

## **New Cinema from Turkey**

**Edited by Gözde Onaran & Senem Aytaç**

Prepared by *Altyazı* in cooperation  
with the Middle East International Film Festival (MEIFF)

## New Cinema from Turkey

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# Editors' Note

## Gözde Onaran and Senem Aytaç

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Cinema in Turkey has been on the rise and, especially in the past few years, experiencing a regeneration of cultural production. A new generation of filmmakers has been praised in Turkey and at various international film festivals. This has been especially true of the European festivals, several of which have also featured special programs on cinema from Turkey. The selection presented here at the Middle East International Film Festival (MEIFF) aims to bring these films and filmmakers in contact with audiences in the Middle East.

Although there have been a few festivals in the Middle East region that have screened Turkish films, these programs have mainly focused on commercial, mainstream offerings. Therefore, the *Altyazı* team decided to organize a program consisting of contemporary independent films from Turkey. This program, entitled "New Cinema from Turkey," aims to present a select but diverse compilation of feature-length and short films from Turkey, hoping to draw a comprehensive picture of the here and now of the country's cinema.

We decided to pair films, screening a short film before each feature, in an effort to bring together filmmakers from different generations who are producing films alongside each other as a part of Turkey's contemporary film scene. As Enis Köstepen points out in the first article of this booklet, short filmmaking appears to be an important benchmark for filmmakers in Turkey working to demonstrate and refine their directorial skills.

The feature film selection here consists of different generations of filmmakers, ranging from those who only recently released their debut to those directors who have already achieved international acclaim – most of whom launched their careers after receiving festival awards for their short films. Extending this logic, the short film selection of "New Cinema from Turkey" consists mostly of works by emerging filmmakers from an even younger generation who have recently been introduced to the film scene through the short film festival circuit, and who may themselves become the next generation of internationally acclaimed directors from Turkey. In addition, while pairing these films and generations, we have also sought to consider the possible thematic cohesions that such combinations might reveal.

The directors who have already found acclaim, such as Reha Erdem, Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Derviş Zaim, and Semih Kaplanoğlu, now occupy a distinctive place in the international reception of films from Turkey. While Reha Erdem has been pushing the limits for a visually experimental cinema, Derviş Zaim has been investigating a unique cinematic language in his films – a language that aims to uphold ties with traditional ways of storytelling and representation by exploring traditional arts, and through continued experimentation with fundamental aspects of representation. Yeşim Ustaoğlu, one of the very few female directors in this group, continues to tell the stories of people who have only rarely been represented on screen in Turkey, while Semih Kaplanoğlu's minimalist cinema of symbolism perpetually engages in spiritual issues.

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Although it could be argued that Özcan Alper, Seyfi Teoman, Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Doğan, Pelin Esmer, and Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun in many ways followed the lead of this previous generation of filmmakers with their own feature debuts – which we have selected for this program – we do not believe that it is necessary to force such a generational relationship between these directors and their films at the national level. Nor do we find it very useful to label this more recent group as a “new wave.” Yet it is nevertheless important to view these films together as diverse parts that conjunctively constitute the whole of cinema in Turkey.

At first glance, these films seem to tell decidedly individual, personal stories – of themselves, for themselves. However, these personal stories are subtly embroidered with political significance, not only in terms of *what* they say, but also in *how* they say it. *Autumn* is a unique example of what might be called a “political film,” one that embeds a personal story in a political context – a strategy that has long been missing in films from Turkey. *Summer Book* is a minimalist example of everyday life in the province. *On the Way to School* deals in subtle, touching ways with an issue that is highly problematic and has been taboo for many years. *Wrong Rosary* depicts the encounter of a muezzin with a young Catholic woman in Istanbul, while *10 to 11* depicts another encounter in the same city, this one between a collector and his doorman.

Hence, in addition to their individual political motives, these films, as a whole, highlight the cultural, economic, and political diversity of contemporary Turkey. The meeting of various ethnicities, classes, languages, religions, and political affiliations in this film program offers a diverse cinematic image of Turkey, and possibly even of the broader geographic region of which it is a part.

You will find two useful articles at the beginning of this booklet: Enis Köstepen’s aforementioned article offers an overview of film production in Turkey within the past decade; Övgü Gökçe and Zeynep Dadak’s article investigates the circulation of independent films from Turkey in international film festivals. In addition, Ayça Çiftçi has written extensive articles for *10 to 11* and *On the Way to School*, the two feature films in competition. Finally, you can find the requisite information about each film screened in the program, accompanied by short commentaries for each that were expressly written by *Altyazı* critics for this collection.

We hope that our collaboration here with MEIFF, along with our future projects that will move to introduce Middle Eastern cinemas in Turkey, will generate and revitalize cultural bonds within the region, bonds which unfortunately seem to have long been neglected.

# Emerging Patterns of Filmmaking in Contemporary Turkey

Enis Köstepen

“The word right now on the streets in film festival–hosting towns is that Turkish cinema is hot in the way, say, Korean cinema was a few years ago,” according to the reviewer of Reha Erdem’s *Times and Winds* (*Beş Vakit*, 2006) in the September 2008 issue of *Sight & Sound*.<sup>1</sup> A subtle aspect of this reviewer’s remark that seems to warrant additional consideration here is the transient quality of film festivals’ attention to particular national cinemas: before Korean cinema, Chinese and Taiwanese were in the limelight, and before these, Iranian cinema was “hot.” At the moment, Turkish cinema is enjoying its turn. Many of the films mentioned in this essay have been traveling the festival circuit: *3 Monkeys* (*3 Maymun*, 2008), *Pandora’s Box* (*Pandora’nın Kutusu*, 2008), *My Marlon and Brando* (*Gitmek*, 2008), and *Wrong Rosary* (*Uzak İhtimal*, 2009) have all been celebrated with internationally prestigious awards at Cannes, San Sebastian, Tribeca, and Rotterdam. These are not, however, the only award-winning films. *Milk* (*Süt*, 2008), *Summer Book* (*Tatil Kitabı*, 2008), *Autumn* (*Sonbahar*, 2008), *My Only Sunshine* (*Hayat Var*, 2009), *Two Lines* (*İki Çizgi*, 2009), *Black Dogs Barking* (*Kara Köpekler Havlarken*, 2009), *The Market* (*Pazar*, 2008), *The Storm* (*Bahoz/Fırtına*, 2008), *Dot* (*Nokta*, 2008), *Mommo* (*Mommo: Kızkardeşim*, 2009), and *10 to 11* (*11’e 10 Kala*, 2009) have all also found special acclaim on the international festival circuit. Hence, in terms of international exposure, 2008–2009 has been an especially lustrous year for Turkish cinema. All of these films have either been released in Turkey or are approaching their release date. Although in recent history, internationally acclaimed Turkish films have proved relatively unpopular at home, in this past year *Autumn* (144,000 admissions), *3 Monkeys* (127,000), and *The Storm* (56,000) have all demonstrated that indigenous independent films are not necessarily limited to fewer than 30,000 domestic admissions.<sup>2</sup> Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s growing reputation in the art of cinema, Kazım Özlü’s esteemed position within Kurdish arts and politics, and Özcan Alper and his producer Serkan Acar’s grassroots mobilization during the distribution of *Autumn* can all be seen as vital in these surprising box-office achievements. Furthermore,

the relative success of these three films has shown other independent-minded Turkish filmmakers the latent potential of creating an audience at home as well as away.

