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A Comparative Analysis of *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler* in the Context of Changing Socio-Political Symbolism of Water

Suyun Değişen Sosyo-Politik Sembolizmi Bağlamında Susuz Yaz ve Kurak Günler Filmlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi



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Abstract

This study examines the similarities and differences in the representations of water between two Turkish films, Metin Erksan's *Susuz Yaz* (1963) and Emin Alper's *Kurak Günler* (2022), produced in different historical periods and political contexts. Water in these films is used as a semiotic intersection where social dynamics, power relations, and ecological crises converge. However, the specific constructions of this common theme in each film reflect the socioeconomic and ideological conditions of their respective periods. In this context, water functions both as a metaphor reflecting the spirit of the times and as a lens through which to analyze the country's political and social transformation. Hence, this article explores the relationship between water and decay, sovereignty, and systemic crises through its visual and sonic representations, using an interdisciplinary methodology informed by political ecology, psychoanalytic film theory, and film sound theory. Through a close reading of the narrative function of water, its visual aesthetics, and its use in film sound, this study aims to reveal how water has become a carrier of meaning in Türkiye's transition from a social structure based on agricultural production to a new political-economic plane shaped by neoliberal crises. The study proposes considering cinema as a multilayered narrative field that incorporates not only visual but also psycho-political and ecological dimensions. Ultimately, this research highlights the role of water symbolism in cinema as a dynamic force that embodies both cultural anxieties and shifting power structures.

Öz

Bu çalışma, farklı tarihsel dönemlerde ve politik bağlamlarda üretilmiş iki Türk filmi olan Metin Erksan'ın *Susuz Yaz* (1963) ile Emin Alper'in *Kurak Günler*'deki (2022) su temsillerindeki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları incelemektedir. Bu filmlerde su, toplumsal dinamiklerin, iktidar ilişkilerinin ve ekolojik krizlerin keşiştiği göstergebilimsel bir kavşak olarak kullanılmaktadır. Ancak, her iki filmde ortak olan bu temanın özgün inşaları, ait oldukları dönemlerin sosyoekonomik ve ideolojik koşullarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu bağlamda su, hem dönemin ruhunu yansıtan bir metafor hem de ülkenin politik ve toplumsal dönüşümünü analiz etmeye imkân tanıyan bir merceğe işlevi görmektedir. Bu nedenle makale, su ve çürüme ile egemenlik ve sistemsel krizler arasındaki ilişkiyi, görsel ve işitsel temsilleri üzerinden, politik ekoloji, psikanalitik film kuramı ve sinemada ses kuramından beslenen disiplinlerarası bir metodolojiyle ele almaktadır. Suyu dair anlatısal işlevin, görsel estetiğin ve ses kullanımının yakından incelenmesi yoluyla bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin tarımsal üretime dayalı bir toplumsal yapıdan, neoliberal krizlerle şekillenmiş yeni bir politik-ekonomik düzleme geçişinde suyun nasıl bir anlam taşıyıcısına dönüştüğünü ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, sinemayı yalnızca görsel değil, aynı zamanda psiko-politik ve ekolojik katmanlara sahip çoklu bir anlatı alanı olarak ele almayı önermektedir. Nihayetinde bu araştırma, sinemada su sembolizminin hem kültürel kaygıları hem de değişen iktidar yapılarının tezahürünü içeren dinamik bir güç olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Keywords

symbolism • water • Jung • Cinema of Türkiye • corruption

Anahtar Kelimeler

sembolizm • su • Jung • Türkiye sineması • yozlaşma



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A Comparative Analysis of *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler* in the Context of Changing Socio-Political Symbolism of Water

Water is a frequently used motif in cinema due to its symbolic potency and is commonly encountered in Turkish cinema. This article focuses on how the meanings attributed to water have changed over time by conducting a comparative analysis of the films *Susuz Yaz* (Metin Erksan, 1963) and *Kurak Günler* (Emin Alper, 2022), which were produced in two different historical periods in Turkey and place particular emphasis on the metaphor of water. The study argues that it is possible to analyze the changing socio-political values of society through the differences observed at the thematic and aesthetic levels of water representations in these films, thereby revealing the flexible character of water's symbolic richness in representing shifting political atmospheres, conflicting identities, and cultural contradictions. The thematic and esthetic treatment of water in these films offers a rich lens through which to examine changing sociopolitical and ecological narratives in Turkish cinema over time. Both films place water at the center of their stories but apply the theme differently, which reflects the changing anxieties, from hope and conflict to crisis and systemic failure, through the symbol of water.

