeşilçam is closer to the Eastern narrative traditions, since it is mostly based on a synchronous understanding of time, and it has instances where the causal continuity of the narrative is completely dismissed.

The lacking stress on narrative causal continuity, is also lacking on at the continuity at the level of stylistic choices. This can be seen at many occasions in the cinema of Baytan and Sunal, as well as in Yeşilçam Cinema in general. One distilling characteristic of Yeşilçam's hybridity is connected to the apparatus theory, that it fails to, or does not put much effort into making the film leave an impression of realism. Apparatus theory was a prevalent cinema theory in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in French film scholarship. Among the main discussants of this dominant debate were theorists Jean-Louis Baudry, Louis Althusser, and Jean-Louis Comolli. As Conley (2018) stated, for the theorists of the apparatus theory,

it was immediately evident that *apparatus* (in French, *appareil de base*) was more or less synonymous with *dispositif*, in their eyes an untranslatable term designating a mechanism or a filmic “device” responsible for the creation and dissemination of filmic effects, notably those leaving the impression—but only the impression—that the moving image is a reliable transmitter of a sense of reality. (p. 146)

The apparatus theory claims that the intention of the apparatus is to make the audience forget—even for a moment—that what is before their eyes is fictional and made by the camera. Yet, Yeşilçam Cinema, and in particular Baytan and Sunal films do not always create such an impression, since the stylistic flaws, such as blurry images and visible shadows, reveal the existence of the camera, and reminds the audience that the story they are following is made by someone. Hence, the flaws and faults of this hybrid cinema is not in line with the intention of the apparatus, according to the apparatus theory.

Apparatus theory is based on the idea that an ideology aims to seem natural and essential, while it is actually imposed. In the case of cinema, the intention of the

cinematic apparatus or *dispositif* is to make the fictional and humanmade storytelling seem like real, as if there is no media between the story told and the audience. Baudry (1974-1975) considers the cinematic apparatus functioning as one of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). The intention of cinema, or more specifically Western cinema, is to make sure that the spectator temporarily forgets the existence of a filmmaker, through a smooth, flawless and fluent storytelling. The Classical Hollywood narrative storytelling is a pioneer of this cinematic intention, since its principles of continuity and invisible storytelling exactly matches the intention of the apparatus, which is a forgetful moment for the audience.

As this thesis argues, absurdity and hybridity create a critical distance because these cinemas place themselves as opposing the intention of the apparatus. As part of the Romanian New Wave cinema movement, which is known for its absurd black comedies, the film *Reconstruction* (Pintilie, 1968) presents a story of the making of a documentary film called *Reconstruction* (Calotescu, 1959). By explicitly showing the existence of the camera, which Alexandru Leo Serban (2010) names as “the cinema mirror”, within the film, this movie questions the idea of “truth” of a film. The same occurs in one of Baytan-Sunal films, namely *Gerzek Şaban*, where a scene about a shooting of a crime movie is jumbled up with a real crime scene. The absurd and hybrid attitude of Baytan-Sunal collaboration, regardless of whether it is intentional or not, constantly reminds the audience of the presence of a filmmaker. While adding to the comic effect of the film, this attitude of emphasising what is concealed by the dominant ideology, is a kind of rebellion. Hence, as the Şaban character of Kemal Sunal is, these films are also anarchic, since they do not try to criticise with the methods of the dominant ideology (the ideology of the apparatus), but through denying the intention of the cinematic device. This meta-critical gaze is allowed by

the distance and feeling of alienation created by absurdity and hybridity the ten films in question.

Hybridity and absurdity, through their rough stylistic features and unusual narrative and character choices, address the existence of the cinematic device, through pointing to “the elephant in the room”. Therefore, by unveiling the naturalized ideology, the hybrid and absurd cinema creates a critical distance on a deeper layer. As noted above, the apparatus intends to present the cinematic device as a source of a *reliable* sense of reality. The reliability of the storytelling of hybrid cinema are shattered through destroying the illusion of an ‘invisible’ filmmaker. In Baytan-Sunal films, this illusion is disrupted by a synchronous understanding of time, so-called ‘flaws’ in the stylistic features, and an unrealistically well-choreographed portrayal of crowds.



Illustration 1 Mughal-E-Azam (Asif, 1960)

Another element of hybrid cinema, which is also against the intention of the apparatus, is an aspect of Eastern cinemas that is frequently seen in the films of Baytan and Sunal: the well-choreographed crowded scenes. An example is from the Bollywood Cinema. In *Mughal-E-Azam* made in 1960 and directed by K. Asif, scenes

which feature many actors and stunts can be found, where it is possible to see everyone clearly (as can be seen in *Illustration 1*), thanks to the good choreography and placements of the characters (“Mughal-E-Azam”, IMDb.com, n.d.).



Illustration 2 Ikiru (Kurosawa, 1952), a



Illustration 3 Ikiru (Kurosawa, 1952), b

Another example from Japanese Cinema is Akira Kurosawa's 1952 film *Ikiru* (“Ikiru”, IMDb.com, n.d.). As can be seen in *Illustrations 2 and 3*, similar to the Bollywood example, although the scenes are crowded, it is possible to see everyone on the screen, due to the careful placement of every actor or actress in the mis-en-scene. This unnatural portrayal and placement of every actor and actress to make sure they are seen on the screen is also against the intention of the apparatus, because these placements and choreographies are too perfect to be realistic. The hybrid cinema of Yeşilçam, and in particular Baytan-Sunal films, mainly imitate the Western cinemas, yet hybridity is ensured by the traces of the Eastern cinemas within these imitations.

CHAPTER 3: BAYTAN-SUNAL FILMS IN 1970S-1980S TURKEY

1. The Sociopolitical Context of Turkey in the 1970s and the 1980s

In the 1970s and the 1980s, Turkey witnessed and was affected highly by a dominance of political polarization of the left and right wings. This political scene was set in the 1960s, after the first military coup on 27 May 1960. Although the 1960s were the best years of a newly forming Turkish national cinema, this era faced a growth of political radicalism in Turkey (Zürcher, 2017, p. 256). The segmentation of the left wing and the right wing was becoming more and more heterogeneous, which lead to a stricter polarization on all levels. The implications of this can be seen in the socio-political and economic side of the cinema industry as well, as will be discussed later in this chapter. In a similar way to the cinema industry which was closely tied with the big picture of Turkey as a whole, the political polarization which started in the 1960s was in full power throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

In the book *Turkey: A Modern History*, Eric J. Zürcher (2017) names the era in Turkish history between 1960 and 1980, namely between two military coups, as “The Second Republic”. During this period, political tension between the left wing and the right wing was increasing, as it was in the rest of the world. There was an economic crisis from 1970s on, a constant renewal of unstable governments, and an increasing political violence. The first significant political happening of the 70s was the 1971 Memorandum, which was not officially a successful military coup, but it was definitely a strike on the political setting. In 1971, a memorandum was made by the military, addressing the prime minister of the time, Suleyman Demirel (Zurcher, 2017, p. 375). This memorandum was an ultimatum for the Demirel government, which did not have the strength to deal with the increasing violence at universities and

streets, and the economic crisis the country was facing. This ultimatum was not a military coup, but it was a warning for the government, to let them know that they should either fix the problems or the military would intervene (Ortaylı, 2019).

The 1971 Memorandum caused the government to collapse. Between the years 1973 and 1980, Turkey witnessed many coalition governments that also failed to solve the problems of the state, namely the unstable governments, economic and political crises (Zurcher, 2017, p. 382). These failures led to a military intervention in 1980, led by Kenan Evren. In the early morning on 12 September 1980, Evren declared that the military took over the government due to the malfunctioning of the government organs (Zurcher, 2017, p. 405). As they promised, the military government quelled the prevalent terror and violence, yet, they also arrested leftist thinkers, students, journalists and politicians, which according to Zurcher caused a humane and societal loss as well. Through military intervention, Turkey's democracy was intervened with as well, despite the attempts to disguise this intervention behind a referendum for a constitutional change (Ortaylı, 2019). The coup and the changing constitution was followed by a military-controlled gradual liberalization of Turkey's economy with the prime minister Turgut Özal (Zurcher, 2017, p. 413). The changes and fluctuations Turkey faced on a political and economic level, inevitably, affected the cinema industry as well.

2. The Effects of the Sociopolitical and Economic Context of the 1970s-1980s on Yeşilçam Cinema

a. The Cinema Industry and Regulations: Before 1970s

The period before Baytan-Sunal films were made was the best times for Yeşilçam industry in terms of economics and production. Turkish film scholars are in

consensus that Yeşilçam cinema experienced its golden age in the 1960s, after the formation period of the industry in the 1950s. Between 1960s and mid-1970s, as Dilek Kaya Mutlu (2013) said,

Through the release of 200–300 films a year (ranging from melodramas to comedies, action and adventure to fantastic and superhero films) and the phenomenal popularity of its film stars, Turkish cinema of the time, constituted a major pastime and a significant site of identity formation and negotiation. (Kaya Mutlu, 2013, p.131)

Yeşilçam Cinema experienced its golden age during these times, not only because of the increase in the number of films produced, but also because cinema became a seminal part of Turkish culture during these years. Since the growing industry was not built on a solid ground of neither originality nor economic stability, the course of 1960s would lead to a declining after mid-1970s. This declining period, that was under the influence of censorship imposed on the industry by the state, coincides with the Baytan-Sunal collaboration. However, the Turkish cinema industry has always been subject to state regulations.

Ever since the beginning of cinema industry in Turkey, there has been state regulations for cinema. Until 1932, there was no law which regulated films, yet the city governors were authorised to apply censorship over cinema (Kaya Mutlu, 2013, p. 132). Later in 1931, a TBMM decree was published in the official gazette, about the decision that there should be legislation and state regulation regarding films and cinema. This regulation was about the laws to be prepared by the government that will ensure “the appropriateness of the movies imported to our homeland, in terms of the

purposes of our revolution and social situation”, especially regarding the education of the children and the youth (*T.C. Resmi Gazete*, 1931).⁹

According to cinema artist Fikret Hakan (2016), as he stated in his book *Türk Sinema Tarihi* (History of Turkish Cinema, translated by the author), censorship was present since 1910s.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the films made back then were not films that touch upon the issues of the people; hence, they were not seen as movies to be censored. From 1930s until 1950s, the melodrama movies were not to be seen by the state as needing censorship, yet by that time, it was understood that cinema could be an influential art form. Hakan (2016) claims so, since legislations and regulations for cinema, under the ‘Police Authority Laws’ were first made in the 1930s (p. 392). From 1939 until 1977, Central Film Control Commission was operating in Ankara, examining films for regulation and censorship (Mutlu Kaya, 2013). Hakan sees this as a precaution measure since films made back then were not causing “any trouble” in terms of sexuality or societal issues. However, in 1950s, when “cinema developed and gave birth to her own children” as Hakan states, Yeşilçam was gravitating towards a “new path” in which the societal challenges were also included in cinema (p. 392). Then, the social realists were only a microdissection of the whole of Yeşilçam.

⁹ After this came the 1932 decree on the control of films, and the 1934 decree followed it, which is an updated version of the first one. The first of these decrees was called “Sinemalar Hakkında Karar”, and was published in the official gazette on 27 January 1931. The second was called “Sinema Filmlerinin Kontrolü Hakkında Tenzim Olunan Merbut Talimatnamenin Meriyete Vaz’ı Hakkında Kararname”, also a decree regarding films and control, which was published on 19 July 1932. The third one, which is an update of the second, was published on 9 January 1934, and it was called “Sinema Filimlerinin Kontrolü Hakkındaki Talimatnameye Dair Kararname”.

¹⁰ *Mürebbiye* (Ahmet Fehim, 1919) is considered to be the first film in Turkish Cinema history which encountered a censorship ban (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2015). In her article “Denetimden Sansure Osmanlı’da Sinema”, Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen (2015) points out that Serdar Öztürk questions the consensus that *Mürebbiye* is the first film that was censored. Yet, it is clear that censorship, as an issue and practice, was present even back in the day (p. 79).

Hence, they did not pose a “threat” so far, yet these regulations were precautionous according to Hakan (2016).

Yeşilçam Cinema has witnessed increasing censorship during 1960s, in other words, after its golden age. In her chapter called “Film Censorship during the Golden Era of Turkish Cinema” in the book *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World*, Dilek Kaya Mutlu (2013) analysed the censorship from 1960 until 1971. She concluded that “[t]housands of film censorship reports, ... reveal that the Turkish state, too, conceived cinema as a powerful, even rival, discursive domain where various social identities and meanings were produced and circulated” (Kaya Mutlu, 2013, p. 131). The state was not involved with supporting the production of cinema, yet it was concerned, on a paranoid level according to Kaya Mutlu, regarding the morals the films would impose over the nation.

Here, it is important to point out a distinction between *regulation* and *censorship*. Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen (2015) stated that regulation in cinema refers to all legislation that has to do with the whole process of cinema, from production to distribution (p. 77). Çeliktemel-Thomen emphasized that not all regulation necessarily has ‘bad’ results, yet although censorship is a subset of regulation, it connotes to a limitation and restraint, which could harm the cinema product and how it is received. Fikret Hakan seems to be using the concepts regulation and censorship interchangeably, according to Çeliktemel-Thomen’s approach. It is not certain whether he meant cinema has been *regulated* since the 1910s, or whether it has been *censored* all along. Nevertheless, it is clear that the state has been involved with the cinema industry since its beginnings, as the analysis above demonstrates. These regulations were increasingly censoring ever since 1960s, as Kaya Mutlu (2013)

argued. And with no doubt, the regulation of films and scenarios in 1977 was classified as censorship.

b. Reactions to 1977 Regulation and The Left-Right Tension

The political and economic climate for the cinema workers of Turkey in mid-1970s was not a welcoming one. Baytan and Sunal made their absurd comedy films in this atmosphere. On top of the general decline of Yeşilçam Cinema - which went hand in hand with the fluctuation of the political situation in the country, and the lack of funding for cinema and cinema workers - the increasing censorship did harm to the cinema industry.

As surveyed in detail above, cinema has always been subject to regulation and censorship in Turkey. Yet, this reached a breaking point in 1977, when the regulation named as “Filmlerin ve Senaryoların Denetlenmesi Hakkında Tüzük” (Regulation About the Inspection of Films and Film Scenarios, translated by the author), was published in the official gazette (*T.C. Resmi Gazete*, 1977). This Regulation was about the censorship of the films on a state level. Although by content it was not substantially different than the regulations before, the cinema industry reacted harshly. It was received in such a way due to the increasing censorship, which was sometimes enforced after a film was made, and the lack of social security for the cinema workers.

The opposition to the rising censorship for movies and the worsened situation of the cinema workers came to a climax once the 1977 Regulation was published. Hakan (2016), gives an overview of the views on the 1977 Regulation through excerpts from the published writings at the time. Sociologist Emre Kongar argued that this regulation was against the freedom of thought and freedom of art and science (Hakan, 1976, p.383). Kongar pointed out that due to the use of vague notions like

“general morality” (genel ahlak) and “national security” (milli güvenlik) in the Regulation, a film could practically be banned for any reason (Hakan, 2016, p. 383). In an interview about the 1977 Regulation, lawyer Orhan Apaydın shared his views on the film inspection councils (film denetleme kurulları), where he emphasized that these councils would not include any members from cinema institutions (Hakan, 2016, p. 384). He adds that even if there were cinema professionals in these councils, since they are appointed by the state and are under the state rule, this by itself would not make this Regulation a democratic one (Hakan, 2016, p. 384). As can be seen from these examples, some intellectuals and lawyers were worried about the antidemocratic limitations this Regulation would bring to the cinema productions.

The cinema workers of Yeşilçam also protested this Regulation. They made a walking demonstration for protesting these for three days in November 1977. The protestors, which were over 400 people working at all levels of the industry (actors, cinematographers, directors, gaffers, etc.) walked from Taksim, Istanbul to the parliament building in Ankara, and they presented the parliament with their memorandum. In the memorandum, they stressed on how cinema is not a matter of police inspection, and how this censorship will erase the Turkish national cinema, which is already in economic crisis and under pressure. They claim that “the new [censorship] regulation captivates the art of cinema by reactionist, degenerate, and primitive thoughts” (translated by the author, Hakan, 2016, 386). Similarly, YÖNSEN (“The Association for Film Directors, Scenario Writers and Assistant Directors”, translated by the author)¹¹, also objected to the police intervention, and pointed out

¹¹ The Turkish name of the association is: “Film Yönetmenleri, Senaryo Yazarları ve Yardımcı Yönetmenler Derneği”.

that the small firms with little budgets will be the most affected ones (Hakan, 2016, p. 387).

