



Polarisation through film sound: sonic resentment in contemporary Turkish cinema

Pinar Üzeltüzenci *

Independent Researcher

ABSTRACT

This article explores Emin Alper's *Kurak Günler* (*Burning Days*, 2022) and Özcan Alper's *Karanlık Gece* (*Black Night*, 2022) through a comparative close listening and audiovisual analysis, focusing on how their soundtracks, comprising music, ambience, and speech, organise political conflict. In both films, sounds associated with specific characters and power dynamics resonate throughout the narrative, infusing the rural landscape with moral ambiguity. This interplay generates resentment within local power networks, which, in turn, supports a broader political examination of contemporary Turkey from an urban-secular art-house listening position, illustrating how culturally encoded sounds, repetition, and narrative reinforcement both presuppose and strengthen this position. In *Kurak Günler*, the sounds of municipal power increasingly envelop the town, whereas in *Karanlık Gece*, the interplay of silence and listening masks a pervasive criminality. The comparison shows how contemporary film sound can expose institutional failure, masculine violence and complicity while also reproducing moral distinctions between opposing social worlds.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 December 2024
Accepted 5 September 2026

KEYWORDS

Resentment; film sound;
listening position; Turkish
cinema; rurality

Introduction

Since synchronised sound entered Turkish cinema, it has been treated as something to control, while continually exceeding any control. This tension is important because the transition to synchronised sound unfolded within the modernising project of the early Republic, in which cinema emerged as a vital medium through which a new national identity could be expressed and experienced. Practices such as post-dubbing carried both technical and ideological weight in shaping this emerging Republican identity, including its language, voice, and musical culture. These practices reflected and influenced how the new nation would sound, and listen to itself on screen, determining which voices would be deemed legitimate and which would be marked as different (Erdoğan 2002, Erol 2012). In contemporary art cinema where the technical conditions under which these distinctions are created have evolved and transformed, ideological implications are no longer conveyed primarily through the dubbed voices and emphatic sound cues characteristic of Yeşilçam. Instead, they increasingly manifest in ambient sound, room tone, off-screen noises, silence, subtle musical textures, and shifts in sonic perspective. Through these

CONTACT Pinar Üzeltüzenci  pinar.uzeltuzenci@ihu.edu.tr

*Present affiliation: Post-doctoral researcher at Ibn Haldun University

© 2026 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

more nuanced forms, film sound continues to encode authority, credibility, and moral value by organising the relationships among voices, bodies, and environments.

This article identifies both continuity and rupture within this history through two films released in 2022: Emin Alper's *Kurak Günler* (*Burning Days*) and Özcan Alper's *Karanlık Gece* (*Black Night*). In both films, sonic markers linked to specific characters and power dynamics are distributed with care and generosity, allowing for repetition and emphasis to shape how the rural community is perceived and categorised. I argue that these sonic strategies both presuppose and reveal a particular listening position from which political conflicts are interpreted as symptoms of a broader moral landscape, a reading grounded in the films' audiovisual construction of contemporary Turkey.

The subsequent sections situate this argument within the historical and industrial transformation of sound in Turkish cinema, before elaborating on the concept of sonic resentment through Jameson, Nietzsche, film-sound theory, and the notion of a listening position. After outlining the methodology and scene selection, I bring the films together through recurring sonic relations. The discussion then considers how political critique can reproduce the divisions it diagnoses.

Historical context

From the early sound era throughout the Yeşilçam period, post-synchronisation played a crucial role in establishing Istanbul Turkish as the normative cinematic voice of the nation, marking regional, working-class, and minority accents often as comedic, exaggerated, or menacing (Balci 2013; Erdoğan 2002; Lülecı and Nas 2020). These conventions established specific associations within the social hierarchy: refined speech signified education, authority, and legitimacy, while stigmatised speech indicated characters belonging to regional, ethnic, or class distinctions. Erdoğan (2002) describes post-dubbing as a process that creates a disembodied voice, transferring from one star's body to another, thereby forming the meta Yeşilçam voice that instructed the masses on how to speak and listen in the world. This separation further reinforced gendered conventions regarding the relationship between voices and bodies, as well as the vocal coding of femininity and masculinity (Turan 2024). With location ambience often muted or artificially reconstructed, vocal delivery and linguistic standardisation became prominent tools for character and plotdefinition making these conventions simultaneously aesthetic, ideological, and industrial.

Advancements in production technology complicate the task of explaining distinctions solely as consequences of industrial limitations. Techniques such as location recording, multitrack editing, spatialisation, and post-production have broadened the ways in which voices can be positioned within acoustic environments (Akıkol Atmaca Demir, and Zülfıkar 2024). The endurance of sonic hierarchies in these transformed conditions shifts the analytical focus from production constraints to the more subtle ways in which contemporary soundtracks organise speech, audibility, and social differences.

This technological transformation coincided with the institutional differentiation of popular, independent, and art cinema, alongside broader changes in Turkey's cultural policy environment (Aksoy and Şeyben 2015). As Akser (2015, 2018) points out, Turkish independent cinema exists within a framework shaped by auteurism, politics, and its relationship with festival audiences. Within this context, features such as restrained

dialogue, sparse ambience, narrative ambiguity, and unresolved endings serve both as formal choices and recognised markers of artistic complexity. Political engagement also plays a significant role in establishing critical legitimacy within contemporary Turkish cinema (Yaren and Karademir Hazır 2020). In this sense, sound design gains political importance by directing attention and shaping the relative audibility and credibility of various voices.