Susuz Yaz, a foundational film from the Yeşilçam era, can be seen as coming from a hopeful and determined period, particularly within the “köy filmleri”¹ tradition, where the village is typically portrayed as a space of potential transformation, innocence, and morality in line with the newly constructed Republic's aspirations for progress and modernization. Depicting water as a scarce and precious resource in a rural village facing the risk of drought, the film criticizes feudal domination, seen as an outdated system from the Ottoman rule that needed to be altered and reformed, and class conflict, while also delivering a moral message by underlining the destructive consequences of greed and unchecked authority (Arslan, 2011; Suner, 2010). In doing so, *Susuz Yaz* aligns with the broader Republican vision of dismantling residual Ottoman power structures, positioning water as a catalyst for moral, social, and political renewal (Dönmez-Colin, 2008).

¹“Village films” (Köy filmleri) is a genre in the cinematic tradition of Türkiye from the 1960s and 1970s that depicts rural life and critiques feudal structures, which at the same time intends to create bridges from rural to urban, reminding the innocent “roots” of the society that was going through a harsh process of modernization. In addition, village films were sometimes used as government-sanctioned tools to promote state-led modernization and project an idealized vision of a reformed rural society in line with Kemalist principles (Yarar Aksoy, 2023).

A contemporary film from the era of “New Cinema of Türkiye”, *Kurak Günler* also focuses on drought in a rural village but avoids conveying a single, central message. Rather, the film explores the intersection of environmental destruction and political corruption, where water scarcity becomes a symptom of systemic failure and social and moral decay. In contrast to *Susuz Yaz*’s overt moral messages, *Kurak Günler* adopts a more fragmentary and ambiguous approach, using water scarcity as a symptom of systemic decay rather than a central point for a unifying moral perspective. In this contemporary setting, environmental destruction and political corruption come together to underscore how scarcity can reflect deeper social and ethical failures, which can be read as a modern take on the earlier film’s exploration of communal and moral decay.

This study explores the cinematic representation of water and how it has transformed over time by analyzing these films’ narrative structures, sound design, and visual esthetics. It also examines whether these cinematic changes reflect broader ideological shifts. Adopting a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, this study draws on theoretical frameworks from political ecology, psychology, and film sound studies to contextualize water symbolism in Türkiye’s changing socio-political environment. With a particular focus on neoliberalism, environmental politics, and cultural representation, this paper aims to reveal how water is treated as a tool of struggle, control, and meaning-making.

The analysis positions water as a dynamic symbol with changing connotations that functions as a cinematic bridge between different political and cultural timelines. By examining water’s symbolism, which shifts between survival, morality, control, and liberation in various historical contexts, this study contributes to discussions on cinema’s role in both environmental and political critique.

Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalytic Aspects of the Symbolism of Water

Water has long been recognized as a powerful symbol in both psychoanalytic and archetypal traditions that study the human psyche because it provides a rich source for exploring unconscious desires, fears, and emotions. Gaston Bachelard explored the psychological and symbolic functions of water in his seminal work *Water and Dreams* (1942). Emphasizing water’s powerful associations with the unconscious, memory, and transformation, Bachelard argues that water represents both maternal qualities and dreams; hence, it symbolizes the potential transformations that the self may undergo. Following a phenomenological approach, Bachelard provides a basic framework for analyzing how water functions as a way to encode and decode personal and

collective meanings in films. Thus, the use of water as the main motif in *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler* functions as metaphors for memory, loss, or personal awakening, not just a mere environmental element but also an emotional and ideological force.

Carl Jung's theories further contribute to this understanding. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959/1969), Jung argues that human experiences are shaped by universal images and patterns present in our shared collective unconscious. According to Jung, these archetypal symbols inform psychology, cultural narratives, and artistic expression across time and societies, and water is an archetype of transformation and regeneration. He calls the archetype of water "the anima," which represents the feminine aspects of the unconscious and psychological change. Anima symbolizes rebirth and the union of opposites: the unconscious feminine aspect of the psyche, which functions as a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious. Jung identified four stages of anima development: Eve (biological), Helen (romantic), Mary (spiritual), and Sophia (wisdom). Psychological growth involves the integration of the anima to achieve individuation, that is, the process of becoming a whole, balanced self (Jung, 1964).

However, Jung's conceptualization, reflecting early 20th-century normative assumptions, is highly gendered. Identifying the anima with what is traditionally deemed "feminine" (for instance emotions, intuition and creativity) reinforces a binary framework that associates femininity with passivity, maternity, and mystery. On the other hand, "the animus" (the masculine aspect of the psyche) is linked to rationality, logic, and assertiveness (Jung, 1964). Feminist scholars have criticized this dichotomy for perpetuating stereotypical notions of gender roles and for positioning women primarily as reflections of men's needs rather than autonomous subjects (Goldenberg, 1979). This is because the four-stage anima progression (Eve to Sophia) also suggests a hierarchy that privileges certain types of femininity (Rowland, 2002).