In the years when the tension between the left wing and the right wing was increasing, the discourses of the people who joined the walk show that they tended towards the left. Although Hakan (2016) mentions that there were people from all political alignments joining the walk, leftists seem to be the majority, since before they arrive at the parliament building, one of their stops was at Anıtkabir, namely Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's grave. Their statements on how the censorship is "reactionist", and how they wish to do "contemporary and national cinema" is in line with this visit, since the Kemalist discourse also values the contemporary and progressive practices. On the contrary, the ruling party's view was not like this. As Erhan Akyıldız writes and Hakan (2016) cites him, Oğuzhan Asiltürk, who was the minister of industry and technology at the time said: "The walk of a handful of people, if they are walking for immorality [ahlaksızlık], will not change much, so let them walk" (translated by the author, p. 390). Here, it can be seen that the 1977 protests were understood as a way to defend sex movies, which are labeled as immoral by the ruling party, but their main purpose, namely eliminating censorship and getting social security, is not recognised. These counter arguments also reflect the tension of the left-wing and right-wing politics of the time. In addition, the main purpose of the walk was not successfully communicated with the public. The people were mostly happy to see film artists, and some, due to the media coverage of the protests, understood this as the cinema workers' wish to make sex movies.

Despite this distinction, cinema workers from both political alignments joined the famous 1977 Yeşilçam March. Their collective aim was to get social security for cinema workers, and also to demolish the censorship on cinema. Later, a documentary

was made about the 1977 March by Deniz Yeşil named *Yollara Düştük* (We Hit the Road, translated by the author) which was ironically also censored in Turkey in 2013 (Kültür Servisi, 2019).

Although it is unknown whether Baytan or Sunal joined the walk or not, it seems like their film production was affected by the general socio-political atmosphere of 1977 and the increasing reactions to state censorship. Although there is not much that could be flagged as a social-realist criticism in the movies made by Baytan and Sunal before 1977, there is a recognizable change in this situation after the year. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, which was made in 1978, as discussed below, the situation in Turkey is explicitly reflected on in the content of the movie, although it primarily aims for comedy. These moments in Baytan-Sunal films, which thematically and directly refer to the issues that are criticized, are ones that have satirical elements as well as the meta-critical distance created by the absurdity and hybridity.

3. Hybridity and Absurdity of Baytan-Sunal Films in Relation with the Sociopolitical Context of the 1970s-1980s Turkey

The rapid changes in the political situation, and the general instability of economy in the 1970s and the 1980s resonated in the cinema industry too. This period of rising instability also coincides with the period in which Baytan-Sunal movies were made. As discussed above, let alone any support from the government, the industry suffered from declining economic assets and censorship. This can be seen not only in the low-cost production, but also the limited possibilities the filmmakers had in terms of film content. Since a film could be censored anytime, this restricted the kind of films that could be made and the issues a film could treat.

Next to these limitations the industry suffered, the film critics were not easy on the filmmakers either. Alongside the harsh economic atmosphere, harsh criticism on was not helpful. In addition to above-discussed Dorsay's explicit criticism of Baytan and other directors, many critics have belittled the productive filmmakers of Yeşilçam that produced popular movies for the general audience. As discussed above in the Introduction chapter, Yeşilçam criticisms can be summarized in three points:

1. Films should be educational, not only entertaining.
2. The films poorly imitated the Western movies, yet they were not able to remove themselves from the context of the East.
3. The productions were low quality, in terms of stylistic choices, flaws, acting, lighting etc.

Given the dire situation the industry was facing, these criticisms seem to be too harsh, and seem to expect too much from an unsupported and restricted industry with little resources. Dorsay (1989) and other critics reduce Yeşilçam in general, and directors like Baytan in particular. However, as discussed above in the introduction chapter, instead of making films that would be high culture products which are mainly critical but distanced from the public; making popular culture movies, *for* the masses and *about* the masses, with subtle and meta criticism, could be a better way to reach the public. In Baytan-Sunal films, next to absurd and comedic features, there are momentary critical references to show hints of resistance to the general situation in the country. In addition, as identified by Ünal (2018), the docile attitude towards criticism in comedy cinema has become more deliberate towards the 1980s. In Baytan-Sunal films, this tendency resonates in the critical distance created by absurdity and some societal issues addressed by the content of the movies as well, under the veil of comedy.

After the 1977 regulation and during the course of the military intervention, in the Baytan-Sunal movies *Gerzek Şaban*, *Tokatci* and *Atla Gel Şaban*, and especially in *Korkusuz Korkak*, it is possible to see references to the socio-political and economic situation of Turkey, through reflection on the issues of the people. These references may not be central to the movies, yet given the situation regarding censorship, it seems to be not so possible to sell a film for the general audience while harshly criticising the situation in Turkey. Contrary to the views of the critics that look down on Yeşilçam, in Baytan-Sunal movies, there are attempts to give a socio-political message while aiming for entertainment. Comedy, ever since it has been present in any art form, has always been a means to convey criticism while making the audience laugh. Baytan-Sunal films had little resources, but they were very resourceful to make the movies somehow work, while aiming for the general audience but sprinkling some socio-political remarks. Instead of seeing these comedy films as not even being worthwhile for criticism, they could be understood as a passive resistance to the censorship. If political and sexual films were censored, filmmakers did not have many options, even when the lack of economic resources are not taken into account. This resistance may be passive, yet it sits at a deeper level since these films create a kind of meta-criticism through absurdity. Although the Baytan-Sunal films are mainly critical through the distanced hybrid and absurd aesthetics, they also touch upon societal issues thematically. These thematic treatments, as well as the meta-criticism, are tied to the satirical comedy tradition.

The reason why this thesis claims that Baytan-Sunal films were resourceful in the given context, is because despite little resources filmmakers had, even though with many flaws and faults, they kept making absurd comedies. Hakan (2016) argued that after mid-1970s, there was a collective effort on the part of filmmakers, to save

the industry from a depression. He divides these efforts into two clusters: the ones that made erotic comedies, and the others. Hakan (2016) lists the types of filmmakers in the second group:

1. The ones that tried to find a healthy way that could be valid for long term,
2. The ones that made “project movies” such as *Hababam Sinifi*, namely a certain project that would compete with the television productions as long as it has good quality,
3. The indecisive ones, about whether to keep making movies or not,
4. The ones that go for collaborations with other companies (p.377).

In general, since the television industry got support from the government whereas such a help was missing in the cinema industry, they had to find ways to compete with the emergence of the new technology. Based on the four types of efforts to save the industry which Hakan has formulized, Baytan-Sunal films could fall in the second cluster, where there was an attempt to make a specific kind of movie series that could be considered as a project. The depression Yeşilçam faced was touched upon in a Baytan-Sunal movie as well. In *Gerzek Saban*, the reason why the director within the movie gets very angry at the protagonist Osman is the limitation the filmmakers have regarding time and money.

While the low budgets and lack of support for the movies caused a faulty style, these limitations also forced the filmmakers to be resourceful, in the sense that they had to find solutions with the limited resources they had. Hence, the resourcefulness Yeşilçam Cinema, and in particular Baytan-Sunal movies were due to the same reasons that created hybrid aesthetics. These are also the reasons why Yeşilçam had a peculiar way to imitate. Hybridity is a characteristic attributed to Yeşilçam Cinema not only for the period in which Baytan-Sunal movies were

produced, but to the whole of Yeşilçam history. Yeşilçam has always been a cinema that *originally imitated* Western cinemas and merged them into an Eastern context. Hence, hybridity is not peculiar to the context of Baytan-Sunal films. However, hybrid aesthetics are especially significant for this era since it was enhanced by the economic fluctuation and decline of the industry.

The phrase “original imitation” is an oxymoron. If something is original, it cannot be imitation, and vice versa. Nevertheless, Yeşilçam makes original interpretations possible and true, and this is instantiated in Baytan and Sunal movies. Ayşegül Kesirli Unnur (2015) quotes Nezih Erdoğan on hybridity and explains:

Nezih Erdoğan explains, “the technical and stylistic devices of Yeşilçam differ radically from those of Hollywood and European cinemas. Lighting, color, dubbing, dialogue, shooting practices, point-of-view shots, and editing create a very specific cinematic discourse in even the most faithful of adaptations” (1998, 266). Therefore, although Yeşilçam filmmakers copied the foreign films, they made the films in a responsive way by not only creating differences in the narratives based on cultural and moral values but also in the style. (Kesirli Unnur, 2015, p. 540)

In other words, the way Yeşilçam imitates can be understood as not merely an imitation that copies everything, but as a cultural translation that creates its unique mimicry in its cinematic style as well as the film content. As discussed in detail below, the stylistic choices of the ten absurd comedy movies of Baytan and Sunal reflect the hybrid way of thinking and the absurdity of the comedies. While the action scenes resemble Western movies, some crowded scenes remind of the Eastern cinemas. Also, the flaws and faults in the productions also reflect how these movies were not in line with the intention of the apparatus, which is a dominant ideology in

the classical Western narrative cinema. This is also in parallel with how Yeşilçam cinema is between tradition and modernity, in terms of the values it praises too (Kaya Mutlu, 2010).

Yeşilçam originated in Istanbul, which is located at the intersection of Asia and Europe, hence at the intersection the two kinds of thinking: Eastern and Western. Its geographical place has parallelisms with the way Yeşilçam combines the Eastern and the Western cinemas. The way Yeşilçam imitates and then “Turkifies” the Western cinemas is very unique, and this makes this cinema an original imitator. The notion Turkification comes from German *geturkt*, according to Arslan (2011), which refers to a Turkish way of transformation or “by being made unruly or unlawful”. In the context of Yeşilçam’s Turkified adaptations or imitations, the unruly method can be understood as the unruliness and unlawfulness of imitation and plagiarism. Nevertheless, this hybrid kind of thinking takes something Western, and culturally translates it to the situation in Turkey at the time. Instead of being dismissed, this effort can be understood in terms of resourcefulness. Despite the oppression of censorship, the declining of Yeşilçam, the low-cost fast productions, Yeşilçam still found a way to somehow originally imitate. Baytan and Sunal collaboration films also Turkified Western action movies, added absurdity and Turkified them, in a faulty but resourceful, therefore hybrid way. Logic would deny the possibility of an “original imitation”, but absurdity is contingent. These ten absurd comedy movies added another layer of irrationality, namely the absurd comedy, on top of their original imitation.

The filmmakers of Yeşilçam, and more specifically Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal, made these movies regardless of the lack of resources and flaws, and despite the tension of a hybrid cinema. In fact, this unique resourcefulness and hybrid

character of Yeşilçam was used for adding a meta layer of absurdity to the films of Baytan and Sunal, since the flaws would disrupt the sense of reality, which is also what absurdity does. Hence, the *absurdity*, which is born out of hybridity, and the *hybridity*, that is fed back by the absurdity; are inseparable in these movies, since they are both born out of the sociopolitical context of Yeşilçam in the 1970s and the 1980s. As a result, a hybrid and absurd aesthetics as such, leaves behind a feeling of alienation, and hence create a meta-critical gaze for the spectator through the distance created by satirically and anarchically acting against the intention of the very apparatus used to tell the story.

The hybridity and absurdity of Baytan-Sunal films paradoxically make sense in the light of the Theatre of the Absurd, where meaninglessness precedes absurdity. As discussed above, the absurdist theatre aimed to point out the meaninglessness of the world through deliberately not making sense. Similarly, if a filmmaker could not make a ‘meaningful’ film in terms of politics, for instance, they could criticize this situation by making films through meaninglessness, and make the audience laugh at the same time. On the one hand, for the absurd theatre, the reason why meaninglessness has come to surface was the war, which created an immense horror. In the context of Turkey of 1970s and 1980s, on the other hand, the political instability and violence caused horror, which may be the reason why Baytan and Sunal turned to absurdity as a way to look critically at the sociopolitical issues, given the limited resources and opportunities the cinema industry had in the certain era. In light of a comparison between the absurdist literature and Baytan-Sunal movies, the meaninglessness and absurdity of these films, in the setting of the hybrid cinema of Yeşilçam, can be understood as a way to resist and criticise the dire situation through disrupting the sense of reality.

Along with this absurd critical distance, these movies have a relation with the satirical comedy traditions. The satire of Baytan-Sunal movies do not necessarily depend on a narrative that is formulated based on the issues of society, yet they touch upon these issues sporadically. In these films, more so increasingly towards the last movies of the duo, there are moments where the protagonist makes an explicit joke about the economic or political situation in an absurd way, and with irony. These absurd and satirical moments are critical on two levels, since they criticise both thematically and formalistically. The reason why these films do not mainly criticise in a thematic way but only sometimes directly touch upon societal issues, seems to be related to the resourcefulness at the face of censorship, within the sociopolitical climate of Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s.

To conclude, given the sociopolitical context peculiar to Yeşilçam cinema and Turkey, the absurd and hybrid aesthetics of Baytan-Sunal movies mainly criticises not through addressing societal issues as a subject matter, but through a kind of storytelling that breaks the fourth wall. It is not certain whether Baytan and Sunal deliberately and on purpose had such a passive yet deep resisting attitude. However, firstly, the intention of the filmmaker is never fully accessible; and secondly, it does not matter as much as how the film was received by the audience. In any case, the hybrid and absurd narrative structure, character juxtapositions and formal style of these movies work against the intention of the apparatus; thus, they shatter the dominant ideology by attacking its fundamental intention of being naturalized. Therefore, through absurdity and hybridity, the ten comedy films made together by Natuk Baytan and Kemal Sunal create a distanced spectratorship which allow for a meta-critical gaze at the dire sociopolitical reality of Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER 4: ABSURDITY AND HYBRIDITY IN BAYTAN-SUNAL FILMS

The ten Baytan-Sunal absurd comedies have a shared basic narrative structure (equilibrium, disruption of equilibrium, restoration of equilibrium), where transitions from one step to the other are absurd and contingent, since they are not supported by a necessary causality. As mentioned in the introduction chapter of this thesis, ten movies made in collaboration of Baytan and Sunal include the following main absurd and hybrid components:

1. *The absurd narrative structure:* The film starts with a bizarre coincidence (most often a misunderstanding) which changes Kemal Sunal's character's life suddenly. This change results in the protagonist to be involved with the mafia. Through a series of contingent events that make no sense, Sunal's character first defeats the mafia men, and then the mafia boss.
2. *The absurd character juxtapositions:* Sunal's character, the protagonist, who is a lay man, somehow gets into trouble with the mafia. This element which is present in all ten movies ensure the unusual togetherness of characters who belong to different worlds.
3. *The absurd stylistic choices:* The formal features of all ten movies are distant from an invisible and continuous kind of storytelling. All films have blurred images, quick cuts, unusual angles and unrealistically well-choreographed crowd representations.

This chapter explores how all the films have these elements, and how these are diversified in each film. Alongside how each film has similar absurd features, they also have different and unique absurdities. All these absurd elements are inseparable from the hybridity of Yeşilçam Cinema, which is positioned against the classical

Western narrative cinema, that is governed by the intention of the apparatus and its purpose of an invisible storytelling. Through pointing out to the existence of the camera and the filmmaker, these films break the fourth wall between the film world and the cinema theatre. This anarchic absurdity and hybridity of Baytan-Sunal films create a meta-critical distance and a feeling of alienation for the spectator.

1. *Sahte Kabadayı / Fake Rowdy* (1976)

a) Introduction and Plot

Sahte Kabadayı, or *Fake Rowdy* in English, is the first film Kemal Sunal and Natuk Baytan made together. It is a film about Kemal becoming a fake rowdy and running after his father's heritage. The writer of the film is Suavi Sualp, the producer is Yahya Kılıç, and the production company is Cem Film ("*Sahte Kabadayı*", IMDb.com, n.d.).