Both *Kurak Günler* and *Karanlık Gece* belong to this transformed aesthetic and institutional environment. While they both address themes of corruption, masculine violence, and complicity, their soundtracks are structured around culturally established contrasts between normative and stigmatised voices, between centre and periphery, and between legitimate and illegitimate forms of expression.

Conceptual framework

This article explores film sound through Fredric Jameson's interpretation of cultural texts as socially symbolic acts. According to Jameson, narrative reorganises historical contradictions through formal structures that make them intelligible and manageable at the textual level (Jameson 1981, 77–79). Jameson also identifies the utopian potential of cultural texts in their symbolic affirmation of historically specific forms of unity and solidarity, even when these forms may be ideological or exclusionary (289–91). I contend that *Kurak Günler* and *Karanlık Gece* exemplify this affirmation without offering a positive alternative. Rather, the way they organise their soundtrack creates an urban-secular listening position that symbolically fosters a sense of affirmation by repeatedly validating suspicions of political corruption, masculine violence, and institutional failure. In this manner, the films' pessimism can yield utopian gratification through coherence and moral vindication, even though no utopian social order is manifest within their narrative worlds.

The concept of resentment sheds light on how political injury serves as a foundation for moral judgement. Nietzsche characterises resentment as a process in which the inability to directly address perceived injuries leads to imaginary revenge and a revaluation of prevailing values (Nietzsche [1887] 2006, First Essay, §10). Scheler expands on this idea, framing resentment as a lasting affective disposition sustained by repressed hostility and a continuous comparison with others (Scheler 1994, 25–29). Jameson considers resentment as an ideologeme embedded within class narratives, rather than merely an individual psychological condition. In his interpretation of Gissing, Jameson identifies an autoreferential structure within the theory of resentment: the act of diagnosing and condemning another group's resentment may itself reflect and generate resentment (Jameson 1981, 189–190). Building on this insight, I propose to view resentment as a socially organised mode of judgement that links political injuries to moral distinctions among groups. This perspective allows an examination of the relationship between resentment, as represented within rural power networks, and the moral vindication associated with the urban-secular standpoint from which those networks are evaluated.

I employ the term “sonic unconscious” to describe the embedded historical associations that render sounds socially recognisable when arranged within a narrative context. Accents, vocal styles, laughter, musical instruments, environmental sounds, and modes of

amplification gain significance through inherited distinctions between centre and periphery, refinement and coarseness, legitimate authority and local cunning, as well as controlled and excessive masculinity. This term pertains to the culturally available sonic repertoire within which cinematic sounds acquire social meaning, rather than referring to the potential unconscious intentions of filmmakers or audiences.

Sonic ressentiment refers to this organisation of an inherited auditory repertoire into a listening position shaped by political injury and moral judgement. When sonic cues become linked to specific characters and power relations, they ultimately acquire broader social significance through their repetition, amplification, and narrative reinforcement. In *Kurak Günler* and *Karanlık Gece*, the ressentiment within local men emerges through such associations, serving as evidence of a broader diagnosis of corruption, violence, and institutional decline. The sonic unconscious provides the culturally ingrained associations that render auditory differences socially intelligible; sonic ressentiment describes their formal organisation into a perspective from which conflict is interpreted and evaluated.

These associations contribute to the formation of a listening position which is the cultural and ideological framework through which sounds derive meaning and through which attention, sympathy, suspicion, and moral biases are shaped. While Chion's concept of "point of audition" identifies the represented location or perspective of hearing within the film's world, a listening position focuses on the social orientation from which sounds gain significance (Chion 1994, 89–92). Chion also introduces the notion of "added value", elucidating how auditory qualities can seem to naturally belong to the people and places depicted on screen, even though this impression arises from the audiovisual construction (5). In this sense, film sound functions similarly to Althusserian "interpellation", as it provides a subject position by unevenly distributing credibility, interiority, threat, and difference across voices, bodies, and spaces (Althusser 1971, 170–177).

I characterise this listening position as urban-secular based on the films' formal alignments rather than the assumed demographic identity of their audiences. This alignment is part of a longer narrative tradition where urban professionals and representatives of central institutions confront provincial actors portrayed as backward, reactionary, or corrupt (Yaren 2026, 40–44). Explicit religious markers play a minimal role in either film, and the rural men's alcohol gatherings complicate any straightforward association between rurality and religiosity. Instead, this designation identifies a cluster of professional, bureaucratic, and urban-cultural values. Emre's legal authority and Murat's oppositional journalism connect credibility with educated, urban-coded conduct. Similarly, Ali's environmental work, his guitar, and his habit of filter coffee do the same, as does the acoustic privacy afforded to quiet conversations. İshak presents a more ambivalent case, as his musical identity and search for truth coexist with his involvement in the crime. In both films, loud voices, exaggerated laughter, overlapping speech, and homophobic ridicule consistently accompany provincial masculine power. Thus, urban-secular designates a textual allocation of credibility, and cultural legitimacy.

Methodology

This study integrates comparative close listening with audiovisual analysis, drawing upon Chion's exploration of the interplay between sound and image (Chion 1994). I address dialogue, ambience, music, and silence, as well as their interaction with visual framing,

approaching the soundtrack as a constructed landscape, shaped through selection, repetition, spatialisation, and mixing.

Each film was viewed three times prior to examining selected scenes through repeated close listening. In the first viewing, I mapped the narrative structure, character alignments, and political conflict. The second focused on dialogue, ambience, and foreground-background relationships, while the third focused on music and its recurring instances.