If these films can primarily be seen to reflect Turkish cinema abroad, emerging blockbusters can be seen to define the film culture for the masses at home. When one looks at the top of the Turkish box office, the significance of the aforementioned numbers begins to pale. In 2008 and 2009, the *Recep İvedik* series pushed the new record to more than four and a quarter million tickets. In addition, of the thirty-eight million total admissions in Turkey (for both domestic and foreign films) in 2008, 60 percent of the admissions were for homegrown productions. The strength of this number is certainly related to the fact that every one of the top ten moneymaking releases in Turkish theaters was of domestic origin. One particularly telling illustration of the domestically popular films’ force against even the biggest Hollywood hit would be 2008’s *The Dark Knight*. This latest Batman film, number one on both U.S. and worldwide year-end box-office tally sheets, was only fourteenth at the Turkish box office, with fewer than a half-million admissions. As such, the Turkish filmmaking landscape is witnessing not only the growth of international recognition but also a vibrant domestic popular cinema.

Both of these filmmaking practices can be traced back to the mid-1990s, when Turkish cinema began to reconfigure both its financial and narrative strategies in an effort to revive and reinvent itself after the collapse of Yeşilçam (the popular filmmaking system of the 1960s and 1970s, which produced approximately 200 films per year). As a consequence of their productivity, the growing yet already visible coupling of international recognition and an invigorated popular cinema is working to broaden a rich film culture while simultaneously expanding the audiences for Turkish cinema both at home and internationally.

## A New Tide of First Features

More independent-minded films can be considered important to Turkish cinema in a number of ways. Not only do they represent Turkey internationally and introduce new directors to increasingly familiar audiences, but they are also recognized for offering novel cinematic representations of modern, and less-expressed, Turkish anxieties. Another significant aspect of these independent films is that they reveal the increasing possibilities for a young director to create the conditions necessary to produce his or her debut feature. Because these films are not altered for commercial success in the domestic market, their diversity signifies the growth of a space for filmmaking in Turkey independent from commercial pressures.

A number of aspects specific to Turkish cinema (though not necessarily unique in comparison to other international filmmaking communities) have allowed for and contributed to the space now occupied by independent first features and their filmmakers. For young Turkish filmmakers, like filmmakers from many other parts of the world, the ability to develop and complete a debut feature film not primarily geared towards market success depends on the director's social network and their individual or collective ability to access funds, enlist a crew, and arrange for discounted (or free) equipment. The most important institutional structure for the funding of first films in Turkey has become the Ministry of Culture's Committee for Supporting Cinema, which began its allocations in 2005. The maximum fiscal support a first feature can receive ranges from 100 to 125 thousand Euros; among the debut features that traveled the international festival circuit, *My Marlon and Brando*, *Autumn*, *Wrong Rosary*, and *Black Dogs Barking* received production support within this range. Certainly these Ministry funds have been crucial: beyond their economic stimulus, the application process and the resulting pronouncements produce excitement and motivation (and debate) within

Turkey's filmmaking circles. Yet what has been essential for the production of these films during the past several years is the generous support of camera and lighting rental houses and post-production facilities. These technical facilities emerged relatively recently in Istanbul with the growth of additional television production – series, music videos, advertisements – that followed the 1990 deregulation of the state's monopoly in TV broadcasting. Further support has come from a number of small independent distribution companies located in Istanbul. In the name of the "independent spirit," these companies have released these films nationally with only a few prints and without significant profit expectation. An important entry point for emerging filmmakers within these national production and distribution networks, in addition to the jobs available on television productions, has been the production of short films. Since many young Turkish directors do not possess a film school education, short filmmaking becomes the necessary ground upon which to learn and hone the craft. This has been fostered and supported, in the past decade, by a proliferation of short film competitions and festivals in Turkey. While the increase in the use of Internet and digital film technologies has bolstered this national short film culture, it has also facilitated the commencement of international exposure at an earlier point in these filmmakers' careers. The short films of Özcan Alper, Mehmet Bahadır Er, Selim Evcı, Kazım Öz, and Seyfi Teoman all screened at international film festivals. Nuri Bilge Ceylan is again, in this respect, an important milestone in Turkish cinema's international recognition, as his first short film, *Cocoon (Koza)*, was screened as an official selection at Cannes in 1995.

With the independent films sharing such a common production background, it is perhaps not that surprising that their most decisive factor, in terms of subject matter, is a proximity to the biographies of their directors. Because most of the emerging directors also serve as their own scriptwriter, these films often carry autobiographical glimpses. The student movement in

*The Storm*, the ex-inmate in *Autumn*, the provincial atmosphere of *Summer Book*, the Turkish teacher in a Kurdish village in *On the Way to School* (*İki Dil Bir Bavul*, 2009), and Pelin Esmer's own uncle as a collector in *10 to 11* all point toward the specific observations or personal experiences of their respective directors. And in films like *Autumn*, *The Storm*, *On the Way to School*, *Black Dogs Barking*, *Men on the Bridge* (*Köprüdekiler*, 2009), and *Children of the Other Side* (*Başka Semtin Çocukları*, 2008) we also witness an exploration of narrative possibilities to link the personal and the political. The engagement with crucial political struggles in these films indicates not only the political affiliations of the directors, but also the increasing boldness of intellectuals and artists in Turkey to address political issues more directly. The choice of political subject matter has also enabled these directors and films to address a larger audience within Turkey. As *Autumn's* and *The Storm's* successes at the box office have revealed, a successful match between thoughtful film language and relevant political issues can attract a larger domestic audience than previously was expected from independent films.

For the time being, at least, there is no one formal umbrella structure in Turkey that connects these filmmakers and their various energies. Still, this void has, to some degree, been filled by the vitality of social networking accessible via the national and international film festival scene. Although the connections between these filmmakers cannot necessarily be defined in terms of a social network or a cultural movement, they certainly do share a national cinematic ethos. This most recent cluster of emerging Turkish directors could perhaps best be seen – as a group – as the followers of the first wave of low-budget independent filmmaking practices pioneered by Derviş Zaim, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Zeki Demirkubuz, and Nuri Bilge Ceylan in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The independent filmmakers of the 1990s emerged as Yeşilçam reached its ultimate cessation. At a time when the filmmakers of the Yeşilçam era were discussing the financial means and necessary state policies to regenerate the

film industry, the national and international successes of the emerging directors of the 1990s introduced and proclaimed the virtues of low-budget guerilla filmmaking in Turkey. Demirkubuz and Ceylan excelled in the art of low-budget productions, and they both received international acclaim at the Cannes International Film Festival: Demirkubuz's *Confession* (*İtiraf*, 2001) and *Fate* (*Yazgi*, 2001) were screened in Un Certain Regard in 2002; Ceylan received the Grand Prix in 2003 with *Distant* (*Uzak*, 2002) and the Best Director award in 2008 with *3 Monkeys*.