The movie starts with a crime scene, where several men, who looks like mafia members, try to steal from "Baba" Şükrü, and they are caught on the act. Later, the son of the "Baba" character, Muhtar, hires a killer to have his father murdered. Şükrü's close friend, "Avukat" or Kamil, plots a revenge for his friend. Avukat looks for Şükrü's son Susta Kazım, from Şükrü's ex wife named Nafiye, and finds out that he lives in Izmit. In the meantime, Kemal sells pişmaniye (a Turkish dessert) in Izmit. They go there to look for Kazım, and the moment they find him, Kemal happens to be having a duello with the bully Kazım, out of his courage of ignorance. A misunderstanding leads to everyone believing that Kemal killed Kazım, which leads to Avukat mistakenly believing that he is Şükrü's son. They take him to Istanbul for him to get Şükrü's money from Muhtar. In Istanbul, first they teach Kemal how to act like a rowdy. Then, due to a series of misunderstandings, he scares all the people that

were indebted to Şükrü, and he is thought to be a rowdy as his father is. He starts collecting the money people owed to Şükrü, by acting like a scary rowdy. Muhtar, who wants his position of power back, plots several tricks to kill Kemal. First, he hires an assassin and instructs the woman he is in love with to seduce Kemal in his house next to the window, but the assassin kills the woman instead. Next, Muhtar asks a bomber to install a bomb into a lighter they gift to him. Although he lights the lighter several times at Muhtar's office, nothing happens until the bomber himself explodes the lighter to prove that it works. Finally, Muhtar hires two assassins to break into his house, to find him watching a film scene, with a rowdy character, which scares them away. After these events, concluding that Kemal cannot be killed by a gun or a bomb, Muhtar sets Sabri against Kemal, and vice versa, over some goods that will be exchanged in a warehouse. He also denounces them to the police. They shoot Avukat on the way, let Kemal go into the warehouse alone, and run away. Sabri and his men are in the warehouse too, and Kemal accidentally drops a heavy piece of iron on his feet and takes his gun, which scares them. The police catch him, and Kemal ends up in prison, where his legacy is known. He is challenged by the leader of the ward, yet Kemal discovers that he has a tick, and defeats him. He discovers in the prison that Muhtar was the one to kill his father. Muhtar tries to have him killed in the prison too, but this as well proves counterproductive. He goes out of the prison, and they try to kill him in an amusement park. By using the toys there, and later ending up in a karate class where he uses the ropes to kick the men chasing him, he manages to defeat them too. Finally, after leaving Muhtar under a pile of sand, he decides to go back to Izmit, and he keeps selling pişmaniye.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Sahte Kabadayı*

Sahte Kabadayı being the first movie of the duo, already bears the major absurd comedy characteristics and themes running through the ten films made together by Baytan and Sunal. Absurdity relates to the appearance of Sunal's character, since his silliness is mostly the cause of it. The film plot is merely based on a series of misunderstandings, the basic plot is absurd, and hybridity can be observed simultaneous with the absurdities.

Kemal's life changes suddenly and abruptly through a misunderstanding, that he is the unknown son of a famous mafia boss who died recently in Istanbul. When he goes back to Istanbul, he gets into trouble with the mafia. He defeats the mafia in an absurd way, and thanks to misunderstandings. This short overview of the story of the film has key happenings that repeat throughout the movies. The sudden big change in the protagonist's life (disruption of the equilibrium), how he gets into trouble with the mafia, and then defeats them in a way that does not make sense (restoration of the equilibrium), shows that absurdity is embedded in the backbone of the film.

The reason why the mafia believes Kemal is a powerful man is all based on how he is courageous out of silliness, how he *acts like* a man to be respected, and a series of helpful misunderstandings. The first misunderstanding is that Avukat thinks he the son of Şükrü because he "wins" a duello with Susta Kazim. Kazim is a man who he clearly cannot defeat, but he still fights him because he is courageous in a silly way. Later, in a transformation scene, Avukat and his man show and explain Kemal how to *act like* a mafia boss, by showing him how he should walk and speak. After this, when they go to Muhtar for showing off, the moment they believe he is powerful is when they drop the safe on his foot, and he yells out of pain. Yet, they think he got

angry for some reason and they fear him because of this. All these events lead to the mafia men believing he is a respectable and powerful man to be feared, yet this belief has no solid ground. It is caused by the misunderstandings that lead the movie; hence, it is not necessary but contingent, thus, absurd.

Another example of how Kemal is saved due to a misunderstanding is a scene where absurdity is in the foreground, when two assassins come to Kemal's house to kill him. When they break into his house, Kemal watches a Western film. The moment the two men enter his house coincides with a robbery scene in the film Kemal watches. The cowboy in the film says, "Drop your weapons". Thinking that it is Kemal who says this to them, the two assassins follow the order. In the meantime, Kemal is not even aware that there are people in his house who are trying to kill him. The cowboy in the film then orders "Undress!". Along with the assassins who cannot see that he is only watching a movie, Kemal also undresses. A gunshot is heard, and the cowboy says, "Leave", and the assassins do. So does Kemal, and they think Kemal is coming after them. They run out to talk to Muhtar and say that they were almost killed. Again, the men were not going to be killed, they just thought they would be because of an abrupt coincidence that the Western film was on the TV at the right moment.

Absurdity, more specifically comedy through absurdity, is introduced to the movie the moment Kemal Sunal's character Kemal enters the scene. From the first time the audience sees his character, things Kemal does, and things happen to him are completely irrational. The first moment we see him, he goes to the coffeehouse to find pişmaniye provider, Sadık, for settling accounts, since he is indebted to this man. He forgets what he came for, he miscalculates the amount of money he owes him, he gives his money to him and takes it back. To the audience, this does not make sense at

all, since it is not reasonable to find the man that he owes money to, without having the money he owes him. Indeed, Sadık gets very angry, and throws him out of the window. The absurdity continues when he lands on a carriage and the carriage begins to uncontrollably roll down a ramp. He destroys a valuable panel, knocks down a painter. Finally, he destroys a marriage by flying off the carriage and falling onto the arms of a man who was just married. This absurd sequence, starting with him finding the man who he should have avoided, has an absurd style as well, where hybridity also comes in.

The absurdity introduced by Sunal's character is ingrained with the style of the film when he is present. The word absurd here is used as meaning not necessary but contingent. For instance, the moment Sadık throws him out of the window, is made of four discontinuous cuts, which does not make sense at all, and is not persuasive at all. First, he is lifted by Sadık and thrown; second, he flies over a table in the coffeehouse; third, he flies out of the window; and finally, he lands on the carriage. There is no continuity whatsoever, but the pace is so fast again, that although it is clear that he does not realistically look like he flied out the windows, the absurdity of the situation accounts for the absurdity of the way the scene is shot. This is one of the instances where the lack of the Western idea of "continuous and invisible storytelling", is most tangible in this absurd film. Neither are the stylistic features sensible, nor is the fact that he is thrown out of a window on a carriage by the man he owes money to.

Here in this scene, what makes the happenings absurd and funny is that they do not make sense. Kemal finding a man on purpose, who he owes money to, is contingent, rather than necessary. If for instance, it was the other way around, and the man owed money to Kemal, it would make sense that he looks for him. This would

make Kemal's character relatable, and thus make the audience think that his actions are necessary. Yet, Kemal's character is far from relatable because his actions do not make sense. This relatability issue reminds one of the Theatre of the Absurd. In this kind of theatre also, the happenings and situations are deliberately absurd and not necessary. Rather, the actions of the characters are fully contingent. This is on purpose, and one reason is for the characters to be not relatable. On the one hand, Kemal willingly puts himself into dangerous situations, which makes him not relatable. On the other hand, there is a second layer of absurdity. Although he endangers himself constantly, due to all his irrational acts, he is always saved due to misunderstandings and coincidences.

In his article on "Eastern Narrative Traditions and The Belonging of Turkish Cinema" (translated by the author),¹² as mentioned above in relation to the notion of hybridity, Sözen points out the difference between the deductive (Western) reasoning and inductive (Eastern) reasoning. The hybrid mind of Yeşilçam, on the other hand, has traces from both cultures of thinking. For instance, in *Sahte Kabadayı*, in line with the Eastern understanding of time and space, there is a synchronicity that is the cause of all the misunderstandings. Yet, there seems to be an influence from the Western idea of causality as well. The Western mind is prone to believe that if "a" follows "b", "a" might be the cause of "b". In *Sahte Kabadayı*, because Kemal was in the right place at the right moment when he was dueling Susta Kazım, he ends up being mistaken as Şükrü's son. Because people see Kemal coming out of the coffeehouse *after* Kazım was defeated in the coffeehouse (by his own clumsiness, actually) they believe that there is a causal connection. Kemal being the only person in the coffeehouse before he was beaten makes the neighborhood people believe that

¹² Original title: "Doğu Anlatı Gelenekleri ve Türk Sinemasının Aidiyeti".

Kemal was the one to beat him. The deductive thinking would want to repeat this experiment, to see if every time Kemal and Kazım are in a confined place, Kazım would be defeated, but the hybrid mind takes it for granted, and does not question the source of the results.

As *Sahte Kabadayı* is a crossbreed between Eastern and Western ways of thinking, it also has stylistic features that come from both visual cultures. The establishing sequence of the film is one that appears like a crime or western movie. Before Kemal appears for the first time, the stylistic features are similar to a crime action movie from Hollywood. The cuts are very fast, the camera moves rapidly, and various angles are used consecutively. Later, once Sunal's character is seen, the pace of the movie gets slower for a while. When his life changes all of a sudden, the pace also increases in a parabolic manner. This wavy and inconsistent pace is also a sign for hybridity. Various film paces can be seen both in Eastern and Western traditions, yet the fast pace is associated with Hollywood, but the slow pace is more common in Eastern cinemas. A classic example to this would be the slow portrayal of the slow life of the child in Abbas Kiarostami's film *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987). Yet in *Sahte Kabadayı*, the pace goes up and down in a sporadic manner, which is a sign of hybridity.

There are many flaws caused by the fast and low-cost productions, but Baytan and the film crew were very resourceful. They may not have the resources to make a more believable flying scene, yet through cutting the scene very fast, the filmmakers have made it work. Therefore, these mistakes should not be a reason for dismissing the movie altogether, like some critics do so, yet they should be understood in terms of the resourcefulness; hence, hybridity. Absurdity and hybridity in this film are closely tied together. As analysed above, how the plot happenings are absurd and how

these unrelatable happenings are presented through a contingent but resourceful (even though flawed) style, show that absurdity and hybridity are inseparable.

2. *Sakar Şakir / Clumsy Şakir* (1977)

a) Introduction and Plot

Sakar Şakir, or *Clumsy Şakir* in English, made in 1977, was written by Natuk Baytan and Suavi Sualp, produced by Yahya Kılıç, and made by Cumhuriyet Film ("Sakar Şakir", IMDb.com, n.d.). This film, which is the second film made together by Baytan and Sunal, is about a clumsy man, Şakir, going to Istanbul from Kayseri in order to claim the property and the money left to him from his dead uncle.

Hasan Emmi, Hacı's dying uncle, speaks his last will to Hacı and tells him that he bequeaths his property to his nephew in Kayseri, (Sakar) Şakir, and asks Hacı to distribute the rest of his money to the poor. Hacı plots for unlawfully taking all his heritage on himself. He asks from the inhabitants of the neighborhood to pay him their debts to Hasan Emmi. He also takes over the small grocery store (bakkal) owned by Hasan Emmi. Known with his clumsiness, Şakir, leaves his village in Kayseri to go to Istanbul, in order to collect his money left to him from his dead uncle. He does all sorts of clumsy mistakes on the way, which leads to his bus having an accident, and he ends up travelling on the top of the bus, and then in the luggage compartment. In the meantime, Hacı finds more ways to cheat and get more money from the inhabitants of the neighborhood in Istanbul, where he runs his store. Şakir arrives to the grocery store and reclaims it. Hacı tricks Şakir into sleeping at a Sevda's house, who is the mistress of Gardırop Fuat, hoping that he will be murdered by Fuat. Fuat turns out to be the passenger that was angry at him, and he tries to kill Şakir, but Şakir

manages to escape. Hacı pays both Sevdâ and Fuat to trick Şakir and get his signature onto a blank piece of paper in order to take his property. Yet, Şakir manages to be saved from these through a series of events caused by his clumsiness. However, he loses his property and burns down all of Istanbul due to his clumsiness as well. In the end, he goes back to Kayseri, and blows up his town as well.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Sakar Şakir*

In this film as well as the others, it is possible to see the same narrative structure of the protagonist's life changing all of a sudden, him getting involved with a rowdy and defeating them in an absurd way. Clumsy Şakir figures out that he inherited a lot of money from his dead uncle, he gets into trouble with a rowdy he meets on the way to Istanbul because of his clumsiness, and in the end, he defeats Hacı, who tries to get his money, and the rowdy, also thanks to his clumsiness. The equilibrium – disruption – equilibrium cycle is an element from Western narrative traditions, whereas the absurd transitions between the stages of the narrative reminds one of Eastern storytelling. This double-sided nature of the narrative also hints at the hybridity of the cinema tradition this film belongs to.

The opening sequence of the film takes place in the house of the dying uncle. On his death bed, the uncle says that he leaves all his heritage to his niece, Şakir. Hacı gets angry, and says, “Wake up from dead, and tell me what you leave for me!” (translated by the author).¹³ Then Uncle Hasan does wake up from death, sits up and he says “Nothing for you” (translated by the author), and dies again.¹⁴ Again, just as

¹³ Original line: “Diril ulan diril, bana ne kaldığını söyle.”

¹⁴ Original line: “Bir bok kalmadı.”

in *Sahte Kabadayı*, the absurdity is introduced right away, as soon as the audience sees Kemal Sunal's character (he plays both the uncle and the nephew).

One absurd element that is recurring in this film, which was also seen in *Sahte Kabadayı*, is that the protagonist "fans the flames" irrationally. Because of his silliness and clumsiness, while travelling to Istanbul, Şakir makes the passenger next to him very angry. First, he sits on his hat, then eats a cucumber very loudly, then he spills a bucket of yoghurt on him. These mistakes are all out of nowhere, and they don't make sense. The bucket lands on the head of the bus driver, and this causes an accident since he can't see the road anymore. They all get very angry at him, but he disappears after the accident. The driver and the other passengers think they got rid of Clumsy Şakir, but it turns out that he was just on top of the bus. As if this was not absurd enough, while the bus is on its first breakpoint, Şakir accidentally lands on the passenger that was angry at him before. He gets very angry at him again, and Şakir, again very irrationally, tells the man that he forgives him, which makes the passenger even more angry. A similar nonsensical event occurs in *Sahte Kabadayı* as mentioned above. In *Sahte Kabadayı*, Sunal's character goes to see the man he owes money to, and makes him angrier by not giving him money again.

What would be expected from Kemal in *Sahte Kabadayı* would be to avoid seeing the man he is indebted to, but he does the opposite. Similarly, the audience would expect Şakir to be more careful around the angry passenger. Yet since absurdity is contingent, and not born out of necessity, he keeps annoying the angry passenger by peeing in his hat when he does not allow him to go to the toilet before him. Even though the man was infuriated because of all the clumsy mistakes Şakir made before, this does not keep Şakir from further annoying him. When the man wears the hat that is full of urine, Şakir runs away from him. Finally, they arrive in

Istanbul, and the man wants to take his luggage and leave. Yet, he finds Şakir in the luggage compartment, and he has broken his luggage as well. He just smiles at him when they open the door, which is also absurd since he should be really afraid instead. Yet again, since absurdity does not follow logic, Şakir keeps annoying him.

An absurd theme running through this film is Şakir misunderstanding the uses of everyday objects. Hacı places him to a flat for him to stay, which is the flat of Sevda who is Fuat's girlfriend. He tricks him into believing that this is his new home, while his plans is for Fuat to get angry when he finds Şakir there. Şakir arrives in the house before Sevda, and he explores the bathroom. Having never seen a bathtub, he thinks it is a kneading trough. He mistakes the showerhead to be a telephone, and gets shocked when water comes out of the "phone". Finally, he believes that the toilet bowl is a tub for washing feet. Here, comedy through absurdity is obtained by the silliness and ignorance of the protagonist.

One everyday object in particular which Şakir misinterprets is also very significant for the era: the television. In another scene, when he is exploring the building, he sees an open door to a flat and comes in. He sees a television, and a man in television, as can be seen in *Illustration 4*. This man is actually trying to fix the television, yet Şakir mistakenly believes that he is watching a TV show. Şakir gives the men some tools he needs, and even lights his cigarette, as in *Illustration 5*. Yet, he says, "The so-called live broadcast must be this".¹⁵ Here, it is important to note that this film was made in an era when televisions were becoming widespread and becoming a part of more households in the big cities, yet it is still new for people from smaller cities and villages. This is one example that Baytan-Sunal movies extract their comedy from the important happenings of the era. This also proves that

¹⁵ Original line: "Canlı yayın dedikleri bu olsa gerek".

their comedy content is not entirely disconnected from their contemporary sociological contexts.