I have chosen the scenes based on five interconnected categories: authority, vulnerability, privacy and intimacy, complicity and judgement, and gendered audibility. The category of authority included aspects such as amplified speech and the control of acoustic space. Vulnerability encompassed elements such as threat, isolation, off-screen sounds, and heightened footstep sounds. Privacy and intimacy focused on quiet exchanges and musical interactions, while complicity and judgement involved themes of withheld testimony, ridicule, and silence. Gendered audibility highlighted inequalities in the individuation and authority of men's and women's voices.

Selected scenes were then replayed with specific attention to the overall sound mix, vocal performance, environmental sound, and music. I followed the repeated sonic cues across scenes to explore how their associations shift from individual characters and power dynamics to the broader community. As separate dialogue, music, and effects tracks were unavailable, the analysis relies on the final audiovisual mixes. Instead, I emphasise the perceptible relationships among sonic elements, contrasts between scenes, and variations in the soundtrack.

Narrative orientation

Kurak Günler and *Karanlık Gece* offer complex explorations of guilt, complicity, and power dynamics within small communities, particularly regarding violence and the suppression of truth.

Kurak Günler follows Emre, a newly appointed prosecutor who arrives in the drought-stricken town called Yanıklar. He quickly becomes embroiled in local political machinations, particularly those orchestrated by the mayor and his son, Şahin, who exert control over the town's critical water supply. Emre's experience at a social gathering at Şahin's residence culminates in a night marked by fragmented memories and the traumatic event of a sexual assault against Pekmez, a young Roma woman. This disorienting amnesia raises crucial questions about agency and moral responsibility, as Emre grapples with his potential involvement in the incident. As he endeavours to piece together the fragmented recollections of the previous night and investigate the assault, he faces a backlash characterised by homophobic rumours propagated by Şahin's circle, which aim to discredit both him and Murat, an opposition journalist with whom Emre has formed an alliance. The narrative builds to a climax on election night, as an enraged crowd pursues Emre and Murat following their attempts to expose corruption, ultimately leading to a physical and symbolic rupture represented by a sinkhole that separates them from their pursuers.

Conversely, *Karanlık Gece* centres İshak, a musician who returns to his mountain village seven years after his involvement in the murdering of Ali, a forest engineer who was marginalised by the local male populace. The past event, marked by silence, demonstrates the theme of complicity as İshak, after encountering Ali on the night of the murder, fails to

intervene effectively in the assault. This lasting silence about the crime haunts İshak until his return to the village, where he begins to confront those involved and to seek the location of Ali's body, paralleling Ali's father's desperate search through the forest for the truth. However, İshak's pursuit of redemption culminates in betrayal when the men he once associated with turn against him, removing his rope as he attempts to uncover the truth, thereby encapsulating the theme of inescapable complicity in violence and the societal pressures that sustain collective silence in the face of wrongdoing.

Comparative analysis of *Kurak Günler* and *Karanlık Gece*

Both films structure their political allegories around similar narrative elements: a rural community, an unresolved act of violence, compromised institutions, and a protagonist whose quest for truth becomes intertwined with his own vulnerability. Emre represents an institutionally isolated newcomer who challenges Yanıklar's local authorities, while İshak serves as an implicated witness, with his struggle against silence reflecting his prior involvement. The films also share a similar set of national allegories, a defeatist tone, and "crisis aesthetics", highlighted by the recurring motifs of the posse and the sinkhole (Yaren 2026), figures whose lineage in Turkish cinema runs through the Turco-Western's reworking of frontier iconography (Çınar 2025). This further explores how auditory cues associated with identifiable figures and power dynamics permeate voices, vehicles, gatherings, infrastructure, and landscapes, ultimately shaping a blanket sonic identity for the broader community.

Sound advance and ritualised violence

In both films, we first hear a tense sound before the first image appears. *Kurak Günler* opens with a black screen accompanied by a distorted, wind-like sound and a mechanical noise reminiscent of an approaching engine. The image then reveals an immense sinkhole in a barren landscape, viewed from above. As the camera gradually pulls away, low-frequency tones and a thin, monotonous string passage with a subtly melismatic quality underscore the movement. As its later recurrences suggest, this string motif functions as the thematic music of the sinkhole, associating it not only with ecological destruction but also with the political and moral corruption that the sinkhole comes to embody. By introducing the town of Yanıklar through this sonic and visual representation of the sinkhole, the film foregrounds ecological destruction as a precursor to its narrative of local corruption and political power. The landscape thus appears as the tangible consequence of a system whose members and operations will only gradually come into focus.

Soon after as Emre enters the town, gunshots ring out, drawing attention to a boar hunt already in progress throughout the area. A group of men pursues a wounded boar through the streets in a convoy of vehicles, striking their metal surfaces, shouting to one another, and firing their rifles. After they shoot the animal, they tie its injured body to a tractor and drag it through the town, followed by an increasingly excited crowd that cheers. The cacophony of gunfire, engine noise, metallic clashes, and male voices creates a "collective effervescence", an intensification of shared emotion through which individual acts of violence transform into a communal ritual (Durkheim [1912] 1995). The animal's suffering becomes both a public spectacle and

a focal point for masculine solidarity. It is only later in the film we learn that Şahin, one of the central figures of the hunt, is a lawyer and the mayor's son. This sequence thus makes the coordinated male violence audible before revealing the political network that enables it.

Karanlık Gece opens with a sense of impending masculine violence as well. A black screen introduces a sustained electronic tone, which is soon overwhelmed by angry male shouts, gunfire, and the sounds of blows against vehicles. As the convoy makes its appearance, overlapping voices meld with the roar of engines and metallic impacts, creating a palpable atmosphere of collective aggression. The men invigorate one another's fervour, acting almost as a singular force. Their target is Ali, a young forest engineer recently appointed to the village. The escalating intensity among the men clearly signals that he is in peril and that violence is imminent. The film subsequently shifts focus, cutting to İshak performing music, thereby delaying a full portrayal of the attack.