Additionally, Jung's archetypal concept of the anima historically resembles and overlaps with Western notions that link women and racialized people to the natural realm and animality. By attributing qualities widely associated with the wild to women and nonwhite populations, such as birth, creativity, and nurturance, these frameworks risk dehumanizing or pushing them into a "primitive" realm; a realm that does not accepted as showing progress like rationality but is cyclical, hence fixed. Critics emphasize that if these assumptions are not critically examined, Jung's archetypes will contribute to the essentialization of gender and race under the guise of universality (Spillers, 1987; Wynter, 2003).

Still, contemporary interpretations have questioned and deconstructed the gendered aspects of Jung's anima and animus concepts. While Samuels (1985) reframed these archetypes as psycho-

logical potentials accessible to all, moving beyond binary associations, Rowland (2002) critiqued their hierarchical nature but at the same time suggested seeing them as dynamic aspects of creativity and rationality. Young-Eisendrath (1997), on the other hand, emphasized their role in reflecting diverse human experiences rather than fixed gender roles. These perspectives reject essentialist notions and adopt a more fluid and inclusive approach to Jungian archetypes. They emphasize that these archetypes should not be restricted to one's biological sex; instead, they can be appropriated to represent the range of character potentials in all individuals (Samuels, 1985).

Water as a Politicized Resource

Apart from its psychoanalytic connotations, water is also a very potent political symbol with its ability to stand in for power, control and exploitation relationships. In the last 50 years, discussions around the commodification and privatization of water have become central in both political and environmental circles. For instance, highlighting how access to or prevention of water has been instrumentalized as a controlling mechanism, particularly over the less privileged communities, Campos Johnson (2020) argues that water should be considered not just as a natural resource but also as a site of geopolitical and economic negotiation. This multilayered value of water shapes the narratives and ideological backgrounds of both *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler*. In both films, the prevention of access to water represents not just scarcity but also a sign of social, political and moral decadence.

In *Susuz Yaz*, the conflict over a vital water resource that sustains the whole village functions as a microcosm of broader dynamics of exploitation and gendered greed, reflecting tensions between individual gains and collective well-being. At the same time, the film conveys a message for an evolving society: the village, viewed as fundamentally pure, risks losing its innocence because of unchecked ambition. Consequently, *Susuz Yaz* can also be read as forwarding a normative directive, one that prompts viewers to believe that to preserve the village's purity, it must resist both modernization and the pursuit of ever-greater profit. Yet, while suggesting the need to protect rural innocence from exploitative economic forces, *Susuz Yaz* also leaves room for the possibility of constructive transformation. In the film, water is used to symbolize the fundamental purity of the village, and it is implied that the political changes and economic expansions brought by the Republican regime will not spoil the internal integrity of society. Instead, water serves as a channel through which a process of modernization can be imagined in which rural values remain intact, as it implies that progress and traditional virtues can coexist without losing the moral foundation of village life.

Similarly, *Kurak Günler* uses the metaphor of water and its absence to refer to systemic injustices and how ecological crises are intertwined with the structural abuse of power. Both films demonstrate the connection between ecological devastation and political corruption by highlighting how the extinction of natural resources, especially water, can symbolize a broader phenomenon related to social justice and equality.

Sensory Dimensions: Enwaterment and Cinematic Soundscapes

Apart from its symbolic and political dimensions, water also has the power to influence the sensory and immersive experience of the viewer. Using a phenomenological lens, Adriano D'Aloia explains how water in cinema creates a multi-sensory environment that engages both sight and sound with her concept of “enwaterment” (2012). According to this concept, water’s flowing nature can envelop the viewer in a sensory experience that blurs the lines between the cinematic space and the audience’s own embodied experience. In *Susuz Yaz*, water flows through the narrative as a source of both tranquility and tension. This contrast evokes a sense of deprivation and longing, as the film uses water (and water sounds) to heighten the emotional intensity of the characters’ struggles. On the other hand, *Kurak Günler* emphasizes the absence of water not only as a physical and environmental void but also as a profound metaphorical absence, captured through the auditory and visual soundscape. The heavy silence and distant mechanical noises in the village replace the expected natural soundscapes and intensify the residents’ alienation and disconnection. This sonic void aligns with D'Aloia’s framework, which proposes that auditory and visual representations of water do more than depict the environment; they evoke emotional and ideological resonance. At times, the film omits the sound of water from the soundscapes and creates a sudden sensory void that reflects the psychological and sociopolitical drought in the village, leaving the viewer to grapple with this fragmented social and ideological landscape.

In both films, the absence or presence of water signifies more than ecological conditions and they represent the larger emotional and political implications that shape the characters’ worlds. This symbolic dimension of water provides fertile ground for examining the characters and themes in the films, where water is used as both a symbol of moral crisis and social conflict.

Bringing together these psychoanalytical, political and emotional approaches within a theoretical framework, this study aims to analyze water as a multilayered symbol that carries both political weight and psychological depth in Turkish cinema. This interdisciplinary framework enables an analysis of how water is positioned in films as a tool for both transformation and political negotiation, as well as ecological destruction, resource control and moral failure. Theoretical lenses

provided by thinkers such as Bachelard, Jung, Johnson and D'Aloia approach water as a means of expression that has the power to both represent and critique the turbulent political and ecological landscapes in contemporary Türkiye.