Illustration 4 Sakar Şakir (Baytan, 1977), a



Illustration 5 Sakar Şakir (Baytan, 1977), b

Sakar Şakir as well as *Sahte Kabadayı*, bears some hybrid elements of the Yeşilçam Cinema. The particular scene in the minibüs, as can be seen in *Illustration 6*, is one that reflects hybridity in two different levels. Firstly, the crowded but well-choreographed placement of the stunts and the protagonist in a way almost all can be

seen reminds of the crowded scenes from Eastern cinemas, like Japanese or Bollywood films. Secondly, although Şakir is speaking and he is the focus, he is not in focus in this plan. We rather see the shirt of the passenger in the front scene in a very clear way.



Illustration 6 Sakar Şakir (Baytan, 1977), c

Another scene that is a fusion of hybridity and absurdity is when Sevda arrives home after Hacı brings Şakir to her flat. For a long while, they do not encounter each other within the same house, just because Şakir is always in the right place at the right moment. The moment she arrives at home, Şakir wakes up and decides to eat something. At the same time, Sevda takes some chicken out of the fridge for herself and leaves it on the table. Şakir picks it up and eats it, without questioning how the chicken ended up there. He drops it under the table and kneels to look for it just when Sevda arrives in the room again. She sees the chicken is gone but does not see Şakir under the table, as can be seen in *Illustration 7*. This happens for a few times more, that they just miss each other thanks to consecutively being in the right place at the right moment. Sevda thinks she is forgetful because of the alcoholic drinks she had. This scene is hybrid because of the combination of perfect timing is thanks to the

synchronicity of the Eastern understanding of time, but a peculiar kind of causality in line with the Western understanding of successive time. It is a scene where hybridity and absurdity come together because the hybridity of the two different understandings of chronology result in an absurd chain of events.



Illustration 7 Sakar Şakir (Baytan, 1977), d

3. *Avanak Apti / Ninny Apti* (1978)

a) Introduction and Plot

Avanak Apti (Baytan, 1978), the third movie of the duo, was made in 1978. It was produced by Yahya Kılıç, made by the production company Cumhuriyet Film, and written by Suavi Sualp (“Avanak Apti”, IMDb.com, n.d.). In this movie, Apti (Sunal) falls in love with a vocal artist Nevin (Ayşen Gruda). When Apti attends one of her concerts, he is mistakenly thought to be another Apti who is richer, and fights over Nevin against a gangster.

The new posters of Nevin, who is a famous singer, has not been hung on the streets. Apti is responsible, since he hangs the posters in an empty field, because he is in love with her and jealous of other men may see her posters. Barut Osman, a mafia

boss, is also in love with her. Committing a fraud, he sells lands he does not actually own to the inhabitants of Apti's neighbourhood. Nuri, Apti's companion, tells Apti he is so handsome that the glass will break if he looks at it. Throughout the film, the glasses Apti look at break, yet always because something else is happening at the same time, like a child throwing a ball at the glass. Apti and Nuri get a flower garland from a graveyard that has a sign on it which implies it is for the dead. They bring it to Nevin, and she faints because she thinks she is dead. Apti and Nuri believe she fainted because of his handsomeness. Nuri tells Apti that women want handsome, famous and rich men, so they look for ways for Apti to get rich and famous. Nevin's agent gives her the news that for a gangster called Urfalı Apti will come to her show that night. Yet, a truck hits Urfalı on his way, and he is hospitalized, yet Apti comes instead, and he is mistaken as Urfalı Apti. Osman is also there that night, and Apti teases him. But Osman cannot put him in his place because the owner of the tavern where Nevin performs is watching Osman all the time, because he wants to get Osman in jail. How Osman is disgraced makes the news. Nevin takes Apti for dinner after this event, and Osman ends up in the same place again. The police captain is also there, so he has to behave and Apti teases him, so they make the news for the second time. This upsets Osman and Urfalı Apti who was hit by a car again. Because Apti cannot pay for the dinner, Nevin leaves him. Osman offers money to Nevin to pretend he kidnapped her, so that they will attract Apti and defeat him. Osman goes to the bank for withdrawing all his money which is in a big sack, while at the same time Apti is there to get the fake advertisement money from the bank to distribute it all over the city. They exchange bags accidentally, so Apti and Nuri end up distributing all the money of Osman all over the town. He also gives some to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood who Osman is already indebted to, so they do not give his money back, and he

arranges their documents of title for the lands, because the police captain is also there, watching him. Finally, when Osman kidnaps Nevin, Apti goes there and defeats the mafia men with fly spray and by accidentally opening doors onto their faces. Just when Osman corners them, Urfalı Apti arrives and takes Nevin away. Apti and Osman make peace, and Apti tells him that a truck will hit Urfalı and Nevin. The movie ends with a truck hit sound.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Avanak Apti*

In *Avanak Apti*, just as in *Sahte Kabadayı* and *Sakar Şakir*, absurdity and hybridity are inseparable. This film has the common plot spine with the rest of the movies, is full of absurd misunderstandings that save the protagonist, and has hybrid characteristics like: discontinuous and ‘flawed’ storytelling due to low cost productions and hybridity, Western influences, and the above-mentioned Eastern synchronicity through the lens of a Western causality.

Apti’s life changes when he is mistaken as another Apti, namely Urfalı Apti who is a rowdy. He gets into trouble with Barut Osman by making him angry for no reason, and defeats him and his men through absurd coincidences. Similar to the films analysed above, *Avanak Apti* has the common narrative structure of the protagonist’s life changing all of a sudden, him getting into trouble with the mafia, and defeating them in an absurd way.

The way Apti is mistaken as Urfalı Apti is based on absurd coincidences, which also have hybrid characteristics. The police captain wants to arrest Barut Osman, but he needs evidence and a valid reason. Hence, he plots for making him angry, and thus causing him to commit a crime so he can take him as a prisoner. Their plan is to make Urfalı Apti to tease him, yet the protagonist enters the tavern instead.

This is only possible because Urfalı was hit by a truck just before he came in, and hospitalized. Thanks to this absurd coincidence, from this time on in the movie, he is considered to be Urfalı Apti, because the real Urfalı Apti keeps being hit by the bus. There are unanswered questions here in the plot, such as, why did they not know how Urfalı Apti actually looks if he is someone who appears on newspapers? Or how can Urfalı be hit by vehicles so many times yet get up from his hospital bed the moment he gets angry? These kinds of gaps in the plot are among hybrid characteristics of this movie. It is absurd at the same time, because these coincidences one after another do not always make sense, and they are born not out of necessity but out of contingency.

One absurd thread that runs throughout the film, and which is seen in *Sakar Şakir* as well, is that the protagonist irrationally “fuels the flames”. Although he is not actually a powerful man like the original Urfalı Apti, and he has no means for defeating him if they were actually to fight, Apti keeps annoying and teasing Barut Osman, who is a mafia boss. Nevertheless, because he is lucky enough and always in the right place at the right time, he always manages to make a fool of him and defeat the villain. Apti does this with Urfalı Apti too, whom he gets to see every time he is hit by a vehicle. He keeps teasing him about being hit by a bus or a truck, and he would be beaten if Urfalı was able to get up. Yet, Apti does not care whether he can actually defeat this person or not when he is teasing him.

In the beginning of the film, Nevin (see *Illustration 8*, on the left) is singing because she automatically signs when she hears applauding, and her agent (on the right) made a clap. We see her and her agent in a medium shot. Her lip movements the audience sees on the screen and the sound they hear are dyssynchronous. In addition, the focus is neither on her, nor on the agent, as can be seen in *Illustration 8*.

Rather, the couch is perfectly in focus. The off-focus image and the mismatch of the sound and the image are present from the first few minutes of the movie.



Illustration 8 Avanak Apti (Baytan, 1978), a



Illustration 9 Avanak Apti (Baytan, 1978), b

A few moments later, in a close-up of Nevin that comes after the blurry two shot, the focus is still not on her (see *Illustration 9*). Instead, the mirror and the windowpane behind her are clearly visible. These consecutive blurry plans show that the movie was made in a hurry, where the camera operator did not have the time to even check

on the focus. Let alone the time to fix the focus, the filmmakers apparently did not have the money or time to re-do an erroneous scene.



Illustration 10 *Avanak Apti* (Baytan, 1978), c

Another moment which bears hybrid characteristics in *Avanak Apti* comes after Apti makes a fool of Barut Osman. This is later featured in a newspaper in the movie, as can be seen in *Illustration 10*. The newspaper is shown in the film when Osman and Urfalı are reading the news, and the audience also sees it on the screen. The excerpt from the paper is obviously handmade, by printing the headline on a piece of paper and sticking it on top of another news on the actual newspaper. The paper colour is different, the font is different, and the cuts are flawed. Even the shadow of the paper on top of the newspaper page is seen on the screen. Similarly, they replaced a picture on the newspaper with a photo of Apti, Nevin, Osman and Nuri. This obvious flaw also shows that the filmmakers did not have the time and/or the money to print a fake newspaper page for the film. Absurdity comes in here since “Urfalı Apti Disgracing Barut Osman” has news value, which does not make much

sense.¹⁶ In addition, this moment in the movie is hybrid because seeing headlines from a newspaper is widely seen in Western cinemas like Hollywood, and also because there is an unavoidable mistake made in the making of this scene. Yet, it somehow does the work of telling the story.

Similar to *Sakar Şakir* and *Sahte Kabadayı* as discussed above, the plot of *Avanak Apti* is merely based on the protagonist always being in the right place at the right time, in a way that the coincidences appear to look like causal connections. How Apti enters the tavern when Urfalı Apti was supposed to, how this leads to Apti superseding Urfalı, and how the police captain is always there when Apti teases Osman and gets saved because he is there, are perfect examples to this. As mentioned above, the coincidences happening in a synchronous manner which causes them to be mistaken as causality is a product of the hybrid mind of the Baytan and Sunal movies.

Another significant synchronicity moment is the bank scene. Apti and Osman coincidentally go to the bank at the same time, the former to get the advertisement money from the bank to hand out in the city, and the latter to withdraw all his money, both to impress Nevin. The nemeses accidentally meet at the bank, both with a sack full of money (or fake money) in their hands, they bump into each other, and their sacks get mixed up. Here, is one of the absolutely synchronous moments, since they both have the same sacks, they both go there at the same time, and the police captain again happens to be there so Apti does not get into trouble with Osman. After they pick up the wrong sacks, they go on. Osman goes to Nevin's house and pours out the fake money on Nevin, thinking that he will impress her with the money he gives her. Yet, the money turns out to be the fake advertisement money from the bank. He then

¹⁶ Original newspaper headline, as can be seen in *Illustration 10*, is: "Urfalı Abdi Meşhur Kabadayı Barut Osman'i kepaze etti".

realises his mistake, but it is too late since Aпти and Nuri had already distributed all his money around the town. The co-incidence of these happenings that result in the inhabitants of Aпти's neighborhood to be paid the money they have been expecting from Osman, is another perfect instance of the hybrid understanding of synchronous time.



Illustration 11 Avanak Aпти (Baytan, 1978), d

As seen in other movies of Baytan and Sunal, the combination of elements from Western and Eastern cinemas also reflect the hybrid character, always entangled with absurdity. The well-choreographed crowded scenes remind Eastern cinemas, as seen in *Illustration 11*. However, some scenes, like the one where Aпти defeats Osman's men, resembles the visual culture of Western cinemas, especially the genre Western. When Aпти is in a warehouse, trying to rescue Nevin from the mafia men, he again happens to be in the right place at the right time, because he beats the men by absurd methods like spraying fly spray on their faces, or by absurd coincidences like opening a door when the man is just behind it. While these synchronous yet somehow causal events happen in the film, the soundtrack resembles songs from Spaghetti

Western movies. To sum up, the absurdity and hybridity are almost always tangled up in *Avanak Apti*.

4. *Korkusuz Korkak / Fearless Coward (1979)*

a) Introduction and Plot

Korkusuz Korkak was released in 1979, produced by Yahya Kılıç and the production company Cumhuriyet Film, written by Erdoğan Tünaş (“*Korkusuz Korkak*”, IMDb.com, n.d.). In this film, Mülayim (Sunal), oppressed by his co-workers, figures out that he has only six more months before he dies. The film is about his adventures as a man with little time left to live, and how he becomes fearless.

Mülayim is a diffident office boy. Where he works, no one else but him does any work. He cleans, waters the plants, goes through folders instead of the other officers, and still does not get any recognition or raise. Instead, just because everyone acts like they are working once the boss arrives, he gets angry at Mülayim and cuts from his salary as a penalty. Later, Mülayim has a doctor’s appointment, where he figures out he will die in six months. After receiving this news, he becomes a fearless person, starts patronizing people at the office and he makes the boss work for him. He finally wins the lottery yet gets upset since he does not have the time to spend this money. Since he has only 6 months to live, he decides to invest this money into construction of a public toilet. When there is a bomb in the neighborhood, he courageously gets near the bomb and plays with it, which gives him the nickname “Bomber Mülayim” (translated by the author), and he becomes an urban legend.¹⁷ As he gets more fearless since he thinks he will die, the people in the neighborhood and in his office start finding him more handsome and charismatic. Due to his fame as

¹⁷ Original nickname in the film: “Bombacı Mülayim”.

“Bomber Mülâyim”, he threatens the mafia men who take money from his boss, and then makes his boss work for him. In the meantime, he keeps looking for ways to die before the six months he has left. He teases the mafia boss Abbas and hires an assassin for getting himself killed. Once he is indebted because of the public toilet construction, and he is already in trouble with the mafia, the nurse who confused the folders in the hospital, Sevim, finds him and tells him that he will live longer. Together they try to cancel his own request for being murdered and try to find the appointed assassin. Despite all the men trying to kill him, he manages to defeat them through always being in the right place at the right moment, and thanks to Kerim’s dedication, who is meant to be his assassin. In the end, with a lucky flip of the coin and with the help of another bomb, he manages to escape all.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Korkusuz Korkak*

As in the previous films of Baytan and Sunal that have been analysed above, in this film, absurdity and hybridity are tied together. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, the narrative structure of all Baytan-Sunal movies can be recognised as well. The protagonist’s life changes all of a sudden with the misunderstood news, that Mülâyim will die in six months. He gets into trouble with the mafia because he wants to die sooner. Yet, he defeats the mafia in an absurd way by eating lemons and with the help of his hired assassin.

The misunderstanding that starts the chain of absurd events in this movie, is also absurd in itself. He thinks he will die in six months, but this was due to a confusion in the hospital. His name is Mülâyim Sert, and the patient that will die who has an appointment on the same day is Mülâyim Ters. The two patients with similar names coming to the same hospital at the same time, lead to an utter change in

Mülayim's life. One absurd moment while he is at the hospital is, when Mülayim bargains with the doctor for living seven months instead of six, as if it is the doctor's decision. Firstly, Mülayim looks very healthy, and the doctor only takes the folder into account and does not even double check, despite Mülayim telling him that his family members live very long. A few moments after he leaves the doctor's room, the Mülayim who will actually die comes in, he looks very old and unhealthy, but the doctor tells him he is good, and he will live longer. The doctor does not get his fault even then, because he just relies on the folders. The absurd coincidence, which obviously does not make sense to the audience, happens in the film as if it is fully reasonable. Such an absurd situation, which is obvious for the audience who watches the ridiculous mix up, is one of the moments in this film that create a critical distance due to not being relatable.

There are elements of absurdity and hybridity in the way Mülayim keeps trying to die earlier than 6 months. First of all, he hires an assassin, whereas he could rather commit suicide. This is one of the absurd choices of the protagonist, since it would be more efficient if he tries to do it himself. What is more absurd is, he asks the agent for the assassin to not kill him on a rainy day, since he would not want the community that will attend his funeral to get wet during the burial service. This is unusually thoughtful for a man who has become reckless after figuring out that he will die soon. The way he cares about how other people will think of him after his death is not in line with this new fearless recklessness. On top of this, he also does not want to die on a Tuesday, because "Tuesdays are shaky" ("Salı sallanır" in Turkish), according to his superstition. Yet, in theory he would not survive after his death to face the unluckiness dying on a Tuesday would bring about. This is also not sensible, since someone who thinks about dying would not care about whether his affairs will

go well after his death. This kind of superstition is also a characteristic of an Eastern way of thinking about destiny, which entails actions done will affect the way destiny unfolds.