Throughout the film, a series of fragmented flashbacks slowly reconstruct the memories of that fateful night. These scenes progressively identify the attackers and ultimately reveal that the men brutally beat Ali to death before disposing of his body in a sinkhole. They also clarify İshak's ambiguous role in the incident. While he was present with the men and was the one to confront Ali initially, he attempted to intervene as the beating began. However, he is unable to save Ali and remains silent about the murder for seven years. Both films commence by depicting aggression as a communal ritual, organised through vehicles, weapons, metallic impacts, and male voices. In *Kurak Günler*, the boar hunt establishes this pattern early on, while the crowd's pursuit of Emre in the final sequence redirects that same collective energy towards a threatened lynching. In contrast, *Karanlık Gece* opens with aggression that foreshadows Ali's murder, but the film withholds the specifics of the attack and the extent of İshak's involvement, revealing these details gradually through his fragmented memories.

Musical scores and electronic textures

The films' non-diegetic scores employ similar strategies. In *Kurak Günler*, the score composed by Stefan Will combines sustained low-frequency drones, sound clusters, and abrasive textures with environmental sounds such as electrical buzzing, wind, and footsteps on hard ground. These elements rarely resolve into traditional melodies or harmonies; however, by recurring across various scenes, they forge a connection among drought, sinkholes, and Emre's interactions with the local power, thereby embedding a sense of unease in the film's soundscape.

Will's score also incorporates a recurring violin theme during key dramatic moments. The ornamented, sliding phrases of the violin evoke feelings of lament and discomfort, while its timbre resists clear classification as either folk or classical. Coupled with the arid landscape, harsh sunlight, and ochre colour palette, the theme subtly suggests elements of Western iconography (Bunbury 2022). The film supports this comparison through Emre's role as an isolated figure of authority in a town dominated by local interests. The violin underscores his vulnerability and the narrative refrains from delivering the expected Western resolution since justice is never restored. This allusion highlights the disparity between Emre's legal authority and his ineffectiveness in bringing change. Alongside the

drones, the violin extends the sense of tension beyond individual encounters and into the wider acoustic landscape of Yanıklar.

The score of *Karanlık Gece* composed by Cansun Küçüktürk features monotonous, unsettling electronic textures, particularly during moments of heightened tension. The sustained electronic tone accompanying the opening convoy establishes a sense of threat, while similar sounds recur in connection with themes of secrecy, collective aggression, and İshak's confrontation with the past. However, in rare moments, this tense hum is interspersed with sparse piano, acoustic instrumentation, and, most notably, the guitar motif associated with Ali. Initially implied by the guitar Ali brings to the town with him, the guitar motif diegetically recurs during a duet between Ali and İshak, and later reappears non-diegetically in scenes shaped by memory and regret. Its acoustic timbre serves as a counterpoint to the score's electronic monotony, evoking a sense of intimacy and attention that violence has disrupted. Although the motif cannot undo the murder or restore their relationship, it allows Ali's acoustic presence to endure throughout the film even after his death.

Masculine sociability and exclusion

Both films illustrate the tensions that arise among men during social gatherings characterised by alcohol, food, music, and conversation. As these scenes progress, the men begin to interrupt each other, laugh loudly, ridicule specific individuals, and raise their voices. Their laughter and noise serve to pressure anyone who does not conform to the group. By participating in the same jokes and directing their hostility towards a common target, they affirm their loyalty to one another.

In *Kurak Günler*, the mayor invites Emre for dinner as a welcome addition to the town's social scene. However, the atmosphere quickly shifts after the mayor leaves for an urgent matter, as the mayor's son, Şahin, and the other men become increasingly boisterous, mocking his discomfort. Şahin turns Emre's unease into a source of entertainment, either condoning his behaviour or strategically avoiding confronting him. Şahin possesses enough social and political clout to steer the conversation and dictate what the group finds entertaining. Despite holding the formal title of the law's representative, Emre increasingly loses control and authority due to alcohol.

What begins at the dinner table transcends that night as the mayor and his supporters adopt similarly loud and aggressive tones in public spaces. They spread rumours, produce fake news, and accuse anyone who opposes them. Later, Şahin exploits Emre's fragmented memory of the evening, using these gaps against him, insinuating that Emre may have participated in the abuse of the Roma girl willingly. No one challenges Şahin's narrative, and this silence allows him to shape the story and instil doubt in Emre's mind regarding his own memories.

The drinking scenes in *Karanlık Gece* unfold in a similar manner. When the men gather around a table, whether drinking together or playing games in the coffeehouse, they speak loudly, interrupt one another, and make jokes with homophobic implications. During one such gathering, Ali becomes the target of their ridicule because he deviates from the group's masculine ideal: his guitar playing, preference for filter coffee, and fair hair are coded as feminine. When one of them calls Ali İshak's "nightingale", İshak reacts angrily and a fight breaks out. At this point, another man arrives and claims that Ali has

made advances towards Sultan, İshak's girlfriend. The men around the table, already agitated by the argument, seize upon this accusation and incite one another to confront him. Raising their voices and striking the table, they leave together to beat Ali. The scene thus shows how homophobic ridicule, wounded masculine pride, and jealousy converge within an already charged noisy atmosphere, transforming verbal provocation into organised violence.

