THE SPATIAL EXILE AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION OF THE ELDERLY IN TURKISH CINEMA AND TV SERIES SINCE 2000

2000 YILINDAN BERİ TÜRK SİNEMASI VE DİZİ FİLMLERİNDE YAŞLILARIN MEKÂNSAL DIŞLANIŞI VE DİJİTAL DIŞLANMA

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ABSTRACT

The changing global demographic structure and accelerating modernization have radically transformed the sociospatial and epistemological position of old age in Turkish society. This study critically examines, through media and cinematic narratives, how the gray-haired/wise (aksaçlı) archetype, traditionally the foundational authority of the family and social memory, has been reduced to an isolated figure of helplessness within the spiral of neoliberal urbanization and digitalization. The theoretical framework of the research is centered on the concept of epistemological rupture, which explains the shift in knowledge from human experience to algorithmic authorities, as well as the concepts of institutional confinement by Erving Goffman (Total Institutions) and Michel Foucault (Heterotopias of Deviation), to address the physical isolation of aging bodies. Employing a qualitative research design and thematic analysis, the study analyzes a broad narrative universe. It traces the trajectory from representations of the elderly as crisis-resolving, wise figures as portrayed by filmmakers such as Ömer Lütfi Mete, Yavuz Turgul, and Çağan Irmak to themes of spatial decay and silent marginalization in post-2000 drama narratives, including *Hanım*, *Eşkıya*, *Beyaz Melek*, *Amour*, and *The Father*. Furthermore, microaggressive practices on new media platforms, such as commercials, internet memes, captions, and cartoons, are deconstructed through the lens of visual ageism. The findings demonstrate that the media subjects older adults to symbolic annihilation by excluding them not only from physical spaces but also from cognitive and digital networks. The study emphasizes the need to move away from dominant mass-media discourses that confine old age to a homogeneous, medicalized, and helpless category, and instead calls for inclusive representations that recenter the ontological dignity and agency of the elderly.

Keywords: Old Age, Ageism, Digital Exclusion, Turkish Cinema, Total Institutions.

ÖZET

Değişen küresel demografik yapı ve hızlanan modernleşme, Türk toplumunda yaşlılığın sosyo-mekânsal ve epistemolojik konumunu kökten değiştirmiştir. Bu çalışma, medya ve sinematik anlatılar aracılığıyla, geleneksel olarak ailenin ve toplumsal hafızanın temel otoritesi olan "aksaçlı" arketipinin, neoliberal kentleşme ve dijitalleşme sarmalında nasıl çaresizliğin izole edilmiş bir figürüne indirgendiğini eleştirel bir bakışla incelemektedir. Araştırmanın teorik çerçevesi, bilginin insan deneyiminden algoritmik otoritelere doğru kaymasını açıklayan epistemolojik kopuş kavramının yanı sıra, yaşlanan bedenlerin fiziksel izolasyonunu ele almak üzere Erving Goffman'ın (Toplam Kurumlar) ve Michel Foucault'nun (Sapmanın Heterotopya'ları) kurumsal hapsetme kavramlarına da odaklanmaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma tasarımı ve tematik analizden yararlanan bu çalışma, geniş bir anlatı evrenini inceler. Çalışma, Ömer Lütfi Mete, Yavuz Turgul ve Çağan Irmak gibi sinemacılar tarafından tasvir edilen krizleri çözen bilge figürler olarak yaşlıların

temsilinden, *Hanım*, *Eşkıya*, *Beyaz Melek*, *Amour* ve *The Father* gibi 2000 sonrası drama anlatılarındaki mekânsal çürüme ve sessiz marjinalleşme temalarına uzanan bir yörüngeyi izlemektedir. Ayrıca, reklamlar, internet memleri, altyazılar ve karikatürler gibi yeni medya platformlarındaki mikroagresif uygulamalar, görsel yaşçılık merceği aracılığıyla deşifre edilmektedir. Bulgular, medyanın yaşlıları yalnızca fiziksel mekânlardan değil, aynı zamanda bilişsel ve dijital ağlardan da dışlayarak sembolik bir yok oluşa maruz bıraktığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, yaşlılığı homojen, tıbbileştirilmiş ve çaresiz bir kategoriye hapseden egemen kitle iletişim söylemlerinden uzaklaşılması gerektiğini vurgulamakta; bunun yerine, yaşlıların ontolojik haysiyetini ve özerkliğini yeniden merkeze alan kapsayıcı temsillere çağrıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlılık, Yaş Ayrımcılığı, Dijital Dışlanma, Türk Sineması, Toplam Kurumlar