Another reason why Mülâyim trying to die is hybrid and absurd, is because the way the protagonist survives this movie despite all the instances he could have died, is based on the synchronous understanding of time discussed above. Towards the end of the movie, mafia men and an assassin are after him, yet he somehow survives. He gets involved with the mafia in order to make them angry, which he hopes will end up in his death. However, the assassin defeats the mafia men, because he wants to be the one to kill Mülâyim. The synchronicity comes in when the assassin, Kerim, is always there to save him from the mafia. Whenever one of the men tries to attack him, Kerim comes faster and beats them. Also, Mülâyim manages to survive some days because it was rainy, or because it was a Tuesday. If someone is determined to kill someone, necessity would dictate him to do it whenever he has the chance. But absurdity is not ruled by necessity, thus Kerim not only keeps him safe, but also takes care of him. Kerim takes Mülâyim back home from a tavern when he is drunk, and advises him not to drink and be healthy. He says that he will kill Mülâyim when he is healthy. The irony is that Mülâyim wishes to die because he thinks he is unhealthy. Therefore, it is absurd that the assassin is trying to take care of him although he aims to kill him soon. Yet, this is in Mülâyim's advantage, because when he figures out that the folders were confused in the hospital, he wants to cancel the request for an assassin. Another absurd coincidence occurs when he goes back to the agent and asks who his assigned assassin was, because the agent dies in his arms before he could tell Mülâyim who his assassin is. Again, the synchronicity of events

here has traces of the hybrid mind of Yeşilçam Cinema, because he misses the chance to figure out who his assassin will be by finding the agent just before his death.

Another absurd recurrence in this film is a running joke made by Mülâyim. When his life is miserable, he makes these jokes in which he tells the exact opposite of what happened, and at the end, he says “hypothetically, I mean” (“mesela yani”, translated by the author). In these jokes, he reveals his coward character, by telling all the fearless actions he could not do as if he did them, which is a full reversal of the actual situation. An example to this is when his co-worker advises Mülâyim to stand up to his boss and ask for a raise, he tells a story about how the boss was afraid of his look, and understood his problem immediately, and gave him a raise without him asking. The audience knows this is not true, since they have seen in the scene before that this is not what happened. At the end of the story, when the co-worker is in shock and admiration, he says, “hypothetically, I mean”, and laughs. Whether the story he tells depends on reality or not does not matter, thanks to the meaninglessness of absurdity. This is because his life unfolds in a different direction anyway, without him having to be brave and stand up for himself, but thanks to the absurd misunderstandings and coincidences. This is also a hybrid moment as it is absurd, since it is not his actions that lead him to have what he wants, but rather abrupt coincidences.

This film, like the above-analysed Baytan-Sunal movies, is full of flaws and mistakes like unmatching audio and visuals, or blurred plans. Even in a shot where only Mülâyim is seen, he is totally out of focus, as can be seen in *Illustration 12*.



Illustration 12 Korkusuz Korkak (Baytan, 1979), a



Illustration 13 Korkusuz Korkak (Baytan, 1979), b

Melek is speaking, yet she is out of focus, in *Illustration 13*. Instead, we see shoulder of the other officer clearly, although this is supposed to be an over the shoulder shot focusing on the other speaking person.

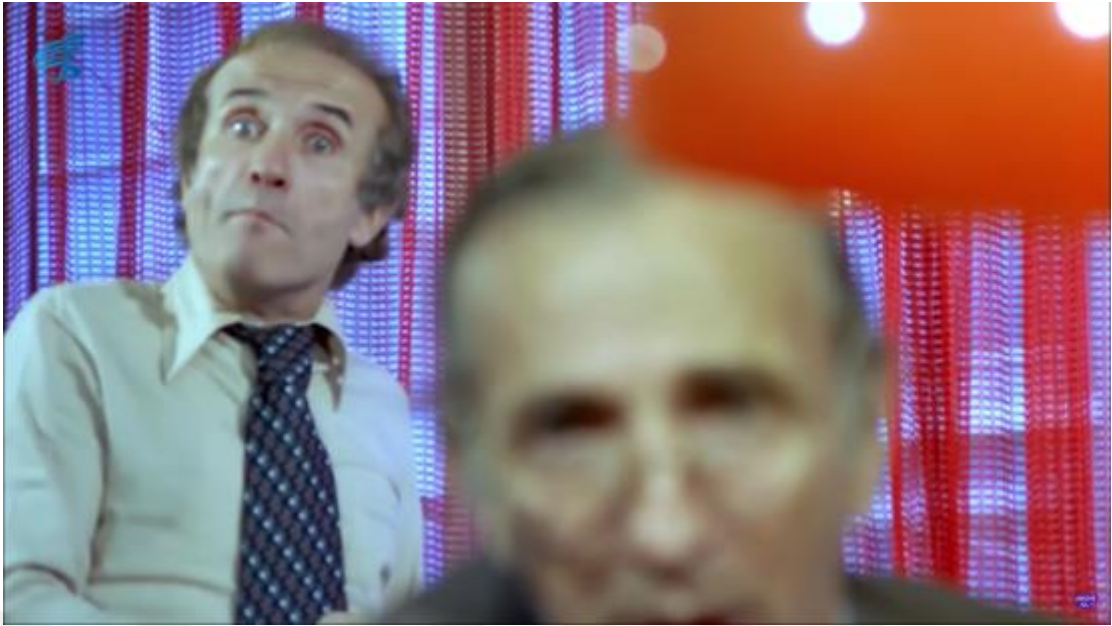


Illustration 14 Korkusuz Korkak (Baytan, 1979), c

Weird angles as in *Illustration 14* are also common in the film. Here it can be seen that more than half of the screen is covered by Mülâyim's co-worker's face which is entirely out of focus and cut under the chin, and half an orange lamp in front of him. On top of that, behind him is the other co-worker who speaks in this plan, and he is also out of focus. Rather, the blinds behind both characters are clearly visible.



Illustration 15 Korkusuz Korkak (Baytan, 1979), d

As can be seen in *Illustration 15*, the shadow of Mülâyim is visible, and these all happen in only one scene, within the time frame of three minutes. These flaws are again signs of fast and low-cost production that the economy of the cinema industry at the time pushed the filmmakers into. However, regardless of the reason behind these moments where the existence of the filmmaker and the camera is reminded to the spectator (intentionally or not), this disruption of the intention of the apparatus is helpful in creating a critical distance for the audience.

This film, as well as the other Baytan-Sunal movies, has influences from both Western and Eastern cinemas. How the protagonist is constantly chased by villains and how he always manages to defeat them, reminds one of action movies of Hollywood. Yet, how he defeats the bad guys is very Eastern, because these moments are all dependent on the synchronicity. The stylistic features also resemble both cinemas, since some action scenes look like Hollywood film scenes, but some, like when Mülâyim saves the neighborhood from the bomb, reminds of Eastern cinemas. As can be seen in *Illustration 16*, the well-choreographed movement of the neighborhood inhabitants as a crowd, when Mülâyim has the bomb in his hand is an element from Eastern cinemas, as discussed above.



Illustration 16 Korkusuz Korkak (Baytan, 1979), e

An absurd and hybrid happening in the movie is when Mülâyim uses the lottery money for building a public toilet. What would make sense, would be for him to use the money from the lottery to live his last months in comfort. Yet, he chooses to fund a public toilet, and even takes out a loan from the bank to complete this project. His loan is due in seven months, so he thinks he is safe since he will supposedly die in six months. In the end of the movie, when he does not die after those six months, the question of how he deals with this debt is unanswered. The lottery-public toilet instance is absurd because Mülâyim chooses to use his money in such a way, and the hybridity comes in when at the end of the movie, where the wrap up is so fast that there remains many unanswered questions.

In the end of the movie, Mülâyim's life depends on flipping a coin. When Kerim, the mafia men, and Mülâyim meet at the same place all together (which is in line with the synchronous understanding of time), and both parties are trying to kill him, he offers to flip a coin. He says that if it is heads, Kerim will kill him, if it is tails, Abbas will, and if it comes perpendicular, he will go away without no one killing him. The absurdity is that a character that wants to stay alive would not bet his

life for the lowest chance. But hybridity lends a helping hand to Mülâyim, and the smallest possibility occurs: the coin lands perpendicular. He does run away, and the men think he cheated so they follow him. Yet, Mülâyim is lucky again because there happens to be a bomb where he runs, and he throws the bomb to the men and survives. Again, everything happens at once and simultaneously, in line with the hybrid mind of Yeşilçam. The wrap up of this move happens in only a few minutes, and lots of questions remain unanswered, such as how he solves problems with the mafia and the bank. This scene is also one where there is a juxtaposition of unexpected characters from different worlds. The assassin, the coward Mülâyim, and the mafia men are not characters that would be realistically together in one scene.

What is unique about *Korkusuz Korkak* among the Baytan-Sunal collection, is that it has explicit socio-political references for the first time. If one digs deeper, the previous films also could be considered to have some political references, yet they do not pass the just-noticeable-difference threshold, to borrow from the terminology of experimental psychologists. As mentioned above in the literature review, these political references which could be considered as criticism have a “hegemonic docile” attitude. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, on the other hand, there are many criticisms of the socio-political situation that affects the daily life of the people. These criticisms would be classified as the more tangible ones, due to the rise of more distinct criticism within comedy overall in Yeşilçam cinema, as identified by Ünal (2018). These instances in the movie can be considered as implicit, yet their presence is ineliminable. One example is in the beginning of the film, when Mülâyim borrows some money from a beggar on the street, saying that he needs the money because of the ‘devaluation’.

Although more implicit, there is also some criticism of the situation of the working class. At Mülâyim's office, while the other officers receive delicious meals for lunch, Mülâyim eats only boiled potatoes, even though he has been working way more than the rest of the officers. The officers, representing the middle class, are not working unless the boss is present. In addition, because Mülâyim is not cunning enough, he does not work for impressing the boss, thus gets a penalty when the boss sees him the only moment when he does nothing. These criticisms may be mild, yet they are central to the plot. This is because the chain of events in the movie starts with the confusion in the hospital and the doctor's refusal to double check the results despite the death of Mülâyim Ters, the older and sick Mülâyim. Instead of thinking that the results may be wrong, the doctor says that it is an insult to the science of medicine when Ters dies. Here, there is a reference to the malfunctioning health system in the country at the time. Another example of a socio-political criticism is when Mülâyim's landlady threatens to sue him for the rent he did not pay. Mülâyim asks, "Will it take six months?", and she says, "Even if it lasts a year, I will take that money" (translated by the author).¹⁸ This moment in the movie could be seen as a subtle criticism of how the legal system is slow. Overall, it is possible to see some mild references to and criticisms of the malfunctioning systems –i.e. law, health, economy- in the country at the time.

5. *Gerzek Şaban / Idiot Şaban (1980)*

¹⁸ Original lines: "Altı ay sürer mi?", "Bir sene de sürse alacağım".

a) Introduction and Plot

Gerzek Şaban (Baytan, 1980) was written by Erdoğan Tünas and produced by Yahya Kılıç and Cumhuriyet Film (“Gerzek Şaban”, IMDb.com, n.d.). It is about the confusion between an actor, Osman, and a mafia boss, Seyfi (both played by Sunal). Their lives get intertwined due to some coincidences, which leads to the series of absurd events coming out of their alike looks.

The movie starts with the shooting scene of a crime action movie, where Osman makes a mistake, ruins scenes that can be done only once, and gets kicked out from the set. Later, as he is walking away from the set, he sees a similar scene on the street, and by interfering, this time he helps the criminal to be caught by the police, by accident, and gets appointed as a watchman (bekçi). Hamdi, the mafia boss, asks for the neighborhood inhabitants to pay for their debts, and they found an association to resist. Osman’s fiancée Lale is the sister of Hamza, a coffeehouse owner, who asks for bride wealth for letting her sister get married to him. Seyfi, a mafia man, who looks exactly like Osman, collects money from people. Osman is expected in the set again as a stuntman, for a fight scene. He accidentally beats the wife of the boss instead of the actress and gets fired. When Osman takes his friends to a restaurant, they confuse him to be Seyfi, and give all Seyfi’s money to Osman. Osman invests this money into the neighborhood association instead of giving it as a bride wealth, and becomes the president. To take revenge, Hamza tells the other mafia men, that Osman took money from the restaurants of their regions, yet they think it is Seyfi who did this, since they look alike. Neighborhood inhabitants plot against Hamza, to make him beat Osman and call the police to get him in jail. Yet, Osman manages to beat Hamza thanks to the black pepper in his eyes, and the police gets Osman instead. Hamza does not press charges, because he wants to defeat him. Seyfi finds out where

Osman is in the meantime, and comes to get him. When Hamza tries to beat Seyfi, Seyfi defeats Hamza, and they mistake him as Osman. Osman starts to get more and more money from the restaurants, acting as Seyfi. The other mafia men beat Seyfi, and when this makes the newspaper, Hamza realises it was not Osman who beat him. Mafia men shoot Seyfi, but he survives and Lale ends up saving him thinking he is Osman. When Seyfi's men find Osman, they make him replace Seyfi to scare the other mafia men. Osman replaces Seyfi and makes the mafia men beat each other, undress in the streets, and makes the news again. They plot for hiring two assassins and inviting him for a birthday dinner to make peace. The assassins shoot each other, so Osman survives. Seyfi beats Hamza and gets his word for allowing Osman and Lale to get married. When Hamdi comes to the neighborhood to get the money from the inhabitants, Osman makes it just in time and pays all their debt. The film crew takes Seyfi to the set, and they finally meet there with Osman and make peace. At the end, Osman beats the wife of the boss again, and gets fired from the film crew for good.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Gerzek Şaban*

The general narrative structure of the absurd comedy is similar to the rest of the movies. Due to the absurd coincidence of people thinking Osman is the mafia boss Seyfi, who looks exactly like Osman, Osman's (the protagonist) life changes. He starts to act like a mafia boss, gets into trouble with Seyfi and Hamza, and defeats Hamdi and other mafia men through changing places with Seyfi whenever he is in trouble.

The opening scene establishes the hybridity and absurdity right at the beginning. *Gerzek Şaban* begins as an action movie: someone running with a bag and a gun, a watchman following him, gunshots. The watchman falls down and the villain

is caught by Sunal's character. He fires his gun, but only a red liquid comes out of the weapon. The director says "cut", which is when the information that they have been shooting a movie is revealed to the audience. The director scolds him for bringing his own gun. As in other Sunal-Baytan films, absurdity comes in as soon as Sunal's character appears on the screen. How this scene resembles a crime action movie from Hollywood hints at the hybridity. Just after this, a bombing scene for the film, which can only be done once, is also ruined by Osman, since he sits on the bomb by accident. This scene adds a particular absurd layer, in a different way than the rest of Baytan-Sunal movies. Here, there is an explicit presentation of the camera within the movie, or the film within the film. The intention of the apparatus, which is to make the audience temporarily forget about the fact that a movie is a fictional story told by someone, is betrayed through the presence of a camera and a film set on the screen.

The sequence after the film shooting scene is one that reveals the synchronous understanding of time that is running throughout the movie. When Osman sees another man running with a gun and a bag, thinking he is in a movie set again (despite the fact that he was fired a moment ago), he plays his part which results in helping the police to catch a real criminal. The policemen thank him for his help, and they believe he has a talent for "smelling crime". They hire him as a watchman due to this, and Osman believes when they hired him as an actor again, still not understanding this was a real crime scene. When he sees the director from the first scene, he runs away from him, which results in helping the police to catch a heroin cartel they have been looking for. Here, a synchronous understanding of time and a Western style causality has merged again. It is synchronous, because the two crime scenes (one movie scene and one real crime event) happen right after one another, and Osman is in the right place at the right time for both. Secondly, a Western way of thinking in causality is

present, since the policemen believe he actually ran after criminals in both instances, while in the first one he was just playing his part, and in the second one he was running away from someone which accidentally led him to the headquarters of a heroin cartel. At the same time, this is an absurd moment as it is a hybrid one, since the two scenes happening exactly in the same way is a slim chance. It is also absurd because Osman catching criminals on act happens not out of necessity, but out of contingency and sheer luck.

Another synchronicity which gives birth to absurdity in *Gerçek Şaban* is Osman and Seyfi looking exactly the same. The way rest of the movie unfolds depends on this look likeness. For instance, when Osman goes instead of Seyfi to the restaurants, the owners think he is Seyfi, so they give him the money. Seyfi gets into trouble instead, and looks for Osman, which is the beginning of the whole series of coincidences.

The protagonist gets to be saved due to his luck, which is another indicator of the fusion of the absurdity and the hybridity in this film. A synchronous coincidence happens when Osman drinks a liquid which he thinks is an invisibility potion. At the exact same moment, Hamza accidentally gets black pepper into his eyes which leads to a temporary blindness, and he cannot see Osman due to this. There is an element of the Western understanding of causality here too, since Osman believes he was not seen by Hamza because of the succession of him drinking invisibility potion and Hamza not seeing him right after. Later when Hamza can see again, he attempts to beat Seyfi this time, which proves as not successful. In all these synchronous moments, Osman is saved thanks to chance.