Water as Hope and Idealized Rural Innocence

Directed by Metin Erksan, *Susuz Yaz* (*Dry Summer*, 1963) is set in a village in the Aegean part of Türkiye. It focuses on the relationship between two brothers and explores themes of greed, power, and social justice by using water as the main anchor motif. The elder brother, Osman, who is also the main landowner in the village, attempts to gain full and sole ownership of the village's water source since it runs through his land. His denial of access to water to other residents results in conflicts since the village is going through a difficult drought. This creates tensions within the community as well as between the brothers, when the younger brother, Hasan, opposes Osman's plans. The film uses the life-giving quality of water as a powerful symbol, contrasting it with its commodification and the resulting human suffering.

Figure 1

Encountering water early in Susuz Yaz (1963), at 02:11, underscores its role as the main actor in the film, shaping both the narrative and thematic focus from the very beginning



Water in *Susuz Yaz* operates as a versatile symbol of binaries, with oppositions that frame the film's central conflict: it stands for both hope and pessimism, life and death, and war and peace. From the opening scene, the juxtaposition of dry, cracked earth next to close-up shots of trickling water immediately establishes water's dual role as a life-sustaining resource and a source of struggle. The water well, as a contested site, becomes a microcosm of broader social tensions where survival, desire, and domination come together. The film's narrative and sound

design intertwine to transform water into thematic, visual, and auditory unity around which power and justice revolve. The antagonist Osman's blockade of villagers' access to water is a powerful move that reflects the dynamics of privatization, which normalize the use of natural resources as property. In this sense, *Susuz Yaz* also stands out as a film that anticipates contemporary debates on environmental justice by framing water not only as a natural element but also as a contested political entity.

Susuz Yaz frames water as a contested political entity that is shaped by the disputes over private property, power, and justice. The central character of the film, Osman's attempt at preventing the villagers from accessing water can be seen as an allegory of early privatization regimes that normalized the subjection of natural resources to private ownership. In this regard, the film foreshadows contemporary eco-social discussions about class domination, environmental justice, and the appropriation of common resources. The contrast between the presence and absence of water forms a powerful metaphorical structure in both the visual and sonic realms. While the images of water flowing refer to the villagers' dreams of the prosperity and fertility of the land, the images of the dry landscapes become signs of social backwardness, deprivation, and ethical collapse. The sound dimension also supports this duality: the tension between the sounds of dripping or flowing water and dry soil and wind recalls that access to water has become a threshold between life and death, hope and despair. The lack of water sounds in the scenes where the conflict escalates creates a sense of physical and social scarcity, making the echoes of the struggle for survival audible. However, when water is present, the mood is marked by a sonic resolution that aligns with the narrative's stance on moral justice and implies that the missing harmony is restored.

Karen J. Bakker's work (2004) also provides a critical framework for understanding *Susuz Yaz*'s use of water as an ecological and ideological symbol. Johnson's conceptualization of water as an "uncooperative commodity" underlines its innate quality that resists control and commodification. She argues that with its liquid, fluid, and mutable qualities, water defies the imposed extractivism regulations. In *Susuz Yaz*, Osman's failed attempts at controlling water resources is an example of the aforementioned quality of water as an "uncooperative commodity." Osman's vile intentions are also reflective of the violence and inequalities inherent in capitalism, which is mirrored in the broader political critiques embedded in the film's rural setting. By presenting water as both a locus of life and a medium of domination, *Susuz Yaz* foreshadows global ecological struggles where access to clean water becomes a broader geopolitical issue (Bakker, 2004).

The film's sound design supports these arguments in how water is used as a dynamic sonic metaphor representing conflict and potential transformation. For instance, the absence of water

sounds during the scenes of dry landscapes creates a sensory emptiness that underscores the vulnerability of life and resources. This auditory strategy provokes critiques of sensory hierarchies, particularly the argument that visual abstraction often dominates spatial and ideological frameworks, thereby overshadowing other sensory dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991; Schafer, 1994; Chion, 1994). By weaving ecological commentary into a tangible, immersive soundscape, *Susuz Yaz* guides audiences into an embodied experience of environmental and social collapse.

D'Aloia (2012) argued that the use of water imagery in cinema opens up the possibility of an immersive experience in which the viewer is drawn into the sensory world of the film through water-related metaphors and soundscapes. The intense aural presence and absence of water in *Susuz Yaz* creates a bond between the audience and the characters of the film, as it is used to reflect both the tension of drought and the relief of the return of water. D'Aloia's concept of "enwaterment," which refers to the bodily experience of being submerged in water, can be extended to the film's use of diegetic and non-diegetic water sounds. The film's final scenes, in which the heavy soundscape of silence and the atonal music fade out and the calm flow of water enters, illustrates how water brings a symbolic resolution to tension. Through these techniques, *Susuz Yaz* manages to make water tangible as both a visual and sonic element, and in this way, the film is able to draw the viewer into the materiality of the narrative world. This sonic shift symbolizes the restoration of natural and social order, echoing D'Aloia's exploration of water's dual function as a space of fear and protection (D'Aloia, 2012).