Though the advancement of low-budget independent filmmaking in Turkey since the mid-1990s has been notable, the means to produce a first film have still not changed significantly. In their endeavors to secure both the funds and the trust to make their first features, this current generation is as dependent on their social networks as were their predecessors. The dilemma that haunted the previous generation of Turkish independent filmmakers continues to haunt the current generation: the domestic box office, national sales of DVD and television rights, and state funds are simply not enough to sustain the filmmaking of those unwilling to cater to commercial pressures and expectations. The production of future works for Turkey's emerging directors thus depends either on European co-productions and sales or on the establishment of production networks through the Middle East, East Asia, or the United States. While this is, of course, a predicament shared by many of the world's filmmakers, one possible recourse for these Turkish filmmakers is located in the growing domestic film-production market discussed above.

## Genres of the Popular

The genre that, in recent years, has been most represented and that has arguably even dominated the top of the box-office chart is comedy. While *The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (*Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak*, 2005), a nationalist, anti-U.S. action movie adapted from



a popular television series, sat atop the all-time box office for several years, the comedy *Recep İvedik* (also an adaptation from a popular television show) replaced it in 2008. And its sequel, *Recep İvedik 2*, has already this year succeeded in surpassing the original. As these chart-toppers demonstrate, adaptation from popular television programs has increasingly become a powerful strategy for creating popular cinema in Turkey, with *Vali* (2008) further serving as a recent notable success. *A.R.O.G.* (2008), another of the year's anticipated comedies, was the big budget follow-up to the sci-fi parody *G.O.R.A.*, both of which were written by and star Cem Yılmaz, Turkey's most famous stand-up comedian. If the jokes in *G.O.R.A.* revolved around what happens when a Turk goes to space, the jokes in *A.R.O.G.* centered on the question of how a contemporary Turk deals with time travel, the Stone Age, and the broader issues of civilization. It is worth noting here too that most films that have a robust popular appeal in Turkey also find release in those parts of Europe where Turkish communities have a strong presence, especially Germany. *Recep İvedik's* success this year in Germany is especially significant: by its eighth week in release the sequel alone had already surpassed \$4 million (U.S.; 3M Euro) in gross revenues.<sup>4</sup> Hence, even without the benefit of the global festival circuit, domestic popular films have become transnational through their circulation and demand in Turkish communities across Europe.

If we set aside television adaptations and comedies, the most novel formation of the popular in the past few years in Turkish cinema was the emergence of the thriller as a viable genre. The significant success of *School (Okul)* in 2003 initiated a wave of thrillers that tended to draw several hundred thousand admissions, if only rarely reaching a million. Though this recent wave of thrillers ceased in 2008, aspiring filmmakers continue working to develop their own thriller projects. Within this consideration of popular genres, what is perhaps most surprisingly is the absence of melodramas in Turkish cinema. Despite its long history, melodrama is no longer the most

popular genre in cinema. For example, *Conscience (Vicdan)*, 2008), one of the most anticipated films of 2008, starring Nurgül Yeşilçay and directed by veteran filmmaker Erden Kıral, has not succeeded in appealing to a large audience. Elsewhere, the box-office success of *The Goal of My Love (Aşk Tutulması)*, 2008), with admissions of 365,000, may suggest the potential of romantic comedy as an emerging popular genre. In terms of drama, Çağan Irmak has emerged as the most important director and screenwriter of the moment, capable of employing the medium to affectively address the audience. After the substantial success of *My Father and My Son (Babam ve Oğlum)*, 2005), which revived the teary audiences of the Yeşilçam era, *Alone (İssiz Adam)*, 2008) proved Irmak's continuing ability to grasp this audience like no other filmmaker in Turkey. In this latter film, Irmak transformed the well-to-do Istanbulite young man's romantic struggles into a cultural phenomenon with a nostalgic but cool soundtrack; with more than two million tickets sold, it was the surprise of the year. Though the success of *Alone* demonstrates that (melo)drama remains an underemployed and potentially profitable mode of narration in contemporary Turkish cinema, when one considers that most of the television series are dramatized around complicated amorous and familial relationships, the question of theatrical demand for this type of film becomes more complex. For the moment, at least, comedy seems to continue as the safer bet for box-office success.

In addition to being viewed and discussed in terms of the return of Turkish cinema's weeping audience, *My Father and My Son* also was recognized as portraying the effects of the 1980 coup on the leftist youth and their families. As a result, one can also view this film as part of a larger group of films dealing with memories of Turkey's modern history. *Mustafa* (2008), *Cars of the Revolution (Devrim Arabaları)*, 2008), *Pains of Autumn (Güz Sancısı)*, 2009), and *I Saw the Sun (Güneşi Gördüm)*, 2009) are all recent examples of this, as they continue to create popular stories out of the critical moments of modern Turkish history. *Mustafa* and *Cars of the*

*Revolution* both glorified causes of the Republic: *Mustafa*, the documentary on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, dealt with him as a charismatic and passionate person rather than an untouchable national hero; *Cars of the Revolution* turned the Turkish state's efforts to initiate a domestic auto industry following the 1960 coup into a drama on modernization. *Pains of Autumn* and *I Saw the Sun*, on the other hand, focused on seldom-represented violent moments of the Republic. Based on a novel by Yılmaz Karakoyunlu, *Pains of Autumn* was a period piece on the 1955 organized attacks against non-Muslim property in Istanbul. *I Saw the Sun*, which dealt with the most recent historical moment, addressed the complexities of the Turkish state's policies regarding the southeast region and its Kurdish population. As these films' power to initiate public debate and draw the audience into theaters signal, dramatizing recent history carries significant market appeal at the moment and could certainly continue to be the motivation of future films. If so, the films discussed here could, in the coming years, be recognized as initiating the formation of a Turkish modern history genre.

In conclusion, there is a final aspect of the current moment in Turkish cinema that should not go unremarked: in addition to the co-existence of successful popular and independent filmmakers considered above, the presence of various generations of filmmakers working simultaneously across Turkey's cinematic landscape is similarly noteworthy. This not only creates the conditions for direct or indirect intergenerational communication within the film culture and is crucial for transferring experience and establishing lineages of continuity, but also carries with it the possibility for sites of contention, which are critical for maintaining and fostering the vigor of the filmmaking scene in Turkey. In sum, we are witnessing the regeneration of a cultural production, which has, in the past, made significant contributions to both the experience of everyday life and to collective memory.

Yet the diversity we are currently experiencing makes it difficult to define an overall structure for Turkish cinema. However, at the moment this diversity is exactly what is more important than any critically defined commonalities or categories. Despite the fact that Paul Schrader, Peter Greenaway, and a number of other Western filmmakers and critics have recently proclaimed the "death of cinema," cinema in Turkey continues to be a promising and exciting medium for art, entertainment, politics, and public experience, and one that still has the capacity and dynamism to attract large audiences.

1 Felperin, Leslie. *Reviews: Films: "Times and Winds."* *Sight & Sound* 18:9 (September 2008), 78.

2 The admission numbers in this catalogue are taken from *Antrakt Haftalık Sinema Gazetesi* weekly reports.

3 Among these names, only Yeşim Ustaoglu has had direct relationships with the younger generation. Kazım Öz was Ustaoglu's assistant in *Journey to the Sun (Güneşe Yolculuk, 1998)*, and Özcan Alper was her assistant in *Waiting for the Clouds (Bulutları Beklerken, 2003)*.