Illustration 17 Gerzek Şaban (Baytan, 1980), a

Another indicator of the hybridity of this movie are the faulty scenes, or visible storytelling, that are likely caused by the fast and low-cost production. For instance, when Osman is walking with the policemen who want to hire him towards their office, for more than half a minute, all three characters in this film are blurry, as can be seen in *Illustration 17*. In the bombing scene in the beginning of the film, where Osman ruins the set, there seems to be a reference to or a mild criticism of the low budget and the economic crisis for the movies shot at the time, since the director within the movie only gets so angry because they have the time and money to shoot that scene only once. This is another instance where there are hints at criticism towards the crisis Yeşilçam was facing at the time, but it is not deliberate or explicit, since it has been used as an element that aims for the audience to laugh.



Illustration 18 Gerzek Şaban (Baytan, 1980), b



Illustration 19 Gerzek Şaban (Baytan, 1980), c

A crowded crime scene which comes after the out of focus walking scene also resembles Eastern cinemas in a Western kind of crime action scene. In *Illustration 18* and *19*, it is possible to see how a crowd comes out of nowhere in seconds, when they hear a gunshot.

This movie also has some mild references to the worsening socio-political situation in the country. As noted by Ünal (2018), the hegemonic docile attitude of comedy films towards criticism changes in the 1980s towards a more explicit and deliberate criticism. This thread is seen in Baytan-Sunal films too, since the societal issues start to find their place in the subject matter of the films. Hamdi, who is the mafia boss, has distributed land to the neighborhood inhabitants in return for money. As they increase their debt, the neighborhood resists. Another reference is to the rising prices for alcohol. The alcoholic of the neighborhood, “Konyakçı”, accepts Osman’s offer to go out for a dinner on his expenses, since he has not been able to drink for a while due to the increasing prices. Alongside with the meta-critical gaze created by the absurdity and hybridity of the film, there is an increasingly deliberate criticism of societal issues in Baytan-Sunal films towards and throughout the mid-1980s, as can be seen since *Korkusuz Korkak* and *Gerzek Şaban*.

6. *Üç Kağıtçı / Humbug* (1981)

a) Introduction and Plot

Produced by Cumhuriyet Film and Yahya Kılıç, *Üç Kağıtçı* (Baytan, 1981), was written by Natuk Baytan himself (IMDb.com, “Üç Kağıtçı”). In this film, Rıfkı (Sunal) goes back to his village in Turkey from Germany to sell his dead father’s property. He must deal with his rheumatism, the problems of his fellow villagers and his relative who withholds the money.

Having just arrived from Germany, Rıfkı is on his way to his village to claim his heritage. He hitchhikes to the village and bets the driver Hasan that it will rain in half an hour, thanks to his rheumatism. The village needs rain for the crops, so they pay Arif for a rain prayer and Rıfkı tells them it will not. He meets his old lover,

Nuriye, but his father now wants more money for the bride wealth. He also figures out that Sabri has officially took all the property. Riza helps him understand that Sabri has been deceiving Rıfkı. Arif wants to kick him out of the village, claiming it will not rain when Rıfkı is there, but his rheumatism tells Rıfkı that it will rain. He bets Arif and the other villagers this time, about the rain and earns a lot of money. His fame as a holy person gets about the other villages too. Satılmış, who is the mayor candidate for the neighbouring village, threatens the villagers to support him. Hasan, who is from this village, plots for helping Rıfkı get more famous and be a rival candidate. People of the village start going to him for his prayers. Misunderstandings and coincidences lead to the people believing he fixes all problems by “blowing” (üfleemek).¹⁹ Rıfkı becomes a candidate for becoming the mayor of the village, and he is supported by the village thanks to his holiness. Satılmış tries to bribe him to leave the candidacy, but Rıfkı exposes him, and pays the villagers’ debt to him by tricking him and giving the money back to him. Sabri and Satılmış figure out that the crippled person who Rıfkı has ‘healed’ was actually not sick. They find a crippled man, Ahmet, and plot for exposing Rıfkı’s lie by asking him to heal Ahmet. They try to find other ways to reveal that he is not holy, but they cannot manage. He becomes the mayor of the village and uncovers all the swindlers in the village. Since Hasan is one of these people, he gets together with Satılmış and tries to defeat Rıfkı again. By secretly adding medicine to his tea and healing his rheumatism, they plot for revealing that he is not a holy person but just a man with rheumatism. Yet, they fail, and the villagers still love him, since he solves their actual issues. An angel he sees in his dream tells Rıfkı that he will die soon because he is a good person. He tries to not help people but ends up helping them anyway. He announces this news to the village,

¹⁹ In Turkish, “üfleemek” means to pray for someone, but Rıfkı literally blows instead.

and says goodbye to them all, but does not die on time. A professor convinces him to tell the village he is not a saint but just a man with rheumatism. He does and resigns from mayorship. The swindlers and the other villagers convince him to get back to his post, because he is a good man regardless of his holiness.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Üç Kağıtçı*

The narrative structure common to all Baytan-Sunal films can be seen in *Üç Kağıtçı* as well. Rıfkı discovers he can trick people by guessing when it will rain, which changes the course of his life (disruption of the equilibrium), gets into trouble with the evil mayor candidate from the other village, Satılmış, and defeats him through revealing he is a fraud after an angel in his dream tells that he will die soon (restoration of the equilibrium). As always, what makes this narrative structure is not the equilibrium-disruption-restoration cycle, but the transitions from stage to stage through coincidences and misunderstandings.

How Rıfkı becomes a holy person in the villagers' eyes escalates in an absurd, synchronous way and very quickly, which hints at the unique hybridity of Yeşilçam Cinema. Just because Rıfkı can tell when it will rain because of his rheumatism, the villagers think he is a holy person. Right after, they start going to him for his prayers. As an “ugly”²⁰ woman asks for Rıfkı to pray for her to get married despite her ugliness, Hamza, who was in jail for ten years for killing his ex-wife, gets back to the village. Just at the right time, and at the right place, which is in front of Rıfkı's place, Hamza says, “I will marry the first ugly woman I encounter”.²¹ As the woman leaves Rıfkı's place, he bumps into Hamza, who asks for her hand right away. Her mom

²⁰ Of course, this judgement is not the author's, but she is labeled as “ugly” in the movie.

²¹ Original line: “Karşıma çıkan ilk çirkin kadınla evleneceğim”.

believes this is Rıfkı's doing. Following this, a man who pretends to be crippled stands up from his wheelchair and walks, after Rıfkı "blows" him. The successive happening of these two incidents, which are synchronous and based on misunderstandings and coincidences, establishes his position as the village saint. When another man who really cannot walk, Ahmet, is brought to Rıfkı to reveal his lies by some villagers who do not believe him, Ahmet sees his toy snake on the ground, and starts walking too. Everyone believes he is a holy person, thinking Rıfkı healed him. All these happen thanks to the absurd –namely contingent– synchronicity.

Examples of other absurd moments are as following. When an angel comes in Rıfkı's dream, and tells him that God will want the people he likes next to him, Rıfkı starts acting in a mischievous way to stop being a person God likes. Yet, as he tries to impede this man's walking, he ends up helping the man instead. This is out of contingency, hence is absurd. The scene when Rıfkı says farewell to the neighborhood because he believes he will die the day after, and how he joins a prequel of his own funeral is also absurd. He eats his own halva, and gets measured for his burial robe and his coffin while he is still alive. He even stops a fight about who will carry his dead body.



Illustration 20 Üç Kağıtçı (Baytan, 1981), a

This film does not have many significant flaws like mismatching sound and audio or blurry plans, as the previous Baytan-Sunal films, apart from a few as can be seen in *Illustration 20*. Yet, the clash of the Eastern synchronicity and the Western understanding of causality still bears the hybridity, which is inseparable from the absurdity as discussed above. In this film too, the well-choreographed crowded scenes as can be seen in *Illustration 21 and 22*, resemble the Eastern cinemas.



Illustration 21 Üç Kağıtçı (Baytan, 1981), b



Illustration 22 Üç Kağıtçı (Baytan, 1981), c

7. *Yedi Bela Hüsnü / Seven Trouble Hüsnü* (1982)

a) Introduction and Plot

Yedi Bela Hüsnü (Baytan, 1982) was produced by Yahya Kılıç and Cumhuriyet Film, written by Ahmet Üstel (“Yedi Bela Hüsnü”, IMDb.com, n.d.). It is a movie about how Husnu is mistaken as a rowdy, and attempts to save his neighborhood from being deported.

A postman brings letters from Malik to all the neighborhood inhabitants. The letters ask them to evacuate their shops, because Malik wants to have a construction there. Mrs. Makbule is the owner of the shops, and he is indebted to Malik. Hüsnü is in love with Hüсниye, he follows her everywhere and goes after anyone who would leer at her, but Hüсниye is not interested in him. Cemal helps Hüsnü to figure out ways to woo Hüсниye. Malik and his men come to the neighbourhood to threaten the shop owners, yet they refuse to leave. As a way to get back to Hüsnü, Cemal offers help to the shop owners for money, to figure out a way to defeat Malik. Cemal persuades Hüsnü that he can be a rowdy, and presents him to the inhabitants as a powerful man that can save their neighbourhood. He tells Hüsnü that Hüсниye may commit suicide

because of Malik, and convinces him to confront Malik as “Yedi Bela Hüsni” (Seven Trouble Hüsni). In the tavern owned by Malik, Cemal arranges a man to be beaten by Hüsni to trick Malik’s men into thinking that he is a rowdy. When he goes back to the neighbourhood, he is welcomed as a hero, which results in Hüsniye falling in love with him. Malik plots for setting the most powerful rowdy of Istanbul, Karamürselli Hamdi, on Hüsni, by telling Hamdi that Hüsni is a powerful rival that may be more powerful than him. When Hüsni confronts Hamdi as there is no one to see, thanks to soapy water on the ground, Hamdi is beaten by his own clumsiness. Malik asks a bomber to insert a bomb in a pear so that they can offer it to Hüsni. They invite them over under the cover of a peace offering. Yet, nothing happens when he eats the pear, because the bomber places the bomb in an apple instead of a pear, which explodes in Malik’s hand, which makes it impossible for him to sign the documents for getting Makbule’s shops. Kız Ismet is another rowdy from another city, whom they call this time for defeating Hüsni. Makbule organizes a party at her place for the shop owners, and Ismet sneaks in dressed as a woman just after Hüsni asks for Hüsniye’s hand from her father, claiming ‘she’, Necla, was his old lover. They tango, and Hüsniye leaves Hüsni because of this. Ismet runs after Hüsni with a knife, but he also fails to defeat Hüsni thanks to a policeman passing by. Finally, Malik kidnaps Hüsniye. Hüsni defeats all his men by being in the right place at the right time, and finally, he brings Hüsniye back to the neighborhood, together with Malik who he turns over to the police.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Yedi Bela Hüsni*

As in other Baytan-Sunal movies, this movie also starts with a change in the protagonist’s life, yet the change is more subtle compared to the the movies before.

Hüsnü becomes a fake rowdy due to a chain of coincidences, and gets into trouble with the villain, Malik. Despite Malik's attempts to defeat him with the help of the most powerful rowdies of the country, he ends up being saved and defeats them through being at the right place at the right time.

Next to the absurdity of the common plots, there are other absurd moments in *Yedi Bela Hüsnü*. For instance, when Hüsnü sings for Hüsniye, people think he is a beggar and gives his money because he opens his hands on the street. This is an absurd instance because it is born out of contingency, because Hüsnü is not necessarily a beggar. Also, when he speaks with a dog about what troubles him, he does a rehearsal of how he would declare his love to Hüsniye. The people passing by think he is in love with the dog. They shame him for having an affair with a dog. Later, when Hüsnü does the same speech to Hüsniye, on the same bench in the street, the same woman who shamed him before passes by, and shames him again. This coincidence is both absurd and synchronous, because it is a little possibility that the same woman would be there in both instances, yet contingency is ruled neither by the principles of possibility, nor by the causality of necessity.

A series of misunderstandings, coincidences and synchronicities lead to Malik's men and the neighborhood inhabitants believing Hüsnü is a powerful man. One example is when Hüsnü goes to Malik's tavern with some men from the neighborhood, looking for Malik. The man hired by Cemal goes in-between, and says he will beat Hüsnü, because Cemal told him to pretend being beaten by Hüsnü. He first takes a hit from Hüsnü, and acting like he is going backwards due to the hit, and takes down the two men of Malik with his two arms. The man makes it look like it was Hüsnü who beat them. Then, when he lets Hüsnü defeat himself, the neighborhood men and the mafia are persuaded that he is a powerful rowdy. Again,

due to a succession of events arranged by the protagonist in order to trick the mafia men, they create an illusion of causality

As Baytan and Sunal kept making movies together, the absurdity was present but faded compared to the first films in this movie. Some synchronous happenings have more explanations behind them compared to the films before. In this film, for instance, Cemal is behind arranging the misunderstandings. However, there are still moments of absurd synchronicities, like when one of Malik's men hides from Hüsni to sneak upon him, yet he ends up shooting himself by accident because he falls, and the neighborhood believes he was the one defeating him, and rumors spread as such. Therefore, although some coincidences have more Western style causal explanations, there are still hybrid absurdities.

When Hüsni confronts Karamürselli Hamdi, he stays in the coffeehouse while everyone is running away from him, but this is only because of Hüsni's courage of ignorance. Thanks to the soapy water on the ground, Hamdi's foot slips, he hits his head on the wall, then falls on the table. People outside think that the noises are Hamdi beating Hüsni, yet when Hamdi comes out of the coffeehouse, he falls down, and Hüsni walks out after him. Just as in *Sahte Kabadayı*, because the crowd was not there to see the rowdy's own clumsiness defeating himself, they believe it was Sunal's character who defeated the rowdy. Similarly, at the end, when Malik kidnaps Hüsniye. Just as in *Avanak Apti*, Hüsni defeats the men by opening doors at the right time or moving a stick just when someone was behind him. Synchronicity saves the day.



Illustration 23 Yedi Bela Hüsnü (Baytan, 1982), a

As in the other movies of Baytan and Sunal, there are some flaws that show that these films were made quickly with low budget. *Illustration 22* demonstrates an instance, where the lighting is not adjusted for inside the minibus, and the characters are completely out of focus. Well-choreographed crowded scenes are seen in this movie as well. When Cemal speaks to the neighborhood people in a coffeehouse, he walks among them. Yet, despite his movement, the men are almost always visible, as can be seen in *Illustrations 24 and 25*.



Illustration 24 Yedi Bela Hüsni (Baytan, 1982), b



Illustration 25 Yedi Bela Hüsni (Baytan, 1982), c

8. *Tokatçı / Swindler* (1983)

a) Introduction and Plot

Written by Suphi Tekniner, *Tokatçı* (Baytan, 1983), was produced by Yahya Kılıç and Cem Film (“Tokatçı”, IMDb.com, n.d.). On his way back from Istanbul - where Osman (Sunal) went to earn the bride price for the daughter of his village’s landowner-, he gets robbed and meets an old friend who teaches him how to swindle.

Osman is an agricultural worker in Hasan Ağa’s land. Osman asks for a raise in his payment, since he wants to marry the landowner’s daughter, but Hasan Ağa does not consent to this marriage. He asks for a lot of money as bride’s wealth. After a failed attempt of eloping with her, Osman moves to Istanbul to earn the money. After months of hard work and austerity, he finally manages to gather all the money needed. He gets on the train back home, yet there are swindlers in the train, and

Osman sits next to them. By constantly yawning in front of him, they make him go to sleep and get his money. He realises this once he gives a sack full of newspaper pieces to Hasan Ağa, which the swindlers replaced the money with. In return, he takes his father's land from him, and Osman becomes a bandit and tries to elope and fails again. He meets his old friend Cevdet, who teaches him how to swindle, despite Osman's inability to understand how swindling works. Together, they attempt to swindle rich people. They get Arif's bag full of money and sell Kara Erol a bag of bicarbonate telling him it is heroin, and then playing a tape recording of a police raid. Due to their conversation at the end of the police raid tape, Erol uncovers their swindling. As they are trying to trick Veysel, another rowdy, in a hotel, because he is in Italy, the receptionist calls Erol. This time, real policemen arrive at the hotel, and they steal Erol's bag full of money again. With all the money they got through swindling, they go back to Osman's village, so that he can marry Emine. In the end, Cevdet and Osman swindle Hasan Ağa again, pretending Cevdet is a state officer. Hasan sells all the village land to Osman, thinking he is getting rid of the land which will bring a lot of tax debt. Hasan Ağa figures out the trick, yet it is too late. Osman distributes the land to the villagers and announces that he will marry Emine.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Tokatçı*

In *Tokatçı*, the protagonist's life changes when he meets an old friend who teaches him tricks for swindling people (disruption of the equilibrium). Osman gets involved with the mafia by swindling a mafia boss called Kara Erol, through selling him bicarbonate instead of heroin. He manages to defeat the mafia through being lucky, since a police raid takes place just when he needs to run away (restoration of the equilibrium). Here, one can see that the narrative pattern is similar to the rest of

the movies, since the protagonist's life changes, then he gets involved with the mafia, and defeats them through absurd coincidences.