Water, listening and guarded speech

Local power dynamics control both the material resources and the flow of information in the films, which are represented through silence. For instance, in *Kurak Günler*, the mayor and his supporters control the water supply in Yanıklar. While running water is rarely heard in the town's public spaces and personal houses (like Emre's), the sounds of water are heard within Şahin's home. Emre can hear the toilet flushing, a shower running, and water being poured, even as the residents of Yanıklar grapple with severe shortages. These domestic sounds indicate that Şahin's family enjoys unrestricted access to water, but they do not provide insight into how the family controls its supply.

In one scene, Emre presses his ear against a pipe in his house but hears nothing, highlighting the limitations of sound and listening. This uncertainty also influences his movements through Yanıklar at night. His footsteps resonate sharply against the backdrop of distant dogs, insects, electrical hums, and the wind. The dogs' frequent barking suggests uncanny activity beyond his sight, yet it does not reveal who or what might be nearby. These sounds amplify a sense of suspicion and paranoia without providing the information necessary for his investigation.

The mayor's voice travels where the town's water does not. Municipal loudspeakers carry his announcements across Yanıklar, and they continue in his absence. The same voice enters Emre's office, mixing with the hum of electricity and the noise from the street. LaBelle (2010) argues that sound produces acoustic territories precisely because it disregards architectural boundaries, binding interior and exterior into a single relational space and unsettling the distinction between private and public. The municipal address system turns this property into an instrument of governance. Emre's office signifies the authority of state law, yet its walls cannot exclude municipal speech. The municipality addresses everyone in Yanıklar, while residents hold no comparable means of reply. Amplification distributes audibility as unevenly as the mayor's network distributes water.

In *Karanlık Gece* as well, local power manipulates information, creating a dependency on political favours. One man confides to İshak that a member of parliament helped him secure social insurance for his ailing child and implies that if he dares to speak about Ali's murder, he risks losing the political connections that provide his child with medical care. Ali's superior at work faces a similar dilemma, advising him to refrain from enforcing wildlife protection laws because he knows the institution will not protect him from the local men in the forest. Political support in both films carries an unspoken condition that is very reminiscent of contemporary Turkey: those who benefit must not challenge their providers.

Karanlık Gece further illustrates the limitations of listening in the forest. While visiting the sinkholes, Ali describes the landscape as both frightening and beautiful. He whistles towards the cliffs, listening for the echo. Following Ali's disappearance, his father

emulates this act, searching the woods for his son's dead body. For seven years, he traverses the forest, whistling, calling Ali's name, and occasionally spending nights there. He listens carefully to the leaves rustling, birds singing, and footsteps, but none of the sounds reveals Ali's whereabouts. At one point, he laments that he hears nothing, as he cannot discern the one voice he seeks. Although the forest remains filled with sounds, it seems to be complicit with the men in concealing the truth.

İshak's own silence significantly influences his search. He pointed Ali out to the other men, attempted to intervene during the beating, and then kept what he knew for seven years. Sultan's directing him to the Kuyucaklı Sinkhole at Giden Gelmez ensnares İshak in a trap. When he ventures into the sinkhole, the men cut his rope, leaving him stranded below. İshak cries out "Don't" as he did during the attack on Ali when the men abandon him, yet they disregard him both times. This repetition recalls his failure to prevent the murder and places him in a position similar to Ali's. At the bottom of the sinkhole, İshak encounters a living caracal, the very animal that Ali had been tracking and striving to protect. Its survival confirms that Ali's attentiveness to the forest stemmed from insights that the other men had overlooked.

The films depict the failure of articulating evidence in distinct ways. In *Kurak Günler*, Emre struggles to fully recall the events of Pekmez's assault, creating an opening for Şahin and his allies to accuse and manipulate him. In *Karanlık Gece*, several characters are aware of what happened to Ali but choose to disclose only information that serves to protect themselves or the other men involved. The first film illustrates how local power can exploit uncertainty, while the second centres on the concealment of known information. In both narratives, those who control the dissemination of information also shape what others accept as evidence.

Music, intimacy and acoustic difference

Although mostly dominated by suspicion and tension, both films offer fleeting moments of intimacy, represented through low volume and incomplete dialogue. In *Kurak Günler*, Emre and Murat speak carefully, frequently pausing and leaving sentences unfinished. Their relationship is ambiguous but this acoustic privacy is opposed to the loud public interactions that characterise the town implying civility. Later dialogues transform their proximity into fodder for homophobic insinuations, portraying their closeness as evidence of both sexual and political impropriety.

In one scene in *Karanlık Gece*, we see Ali and İshak beside a stream. Ali plays the guitar while İshak accompanies him on the saz, as they are enveloped by the gentle sounds of flowing water and the rustle of the forest, in stark contrast to the overlapping shouts, gunfire, and clashing sounds from the other men. Ali and İshak try to adapt to each other without either instrument overpowering the conversation. Despite the shortness of this intimacy, the cultural and interpersonal differences become briefly audible without any sense of hierarchy, ridicule, or punishment (see [Figure 1](#)). This duet provides an alternative listening experience to the group, which typically views difference with suspicion, ridicule, or punishment.

Later, the other men refer to this musical encounter through homophobic insinuations, recasting Ali's guitar, vocal style, and closeness to İshak as indications of failed masculinity. The attack on Ali shatters the social bond that the duet had briefly established.



Figure 1. Ali and Ishak's guitar-saz exchange by the stream in *Karanlık Gece*. The instruments retain distinct timbres while their performance creates reciprocal attention across cultural and interpersonal difference. Source: frame capture from *Karanlık Gece* (Özcan Alper, 2022).