4 "Germany Box Office for April 2-5, 2009." Box Office Mojo International website.

# Traveling Films, Emerging Directors: The Independent Spirit in Turkish Cinema

Övgü Gökçe and Zeynep Dadak

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When Sean Penn, the head of the jury at Cannes 2008, presented the Best Director prize to Nuri Bilge Ceylan for his film *3 Monkeys* (*3 Maymun*, 2008), probably only a few Turkish cinephiles were watching the award ceremony on television. In the ensuing days, however, as a result of the extensive coverage of the event by the Turkish press and media, a public that had generally heard little about this director was suddenly talking about the dedication Ceylan made upon receiving the award. "I would like to dedicate the prize," he said, "to my lonely and beautiful country, which I love passionately." Among the many discussions of this sentence, a part of which ("lonely and beautiful country") almost became an idiom in its own right, several commentators noted that, "ironically," perhaps no more than sixty thousand of his countrymen had seen any of Ceylan's previous films. However, whether because of its success at Cannes or the popularity of actor-singer Yavuz Bingöl in the lead role, *3 Monkeys* (2008) changed these numbers significantly. More than 50 copies of the film circulated for 24 weeks, ultimately resulting in more than 125,000 admissions. While the film's box office was far below what would usually be expected from a Cannes winner (at least in European countries), these numbers, and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's success in general, need to be understood within the larger framework of the strong effort that has been required and that continues to underlie individual filmmaking in Turkey. The indication of an independent spirit reveals itself through alternative production strategies, experimentation with film style, and emphasis on themes that, while individually divergent, consistently bind personal query with social criticism.

Turkish cinema has been on the move since the middle of the 1990s. While it witnessed the reemergence of Turkish popular films, which once again began to win over the domestic audience, the second half of the 1990s also restored the influence of "the director" after a particularly fallow period of filmmaking in Turkey. Whether they are referred to as auteurs or independent directors, the filmmakers from Turkey who

garnered international acclaim in the past 20 years shared a common aspiration as they sought new stylistic approaches for their individual stories. As film critic Fırat Yücel has noted: "In the 1960s and 1970s, those filmmakers who possessed a distinctive vision (directors such as Metin Erksan, Atıf Yılmaz, Ömer Lütfi Akad, Halit Refiğ, and Yılmaz Güney) were necessarily responsible to the demands, emergencies, and expectations of Yeşilçam; alongside their urge to develop a personal cinema, they were also expected to produce star-based genre pictures (mainly melodramas and comedies) for the studios."<sup>1</sup> This period was followed by the collapse of the industry in the 1980s; during this time only a very few directors – Ömer Kavur and Erden Kıral provide two examples – could continue to pursue to their cinematic ambitions. Yücel has called this transitional period from the 1970s to the 1990s a "fruitful gap" and argues that the absence of a pre-tested form of independent filmmaking created a "rootlessness [that] provided these directors with the necessary freedom and flexibility to pursue their own ways and means of self-expression."<sup>2</sup> This gap also opened up multiple ways of producing independent films through a variety of approaches to auteur-oriented cinema. A significant turn in contemporary Turkish cinema can be observed through the filmographies of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz, Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Derviş Zaim, as well as Reha Erdem and Semih Kaplanoğlu after them, and now with the coming aboard of young filmmakers such as Seyfi Teoman, Özcan Alper, Kazım Öz, Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun, Aslı Özge, and Pelin Esmer.

It is, of course, more meaningful to situate this new independent cinema in the larger context of contemporary Turkish cinema, which has seen a re-establishment of the relationship between its audience and domestically produced mainstream films. This larger picture consists of a number of unique yet interrelated phenomena. For example, as domestic films began to demonstrate profitability in the national marketplace, theaters began to open up additional screens for other Turkish titles.

At the same time, both support from the Ministry of Culture and an increasing prevalence of European co-productions provided newly viable financing options for individual filmmakers and thus allowed them to challenge the domination of commercially driven domestic productions. The national and international festival success these independently produced films have attained has led to a growing visibility in mass media, developing new outlets, and gaining access to others that previously took little note of these films.

This past year, in particular, has witnessed the recognition and extolment – both nationally and around the globe – of the diverse offerings of the Turkish independent filmmaking scene. Exercising discernment in accord with the space available, a selection of these films and awards are recounted here. As mentioned at the top of this article, *3 Monkeys* by Nuri Bilge Ceylan garnered the award for Best Director at the 2008 Cannes International Film Festival. Yeşim Ustaoglu's poignant family drama *Pandora's Box (Pandora'nın Kutusu)* won the Golden Shell for Best Film at the San Sebastian Film Festival. "For its skillful blending of documentary style with a classic love story and ultimate creation of a truly modern and unlikely international heroine," Hüseyin Karabey's first feature, *My Marlon and Brando (Gitmek)*, 2008, received the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival's award for Best New Narrative Filmmaker.<sup>3</sup> After receiving Best Film and Best Director awards from numerous film festivals in Turkey and touring countless European venues, Özcan Alper's *Autumn (Sonbahar)*, 2008, had its U.S. premiere at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in March 2009 as a part of the prestigious New Directors/New Films series. In addition to the awards and festival screenings, the visibility of these films was also enhanced by the praise bestowed by the critical media. Film critic Howard Feinstein called *Autumn* "a masterpiece."<sup>4</sup> A.O. Scott in *The New York Times* compared it favorably with its predecessors, namely the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan.<sup>5</sup> Although flirting at times with a reductive and stereotyped conception

of Turkish films, both film critics and festival programmers have expressed an increasing interest in Turkish cinema. The most noteworthy manifestations of this interest have been the special festival programs on Turkish cinema, such as those put on by the 2009 International Film Festival Rotterdam, the 2009 Crossing Europe Film Festival in Linz, and the 2009 Gothenburg International Film Festival. From Pusan to Berlin, from Fajr to Melbourne, *Milk (Süt)*, 2008, *Summer Book (Tatil Kitabı)*, 2008, *My Only Sunshine (Hayat Var)*, 2009, *Two Lines (İki Çizgi)*, 2009, *Black Dogs Barking (Kara Köpekler Havlarken)*, 2009, *The Storm (Bahoz/Fırtına)*, 2008, *Dot (Nokta)*, 2008, and *Mommo (Mommo: Kızkardeşim)*, 2009 circulated through film festivals all around the world. As a result, some of these titles, such as *3 Monkeys*, *Autumn*, and *Milk* have also seen successful world sales with releases in England, the United States, France, Germany, and Poland.