1. INTRODUCTION

In the traditional Turkish social structure, the transmission of cultural memory, moral values, and social norms from one generation to the next has been shaped largely through an oral narrative tradition centered on family elders, grandfathers, and grandmothers. In Turkey, children have grown up internalizing the fundamental elements of becoming a virtuous individual, such as propriety, respect for elders, loyalty, love of country, religious sensibilities, and justice, through the experience-rich stories told by these wise figures within the household. From a sociological and cultural perspective, this situation demonstrates that the elderly do not merely represent a stage of biological decline but also embody an epistemological authority within the family and serve as the gray-haired archetype, a figure whose counsel is sought and heeded during times of crisis. Indeed, as Anthony Giddens (2013) emphasizes, the great respect and status accorded to the elderly in traditional societies stem from their role as the sole and legitimate bearers of social norms and moral values. The gratitude felt toward these figures of authority who shape social values through their stories and memories has fostered an unwavering bond of loyalty that children maintain throughout their lives; old age has come to be regarded as synonymous with wisdom and social prestige, and showing respect to the elderly has been adopted as an immutable social norm. In this traditional hierarchy, the elderly individual is the natural head of the household, the most prestigious spot in the home, not only physically but also spiritually.

However, the dissolution of the traditional extended family, replaced by the nuclear family model, along with the practices of modernization, waves of industrialization, and the transformation of urban spaces, has created a profound ontological and sociological rupture in this ancient process of knowledge transmission. As Özkul and Kalaycı (2015) also point out, based on a report prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2011), migration, urbanization, the emergence of diverse professional specializations, and radical changes in the economic system have eliminated the elderly individual's power to represent the family in traditional society and their initiative in guiding intergenerational relationships. As mass media, modern educational institutions, and algorithmic systems have replaced storytelling and the face-to-face transmission of experience, older adults have completely lost their role in knowledge transmission; consequently, the organic bond of respect that should exist toward them has been deeply disrupted. Modern culture's pragmatic logic is rooted in speed, capitalist production, competition, and youth, which have marginalized the value of wisdom and life experience, pushing the elderly to the margins of modernity in terms of both their physical capabilities and their social roles. Once revered storytellers at the center of the household have, as predicted by modernization theory, been reduced to symbolic figures who

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have lost their authority, with their professional and cultural skills deemed outdated in the face of the momentum of technological advancements and a new, child-centered social order. This loss of epistemological and social function has paved the way not only for the spatial exile of the elderly from the center of the home to institutionalized settings (nursing homes), but also for the erosion of respect toward them, the onset of a cycle of systematic ageism, and the marginalization of the elderly from social life, effectively coding them as a burden.

This epistemological decline, in which older individuals have evolved from storytellers and sages into passive, inactive, and care-dependent objects, has also been dramatically reflected in cinematic and media narratives, which are among the most powerful arenas for reproducing social reality. In the early days of Turkish cinema, authoritarian characters who held the family together and embodied traditional wisdom were replacedparticularly after the 2000sby representations of the elderly who were increasingly isolated, losing their sense of belonging amid the grip of urban transformation and neoliberal policies, and becoming the objects of technological advertisements and comedic elements, ultimately isolated because they could not keep up with the pace of the digital age. This sharp rupture in the transmission of tradition, brought about by shifting social norms, has led to elderly characters on the silver screen being entirely stripped of their status as sources of wisdom and confined to a category of helplessness centered on themes of dementia, spatial exile, and cognitive impairment. In this context, this article examines how the respected elderly figurewho occupies a central role in the transmission of moral and cultural values in traditional Turkish society and has raised generations through their stories is subjected to sociospatial exile and cognitive isolation along the axis of the Gray Digital Divide in Turkish cinema and digital platform narratives between 2000 and 2026, through a critical theoretical perspective centered on sociological film analysis methods.