As it is common in most Baytan-Sunal films, absurdity is introduced to the film right away when Sunal's character appears on the screen for the first time. In *Tokatçı*, the opening scene depicts Osman, riding a donkey in reverse. He says, to the woman who leads the donkey, "Emine, why is the head of the donkey on the wrong side?"²² To the audience, what is in reverse is clearly Sunal's character, but he claims that the donkey's head is in the wrong side, despite the direction they are moving towards, the place of the tail, where Emine is placed etc. As pointed out by Sunal (1998) himself regarding his Saban character, here can be seen that this character, through ignoring the dominant order all together, has a comic anarchic attitude. It makes no sense at all, and this moment is not in continuity with the next scene. This absurd moment serves as a foreshadowing that more absurdities are to come throughout the movie.

As promised, other absurd moments occur in the film. Although it is not in his interest, Osman says he will pay more than Emine's father asks for, because he thinks Emine is worth more money. Her father, Hasan Ağa asks for 250.000 liras, and Osman says, Emine is worth at least 550.000 liras, while he does not even have the money Hasan asked for in the first place. Then, when Osman's father warns him about being careful with increasing the amount of money, he says that 550.000 liras is also not enough for a woman as beautiful as Emine, it should be 600.000. In the end, he ends up having to pay almost three times the money Hasan Ağa asked for. This does not make sense at all, but absurdity, as discussed above, is not ruled by necessity. When Osman attempts to elope with Emine, Hasan masquerades as Emine

²² Original line: "Emine, bu esegin basi niye ters tarafta?"

and goes with him instead, to bust him on act. How he cannot recognise his lover and can confuse her with her father does not make sense as well.

Absurdity is also seen in the form of silliness of Sunal's character, which could be considered as absurd based on above-mentioned analysis of Sartre regarding the connection of absurdity and silliness that comes out from the contingency. For instance, when Cevdet tries to teach Osman how to win money in a poker game through teaching, although Cevdet tells him about the tricks, Osman still does not understand how the trick works, and reveals the cards Cevdet has been hiding. He does this not because he wants to stop him from cheating, but because he believes Cevdet deserves more money due to more cards he has. Another silly and absurd instance like this is when they go to Veysel's hotel, and Osman cannot go in through the revolving door. Cevdet has to take him out, because he cannot figure out how this works. Similar silly instances were seen in *Sakar Şakir* too, when Şakir could not understand how the shower or the wash closet function.

As in all the other Baytan-Sunal movies, how the plot unfolds in *Tokatçı* depends on the synchronous moments. When Hasan finds Emine and Osman in the samanlık, he silently enters the room, Emine stands up in fear without saying anything, and she leaves the room. Hasan sits in her place. Thanks to the way they were sitting, which was back-to-back, Osman does not see this replacement, and keeps complaining about Hasan Ağa. When he holds his hand, he realises it's not a woman's hand, and then turns his head to see it was Hasan Ağa. Another example is the scene where Osman goes into the compartment of the swindlers, just when the swindlers in the train were complaining about there being no silly people that they can trick. He also tells them he has six hundred thousand liras, which leads to the family stealing his money. The rest of the plot depends on the moment Osman happens to

come in just when the swindlers were looking for someone with money. This scene also has symptoms of the fast and low-cost production. As can be seen in *Illustration 26*, when the family yawns excessively to make Osman sleepy to steal his money, no one on the screen is in focus. Together with all the characters being out of focus not making sense, how all the family exaggerates their yawning is also absurd.



Illustration 26 Tokatçı (Baytan, 1983), a

As Cevdet is trying to teach Osman how to swindle, he takes him together to several missions in a row. When they are trying to steal Arif's bag full of money, Osman keeps getting the wrong man's bag, since he looks at the other side just at the exact moment Arif leaves and another man comes in his place. Finally, when he manages to get Arif's bag into their special suitcase that swallows other bags, Arif picks it up and leaves. Yet, because the bag does not look like Arif's bag, he gives it to Osman willingly, thinking his own bag is elsewhere. Again, despite the silliness of the protagonist, because coincidences happen in a synchronous way, and in his advantage, Osman gets what he wants.

In the scene where Osman and Cevdet sell bicarbonate as heroin to Kara Erol, they act like Cevdet is from China, and Osman speaks to him in gibberish, claiming it

is Chinese. Cevdet wears a kimono over his everyday shirt, and this is supposed to trick Erol into thinking he is from China. The beginning of their dialogues is as follows: Osman says “Selaminko”, and Cevdet replies “Aleminko”. To a Turkish audience, these words are obviously morphed versions of greetings in Turkish. The rest of their speeches are also based on Turkish sentences, with each word having an additional suffix in the end which makes the word sound like it is from an Asian language. Yet, Kara Erol does not question this situation. It is not even necessary that they pretend that Osman’s sidekick is from China for them to be tricked. Nevertheless, as in situations like this in the rest of the movies, absurdity is never ruled by necessity.

In this movie, there are some underlying socio-political references as well, in line with the increasing tendency for deliberate societal criticism of Yeşilçam comedy movies in the 1980s (Ünal, 2018). Hasan Ağa being a landowner and making the villagers work for just food and shelter, how Osman must migrate to the city to earn money, and how there are swindlers in the city are examples to these. Although these issues are not treated in detail, they are still present next to the element of comedy, which is inherently critical through the absurd distance.

9. *Atla Gel Şaban / Come, Şaban* (1984)

a) Introduction and Plot

Atla Gel Şaban (Baytan, 1984) was produced by Yahya Kılıç and Cem Film in 1984, written by Aydemir Akbaş and Osman Şahin (“Atla Gel Şaban”, IMDb.com, n.d.). In this film Niyazi (Sunal) discovers that he is successful in guessing which horse will win the horse races, and Kazım detains him to get rich.

In his dream, Niyazi leaves home to run away from his debtors in his neighborhood, who end up killing him because of the money he owes them. When he wakes up, he tries to figure out ways to avoid them. In work, as a copywriter, he is also in trouble since he cannot write happy poems. He pays his debts with his paycheck, which leaves the family very little money for the rest of the month. In the meantime, he catches the shop owners doing fraud to earn more money. The horse-race mafia men arrive in their neighborhood's coffeehouse to collect money for the horse race debts, just after Niyazi comes in too. Niyazi gets involved when a fight starts, but because police arrives just in time, they let him go. As his family pressure him for not earning enough money, he decides to bet for horse race too, but he does not play his coupon. People in the crowded minibus he rides every day, who are also his muse, try to convince him to play. One day, when he sits behind Kazim's man, who is the head of the horse-race mafia, and guesses the outcomes of all the races correctly, they discover Niyazi has a talent. They detain him and make him play coupons to earn money, but his muse is missing. All the men of mafia do a mis-en-scene of a minibus in the house of the mafia, and this helps him guess the outcome of the races right. After Niyazi proves that he can guess it right, he gives them the wrong answers as a way to get revenge for detaining him. Instead, he plays the correct bet, and he wins the money. Going back to his neighbourhood, he gives money to all the people in need, and finally can support his family.

i. Absurdity and Hybridity in *Atla Gel Şaban*

Niyazi's life changes when he discovers he can guess the horse race outcomes right, as long as he is in a minibus (disruption of the equilibrium). He gets involved with the mafia when the mafia boss discovers his talent. Later, he is saved because he

gives them the wrong guesses just after he proves his talent to them (restoration of the equilibrium). Therefore, the common narrative structure of the Baytan-Sunal movies discussed above is seen here too.

The name of the movie, “Atla Gel Şaban”, has two meanings in Turkish. The colloquial meaning is “Come, Şaban”, but another meaning could be “Come with a horse, Şaban”. The dual meaning of the name reveals the absurd comedy featured in the movie. Şaban is not the name of the protagonist in *Atla Gel Şaban*, but the name of the iconic Sunal character, who is known to be silly and clumsy. Traces from this character can be seen throughout the movies of Baytan and Sunal. The clumsiness and silliness of the Şaban character, which is seen in these movies, is often what causes absurdities in the first place.

As it is commonly seen in other Baytan-Sunal movies, absurdity is introduced right away as Sunal’s character is seen on the screen. The film opens with views from the hippodrome, and men placing bets for horse races. When we see Niyazi for the first time, he is leaving home to run away from his debtors. As he is leaving, he leaves gifts for his sons while they are sleeping. He gives one of them a pen, and says “it runs like a watch, tik tok”.²³ He offers a watch to the other one, and says the same thing, and then realises that the gift is already a watch, and laughs about it. This joke does not make much sense, since he should know he is giving a watch as a gift, but he finds it funny anyway. Turns out, all the running away was a dream.

²³ Original line: “Saat gibi işler, tıkr tıkr”.



Illustration 27 Atla Gel Şaban (Baytan, 1984), a

A very absurd scene is when Niyazi is trying to avoid his debtors, as he attempts to camouflage himself while passing by these people. To do so, he wears a helmet, a mask, and metal home utensils, as can be seen in *Illustration 27*. This is a silly move in the setting of the neighbourhood, because he draws more attention to himself due to his strange clothing. As he passes by the butcher, he comes and speaks to him, but does not recognise Niyazi. Even though his camouflage does not make sense, and even though he should be attracting more attention to himself, somehow, Niyazi's affairs go well, thanks to the absurdity and the hybridity which is due to synchronicity. Another example is when Kazim's men find Niyazi and try to torture him to figure out where he gets the information. Their torture does not work on him. As they hit his feet with a stick, he only gets tickly. Although Niyazi does not create the circumstances for saving himself, he ends up being saved thanks to his silliness or coincidences anyway. Hence, he gets saved not because he necessitates it, but because of contingency.



Illustration 28 Atla Gel Şaban (Baytan, 1984), b

This film has a layer of absurdity on the level of character choices, where the absurd character juxtapositions is more emphasised compared to the movies Baytan and Sunal made together until this one. The serious mafia men end up in situations that they never would, if it was not for the absurdity introduced to their lives by Sunal's character. Next to the absurdity of a common man like Niyazi ending up with mafia men, the absurd situations mafia men find themselves in adds to the absurdity of the movie through character choices. The mafia men have to create a mis-en-scene of a minibus for Niyazi's muse, since this will help him guess the outcome of the horse race correctly. In their first attempt, he guesses five of the results, but the sixth turns out to be wrong. He needs a specific song, the gossiping lady and the smelly man all together to guess everything right, as can be seen in *Illustration 27*. But this also does not work, so they bring a real minibus to create a situation as close to the real minibus environment as possible, as in *Illustration 29 and 30*. These are quite absurd, since very serious mafia men are juxtaposed in such an absurd situation that they would normally not be seen in, just for Niyazi's superstition. Also, how they bring a minibus into a house instead of just letting him take a real minibus does not

make sense, since the latter would be much easier. Nevertheless, this method works, and he guesses the outcomes right.



Illustration 29 *Atla Gel Şaban* (Baytan, 1984), c



Illustration 30 *Atla Gel Şaban* (Baytan, 1984), d

In *Atla Gel Saban*, synchronicity saves Niyazi from his own silliness. Niyazi enters an argument with the mafia men who collect debts in the neighborhood coffeehouse. Although he has nothing to do with this man, he speaks with them and gets into trouble, but he is saved thanks to the police officer entering the coffeehouse at the right moment. However, his silliness is also what makes him end up in absurd situations like having to guess the outcome of the horse race in a mafia headquarter, where a mis-en-scene of a minibus is made. Just when Niyazi wears jokey's clothes to run away from his wife, he is taken by the owner of a horse to the race. Due to his lack of knowledge for how to ride a horse, his horse runs in reverse, and then throws him off his back, right next to Kazim, who was also looking for him.



Illustration 31 Atla Gel Şaban (Baytan, 1984), e

As in other Baytan-Sunal movies, some flaws indicate that the movies were made fast with little budget. In *Illustration 31* for instance, the men enter from the hallway, but they are fully blurred. Instead, the man on the lower right corner is in perfect focus. In such a crowded scene, the focus would be very important for steering the attention of the audience. Despite the bad focus, the crowd is very well-placed and choreographed as always, and as a result this scene resembles the Eastern cinemas. The double-sided hybridity here creates a deeper absurdity, which allows for the critical distance for the audience to be created. In addition, in some scenes, when there is no dialogue, the sound is completely omitted. The environmental sounds are not heard. It seems like the filmmakers did not have the source for shooting a scene again, taking time to check the focus, or make sure that the sound recordings are correct.

There are socio-political references in this movie too. How the shop owners trick the customers for paying more is one example. Another is when Niyazi cannot work as a copywriter for happy poems, since he cannot get his mind off the expensive

prices. These references are in line with the tendency of a louder criticism in the 1980s.

10. *Tarzan Rıfkı / Tarzan Rıfkı* (1986)

a) Introduction and Plot

In 1986, Baytan-Sunal duo makes their last film together named *Tarzan Rıfkı* (Baytan, 1986) shortly before the death of Natuk Baytan. This film was written by Natuk Baytan himself, and produced by Yahya Kılıç and the production company Cem Film (“Tarzan Rıfkı”, IMDb.com, n.d.). It is about Rıfkı (Sunal), a clumsy man who thinks he is Tarzan and becomes a mafia member accidentally.

Rıfkı, who works in the neighborhood coffeehouse, is in love with Gül who he wants to marry. She wants him to rent a flat before they get married, but the rents are expensive. The neighborhood inhabitants want to help him to prevent him losing his mind, so they build him a shed in the forest. When the shed breaks down, this drives him crazy and he starts yelling as Tarzan. A gang of rich young men invades some land of the neighborhood, and the inhabitants try to fight them. When they cannot defeat them, they plot for setting Tarzan Rıfkı on them. “Şişko”, the man who sold Rıfkı his ropes, does not believe that he is a Tarzan, and he asks Rıfkı to call a lion to prove he is Tarzan. As Rıfkı is waiting for meeting a girl with a rose on his collar, mafia men come to pick up Rıfat who was supposed to have a rose too, so they get the wrong guy. They figure out their mistake when they see the news of the real Rıfat killing a woman in a forest. Yet, since they revealed a lot of information to him, they let him think that the mafia boss Abdullah’s lover, Melahat, is his daughter that will marry Rıfkı. They arrange a fake engagement. Abdullah gets, jealous, and this time they plot for Kerpeten Hüsnü to defeat Tarzan Rıfkı, who was involved with another

rowdy named Tarzan before. They tell Rıfkı that Melahat was kidnapped by Hüsnü, so he goes there to save her. When Husnu realises Abdullah sent Tarzan, he beats him to take revenge. This time, Abdullah plans for Palabıyık Rocky to kidnap Melahat this time, so that Tarzan Rıfkı will try to save her and be defeated by Palabıyık this time. Rıfkı comes in just after the police captain who is after Palabıyık, so he cannot defend himself when Rıfkı beats him in his presence. Just when Abdullah thought Tarzan was dead, he comes back. This time, they attempt to make him get jailed for heroin trafficking, yet he gets saved again. Finally, during the wedding of Melahat and Rıfkı, they place heroin in a jacket they think he will wear, which ends up on Abdullah. When they call the police to get Rıfkı arrested, they arrest Abdullah, Melahat and all the other mafia men instead. In the end, he gets together with Gül again.

b) Absurdity and Hybridity in *Tarzan Rıfkı*

The narrative pattern of equilibrium-disruption-restoration of the protagonist's life changing, him getting involved with the mafia and then defeating them absurdly is seen in *Tarzan Rıfkı* as well. Rıfkı starts living like Tarzan when he cannot find a place to rent for getting married, due to the expensiveness of the rents (disruption of the equilibrium). He gets involved with the mafia when they get him instead of Rıfat, because of a rose in his collar. Thanks to his luckiness, the mafia men get arrested when their plan against Rıfkı backfires (restoration of the equilibrium).