However, following his death, his guitar arpeggio reappears in the non-diegetic score, particularly during scenes that show Ishak's guilt. Reminiscent of Ali's guitar, this melody allows him to persist as a sonic ghost, preserving an acoustic trace of his individual presence. Consequently, this motif limits the group's control over the film's sound landscape: while the men destroy the relationship, they cannot fully erase its acoustic memory.

Gendered silence and acoustic agency

The films' soundtracks are predominantly characterised by male voices. Men's voices fill public spaces, legal discussions, political conflicts, and private confrontations, while women speak less frequently and often participate in narratives shaped by men's conflicts (Yaren 2026, 45). The limited presence of women's voices highlights how sonic resentment is influenced not only by gender but also by politics and context.

In *Kurak Günler*, the assault on Pekmez, a young Roma woman, serves as the central crime under investigation. However, Pekmez speaks very little and never fully recounts the assault in her own words. Instead, men narrate what happened to her, debate the circumstances of the night, and determine the direction of the case. In contrast, the film dedicates significantly more time to Emre's fragmented recollections of the same night. Through flashbacks, distorted sounds, and uncertain visuals, the audience is immersed in his confusion. While the film exposes the violence inflicted on Pekmez, it largely refracts the event through the male prosecutor's memories and the conflicting accounts from other men. Although Pekmez is integral to the plot, she is afforded minimal opportunity to express herself.

The election night crowd further illustrates this disparity. Women are seen among those celebrating the mayor's victory and later confronting Emre and Murat. However, the

soundtrack obscures their individual voices, blending them into the cacophony of the crowd's shouts, engines, and metallic sounds. As a result, the women are subsumed into the threatening mob, leaving it unclear whether they support, oppose, or passively follow the violence. Despite their presence, the sequence still conveys power primarily through loud and aggressive male voices.

This limited representation of female voices also underscores the central conflict around which the film organises its political landscape: the clash between institutional law and the extralegal "law of the forest" that governs Yanıklar. Although institutional authority is not exclusively male, evidenced by the presence of a female local judge, her role is brief, and she is portrayed more as someone entangled in the town's power dynamics than as an autonomous counterforce. Consequently, institutional law is primarily centred on Emre, the male prosecutor. The film thus exposes a violently patriarchal local order while simultaneously revealing its own gendered limitation: by constructing both the extralegal order it condemns and the institutional law opposing it predominantly through male voices and agency, it tacitly assumes law itself to be a masculine domain. In attempting to expose one male order through its confrontation with another, the film also reveals its own implicit assumption that political and legal conflict is fundamentally organised and resolved by men.

The women in *Karanlık Gece* are also implicated in the community's silence rather than positioned outside it. Sultan is portrayed as ambitious, desirous, and pragmatic: despite her relationship with İshak, she quickly becomes intimate with Ali and, after İshak leaves, marries one of his closest friends. Although she possesses crucial knowledge about Ali's disappearance, the note she gives İshak leads him to the sinkhole and simultaneously into a trap. İshak's mother likewise knows what happened but urges her son to abandon his search, using her authority to protect him rather than expose the murder. Women possess knowledge and show agency, but their actions are entangled with jealousy, self-preservation, and complicity as partners in crime among men.

Sinkholes and the expansion of antagonism

Present in both films, the sinkholes serve as a point of convergence for ecological, political, and social conflict, symbolising institutional, economic, and moral disintegration in contemporary Turkey (Yaren 2026, 47–48). Early on in *Kurak Günler*, Emre describes the sinkhole as terrifying, while Zeynep, the judge, adds that it possesses a certain beauty. Similarly, Ali uses the same descriptors during a patrol scene in *Karanlık Gece*. These dialogues suggest that the films render destruction visually appealing. Simultaneously, both narratives pinpoint human activities and moral corruption that contribute to sinkhole formation. In *Kurak Günler*, excessive and illegal water extraction causes the land to collapse symbolising the greed and immorality of the men. In *Karanlık Gece*, the sinkhole functions as the unconscious that hides repressed truths, Ali's body and later İshak as well.

On election night in *Kurak Günler*, the sounds of the local officials echo throughout Yanıklar. Crowds gather outside Emre's home, hurling accusations before surrounding his vehicle. The cacophony blends with the sounds of barking dogs, gunfire, and the clash of metal. As individual voices and motives become increasingly indistinguishable, some participants may act out of aggression, while others may be motivated by loyalty, dependence, fear, or opportunism. Although the mayor, his son Şahin, and their



Figure 2. The crowd surrounding Emre and Murat during the final confrontation in *Kurak Günler*. The image retains separate bodies, while layered voices, accusations and metallic impacts make the crowd audible as a single entity. Source: frame capture from *Kurak Günler* (Emin Alper, 2022).

associates remain the main political figures, the soundtrack blurs the distinctions between organisers and followers. As individual voices merge into a single entity, the violence associated with the local power begins to define the town as a whole (see Figure 2). The crowd claims Yanıklar acoustically before it reaches Emre's door: its noise occupies the streets, the courtyards and the interiors alike, leaving no position from which one could remain unaddressed (LaBelle 2010).

Karanlık Gece allows for the spread of aggression, homophobic ridicule, and concealment across its rural setting, yet it maintains stronger internal distinctions. As İshak ascends towards the sinkhole, he hears the men above before he can see them clearly. They sever his rope, cutting off his only escape route. However, İshak's guilt prevents him from completely distancing himself from the community he is investigating, while Ali lingers on as a sonic ghost even after his death.