Susuz Yaz can also be analyzed through a Jungian reading. Jung's archetypes, especially those related to the duality of water as life-giving and life-taking, overlap with the narrative structure of the movie. Osman's attempt to dominate the water represents an attempt at social domination, while the release of water at the end represents liberation, harmony and renewal. The return of water marks a collective catharsis that mirrors Jung's vision of the unconscious as a force that cannot be permanently subdued. The film thus uses water to navigate the psychological tension between repression and freedom, casting the struggle for resource control as both a political and existential crisis.

Through a Jungian interpretation of gender, we can say that the film's female protagonist, Bahar, is positioned as both a source of life and beauty as well as a victim of male desire and control. In a Jungian perspective, she is nurturing, emotional, loyal, and connected, almost to the degree of identification, to the fertility of the land. Osman's selfish plans of controlling the water resource parallel his desire to control Bahar's body and independence as well. This implies that,

just like access to water, feminine agency in the film is also prone to be monopolized by Osman's patriarchal power.

The connections and similarities between Bahar and the water in the plot reinforce the binary view of gender. While men control and manipulate water resources, women are symbolically and literally subjected to its scarcity. The imagery of Bahar's suffering aligns with feminist critiques of Jung's hierarchical anima progression, in which the biological and sensory aspects of femininity are subordinated to more intellectual or spiritual ideals (Rowland, 2002). *Susuz Yaz* illustrates the dangers of this framework: Bahar's value is linked to her reproductive capacity and vulnerability rather than her agency and/or rational capacity (Özen, 2021).

Water as a Symbol of Ecological and Social Breakdown

Kurak Günler (2022), directed by Emin Alper, is a political thriller set in a fictional town named Yanıklar in Türkiye that is suffering from drought and political intrigues. The story follows Emre, an idealistic young prosecutor who is newly appointed to the town and quickly becomes entangled in its web of complex power relations, including political corruption and other hidden tensions. As Emre investigates the suspicious events around the town's water resources, he encounters resistance from powerful local figures. Like *Susuz Yaz*, the film uses the absence of water as a central metaphor for moral and social decay and highlights the convergence of themes like environmental exploitation, political authoritarianism, and collective complicity. With its haunting audio-visual atmosphere and layered narrative, *Kurak Günler* subtly deals with the dynamics of power relations and justice in contemporary Türkiye.

Figure 2

The visual domination of dry landscapes in Kurak Günler (2022) highlights the underlying tension between scarcity vs. fertility and moral purity vs. decadence



In the film, water represents power, and the villagers' obsession with water, hence power is also reflected in their treatment of women, particularly of the mute Roma girl called Pekmez. The connection made between women and water is striking in this film as well. In one particular scene, two of the men who are represented as shady figures in the competition in controlling the water resource, pour water over Pekmez generously, in a cruel performance that emphasizes the commodification of both water and women. Even though water is scarce in town, these men do not hesitate to use it as a tool to show off and establish dominance. The movie presents Pekmez as marginalized in multiple layers at once, as a Roma person, as a mute individual and as a woman. Here, she is stripped of her voice and agency and reduced to a simple resource that, like water, must be controlled by men and owned by them in a spectacle of power. Water in the film, when it does appear, is almost always misused. In this particular scene, water, typically associated with purity and renewal is weaponized, amplifying the sense that the very elements meant to sustain life and wash away sins have become instruments of degradation in a town corrupted to its core. In both films, water represents states of femininity under patriarchal systems, and the control over water reflects patriarchal impulses to dominate nature, fluidity, and life itself, which are perceived as feminine. These films demonstrate how such control leads to the commodification and subjugation of both women and natural resources.

The dry visual settings of both films highlight the moral state of their societies driven by authoritarianism and resentment. In *Susuz Yaz*, Osman's hoarding of water reveals his material greed and patriarchal tendency to dominance and turns water into a contested symbol of power. Similarly, in *Kurak Günler*, the control over water mirrors broader systems of corruption and social decay, where women and minorities bear the greatest burden of patriarchal violence.

Both *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler* expose the still gendered representations of water in cinema by association with water and femininity, and continue to establish the Jungian tradition. Hence, while they show how women are exploited under patriarchal power, they also contribute to reinforcing this distinction by identifying femininity with these ancient normative qualities.