2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL BREAK AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION

The elderly figure, traditionally positioned as the wise narrator at the head of the household, resolving crises and offering guidance through their experiences, has undergone a dramatic epistemological collapse under the dual pressures of digitalization and neoliberal urbanization practices that gained momentum in the 2000s (Giddens, 2012; Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). As Neil Postman's concept of Technopoly also indicates, the severing of the source of knowledge from human experience, context, and historical memory, and its transfer to algorithmic authorities, search engines, and massive databases, has fundamentally shaken the social function of the elderly (Helman, 2005; Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015; Palmore, 1990). Older adults, who in traditional culture held the status of wise elders (aksaçlı), have begun to be recoded as a cognitive burden in this new era, where knowledge is reduced to mere processable data, as they struggle to keep pace with technological speed, remain excluded from new-generation communication networks, and find themselves at the center of the gray digital divide (Kalınkara, 2016). In mass media, advertisements, and new media platforms, elderly characters are stereotyped as outdated individuals who do not understand technology, shout into the phone, struggle with internet use, and lack digital literacy, and are made the direct targets of practices of visual ageism (Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017; Loos & Ivan, 2018). Particularly in contemporary media narratives and humorous content produced on social media (such as memes), the portrayal of older adults deprived of their agency and depicted as outdated, childlike, and in need of care functions as a hegemonic mechanism that normalizes age discrimination in society and symbolically erases older individuals (Balcı Aydoğan & Abuşoğlu, 2022; Tuchman, 1978). Ageism, as conceptualized by Robert N. Butler, when combined with these exclusionary media discourses based on chronological age, paves the

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way for the complete isolation of older adults not only from the virtual world but also from the center of social life and the production of legitimate knowledge (Butler, 1969; Görgün Baran, 2016).

2.1. Ömer Lütfi Mete School and the Aksaçlı Archetype

At the historical threshold immediately preceding the epistemological rupture, intergenerational alienation, and the spiral of cognitive isolation created by digitalization, the most accomplished manifestations of old age's position as a respected, guiding figure, one whose epistemological legitimacy is upheld and to whom others turn for advice, in Turkish television and film narratives were embodied in the screenworld of Ömer Lütfi Mete (Yeşilçiçek & Gök, 2019). Mete, whose life and literary philosophy were founded on a synthesis of Islam and national values, adopted a didactic and socially beneficial approach in his screenplays; he constructed foundational characters who defended traditional morality and social memory against the erosion of the modern city (Yeşilçiçek & Gök, 2019). This approach, contrary to the general tendency to portray older adults in media narratives primarily through stereotypes of passivity, dependency, or cognitive impairment (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026; Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017), portrays old age not as a state of decline or an object of care, but as the pinnacle of refined wisdom, moral superiority, and mentorship.

The elderly characters featured in productions such as *Deli Yürek*, *Kurtlar Vadisi*, and *Ekmek Teknesi*all, created by Ömer Lütfi Mete, and which reached the largest viewership of their time, were portrayed on screen as role models that society longed for and embraced (Yeşilçiçek & Gök, 2019). In this universe, characters such as Kuşçu from the *Deli Yürek* series, Ömer Baba from the *Kurtlar Vadisi* series, and Fırıncı Nusret Baba from the *Ekmek Teknesi* series represent the wise and gray-haired (aksaçlı) figure through their religious and national heritage. Young protagonists struggling amid the complex relationships, bureaucratic deadlocks, or the cycle of crime in the modern city find solutions to the moral and practical crises they face not in technological systems or rational bureaucracy, but in the traditional and spiritual sanctuaries of these wise elders, such as a ney workshop, a bakery, or a dovecote (Yeşilçiçek & Gök, 2019). Through their parables, Sufi teachings, and advice woven with patience, these figures serve as central authorities who correct the distortions and misperceptions in the plot.