Another ramification of this exposure has been more local, and can be seen through the reception these films have found in the major domestic film festivals in Istanbul, Ankara, Adana, and Antalya. Unlike previous years, this past year showed signs (however slight) indicating the elimination of a certain prejudice against internationally acclaimed films, which had previously been palpable and which was fed by the idea that these films preferred foreign appreciation. For example, *Wrong Rosary (Uzak İhtimal)*, 2009, the feature debut by Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun, won the awards for Best Director, and Best Actor at the 2009 International Istanbul Film Festival and Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival. After that, the film was selected for competition at Rotterdam, where it won one of the three Tiger Awards for Best Film, and was lauded by that jury as "a uniquely creative film." Coşkun dedicated his Istanbul Best Director award to Semih Kaplanoğlu, who was also in the National Competition with *Milk*, and thus indicated, in a way, a desire on behalf of the newcomers to establish an affinity with the previous generation of filmmakers. *Wrong Rosary* was not the only first feature that

received an award at Istanbul and Adana this past year. Aydın Bulut's *Children of the Other Side* (*Başka Semtin Çocukları*, 2008) received the Public Award in both festivals, and Pelin Esmer's *10 to 11* (*11'e 10 Kala*, 2009) was awarded a Special Jury Prize in Istanbul; another young woman filmmaker, Aslı Özge, also found success there when her film *Men on the Bridge* (*Köprüdekiler*), praised particularly for its interesting crosscutting of fiction and documentary, earned the Best Film Award. *10 to 11* and *Men on the Bridge* also shared the award for Best Film in Adana and received significant critical acclaim, marking the beginning of an exciting international exposure. Finally, Orhan Eşköy and Özgür Doğan's feature documentary *İki Dil Bir Bavul* (*On the Way to School*), the story of a first-time Turkish teacher going to a Kurdish village in the southeast of Turkey, won the Yılmaz Güney Grand Jury Award and Turkish Film Critics' Award at the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival. *On the Way to School* is a distinctive and refreshing example and, akin to *Men on the Bridge*, stimulates the viewer to rethink documentary and its purposes in contemporary Turkey.

Upon final analysis, these more recent films of notable independent spirit have contributed to bridging the gap between films made for "cinophiles" (national or international) and films made for the "average filmgoer" in Turkey. Today, a certain demand for domestic production as observed through the increasing numbers of viewers, also contributes to the growing visibility, hence the positive effect of the festival-acclaimed films on the larger filmmaking scene in Turkey. In other words, although the popular titles ostensibly outnumber the so-called festival films in both number of screens and box-office receipts, they clearly benefit from the continual programming of Turkish films at festivals both inside and outside Turkey. In turn, the revival of filmgoing habits and the renewed attentions of younger audiences encourage the new generation of filmmakers to consider their relationship with their audiences more critically. Films and filmmakers who have tended

to circulate within art-cinema venues now find themselves operating in a climate in which reaching an expanded audience has become possible in ways it never was before. So far this year, in theaters across the country, *3 Monkeys*, *Autumn*, and *The Storm* have all attained markedly greater admissions and significantly outperformed the extremely narrow range of ticket sales that would normally have been expected of their "independent" categorization. While obviously a premature prediction, both the first-time directors of 2008 and 2009 and their acknowledged forerunners on the independent scene have started to call attention to one thing in particular: despite the long-reigning divide between the populist motto, "We give the people the kind of films they want to see," and the art-house slogan, "We make the kind of films we want to make," a new contract with the domestic audience can now be imagined and is, in fact, being forged. It now appears that a more socially informed way of making individual films is underway.

1 Yücel, Fırat. "Opening the Path: Times and Winds of the '90s," *Young Turkish Cinema*. Senem Aytaç and Gözde Onaran, eds. (Istanbul: Altyazı. 2009), 15.

2 ibid

3 <http://www.tribecafilm.com/home/18455719.html>

4 [http://www.indiewire.com/article/new\\_directors\\_new\\_films\\_09\\_going\\_against\\_the\\_grain/](http://www.indiewire.com/article/new_directors_new_films_09_going_against_the_grain/)

5 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/movies/27dire.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

# 10 to 11: Meetings in Time and Space

## Ayça Çiftçi

*10 to 11 (11'e 10 Kala, 2009)* intertwines the seemingly different lives of two lonely men, contextualizing them within Istanbul's own vast collection of individual stories. In her documentary *The Collector (Koleksiyoncu, 2002)*, Pelin Esmer, the director of both films, shared her uncle Mithat's story with audiences. She returns again seven years later, placing the same narrative in a fictive world and integrating her uncle's real story with fabricated events, professional actors, and constructed spaces.

Mithat is an old man who lives by himself in an apartment filled to its brim with the various items he has collected over the past 50 years: from newspapers to binoculars, from stamps to hats. Unlike other collectors, who typically have a passion for specific items, Mithat is indiscriminating, collecting practically everything. Anything that he can pull from life and put aside is brought home with him. The vastness of his collection renders Mithat's memory almost tangible. He not only collects objects but sounds as well. For instance, he has kept both the sound recording of a phone conversation with his wife and sound bytes of Alparslan Türkeş – a major nationalist politician in Turkey – announcing the 1960 coup d'état, both originally recorded nearly 50 years ago. As he walks the streets seeking his objects, he also records street sounds, bringing all of it home to join the rest of his collection. The film, in fact, opens on Mithat strolling down the streets of Istanbul, going from one secondhand bookstore to another.

After his trip, the camera slowly moves inside Mithat's apartment, leading the viewer on a walk through his home. With its mobile structure, this sequence simultaneously reveals the magnitude of Mithat's collection and fills the viewer with awe as a result of having gained access to such an interesting space. Throughout this sequence, Istanbul's ambient sounds, recorded during the previous scenes, continue uninterrupted: seagull cries, car noise, and the shouting of vendors are all carried into his home.

As the tour of his collection meets with the sounds of Istanbul, it becomes clear that through the many objects he has collected, Mithat now contains Istanbul within his space. These sounds later turn diegetic, as we see Mithat's recorder playing the sounds from his previous trip.

When the film moves from Mithat's space to building superintendent Ali's basement apartment, the contrast between the two is quite striking. Unlike Mithat's overstuffed apartment, Ali's apartment is completely barren. Where the film had entered Mithat's apartment with a traveling shot, the camera is stationary at Ali's doorway, implying perhaps that this is all there is to see. Yet this difference stems from not only a socio-economic contrast, but also the two men's dissimilarity in terms of their experience of the outside world. Ultimately, what fills Mithat's apartment is his experiences: his house is a storage space for the accumulation of the various items that act as physical, tangible representations of his memories and past experiences. On the other hand, Ali lives a life isolated from experience. Having spent his adult life on duty in this building, leaving the apartment even for a short period of time makes him nervous, as he feels he must always make himself available in case of sudden need. Thus, he has never known other neighborhoods or been able to collect outside experiences. His house is empty – not only because of his low income but also because of his low level of experience.

As a result of earthquake regulations, the building that Mithat and Ali reside in is scheduled for demolition. The idea of home is, therefore, brought to the center of the story, and is specifically addressed through the residents' relationships with their apartments, the different ways in which their homes are utilized, and the disputes over what is deemed worth keeping. For most of the building's residents, the most important thing is to have a new house, with a safe environment for children and

a multipurpose living space. For them, moving is easy: it would suffice simply to load up a truck with those belongings that still possess use-value or that, like photographs, have obtained a significant nostalgic quality. Mithat's house, however, stores his life, and after all those years it has become immensely difficult to move out. The tension between Mithat and the other residents grows into a clash of values, and he ultimately receives official notification for living in squalor. As Mithat's collection becomes rubbish in the eyes of the other tenants, the relationship between Ali and Mithat goes beyond that of resident and superintendent. Only the two men who will not or cannot go anywhere else remain in the building: the former has nothing; the latter, too many things.