In both films, the scarcity of water also evokes themes of pollution, sin and uncleanness in a sense that it signifies not only physical absence but also moral, social and spiritual decadence that reflects the characters' environments and souls. In *Susuz Yaz*, Osman's control of water creates not only a physical drought but also a metaphorical one, where greed and exploitation lead to the moral decay of the community. The dry landscape and the villagers' inability to cleanse themselves because of lack of water highlight the association of water with purity and its absence

with dirtiness and sin. Osman's monopolization of water transforms him into a figure of moral corruption and is used to prove how his selfishness contaminates the social fabric of the village.

The absence of water in Muslim contexts (these villages are supposedly of Muslim religion as with many rural towns in Türkiye) also brings to mind "cenabet" a concept in which physical impurity symbolizes a state of spiritual disconnection. Osman's actions fit the notion of uncleanness, not just in the literal sense that signals hygiene, but also as a reflection of his corrupt intentions and the harm he causes to the village's harmony. At the same time, the villagers, being deprived of this life-giving resource, are kept spiritually distant from ideals of justice and collective well-being, further reinforcing the association of water with both physical and moral purification.

This is particularly important in the context of early Republican Türkiye, where the village was idealized as the epitome of innocence and moral purity, a space free from the corruption and decadence associated with urban life and the newly introduced modernism. The purifier aspect of water is closely linked to the pastoral vision of rurality, which symbolized the vitality of the land and the morality of the villagers. This idealized vision is crushed by the moral decay brought by the drought exposing how exploitation and greed can erode the village's presumed purity. Osman's actions disrupt the community's social and physical harmony and cast a shadow on the understanding of the village as the epitome of power and pureness. In this context, the movie reveals the fragility of the ideological frameworks that encompass rural landscape and personal greed.

In *Kurak Günler*, the absence of water is similarly heavy with symbolic weight, but this time, it has a darker, more pessimistic tone. Here, the Yanıklar village as a whole is depicted as a place of systemic corruption, where the lack of water symbolizes not only environmental degradation but also social rot. The concept of *cenabet* resonates in a broader social context in this film as well: the town's inability to sustain its natural resources reflects its spiritual and ethical impurity. This becomes literally evident when Emre, the protagonist, goes to the lake to take a shower because running water is simply unavailable in the houses.

The idealized image of an innocent villager is inverted in *Kurak Günler*. The town reflects not only the environmental consequences of neglect and exploitation but also a broader social decline where the purity once attributed to rural life has been replaced by decadence and decay. Unlike *Susuz Yaz*, in which the moral and economic imbalance caused by Osman is ultimately resolved in the end with the release of water, signifying redemption and the restoration of harmony, *Kurak Günler* offers no such resolution. The water dispute is unresolved, and the possibility of salvation is irreversible. Hence, the absence of water symbolizes the complete loss of ethical and social

integrity. This unresolved crisis underscores the film's critique of the sociopolitical realities of contemporary Türkiye, suggesting that the ideals of purity and salvation, once associated with rural life, have eroded, leaving behind a barren landscape of systemic failure and division.

In both of these films, drought serves as a mirror for broader social failures. The concept of pollution extends beyond physical pollution to include the ethical and emotional degradation that results from the exploitation of natural resources and people. Furthermore, the theme of drought can be linked to the cultural concept of 'cenabet', in which pollution is both an individual and collective condition. In *Susuz Yaz*, this pollution results from Osman's monopolization of water and its consequences for society. In *Kurak Günler*, it is linked to broader systemic corruption and exploitation, suggesting that the lack of water, both literally and symbolically, reflects a society that has not been cleansed of its sins and has not reconciled with its humanity.

In *Kurak Günler*'s world, the lack of water and sinkholes are first a literal symbol of ecological collapse. On the other hand, on a more metaphorical level, the shortage of water is also a reference to moral decadence within the community (important to note that the word decadence, "çürümüşlük" in Turkish, has increasingly become popular recently in describing the latest state of society of Türkiye). The sinkholes in the film are the direct result of unsustainable resource management and function as a metaphor for the loss of trust and the destruction of reliable social structures. Unlike *Susuz Yaz*, where water scarcity causes conflict but holds the possibility of redemption, the water in *Kurak Günler* is irreversibly contaminated and symbolizes permanent decline. The Jungian approach to myths and symbols, in which they expose the inner workings of the psyche (Jung, 1981), helps us to understand *Kurak Günler* as a cinematic exploration of collective unconscious anxieties, ecological breakdown, political corruption, and social disintegration. The sinkhole in the film represents an archetypal open "wound" ready to swallow the town.