This comparison highlights varying degrees of sonic resentment. In *Kurak Günler*, sounds linked to the governing network permeate public spaces and crowds, ultimately shaping the sonic landscape of Yanıklar. In contrast, *Karanlık Gece* features sounds such as the mountain echo, the exchange between guitar and saz, and the returning guitar arpeggio that remain beyond the men's control. The caracal also underscores Ali's attentive relationship with the landscape, which the other men have overlooked. While violence looms large in the film, these sounds and images prevent the men's hostility from completely defining the landscape. Thus, the distinction between the films lies in the extent to which sounds associated with specific characters and power dynamics shape the wider community's perception.

Discussion

Across both films, the concept of sonic resentment operates on historically ingrained associations that render sonic differences socially comprehensible. Accents, vocal styles, loud male voices, mocking laughter, and overlapping conversations evoke recognisable

distinctions between urban refinement and provincial coarseness, legitimate authority and local cunning, as well as controlled and excessive masculinity. Male characters utilise speech, laughter, and noise to assert power, maintain group boundaries, and identify targets for ridicule or punishment.

This repertoire has an intertextual lineage in Turkish popular cinema. Yeşilçam often employed exaggerated vocal performances to portray provincial, working-class, and minority characters as either comedic, excessive, or threatening figures (Balcı 2013; Erdoğan 2002; Lüleci and Nas 2020). In the films under discussion, loud speech and mocking laughter carry echoes of that history while serving to intimidate and foster masculine solidarity. This intertextual memory is integral to the sonic unconscious that underpins sonic resentment.

The films initially ascribe these auditory cues to specific male characters before broadening them across the films' overall soundscapes. Recurring elements such as loud speech, mocking laughter, gunfire, and metallic impacts appear alongside the sounds of barking dogs, insects, and footsteps on parched soil. The emphasis on such voices, actions, and moments of threat imbues them with political significance, framing violence as a pervasive condition rather than a series of isolated incidents. In *Kurak Günler*, Şahin's mocking tone and the mayor's amplified announcements suggest both personal entitlement and municipal authority. As the film progresses towards its final scene, the sounds tied to the governing network gradually coalesce into an oppressive acoustic image of Yanıklar.

Silence plays a crucial role in the sound design of both films, serving as more than merely the absence of sound. In *Karanlık Gece*, prolonged silences envelop confrontations, withheld testimonies, and moments where the villagers refuse to acknowledge what happened to Ali. Subtle environmental sounds intermittently punctuate these passages without alleviating their tension. Thus, silence manifests as an audible form of denial. Similarly, in *Kurak Günler*, quiet moments accompany the imagery of the arid landscape and the sinkholes. The relative lack of water, vegetation, and other indicators of ecological vitality underscores what Yanıklar has lost. Consequently, the themes of ecological degradation and moral disintegration become heard through a shared vocabulary of acoustic scarcity.

In both films, these silences contribute to the creation of sonic resentment. By integrating elements of aggression, concealment, and unresolved conflict into their soundscapes, the films depict antagonism as a structure that consistently stifles the potential for dialogue. Silence signifies a refusal to speak, testify, or accept accountability. When these silences alternate with discordant drones, gunshots, engines, metallic clashes, and male shouting, a series of sonic dead ends emerges: moments where communication, accountability, and reconciliation seem possible but are ultimately denied by sound.

Karanlık Gece distributes aggression and concealment throughout its rural setting while maintaining a greater degree of internal differentiation. The men transform Ali's guitar, ringtone, filter coffee, and quiet demeanour into markers of pretension and failed masculinity. Raised voices, homophobic insinuations, and strategic silence regulate belonging and access to knowledge. İshak's involvement in Ali's death complicates the moral distinction between witness and community. His quest for truth arises from within the very history he seeks to investigate.

Music serves to temper the reach of the men's shared aggression. In the exchange between guitar and saz beside the stream, Ali and İshak listen to one another, responding and adjusting without either instrument overshadowing the other. The acoustic instruments maintain their distinct timbres and culturally coded associations, enabling differences to coexist with intimacy rather than mockery. After Ali's murder, his guitar arpeggio re-emerges in the non-diegetic score. While the duet itself cannot be restored, its acoustic memory persists beyond the group's control. Detached from its deceased performer, the arpeggio allows Ali to linger as a sonic ghost, preserving the memory of a potential solidarity that the men's violence shattered but could not wholly erase. Similarly, the mountain echo and the caracal's survival uphold forms of attention and connection that the men either dismiss or strive to suppress.

Jameson's ideas of ideological containment and utopian gratification help explain why this way of listening can feel satisfying. Neither film solves the political problems it presents. The law fails; witnesses remain silent and careful listening does not lead to lasting change. However, the repeated exposure of corruption, violence and concealment confirms the suspicions associated with an urban-secular point of view. The films show rural men directing jealousy, suspicion and anger towards outsiders. From the position the films offer, this behaviour appears to confirm a wider story of institutional and moral failure. This creates the self-repeating structure that Jameson identifies in discussions of *ressentiment*. A group may condemn the hostility of others while repeating the same hostile division between "us" and "them" (Jameson 1981, 181–202). The films allow the urban-secular position to say, in effect, "we were right about them". This confirmation provides moral satisfaction and creates a sense of solidarity among those who share the same judgement. It resembles the utopian gratification that Jameson finds in symbolic experiences of collective unity (1981, 287–91). Brown's concept of wounded attachments also helps explain this process. A group can build its identity around a history of defeat and return repeatedly to that injury in order to preserve a stable sense of who it is (Brown 1995).