## Meeting Over a Collection

After receiving a notice from the municipality, Mithat is forced to spend his days boxing his collection and, as such, hands over his daily collecting duties to Ali. In Mithat's service, Ali is initiated into the streets and neighborhoods of Istanbul. Walking those same streets that Mithat has sauntered for years, Ali seems like a newcomer to the city, experiencing difficulties with public transportation and having trouble finding his bearings. As it turns out, Mithat's passion for collecting is not only about gathering items, but is also a lifestyle, a summation of his everyday practices. His real passion is the rhythm of experiences that are built upon and repeated through the people, routes, and chats he engages in daily: the regular stopover at the newspaper stand, the group of mechanics he keeps as acquaintances, the restaurant he visits at lunch breaks. When Mithat transfers his duties to Ali, he also hands down a readymade path to experiencing Istanbul; Ali looks at Istanbul by borrowing Mithat's eyes. On Mithat's behalf, Ali rides the boat, visits the old bookstores, and chats with the lady at the restaurant. And it is

through the collection that the two characters get to know each other. When Ali brings Mithat's broken sound recorder to the mechanic, he finds out that Mithat had studied engineering and mathematics in the United States. And later, when Ali returns the now-repaired device, Mithat finds that Ali had accidentally turned it on and recorded his conversation at the restaurant. As a result, Mithat gathers new details about Ali's life. The bond created between the characters by the collection is not located solely in Ali's assisting Mithat. Rather, by entering into Mithat's regular field of experience, Ali manages to get to know him. Moreover, the collection develops a space for dialogue between the two men. Whoever interacts directly with Mithat ends up as a part of his collection one way or another. The toy he once bought for his nephew sits in a corner with a tag that shows the purchase date, just as the sound recording of a conversation he had once upon a time is filed away somewhere. Even Ali's mistake becomes a part of the collection: the sound he accidentally recorded while telling his story overwrites a previous sound byte recorded years ago, thus forming another piece in the collection of memories. Just as Mithat's vodka mixes with Ali's compote, one man's memories intermingle with the other's.

Even though Ali sets out in Istanbul under the guidance of Mithat's experiences, the same streets ultimately take him somewhere else. He walks around with a different code of ethics and with different needs, and looks around through the eyes of a different self, made up of different reminiscences. In the end, within Mithat's experiences, Ali cracks open a door for himself. This realization emerges organically from the film's internal logic. The entire dynamic of the film relies on the agreements and the conflicts between people who possess disparate systems of value. Showing such incompatibilities as inevitable yet interesting, *10 to 11* handles its characters with a nonjudgmental, calm tone. All the characters' actions grow out of their individual

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perspectives, however simple-minded and mundane these may be, from Mithat's nephew who treats the collection as treasure to the neighbors who treat it as garbage, from the sister who sees it as clutter, to Ali who uses it as an escape from his life. This conflict-ridden merger of divergent values is, the film seems to be saying, nothing but life itself.

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Translated from Turkish by Zeynep Dadak



# On the Way to School: On the Way to the Kurdish Issue

**Ayça Çiftçi**

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Recently, Turkey has witnessed an exceedingly heated debate on a possible resolution to the “Kurdish issue.” Appearing in the headlines every day, this issue continues to preoccupy all of Turkey, and particularly the political actors and newspaper columnists. Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the dominant approach has been to ignore and oppress. Nevertheless, when armed conflict flared up during the mid-1980s, it became clear that such an approach – one that is simply about controlling – could not remedy the situation. The failure in dealing with the issue has, in fact, only recently been confronted, and only after the death toll has risen within the past 25 years to the tens of thousands. Today, the implicit significance of this particular historical moment persists as the subject of intense discussion; in other words, the debate continues in regard to who benefits from policy change and whether or not it provides a real solution to the problem. In this environment, finally, the common people can also express themselves, aside from the language and arguments that emanate primarily from the political figures. The stories that these common people tell are essential in understanding the issue and discussing the ways in which it could be resolved. Recently, cinema has become the primary medium through which these issues have been expressed and made available. In Turkey, speaking Kurdish, and in fact even the word “Kurdish” itself, has been illegal for many years. Now, finally, stories of the Kurdish problem are in circulation through films, partly owing to the recent developments in securing the freedom of speech. One example here is Özgür Doğan and Orhan Eskiköy’s documentary film, *On the Way to School*.

*On the Way to School* tells the story of Emre, a newly graduated teacher from western Turkey, who is appointed to teach in a small Kurdish village. In addition to his distress over the upcoming year with new students, the rough living conditions in the village present Emre with his first difficulties. Paying little attention to the shortage of water in this poor village, Emre gets ready for the first day of school just as though he were at home. With the village in view behind him, he puts on his hair gel, and the film suggests that he is already taking on certain attributes of a tragicomic hero. Yet the real difficulties arise when Emre begins to teach, as his class of students cannot speak any Turkish. Because his training has in no way prepared him for such a situation, he is left to his own devices in solving – or attempting to solve – this matter. It is no wonder, with the ideologically charged education system mostly in denial of both its Kurdish constituency and the Kurdish language, that Emre was never schooled in strategies and techniques to cope with this type of situation. And thus Emre decides that the first thing to do, before engaging the standard curriculum, is to teach his students Turkish. We are not surprised, of course, to find Emre entrenched in a battle over this forced “standardization” of his students. On the other hand, just like their teacher, these students also struggle: on top of the new uniforms, the space, the social codes, and the rules at school that might already make children uncomfortable, they are confronted with a wholly new language. For example, when one little girl needs to go to the restroom, she not only discovers that she must ask for permission, but also that she must learn how to do so in Turkish. And those students who continue to insist on speaking their mother tongue – Kurdish – at school find that they will be disciplined; for example, made to stand on one leg in front of the blackboard.

This story, not too surprisingly, strikes close to home for the filmmakers themselves: when Özgür Doğan explains the origins of the project, he points out that the film holds certain autobiographical elements. For example, similar to the students in the film, when he first started school he could only speak Kurdish. A mutual friend's story about teaching in a Kurdish village inspired Doğan and Eskiköy to make a documentary film that drew on their own childhood memories. *On the Way to School* is part of an emerging cinema by Kurdish filmmakers who now feel less oppressed and have thus begun to tell personal stories – of their villages, from their childhood, and even through their grandfathers. It is one of the first examples of what we might today call Kurdish cinema in Turkey.

It is now perhaps even more critical that these stories be told. There are millions of people in Turkey who have never been to the eastern part of the country and whose limited knowledge of that region is completely constrained and constructed by the war coverage in the news. These people need to hear the everyday stories of people living in eastern Turkey. For example, they need to see, in *On the Way to School*, the efforts of Zülküf, one of the students in the film, to learn Turkish, where and how he studies, and the kinds of games he plays – in his native Kurdish tongue – during breaks.

*On the Way to School* is careful about not intervening in people's lives, choosing to observe from a distance. With minimum manipulation, it chronicles the school year. Özgür Doğan, in an interview, has stated his intentions in this regard clearly: "This film is an effort to understand both sides. We take a side by choosing not to take a side. Instead, we try to make sense of both sides. We therefore choose not to go inside but rather identify as much as we can without affecting their lives." The precarious nature of the issue, however, makes it impossible not to take sides, yet the tightly edited *On the Way to School* tells its story in a direct and straightforward manner. The film avoids being didactic

even with material that could easily lead it in that direction. It presents a link to re-evaluate our relationship with these people's stories, which have never been available for most of us until recently. Just like in the village school we see here, Kurdish was banned until the late 1990s from both Turkish cinema and literature. Through such parallels between real life and cinema, films like *On the Way to School* help us to experience these stories, and offer at the same time a unique opportunity to reflect back on common presumptions and presuppositions.