In *Kurak Günler*, the sound design amplifies this crisis. The absence of natural water sounds is juxtaposed with the discordant noises of urbanization and an unsettling silence. This creates a soundscape that reflects the loss of harmony in both the natural world and human society. The film subverts Adriano D'Aloia's concept of "enwaterment," where water typically immerses viewers in a cinematic experience. Instead, the toxic and depleted use of water alienates the audience through what can be called "dewaterment," since it associates its absence with moral decay.²

Jung's archetypal interpretation of water as a symbol of the unconscious, transformation, and life cycle (Jung, 1981) offers a stark contrast between the two films. In *Susuz Yaz*, the ultimate

²A term I introduce here in contrast to D'Aloia's "enwaterment," referring to the alienation caused by the sonic and symbolic absence of water.

salvation of water signifies moral and social renewal, which is in line with Jung's concept of rebirth. Hasan's victory over Osman represents a restoration of balance in which water symbolizes justice and the cyclical nature of life. However, *Kurak Günler* implies that water no longer has this redemptive potential. Its stained state reflects psychological and social stagnation, where transformation is no longer possible and decay persists.

Water, in the neoliberal context, represents the adaptability demanded by neoliberal policies owing to its fluidity. Neoliberalism is said to thrive on flexibility, deregulation, and the continuous reshaping of economic and social structures according to the needs of the market. Just as water flows freely, changing its own shape depending on the container it occupies, neoliberalism encourages fluidity that shapeshifts depending on the conditions and weakens community bonds and established boundaries. *Kurak Günler's* portrayal of a society in which the collective good is disregarded in favor of individual profit parallels the erosion of social systems under neoliberalism, where public resources like water are spared for the benefit of a few (Harvey, 2005; Brown, 2015).

Furthermore, the film taps into the concept of water as a symbol of instability and insecurity, themes that resonate with neoliberalism's sense of uncertainty (Bauman, 2000). In the same way that water in *Kurak Günler* is both vital and elusive, the economic and social conditions in a neoliberal system are marked by constant volatility and risk (Brown, 2015). The water crisis in the film serves as a powerful metaphor for the broader deterioration of stability in a society governed by these values. When natural life-giving resources become scarce and essential services are privatized, communities face not only environmental collapse but also social and political alienation. The fluidity of water, in this context, represents the uncertainty and precariousness that endangers every aspect of life under neoliberal frameworks (Shiva, 2002).

The dry and brown landscape of *Kurak Günler* functions as an appropriate visual representation of the consequences of political power networks' environmental neglect. The drought is not just a natural disaster; it is also a manifestation of the larger crisis caused by the absence of justice, morality, and sustainable governance. In a neoliberal context, water's absence symbolizes the moral and political dryness that dominates when the logic of profit dominates. The characters in the film, much like the water they compete over, are trapped in a struggle for survival, but the real danger is the way the system fails to provide a long-term solution, which in the end leaves them in a perpetual state of crisis. The film portrays a society in which water, like other resources, becomes a commodity that is weaponized to control those in need. This mirrors the rise of individualism

and competition in neoliberal systems, where an individualistic survivalist mentality replaces collective care and solidarity.

In this way, the film can also be evaluated as a commentary on a neoliberal governance model that prioritizes economic gain over ecological balance, social welfare, and ethical responsibility. The image of water, once a symbol of life and regeneration, becomes a reflection of the consequences of environmental exploitation. *Kurak Günler* thus uses the symbol of water to critique the transformation of natural resources into financial assets and to question the long-term viability of a system that thrives on the commodification and privatization of everything, from water, land, to human relationships. The film's water crisis, then, becomes a multilayered metaphor, not only for environmental collapse but also for the failures of neoliberal policies to provide sustainable, just solutions.

From Redemption to Neoliberal Fatalism: Changing Rural Portrayals

In *Susuz Yaz*, water's fluidity signals potential for change and reflects the transformative aspirations of early Republican Türkiye. Water, often symbolizing life and fertility, is central to the narrative, representing not only the physical survival of the villagers but also the ideological promise of a modernized, progressive Türkiye. The protagonist, who struggles to manage the water crisis in the village, is faced with ethical dilemmas that mirror Türkiye's larger moral struggle as it transitioned from the Ottoman Empire to the newly established Republic.

In this context, the fluidity of water in *Susuz Yaz* works as a symbol of both the challenges and possibilities that the Turkish Republic aimed to address, namely, the modernization of rural areas, the democratization of resources, and the promise of a new social order. This is why water in the film holds the potential for renewal and justice, since it reflects the ideal of the transformation of the Republican vision. The film's treatment of water as a resource that can foster unity and social progress speaks to the nation-building project of the early Republic, where the fluidity of water metaphorically aligns with the fluid social changes the Republic aimed to realize, particularly in rural areas that were seen as the core of the country's agrarian economy.

In contrast, *Kurak Günler* presents water's fluidity in a very different way which reflects the neoliberal realities of contemporary Türkiye. The film, set in a town facing a long drought, depicts water as caught between the complex forces wielded by shady figures with the intentions of commodification and exploitation. Water, much like the lack of other natural resources under neoliberalism, is manipulated by local elites and politicians and is being employed as a tool for power and control rather than a symbol of renewal or collective welfare. Water, in *Kurak*

Günler, reflects the endless capacity of neoliberal capitalism to absorb and commodify everything, including natural resources and human relations. The once-idealized concept of water as a life-giving force is now co-opted and drained of its regenerative potential, and reduced to another commodity that can be bought, sold, and controlled.