Both films expose political patronage, ecological destruction, economic dependency, masculine violence and the failure of public institutions. However, their repeated use of particular voices and sounds can also turn specific forms of corruption into a general image of rural society. *Kurak Günler* moves further in this direction because the sounds of the mayor's network gradually come to define Yanıklar as a whole. *Karanlık Gece* preserves differences within its community and landscape, which makes its point of view less complete and less secure. *Sonic resentment* therefore operates by degree. A film's use of voices, music, silence and environmental sound can strengthen the division between metropolitan and rural worlds, but it can also complicate or interrupt that division.

Conclusion

This article develops the concept of sonic resentment to illustrate how film sound transforms political judgement into a sensory experience. Voices, music, and environmental sounds acquire political significance through their consistent association with specific characters and power dynamics. In both films, the presence of loud male voices, evil-ish laughter, silence, gunfire, and amplified speech make the hostility of masculine

networks audible. Simultaneously, these auditory choices position an urban-secular mode of listening as more credible than the social landscape it critiques.

This perspective reveals a central contradiction. Both films confront issues such as ecological destruction, political patronage, inequitable resource distribution, patriarchal violence, homophobia, and institutional failure. However, the continual presentation of these problems also offers moral validation to viewers who already perceive rural power as corrupt and violent. Consequently, the analysis of resentment may inadvertently perpetuate the very division between “us” and “them” that it aims to critique. The belief that “we were right” fosters symbolic solidarity based on a shared experience of political defeat.

Furthermore, this argument highlights the evolving ideological role of sound in Turkish cinema. Contemporary location recording, intricate ambient soundscapes, and nuanced mixing contrast with Yeşilçam’s post-synced voices and more overt musical cues; nonetheless, sound remains a significant marker of social and political difference. Sonic resentment provides a framework for examining this continuity without treating every sound as a deliberate stereotype. It underscores both the hostility depicted within a film and the political vantage point from which that hostility acquires meaning. Future research could explore how other films and national cinemas utilise sound to articulate political injury, division, and belonging.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

The author used Grammarly in the final stage of the article for an overall check on readability.

Notes on contributor

Pınar Üzeltüzenci is a film and media scholar whose research focuses on the ideological functions of sound in cinema. She is currently working on the first monograph devoted to sound in Turkish cinema, forthcoming from Bloomsbury Academic.

ORCID

Pınar Üzeltüzenci  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-0767-7997>

References

- Akikol, Rahime, Bahar Atmaca Demir, and Haluk Zülfişkar. 2024. “Sound Design in the Turkish TV Series and Cinema Sector: Post-Production Stage.” *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 12 (1): 182–206. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2024.596>.
- Akser, Murat. 2015. “Turkish Independent Cinema: Between Bourgeois Auteurism and Political Radicalism.” In *Independent Filmmaking Around the Globe*, edited by Doris Baltruschat and Mary P. Erickson, 131–148. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442620377-011>.
- Akser, Murat. 2018. “Locating Turkish Cinema Between Populist Tendencies and Art Cinema.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Asian Cinema*, edited by Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, Gina Marchetti, and See Kam Tan, 151–170. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95822-1_8.

- Aksoy, Asu, and Burcu Yasemin Şeyben. 2015. "Storm Over the State Cultural Institutions: New Cultural Policy Direction in Turkey." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21 (2): 183–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2014.890605>.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, edited by Ben Brewster, 127–186. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Balcı, Dilara. 2013. *Yeşilçam'da Öteki Olmak*. İstanbul: Kolektif Kitap.
- Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bunbury, Stephanie. 2022. "Cannes Review: Emin Alper's 'Burning Days'." *Deadline*, May 26, 2022. <https://deadline.com/2022/05/burning-days-film-review-cannes-1235033325/>.
- Chion, Michel. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Çınar, İlyas Deniz. 2025. "Translocalizing the Frontier: The Case of the Turco-Western." *Studies in World Cinema* 5 (2): 183–208. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659891-bja10057>.
- Durkheim, Émile. (1912) 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press.
- Erdoğan, Nezi. 2002. "Mute Bodies, Disembodied Voices: Notes on Sound in Turkish Popular Cinema." *Screen* 43 (3): 233–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/43.3.233>.
- Erol, Ayhan. 2012. "Music, Power and Symbolic Violence: The Turkish State's Music Policies During the Early Republican Period." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (1): 35–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549411424947>.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- LaBelle, Brandon. 2010. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. New York: Continuum.
- Lüleci, Yalçın, and Alparslan Nas. 2020. "Türk Sinemasında Azınlıklar." *Düşünce ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* (2): 1–16. <https://izlik.org/JA22YZ47BR>.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1887) 2006. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheler, Max. 1994. *Ressentiment*. Edited by Lewis A. Coser. Translated by William W. Holdheim. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press.
- Turan, Müge. 2024. "A Nation Dubbed: Ghost Voices in Yeşilçam." PhD diss., University of Toronto. <https://utoronto.scholaris.ca/items/fe2ac0c8-2563-4935-af5f-b82914e80687>.
- Yaren, Özgür. 2026. "Posses and Sinkholes: Crisis Aesthetics in Turkish Political Cinema." *Studies in European Cinema* 23 (1): 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2025.2489230>.
- Yaren, Özgür, and Irmak Karademir Hazır. 2020. "Critics, Politics and Cultural Legitimation: An Exploratory Analysis of the Turkish Film Field." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23 (4): 611–629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418810079>.

Films

- Karanlık Gece (Black Night)*. 2022. Directed by Özcan Alper. Nar Film.
- Kurak Günler (Burning Days)*. 2022. Directed by Emin Alper. Liman Film.