Translated from Turkish by Zeynep Dadak

# Short Films





## Ata

Turkey, France | 2008 | 26 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish, French

**Directors / Screenwriters:** Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovanetti  
**Producer:** Envie de Tempête Productions  
**Cinematographer:** David Chizallet

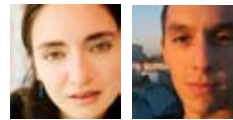
**Editor:** Tristan Meunier  
**Sound:** Matthieu Tartamella  
**Cast:** Ceyda Bakbasa, Ahatjan Ali, Eric Freydefont

Contact: czggfilms@gmail.com

<http://czggfilms.free.fr>

*Ata* tells the story of Ceyda, a young Turkish woman who goes to France to make a fresh start in life with her French boyfriend. Because he has to go away immediately on business, she finds herself, in these first days of her new life, unexpectedly alone. Her loneliness is interrupted by a chance encounter with a stranger who shares her language. Ahatjan, an illegal Uyghur, works at the construction site next door, and his interesting company turns out to be a pleasant surprise. While these two aliens – one legal, the other illegal – form a friendship, we are promptly reminded that in the EU, laws and law enforcers have no mercy for illegals. *Ata* is a short fiction informed by a deeper understanding of the conditions of exile and migration in the contemporary world. Behind its humanistic façade, it tactfully explores the ideas of home, ethnicity, nation, and the power of language.

—Yeşim Burul Seven



**Çağla Zencirci** was born in Ankara in 1976. With **Guillaume Giovanetti** (born in Lyon, France, in 1978), she has directed several narratives and documentaries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe, which have been screened and awarded in many festivals and broadcasted on television. Now they are working on their first feature film, *DILI*, a documentary to be shot in Pakistan.

### Filmography

2006 *Carnegami* (short)  
2007 *ShantyGARDENtown* (documentary)  
2008 *Ata* (short)  
2009 *Six* (documentary)

- CNC French National Center of Cinema: Prize of Quality
- If Istanbul International Film Festival: Best Short Film
- Con-Can Movie Festival: Grand Prix, Audience Award
- Créteil International Women's Film Festival: Best French Short Film, Fresnes Award
- Tétouan International Mediterranean Film Festival: Grand Prix
- International Short Film Festival of Villeurbanne: Best Script, Special Mention of the INSA
- Montpellier International Mediterranean Film Festival: Special Prize of the Jury

- Contis International Film Festival: Ciné-Cinéma Award
- FujiFilm Awards: Prize of the Public
- Vaulx-en-Velin Short Film Festival: Youth Jury Award
- Tirana International Film Festival: Mention of the Jury

## Death of the Poet (Şairisi Ğura/ Şairin Ölümü)

Turkey | 2009 | 18 mins | HDCAM  
Lazuri, Russian

**Director / Producer / Editor:** Elif Ergezen  
**Cinematographer:** Jordane Chouzenoux  
**Archival Footage:** İsmail Avcı Bucaklışı

**Sound:** Mehmet Kılıçel  
**Sound Designer:** Nurkut Özdemir

Contact: elif.ergezen@gmail.com



In her poignant film *Death of the Poet*, Elif Ergezen interweaves itinerant poet Helimişi Xasani's sound recordings in the Laz language (Lazuri) – a disappearing language of the Caucasus that is spoken in both Turkey and Georgia – with the stunning imagery of the Black Sea region. Born in the Hopa district of Turkey, Helimişi remains a perpetual inspiration to emerging artists. Filled with such inspiration, the film captures Helimişi's story through the lens of his daughter, who lives in dire conditions in a Georgian village across the Turkish border. After spending most of his life exiled in Leningrad, Siberia, and Tbilisi, Helimişi passes away in this border village and is buried with his tombstone facing his hometown in Turkey. Without speaking her "father tongue" – neither Turkish nor Lazuri – the daughter recollects, in Russian, her family's story of longing and separation and bids her father and his great art a humble farewell, aided by Ergezen's cinematic vocabulary.

—Zeynep Dadak



**Elif Ergezen** graduated from the Communications department of Galatasaray University in Istanbul. She then obtained her Master's degree in Cinema from Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne University in France in 2005. She has worked on the production and editing of several film projects.

### Filmography

- 2002 *Unconsciously (Şuursuzca)* (short)
- 2004 *Yesterday, Elsewhere (Dün, Başka/Yerde)* (documentary)
- 2006 *Departure (Terk)* (short)
- 2009 *Death of the Poet (Şairisi Ğura/Şairin Ölümü)* (documentary)



## Milk and Chocolate (Süt ve Çikolata)

Turkey | 2008 | 22 mins | Color | DigiBeta  
Turkish

Director / Screenwriter / Producer /  
Cinematographer / Editor: Senem Tüzen

Cast: Aysel Gedik, Mihriman Özdemir, Emine Aksoy,  
Fatma Doygun, Fatma Sabanlı, Ahmet Açık,el,  
Savaş Uyaniker, Betül Baysal, Deniz Atalay,  
Habibe Doygun

Contact: senemtuzen@hotmail.com

*Milk and Chocolate* is one of the most exceptional recent Turkish short films. Shot in a beautiful village in central Anatolia, the film delves into the imagination of its teenage protagonist, Emine. Her seemingly straightforward but ultimately difficult task turns into something of a quest: the baby is hungry, her mother has no milk, and Emine is sent to get some from the neighbors. Senem Tüzen, who has already received numerous awards for her short *Unus Mundus*, stands out again as a filmmaker of great merit. *Milk and Chocolate* is a gem: Tüzen paints an authentic depiction of village life by interlacing a clean naturalism, the remarkable directing of amateur actors, and a diligent conception of location. In addition, she skillfully and simultaneously guides the audience to the inner depths of a coming-of-age story, with all its hoped-for wonder, regret, and sorrow.

—Övgü Gökçe



**Senem Tüzen** was born in Ankara in 1980. She graduated from the Cinema-TV department of the Mimar Sinan Fine Arts Academy in Istanbul.

### Filmography

- 2005 *Rats (Fareler)* (short)
- 2007 *Unus Mundus* (animation)
- 2008 *Milk and Chocolate (Süt ve Çikolata)* (short)

- Işık Film Festival: Best Short Fiction Film
- Izmit Short Film Festival: Special Jury Award

## The Sacrifice (Kurban)

Turkey | 2009 | 17 mins | Color | HDCAM  
Turkish

Director / Screenwriter / Producer /  
Cinematographer: Ali Betil

Editors: Ali Betil and Onur Karaoğlu  
Sound: Deniz Buga  
Cast: Sergen Parlak, Dora Tolay

Contact: alibetil@gmail.com



In the opening of *The Sacrifice*, a shepherd feeds and tends his herd. While we initially may believe that this image displays a relationship of affection, the film quickly reminds us that the herd is fed only to be sold and butchered. In this way, we are introduced to the sacrificial animal of the film. Only then are we introduced to the family set to perform said sacrifice. As they enter their house, a television broadcasts Ömer Kavur's *Yusuf and Kenan* (*Yusuf ile Kenan*, 1979), an important Turkish film that tells the story of two brothers who drift to different edges of life after their migration to the big city. Just like Yusuf and Kenan, Sergen and Erdem – the two brothers in *The Sacrifice* – are very different from each other. Instead of getting to know the village, Erdem acts like an occupying force, objectifying the things around him and making targets out of them. While Erdem kills animals to pass the time, the adults think they deserve to kill the animals they butcher. Tension builds as Sergen, as if to oppose this “mature” and “rational” world, refuses to eat the meat of a sacrificed animal and comes into the line of fire of Erdem's gun.