This shift in the symbolism of water from *Susuz Yaz* to *Kurak Günler* highlights the broader changes in Türkiye's political and economic landscape, from the early Republican ideals of modernization and social justice to the fluid, exploitative systems of the neoliberal mentality. In *Susuz Yaz*, although the scarcity of water poses a serious obstacle in building a collective future, it is presented as a part of a communal apprehension in which justice and renewal are still possible. Water is imagined as a resource that can realize the idea of labor-based solidarity and redistribution. In this respect, the fluidity of water points to a hopeful vision that implies the socio-economic backwardness of the country can be improved with new reforms. In contrast, the fluidity of water in *Kurak Günler*, represents the relentless nature of neoliberal capitalism which has infiltrated every aspect of life, commodified everything and deepened inequalities. Here, water is no longer a resource that signifies hope but an object of capital that only a few can access and the majority are excluded from. Hence fluidity does not represent solely water, it underlines capitalism's capacity to adopt any condition. *Kurak Günler* demonstrates a political atmosphere in which collective transformation has become impossible and the dark reality of a new regime that prevents the redistribution of wealth through the manipulation of fundamental resources of life.

The way the rural populations are represented in *Susuz Yaz* and *Kurak Günler*, reveals how the socio-political transformations in Türkiye have been reflected in cinema. Despite its contradictory structure, *Susuz Yaz* portrays rurality as a possibility for liberation and transformation. Osman's possessive and monopolistic intentions are balanced out by Hasan's ethical stance. Hence, the film presents an image of the potent rural, which still embodies a reformist hope and cultural authenticity. This representation carries the traces of the ideals of the early reform movements and the optimistic modernist vision of the rural that dominated the 1960s. In contrast, *Kurak Günler* draws a pessimistic framework of rural life. The characters in the movie are surrounded by corruption, and they are also positioned as the active or passive agents of this decay. Hence, the film argues that under neoliberal policies, the rural is sucked into not only an economic but also ethical and ecological exhaustion. This ideological rupture echoes on the film's sound dimension as well. The natural environmental ambience of *Susuz Yaz* emphasized the material reality and transformability of the rural but the mechanical and industrial sound design of *Kurak Günler* suggest that the rural has become a consuming, unproductive space. As argued by Johnson (2020)

sound and image in the films also mediate the political and sensory meaning of water. In this context the lack of water creates not only a natural crisis but it also emerges as a sonic symptom of systemic fragmentation.

The distance between the contradictory but hopeful plot of *Susuz Yaz* and the depiction of ecological crisis and social decadence of *Kurak Günler* is indicative of larger changes in the political and cultural landscape of Türkiye. Hence, the transformation of water's symbolic meaning from a lifegiving notion to a dirty, corrupt one can be read as a trajectory from the country's post-war optimism to a neoliberal disappointment.

Conclusion: Water as a Mirror of Power, Decay, and Potential Change

This paper demonstrated how water has been used as an ideological symbol in the cinema of Türkiye at different historical periods through the films *Susuz Yaz* (1963) and *Kurak Günler* (2022). Through a comparative analysis, the evolution of water's meaning from vitality, social justice, and collective solidarity to darker notions of ecological exhaustion, moral disintegration, and institutional bankruptcy is mapped. In *Susuz Yaz*, water is used as a symbol of survival and the resilience of the rural community in the process of modernization. While the scarcity of water triggers ethical tensions and class conflicts, the film offers a hopeful horizon reflecting the developmentalist imagination of the period's state of mind. On the other hand, *Kurak Günler*, codes water as an already contaminated and missed resource. Lack of water in the film implies the collapse of trust in the law and the imagination of common life, as well as the rise of a new form of authoritarianism. The transformation in the representations of water, from purity to decay and from fertility to drought, reflects Türkiye's trajectory from republican ideals to neoliberal corruption. The film's dry landscapes and carefully crafted sound design create an atmosphere in which ecological disaster is inseparable from political crisis. Here, the absence of water functions not only as a physical but also as an ethical and ideological void. In particular, *Kurak Günler* uses sound to indicate tension and uneasiness, which places an important role on the sound design as much as the visual narrative. Water functions as both a thematic motif and a sensory mapping tool in these two films, reflecting the hegemonic structure of the films' respective times. Using a theoretical framework based on psychoanalytic, environmental, and ideological interpretation, this article has demonstrated how the representation of water in the films reflects Türkiye's socio-political changes. In conclusion, this study has shown how water is positioned as an active and ideologically charged element in the cinema of Türkiye through these films in which water is used as a tool that makes power, decay, and possible forms of resistance visible and audible.



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