This narrative structure, penned by Mete, represents the last stronghold in the media of an ancient order, a time when knowledge had not yet been handed over to search engines and algorithmic systems, in which the elderly subject held the family and society together through the oral narrative tradition, wisdom, and life experience. However, the transformation in cinematic and digital platform narratives following the year 2000 would erode this archetype of the wise elder who possessed decision-making authority and was held in high regard, replacing it with a new climate of helplessness that rapidly gave way to institutional marginalization, cognitive erasure, and digital exclusion (Ertaylan, 2016).

This gray-haired (aksaçlı), crisis-solving sage figure, as portrayed by Ömer Lütfi Mete in his television narratives, has also resonated in Turkish cinema, particularly in the works of directors and screenwriters such as Yavuz Turgul and Çağan Irmak, with a range of sociological nuances.c In Yavuz Turgul's films, elderly male characters (*Muhsin Bey, Eşkıya, Gönül Yarası*) are portrayed as the last bastions carrying the moral codes of the past, mounting an honorable resistance against rapidly corrupting, capitalist, and value-deprived urban modernity. In particular, the film *Eşkıya* (1996) depicts the struggle of the elderly character Baran, released from prison after 35 years, as he grapples with the ruthless, technologically driven structure of modern Istanbul; it serves as an epic lament illustrating

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how the codes of chivalry and loyalty from the old world cannot take root in the new (Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017). On the other hand, Çağan Irmak's films portray elderly characters as organic bridges that mend the intergenerational divide and hold the family together. Indeed, the tradition in Asian and Turkish cinema, unlike in Western cinema, of placing the elderly at the center of crowded settings, and the reality that the elderly serve as bridges establishing intergenerational relationships within neoliberal policies (Döger, 2022), finds a direct counterpart in Irmak's film *Dedemin İnsanları (My Grandfather's People)* (2011). By positioning the elderly grandfather as the keystone holding historical bridges in place, the director emphasizes that family and collective memory can coalesce only around these figures. However, just as in Mete's universe, these nostalgic and revered elderly figures in Turgul and Irmak's films have also been unable to escape, gradually giving way to more passive, ailing, and spatially isolated characters (*Cici, Kabadayı, Unutursam Fısılda*) amid the rise of digitalization and neoliberal disruption in the post-2010 era (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026; Ertaylan, 2016).

2.2. Comprehensive Institutions and Heterotopical Deviations

The elderly figure who, as the wise narrator at the head of the traditional household, resolved crises and provided guidance drawn from their experiences, has undergone a dramatic epistemological collapse under the grip of digitalization and neoliberal urbanization practices that gained momentum in the 2000s (Giddens, 2012; Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). As Neil Postman's concept of Technopoly also indicates, the severing of knowledge from human experience, context, and historical memory, and its transfer to algorithmic authorities, search engines, and massive databases, has fundamentally shaken the social function of the elderly. Older adults, who in traditional culture held the status of wise elders (aksaçlı), have begun to be recoded as a cognitive burden in this new era, in which knowledge is reduced to mere processable data, as they struggle to keep pace with technological speed, remain excluded from newgeneration communication networks, and find themselves at the center of the gray digital divide (Kalınkara, 2016). In mass media, advertisements, and new media platforms, elderly characters are stereotyped as outdated individuals who do not understand technology, shout into the phone, struggle with internet use, and lack digital literacy, and are made the direct targets of practices of visual ageism (Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017; Yasa, 2021). Particularly in contemporary media narratives and humorous content produced on social media (such as memes), the portrayal of older adults as subjects who have been stripped of their agency, depicted as outdated, childlike, and in need of care, functions as a hegemonic mechanism that normalizes age discrimination in society and symbolically erases older individuals (Balcı Aydoğan & Abuşoğlu, 2022; Tuchman, 1978). Ageism, as conceptualized by Robert N. Butler, when combined with these exclusionary media discourses based on chronological age, paves the way for the complete isolation of older adults not only from the virtual world but also from the center of social life and the production of legitimate knowledge (Görgün Baran, 2016).

3. METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE SELECTION, AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is structured around a qualitative research design that treats cinematic and media texts not as passive reflections of social reality, but as meaning-producing discursive structures and sites of ideological hegemony. Among qualitative research approaches, a phenomenological research design was adopted, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of multilayered phenomena, such as digital exclusion, ageism, and spatial isolation, that individuals experience in their daily lives. In defining the conceptual boundaries of the research, visual texts in which elderly characters are central to the narrative were used as the

basis; the visual and narrative layers were examined within the framework of the thematic analysis method conceptualized by Braun and Clarke (2006). The selected films were subjected to descriptive and interpretive coding at the scene and sequence levels, focusing on narrative structure, dialogue, use of space, close-up choices, and character performances. How elderly characters are portrayed in relation to themes such as autonomy, the right to make decisions about their own lives, perceptual reality, cognitive fragility, and social isolation (invisibility) was deciphered through this systematic analysis framework.

Purposive sampling was used to construct the study's sample. The films included in the sample were selected based on strict academic criteria, such as representing the period after 2000 and the ontological transition to this era, featuring elderly characters as the primary drivers of the plot (main characters), and achieving high box-office success and critical acclaim. In this context, films from Turkish cinema, including Eşkıya (1996), Güle Güle (2000), Beyaz Melek (2007), and, in particular, Hanım (1988), a masterpiece exploring the theme of spatial decaywere included in the analytical universe; to present a comparative analysis of universal practices of isolation and cognitive collapse, internationally acclaimed films such as Aşk (Amour, 2012) and Baba (The Father, 2020) have also been integrated into the thematic framework. In addition, to assess the reception of cinematic texts by audiences and discourses on aging in digital media, the perspective of reception analysis, drawing on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, has been incorporated into the discussion; thereby deconstructing how representations of aging in the media are interpreted through dominant, negotiated, and oppositional modes of reading.

3.1. Representation Policies from Yeşilçam to the Present

Beyond serving as an impartial mirror of social reality, cinema, as a representational space that actively constructs dominant power structures, cultural norms, and social hierarchies, functions as a foundational ideological apparatus that shapes how aging is perceived. Looking at the historical journey of Turkish cinema, it is evident that during the pre-1990 Yeşilçam era, films were predominantly structured around young, beautiful women and handsome male characters; elderly characters, on the other hand, were positioned not at the center of the narrative but rather in supporting roles, either as obstacles in the protagonist's path or as sources of wisdom. During this period, the portrayal of old age on the silver screen, as embodied by master actors such as Hulusi Kentmen, Münir Özkul, Adile Naşit, Ali Şen, and Aliye Ronawas, was constructed through rigid stereotypes such as wise, negative, grumpy, needy, and conservative. In particular, representations of older women were homogenized by confining them to the stereotypes of the sacred and self-sacrificing mother who has devoted her life to her children, or the authoritarian/oppressive mother-in-law or matriarch who serves as the guardian of the patriarchal system. As explained by Gaye Tuchman's concept of symbolic annihilation, the reduction of older individuals (especially older women) to such stereotypes in the media, thereby rendering them invisible in the public and cultural sphere, is a gendered exercise of power that denies their social value. When examined within the context of theories of aging: In the film *Güle Güle* (2000), the elderly characters build strong bonds among themselves to avoid complete social exclusion, thereby establishing a peer solidarity that is a direct manifestation of the Subculture Theory in the literature; whereas, in the film *Nadide Hayat* (2015), scenes where an older adult struggles with technologyin contrast to young people using computers in university classroomscorroborate Modernization Theory, which argues that the elderly lose status with the advancement of technology.