To begin with, it is absurd that in this movie a grown man is living like Tarzan but also running a coffeehouse in the city. The way Rıfkı becomes Tarzan is a reference to the economic situation in the country, since he goes crazy because of the expensive prices for renting a house. A unique absurd and hybrid moment occurs when a man from the neighborhood asks Rıfkı to call a lion to prove his Tarzan-ness.

Not a sensible request, but absurdity comes in, and the lion actually comes. The way this film portrays the lion's arrival is absurd and hybrid at the same time. First, a donkey arrives, after Rıfkı yells out. Then, as they were laughing at Rıfkı, a lion follows the donkey. The editing of the lion scene reveals that the lion was never there at the same time with the characters. The lion is seen in a close-up shot, with no reference to it being there (see *Illustration 32*), and then there is a cut to a shot of the afraid people (see *Illustration 33*). This reminds one, of the editing theory of the Russian director and cinema theorist Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein (1949) claims that if an image is shown after an image in a film, the audience will assume a connection. Although clearly the lion plans were either shot elsewhere or taken from a documentary movie, since they were edited together, they make an impression that the lion was there. Turns out, this was another synchronous moment. A lion ran away from a circus nearby, right at the same time when Tarzan Rıfkı called a lion.



Illustration 32 Tarzan Rıfkı (Baytan, 1986), a



Illustration 33 Tarzan Rıfkı (Baytan, 1986), b

There are absurd instances in this movie, as in all Baytan-Sunal collaboration movies. One occurs when Rıfkı places an advertisement on the newspaper, saying he is Tarzan and looking for his Jane. He gets letters from women, and this makes Gül angry. Another absurd moment is when Rıfkı attempts to kiss the back of the neck of his father-in-law, because it is “thick”. This is a joke that refers to the saying “ensesi kalın”, in Turkish, which means someone is rich, yet it literally translates to “the back of his neck is thick”. Hence, because he takes the saying literally, he finds it normal, wanting to kiss the back of the neck of a man he just met. This, as all the other absurd moments, does not make sense, yet absurdity is never ruled by necessity. Other examples are Rıfkı jumping out the windows when he is leaving places, or when he thinks the mafia men do not want to speak to him when they are tied to chairs with their mouths taped. A silly absurd instance is when Rıfkı is sent to the police by Abdullah, to sell them a product called “eroinsaf” (literally translates to heroinpure). He does not question this at all, and he is not afraid to go to the police with what seems to be heroin, yet he is saved anyway.



Illustration 34 Tarzan Rıfkı (Baytan, 1986), c

The “Tarzan-style Engagement” scene is a hybrid and an absurd one at the same time, where the unexpected character juxtapositions in an unusual setting is at its height. As in *Atla Gel Şaban*, the absurdity is in how serious mafia men end up in forest clothes, as seen in *Illustration 34*. The hybridity comes in when this is considered as an adaptation of the original Tarzan story. The original Tarzan is neither a Turkish story, nor a city story, but it is adapted into a Turkish setting as such. As can be seen in *Illustration 35*, the buildings can be seen behind the forest, and the Tarzan costumes are fused with the common Turkish men’s clothes of the time, like the white undershirt of the father, and Rıfkı’s typical shirt and hat. Furthermore, the horns on the headpiece of Abdullah is a joke with word play which has been implemented into the costume. In Turkish, when one is “cuckolded” the term for this is “boynuzlanmak”, which literally means “getting horns”. The joke is that Rıfkı is about to have sex with Abdullah’s lover while he is wearing horns.



Illustration 35 Tarzan Rıfkı (Baytan, 1986), d

A synchronous understanding of time which is influenced by the Western understanding of causality also governs the plot of *Tarzan Rıfkı*. The way Rıfkı ends up messing with the mafia is due to a coincidence and a misunderstanding. The mafia is looking for a man called Maniac Rıfat, who was supposed to be picked up by the mafia men, while wearing a rose on his collar. Yet, just a few moments before Rıfat, Rıfkı comes to the same spot, waiting for a woman with a rose on his collar, due to a coincidence. The mafia men mistake Rıfkı as Rıfat, and they take him instead, while the woman that would meet Rıfkı meets Rıfat instead. After they take Rıfkı, although he speaks about a wedding with a girl, the mafia understand it as a metaphor for killing someone. It is synchronous, because all these coincidences happen simultaneously in the right place and at the right time, which lead to misunderstandings. It is influenced by the Western thinking on causality, since the reason why they mistake Rıfat as Rıfkı in the first place is because he is a man with a rose on his collar, standing at the place Rıfat is expected to be. The way he defeats the mafia men is also thanks to the synchronicity. Although the mafia was plotting to get

Rıfkı arrested with heroin in his pockets, since Abdullah ends up wearing the jacket intended for Rıfkı, he and the others get arrested in the end.



Illustration 36 Tarzan Rıfkı (Baytan, 1986), e

The last film of Baytan and Sunal does not have easily recognisable flaws which create a feeling of alienation like the others, yet as a hybridity element, there are scenes where the apparatus is used against its intention. The camera, according to its ideology based on the apparatus theory, is supposed to shoot in a way that its aim is not to be recognised as a shooting device with an intention, but to be hidden as it is a natural process. Yet, in scenes like *Illustration 36*, the presence of camera is not easily forgotten. This is because the camera follows the men walking together, without cuts, in a continuous shot, for about a minute. Hence, despite the lack of noticeable flaws, this movie still bears a hybrid style due to not fitting in with the intention of the apparatus.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Film director Natuk Baytan and actor Kemal Sunal made ten absurd comedies together between the years 1976 and 1986. The ten films made by Baytan and Sunal (namely *Sahte Kabadayı*, *Sakar Şakir*, *Avanak Apti*, *Korkusuz Korkak*, *Gerzek Şaban*, *Üç Kağıtçı*, *Yedi Bela Hüsnü*, *Tokatçı*, *Atla Gel Şaban*, *Tarzan Rıfkı*) were absurd comedies. The absurdity of these movies was inherently tied to the hybrid characteristic of Yeşilçam Cinema. The hybrid aesthetics, which was at its height in the 1970s and the 1980s due to the issues Yeşilçam faced, in relation to the turbulent sociopolitical context of Turkey of the era, highlighted the absurdity of the ten Baytan-Sunal movies. In other words, these films are the product of a combination of hybridity and absurdity.

For Yeşilçam Cinema, the 1970s and the 1980s were an era of the rising competition with the television, which was supported by the state unlike the cinema industry. The bad economic situation and the lack of a strong foundation for the industry led to fast and low-cost productions, and harsh criticism on the part of film critics. Despite these struggles, many filmmakers including Baytan kept making movies. Nevertheless, this situation resonated in the movies they produced, and the sociopolitical context of Yeşilçam and Turkey has manifested itself in Baytan-Sunal comedies as absurd and hybrid aesthetics.

Absurdity and hybridity in Baytan-Sunal movies appear on three levels: narrative structure, character choices and stylistic choices. The ten movies made together by Baytan and Sunal have an abundance of absurd and hybrid moments, most often tied together. First of all, the fact that each film imitates each other is already a unique way to imitate. Hybridity of Yeşilçam refers to the unique imitative function of Yeşilçam Cinema. Through mimicking Western action films with Eastern

interpretations, Yeşilçam Cinema, and Baytan-Sunal movies in particular, create a unique way to adapt and mimic. The fusion of the two different ways of thinking, with an abundance of resourcefulness, is what makes this kind of imitation a unique one. On top of the imitation which brings in hybridity, the absurdity on the layers of narrative structure, character and stylistic choices, together place these movies against the classical narrative Western cinema. This attitude, which betrays the intention of the cinematic apparatus, allow for a distance for a meta-critical gaze on the part of the audience.

Firstly, the narrative structure common to all the films is absurd, in the sense that the passages between stages of the narrative are all based on misunderstandings or coincidences. The protagonist's life changes suddenly (disruption of the equilibrium), he gets into trouble with mafia and then defeats the mafia in an absurd way (restoration of the equilibrium). The trio of change, trouble and restoration in the narrative structure is commonly seen in Hollywood action films for instance, where the protagonist faces a difficulty, gets into trouble, and then saves the world through lots of action. However, Baytan-Sunal films take this pattern, add absurdity and combine it with Eastern elements. The transitions from one narrative phase to another are always based on coincidences and absurdities which happen in a synchronous manner.

Synchronous misunderstandings and coincidences lead Sunal's character into the absurd situations. Because everything happens at the same time and in the same place, many misunderstandings happen, and the protagonist finds himself in unexpected circumstances. Yet, these synchronicities are remoulded with a Western understanding of causality, because the co-occurrence of the simultaneous events are not taken for granted, the absurdity is in how the characters misunderstand what

happens to the protagonist due to their observing of consecutive events. The synchronous understanding of time which is affected by a Western understanding of causality in succession, is the main symptom of the hybridity and absurdity of the narrative structure Baytan and Sunal movies.

The second level in which absurdity shows itself is character choices. Through a juxtaposition of the serious mafia men and Sunal's protagonist who is either a silly or a common man, these characters end up in unexpected and unrealistic situations. Other absurd character-related threads running through the ten movies involve: absurdity being introduced as soon as Sunal's character is seen, villains with absurd names and absurd weaknesses, misunderstandings that lead to the protagonist being mistaken as a powerful man. Also, Western-influenced characters like mafia men (like gangsters in a Turkish setting) are placed in an Eastern setting. Through juxtaposing characters that would not be expected to end up together, and highlighting absurd features of the characters, Baytan-Sunal films prevent the characters to be relatable for the audience. The disruption of the identification of the characters ensures the effects of absurdity to be at their fullest, since absurdity aims for a feeling of alienation on the part of the spectator.

A common absurd pattern running through all movies, is that the mafia boss always has an absurd weakness. In *Sahte Kabadayi*, for instance, the mafia boss has a callus on his foot, and this is his weak spot that the protagonist defeats him through. In *Avanak Apti*, Urfali Apti's weakness is that he keeps being hit by a bus. Abbas, the mafia boss in *Korkusuz Korkak* cannot stand lemon, and Sunal's character defeats him through eating lemon in front of him. Another layer of absurdity regarding the villains in these movies is their absurdly funny nicknames. *Sakar Şakir*'s Gardırop Fuat (Wardrobe Fuat), *Avanak Apti*'s Barut Osman (Gunpowder Osman) and *Tarzan*

Rıfkı's Kerpeten Hüsni (Nail Puller Hüsni) *Palabıyık Rocky* (Handlebar Moustache Rocky) are some examples. The mafia bosses with absurd weaknesses also serve for another layer of absurdity within Baytan-Sunal movies. How these films bring together characters from different worlds is remarkable. The mafia men are not characters that would be expected to be seen next to poor men like Sunal's protagonists. Through these unusual juxtapositions, these movies add a layer to the absurdity, on the level of character choices.

Some absurdity is established through the inability of the protagonist to understand metaphors, which point to the silliness characteristic of absurdity. In *Korkusuz Korkak*, when Sevim says "Dur canım!" (literally means "Stop, my dear!"), meaning "do not be so fast", but Mülayim takes this literally and stops walking. Similarly, in *Sakar Şakir*, when someone says "Yanıyorum!" (literally translates to "I'm burning") in a metaphorical sense meaning he is in trouble, Şakir pours some water on him. Another example is in *Avanak Apti*, when Apti and Nuri are entering a tavern with inappropriate clothes, the waiter at the door says "Buraya düpedüz girilmez!" (literally translates to, "You cannot enter here straight away!"). While the waiter was referring to them not wearing proper attire, they try walking sideways and backwards instead, again not understanding the metaphor. In *Tokatçı*, also, when Cevdet says "Kulaklarını aç dinle", which means "open your ears and listen", he literally opens his ears by pulling them apart. These silly moments emphasise the absurd character juxtapositions, since they are also referencing to the protagonist being a common man, in contrast to the mafia men.

The stylistic choices of Baytan-Sunal movies are the third and final level where an absurd and hybrid aesthetics is created. The flaws seen throughout the films (namely blurred plans, strange angles, quick cuts etc.), which are against the intention

of the cinematic apparatus, are not only absurd, but also signs of hybridity. When flaws appear on the screen, the audience is reminded of the existence of the filmmaker. Through breaking the fourth wall on a stylistic level, the absurd comedies prevent an immersive experience. This is also due to the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam Cinema, since the hybrid aesthetics do not follow the logic of the classical narrative cinema which strives for invisible and continuous storytelling. Another stylistic characteristic of Baytan-Sunal movies, namely the crossbreed of Western and Eastern aesthetics, places them at the heart of hybrid cinema. How these films have crowded but unrealistically well-choreographed scenes remind one of Eastern Cinemas like Bollywood or Japanese Cinema. These films are Turkified Western action movies, with influences from Eastern cinemas such as Egyptian and Indian which are themselves hybrid. The films have fluctuating paces, which go back and forth between fast and slow. The fast pace of some scenes resembles the Hollywood style, whereas some slow scenes demonstrate that these films take place in the Eastern setting, which is not ruled by a cult of speed. The togetherness of the stylistic features from both narrative traditions are due to the hybridity of Yeşilçam Cinema.

The running absurdities and hybridities in Baytan-Sunal films and their satirical and critical stance are multifaceted. The hybrid aesthetics shows itself in the stylistic choices and also in the film content, from the narrative structure to unusual juxtapositions of characters. All three levels in which Baytan-Sunal films display hybridity and absurdity are present in all ten movies, yet there is a shift in emphasis throughout the course of the collaboration of the duo. In the first movies, absurdity depends more on synchronicity which involves a narrative flow through misunderstandings and coincidences. In the latest movies, the absurdity is established through juxtaposition of unusual characters in unexpected situations, even though

synchronicity is always present. Flaws get less visible towards the last movies, yet they are always there as a betrayal to the intention of the apparatus. This shift of the emphasis of absurdity is connected to the increasingly deliberate and satirical societal criticism of the Baytan-Sunal comedies, since the issues find their way into the content of the movies, and therefore the lives of the characters as well. These issues are touched upon in the films mostly through instantaneous and satirical jokes which are also absurd. These jokes are instantenous and momentary in the sense that they are not deeply tied to the narrative structure, yet they still thematically touch upon and criticise the societal problems. These moments of satire function as a support for the absurdist humour of the ten movies in question. The critical gaze created by the absurd and hybrid aesthetics makes sense in connection to the Theatre of the Absurd and the satire comedy traditions, since these moments are indicative that the absurd distanced criticism of the Baytan-Sunal movies may be intentionally meta-critical, yet also satirically critical in a veiled way as part of their resourcefulness.

The increase in the explicit satirical criticism is closely tied to the changing sociopolitical situation in Turkey, in the period from the 1970s to the 1980s. The hybrid nature of Yeşilçam Cinema, within the fluctuating socio-political situation in Turkey of the 1970s and 1980s, forced the filmmakers of the time to be resourceful, since their resources were limited. This resourcefulness is on two levels: production and film content. Given the harsh political environment and increasing censorship, filmmakers could not always risk openly criticising the societal issues of Turkey, so they had to find ways to do so without facing the risk of their movie to be censored and banned. In Baytan-Sunal movies, this resourcefulness is combined with absurdity as a method to create a critical gaze. Through breaking the sense of reality for the audience, these absurd comedies have an anarchic stance against the dominant

ideology of classical narrative cinema, and the intention of the apparatus, which is inherently tied to ideology.

The absurd and hybrid aesthetics of Baytan-Sunal movies, as claimed by this thesis, is a result of the dire situation Turkey is in at the time, with its unstable governments, declining economy and increasing political polarization and violence; and the declining period of Yeşilçam which coincide with the Baytan-Sunal movies. Popular comedy movies made in this period such as these films, which look like they are merely for entertainment, have been criticised heavily by the film critics of the era, for not being educational or critical. However, this criticism is one that judges a popular culture production by the criteria of a high culture production. Yet, as argued above, this is not necessarily a fruitful or efficient way to understand these films. An artwork made *for* the masses which is *about* the masses could be a better way to make sure that the criticism (which is *for* the masses but not only *about* the oppression of the masses in a top-down manner) reaches the targeted group of people, namely the general public, with a bottom-up attitude. Therefore, Baytan-Sunal films are critical in their own way, within the popular culture realm which is familiar to the public. Hence, chances are higher that this criticism, albeit subtle and meta, may reach the public. To conclude, this thesis argues that in Baytan-Sunal movies, the satirical absurdity on the levels of narrative structure, character choices and stylistic choices, which are due to the hybrid nature of Yeşilçam cinema, create a distance that allows for a meta-critical gaze (since they prevent an immersive relatable storytelling), although movies as such have been criticized for not being critical or educational for the general public.

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