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4. COGNITIVE DECLINE, ILLNESS, AND SILENT EXCLUSION IN CINEMATOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS

Going beyond being a neutral mirror of social reality, cinema, as a representational space that actively constructs dominant power structures, cultural norms, and social hierarchies, functions as a foundational ideological apparatus that shapes how aging is perceived (Hall, 2017; Balcı and Öztekin, 2026). Looking at the historical trajectory of Turkish cinema, it is evident that during the pre1990 Yeşilçam era, films were predominantly structured around young, beautiful women and handsome male characters; elderly characters, on the other hand, were positioned not at the center of the narrative but rather in supporting roles that either obstructed the protagonist's path or offered them advice (Nazik, 2016; Balcı and Öztekin, 2026). During this period, old age as portrayed on the silver screen by veteran actors such as Hulusi Kentmen, Münir Özkul, Adile Naşit, Ali Şen, and Aliye Rona was constructed through rigid stereotypes such as wise, negative, grumpy, needy, and conservative (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026; Diken Yücel & Arısoy, 2023). In particular, representations of older women have been reduced to a single, trapped between the stereotypes of the sacred and self-sacrificing mother who has devoted her life to her children and the authoritarian/oppressive mother-in-law or matriarch who serves as the guardian of the patriarchal system (Abisel, 2005; Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). As explained by Gaye Tuckman's concept of symbolic annihilation, the reduction of older individuals (especially older women) to such stereotypes in the media, thereby rendering them invisible from the public and cultural sphere, constitutes a gendered power practice that serves to deny their social value (Tuchman, 1978; Edström, 2018; Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). When examined within the context of theories of aging, the fact that the elderly characters in the film *Güle Güle* (2000) build strong bonds among themselves to form a peer solidarity networkin order to avoid being completely excluded from societyis a direct manifestation of the Subculture Theory in the literature (Kuruoğlu and Salman, 2017), whereas in the film *Nadide Hayat* (2015), scenes where an older adult struggles with technologyin contrast to young people using computers in university classroomscorroborate the Modernization Theory, which argues that the elderly lose status with the advancement of technology.

4.1. Space, Memory, and Decay in Turkish Cinema

When examining the post-2000 period of Turkish cinema, and even the transitional works that foreshadowed this transformation, it becomes evident that the relationship between elderly bodies, urban space, and social memory is shaped by a profound theme of disaffiliation and decay (Ertaylan, 2016; Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). Elderly characters are no longer central figures representing wisdom in the narrative; instead, they have become passive victims situated within issues such as the need for care, intergenerational conflict, social isolation, and coming to terms with the past (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). In the film *Hanım* (1988) by Halit Refiğ, one of the most striking examples of this sociospatial isolation, the old wooden mansion where the main character lives functions almost as a character in its own right, appearing on screen as a physical metaphor for old age and the need for care. The decay of this space, cut off from the outside world, progresses in tandem with the elderly individual's internal decay; the character, trapped between the past and the present, is rendered invisible within the ruthless rhythm of the modernizing city (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). On the other hand, in more recent popular cinematic narratives such as *White Angel* (2007), the subversion of traditional codes emerges in a different dimension; the elderly authority figure (Ahmet), who rejects cancer treatment and the oversight of modern medicine, flees from his sons and takes refuge in a nursing home. While this escape embodies resistance

against old age and the medical siege imposed by modernity, it also demonstrates the collapse of traditional family-based care mechanisms and the elderly individual's forced confinement to institutional settings (nursing homes). Similarly, in films such as *Eşkıya* (1996) and *Güle Güle* (2000), the struggles of elderly characters as they attempt to keep pace with the technological and sociological speed of the modern world result in their becoming voiceless, marginalized subjects in society.

The themes of spatial decay and the loss of memory, particularly when examined through Halit Refiğ's film Hanım (1988), strikingly demonstrate how the experience of old age transforms not merely into a biological decline but into a profound sociospatial isolation, completely severed from the outside world (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026). In the film, the old wooden mansion where the character Olcay Hanım lives, a place laden with memories of the past, functions almost as another main character, appearing on screen as a physical metaphor for old age, isolation, and the need for care. The peeling paint on the mansion's exterior and its decaying structure progress in a manner that is both synchronous and parallel to the elderly character's internal decay due to her terminal cancer. Trapped within this enclosed space where she mourns the past, the elderly subject is rendered completely invisible in the face of the fast pace of the modern city outside and neoliberal socialization practices. These practices of spatial invisibility and silent marginalization align on a universal level with the systematic alienation of the elderly, not only from environmental factors but also from their own perceptual realities and autonomous decision-making capacities, as seen in films such as *The Father* (2020) and *Amour* (2012) (Sezgin Emüler & Sarıoğlan, 2025). In these films, old age is portrayed as a phase of existential isolation in which identity and agency are gradually erased, and the individual is completely severed from the network of social relationships (Gullette, 2004; Sezgin Emüler & Sarıoğlan, 2025). The films *Eşkıya* (1996), *Güle Güle* (2000), and the more popular *Beyaz Melek* (2007) depict the efforts of elderly characters to preserve their traditional dignity in the face of modernity's institutionalized spaces of confinement (nursing homes) and its speed-driven technological encroachment, presenting this as a tragic struggle for survival. However, the ruthless rhythm of the modern city and the epistemological rupture caused by digitalization deprive the elderly individual of this potential for resistance, transforming them into an object of exclusion and helplessness, imprisoned in decaying mansions, tight frames, and institutional spaces devoid of belonging (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026).

While themes of spatial decay and social exclusion are explored as a silent tragedy in dramatic cinema, in Turkish horror cinema, which has grown increasingly popular since the 2000s, they are transformed into metaphors for grotesque physical decay and uncanninepg. Particularly in local horror films dominated by the cinema of Alper Mestçi and Hasan Karacadağ, such as the Siccin and Dabbe series, old age is depicted as a source of horror that embodies religious and moral decay, past sins, and supernatural entities (witchcraft, jinn, amulets). Given modern society's efforts to keep any physical cycles evoking death and decline out of sight and to push them beyond aesthetic standards, the idea of eliminating the elderly woman/body in horror films by associating her with dark rituals actually corresponds to a societal consensus in the unconscious and symbolic violence.

4.2. Visual Aging and Microdiscrimination in the Digital Age

This epistemological and physical exclusion, presented in a dramatic or unsettling manner in cinema, is reproduced through much more aggressive, consumption-oriented, and mocking practices of visual ageism in television commercials, humor magazines, and today's digital social networks (Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017). In television commercials, the most

fundamental medium of visual culture and consumer society (Baudrillard, 2008), older adults are reduced to figures stripped of their agency and decision-making capacity. In many food commercials, the stereotype of the passive grandmother or grandfather, smiling at the head of the table but having no say in product selection or family dynamics, predominates (Ertung, 2013). In advertisements for technology and communication brands, the stereotyping of older characters as comical figures who cannot use smartphones, struggle to access the internet, or shout at the screen serves to symbolically legitimize digital exclusion (Apak and Aka, 2020). These reductive and mocking representations strip older adults of their agency in contemporary society, confining them to a category of cognitive ignorance that renders them entirely dependent on the guidance of younger generations (Dağ, 2016; Diken, Yücel, & Arısoy, 2023).

This phenomenon reaches its peak in the humor culture of social media and the internet (in memes and cartoons). Internet memes depicting older people being strapped to chairs during the pandemic, the contrast created by an elderly man wearing a Star Wars hat while going out with BİM shopping bags, or their being portrayed as if they were participating in the Umrah pilgrimage through virtual reality gogglesthese are the most concrete indicators of how older people, unable to keep up with the new generation's jargon, have been turned into the other and objects of humor by the younger generation (Balcı Aydoğan & Abuşoğlu, 2022). For example, in a cartoon from a humor magazine depicting the year 2080 (Demir, 2016), the portrayal of older individuals as advertising agency creative directors or mobile app developers aims to make readers smile by playing on the myth that old age is compatible only with old-fashioned and traditional professions.

This ageism, which gained momentum on digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, has reinforced humorous, disparaging, and emotionally infantilizing patterns of microageism in aging practices on social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) (Akbuğa, 2026). These exclusionary discourses, constantly circulated by the media and digital power structures, poison older individuals' perceptions of their own aging experiences; the symbolic violence thus created is internalized by the victims themselves, thereby ensuring that ageism becomes a structural norm (Göregenli, 2012; Timurturkan & Demez, 2018).

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

When approaching the past twenty-five-year journey of Turkish cinema and media from a holistic perspective, it is clearly evident that the experience of aging and the bodies of the elderly have undergone a radical sociospatial and epistemological transformation (Özkul & Kalaycı, 2015). The archetype of the gray-haired (aksaçlı) elder who, in traditional social structures, served as the transmitter of cultural memory and the legitimate and respected authority within the family hierarchy has been pushed away from the center of the home and out of the public eye as a result of structural transformations such as neoliberalization, rapid urbanization, and the absolutization of the nuclear family (Balcı & Öztekin, 2026; Diken, Yücel, & Arısoy, 2023). The pragmatic nature of modernity, rooted in speed, performance, and consumer culture, has pushed the elderly individual outside the cycle of production, recoding them as a social care burden and a crisis area that must be managed (Kalınkara, 2016). In this context, even in early or transitional works such as Halit Refiğ's film *Hanım* (1988), old age is portrayed as a metaphor for a sense of rootlessness, decaying in the face of the ruthlessness of urban transformation, trapped in the past, and growing increasingly isolated (Topalak, 2020; Balcı Öztekin, 2026). On a cinematic level, the confinement of elderly characters to aging mansions or institutionalized spaces, such as nursing homes, demonstrates that old age is not merely a physical decline but also a process of exclusionary

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social isolation and silent othering (Ertaylan, 2016). Indeed, the reduction of the elderly to the status of the other through the loss of social status has paved the way for elderly bodies in cinema to be frequently framed through indicators of uncanniness, dementia, loneliness, or absolute helplessness (Creed, 2007; Diken, Yücel, & Arısoy, 2023).

When this spatial exile and loss of social status are combined with 21st-century communication technologies and digitalization practices, they have condemned older individuals to a new form of cognitive isolation within the grip of the Gray Digital Divide. In the age of technopolis, where the source of knowledge has been severed from human experience and transferred to algorithmic authorities, old age has lost its traditional status as a source of wisdom; in the media and popular culture, it has been transformed into an outdated object, constantly portrayed as unable to adapt to new technologies and stigmatized as digitally illiterate. It is no coincidence that in humorous content, particularly in television commercials, popular comedy films, and social media platforms (such as memes), older adults are stereotyped as childlike, ridiculous, or technophobic, with their agency stripped away (Balcı Aydoğan & Abuşoğlu, 2022; Yasa, 2021). These discourses of microageism, systematically circulated through contemporary media and digital platforms, glorify the fetishization of youth while subjecting older individuals to symbolic annihilation and normalizing age discrimination in society (Tuchman, 1978). The fact that visual media not only underrepresents older adults relative to their population but also, when they are depicted, constructs them as objects of pity, dependency, or comedy shatters older adults' perceptions of their own competence, leading them to internalize social exclusion (Kuruoğlu & Salman, 2017).

The only way to overcome this structural isolation and cinematic ageism is to deconstruct the dominant media discourse that marginalizes old age as a homogeneous, passive, and helpless category. While films in contemporary international cinema, such as *The Father* (2020) or *Amour* (2012), represent a significant cinematic achievement by bringing the processes of aging and cognitive decline to the screen in all their raw honesty while highlighting the individual's vulnerability, the media must move beyond narratives that are purely medicalized and reduced to tragedy (Sezgin Emüler & Sarıoğlan, 2025). In accordance with the principle of social responsibility inherent in communication tools and cinema, it is imperative to create space for multidimensional and inclusive representations of older adults who are capable of making their own decisions, who build a healthy bridge between the past and the future (Döger, 2022), and who retain their unique agency even in the digital age. Even if the shift of knowledge from humans to algorithms is an inevitable technological evolution, it must not be forgotten that no data that has not passed through the refined filter of human experience can be transformed into true social wisdom. Ultimately, Turkish cinema and mass media must rescue elderly bodies from tight frames, confined spaces, and the shadow of digital exclusion, restoring to them the ontological dignity they deserve; this is not only the most fundamental condition for combating ageism but also for repairing intergenerational cultural memory and social peace.

It should not be forgotten that:

Data fills the mind, but wisdom builds the soul;
The legacy of the elders is far deeper and
more guiding than the code stored on servers.

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