—Özge Özyılmaz



**Ali Betil's** first fiction film *Sorrow*, premiered at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. *Sorrow* achieved international fame, showing at 52 festivals in 26 countries. His second film, *The Sacrifice*, was made with an HD camera and a crew of two, and represents his childhood memories. Betil will continue his film studies at Columbia University in New York this year.

### Filmography

- 2007 *Fırat/Hrant* (documentary)
- 2008 *Sorrow (Hüzün)* (short)
- 2009 *The Sacrifice (Kurban)* (short)



## Semolina Halva (İrmik Helvası)

Turkey | 2008 | 11 mins | Color | DVCAM  
Turkish

Director / Producer / Editor: Ezgi Kaplan  
Cinematographer: Tamer Giray  
Cast: Mari Tovmasyan, Takuhi Tovmasyan

Contact: ezgikaplan@gmail.com

At the beginning of *Semolina Halva*, the audience listens in as an Armenian woman complains about how her culture is perceived in Turkey: "When they need to refer to Armenians, all these allegedly intellectual people either talk about our cherry liquor or our appetizers. They reduce us to our eccentric food." Semolina halva is a dessert that is part of a mourning ritual in cultures as diverse as Greek, Armenian, and Turkish. During the documentary we do not see much more than the preparation of this dessert by an Armenian woman. Thus, one can easily jump to the conclusion that the movie itself perpetuates what the woman has referred to. However, *Semolina Halva* does not harbor any romantic conceptions about the culinary commonalities of different cultures. Rather, it paves the way for a striking personal story that parallels the greater history of Armenians in Turkey. While the halva is cooked, we listen to a story that brings us from "the big disaster" in 1915 to the traumatic recent assassination of Hrant Dink – a pivotal figure for the Armenian minority in Turkey. The *punctum* of the documentary comes at the end of this story with a fleeting, hardly noticed facial expression on the woman cooking halva as she utters Hrant Dink's name, reflecting in that slight expression the sorrows of a whole society.

—Abbas Bozkurt



**Ezgi Kaplan** was born in Istanbul in 1981. She is an M.A. student in the Film-TV department at Istanbul Bilgi University. She makes short experimental videos and produces her own documentary projects. She also works as a freelance video designer for *Çıplak Ayaklar Kumpanyası*.

### Filmography

2008 *Fallacy (Yanılğı)* (short)

2008 *Semolina Halva (İrmik Helvası)* (short)



## Turnout (Sapak)

Turkey | 2008 | 15 mins | Color | DigiBeta  
Turkish

**Director / Screenwriter / Producer / Editor:**  
Firat Mançuhan  
**Cinematographer:** Meryem Yavuz

**Sound:** Orçin İnceoğlu, Akın Andırın  
**Cast:** Bülent Emin Yarar, Kaya Akkaya, Pınar Sesveren,  
Mert Trenova

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The reasons behind criminal actions, the identity of criminals – both actual and as we construct them – and the criminal desires we won't even admit to ourselves make up several variations on a popular theme in recent Turkish cinema. Firat Mançuhan's *Turnout* follows this lead. The film opens with the view of a highway; onscreen text then reminds us of the seven killings that took place on this road. The audience enters into the film knowing full well that they may be forced to witness the depiction of at least one murder, and as the camera returns to the highway, our anxious waiting, increasingly tense with each moment of delay, finally ends with a fast-passing car. Thanks to the introductory warning, the driver, whom we see drinking beer and smoking weed, is easily transformed into a potential murderer. The rest of the film, however, works to demonstrate the error of these too-simple connections and character readings. Only after the crime and violence take place do we see the very basic reasons behind it. The film forces us to recognize that whatever lies behind violent crimes goes far beyond a mere murderous urge.

—Özge Özyılmaz



**Firat Mançuhan** was born 1981 in Ankara. He studies at the Cinema-TV department of Marmara University's Faculty of Arts.

### Filmography

2008 *The Turnout (Sapak)* (short)  
2007 *The Barber (Berber)* (short)

- Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival, Student Films Competition: Best Fiction Film
- Cyprus International Film Festival: Best Fiction Film
- Yıldız Short Film Festival: Best Fiction Film
- Akbank Short Film Festival: Best Fiction Film
- Izmir International Short Film Festival: Special Jury Award



## The Waiting (Bekleyiş)

Turkey | 2008 | 15 mins | Color | 35mm  
No Dialogue

Director / Screenwriter / Producer / Editor:  
Emine Emel Balci

Cinematographer: Murat Tuncel  
Cast: Hayrettin Karaaslan, Bedriye Karaaslan

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*The Waiting* opens with the sounds of cockchafer bugs on a black screen and then, with a shot sliding across a naked hill, calls us to another life surrounded by pure nature, far from civilization. The film continues with extreme close-ups, as if to focus on all of the details waiting for us in this other world. *The Waiting* reveals the reality of the moment, with the film's lack of dialogue and recurring close-ups attempting to better represent life's texture and the authenticity of the (non)actors – who had their first film acting experience here. We understand that it is the story of an old man and a disabled old woman, and they pass in and out of the frame discreetly, as though they are just two of the many objects in view. When the man sets out on a journey to get flour from a faraway grain mill, the waiting, the story of the film, begins. In this world without words, the director takes all of the things that her camera touches and transforms them from mere objects into the living actors of her story.

—Özge Özyılmaz



**Emine Emel Balci** was born in 1984. She graduated from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University's Film and TV department. Her first documentary film, *Women of the Lake*, won several awards in national and international festivals, while *The Waiting* has screened in numerous international film festivals. Balci is currently writing a feature film script and developing a documentary feature.

### Filmography

2002 *A Short Film About Luck! (Talih Üzerine Kısa Bir Film)* (short)  
2004 *Joseph and Ismael (Yusuf ile İsmail)* (short)  
2005 *Jakob (Yakup)* (short)  
2006 *Passion (Sevda)* (short)  
2007 *Women of the Lake (Gölün Kadınları)* (documentary)  
2008 *The Waiting (Bekleyiş)* (short)

- Maltepe University Short Film Competition: Third Prize
- Kristal Klaket Short Film Competition: Jury Prize
- Istanbul Technical University Short Film Competition: Best Cinematography

# Feature Films





## 10 to 11 (11'e 10 Kala)

Turkey, France, Germany | 2009 | 110 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director / Screenwriter:** Pelin Esmer  
**Producer:** Tolga Esmer (Sinefilm)  
**Cinematographer:** Özgür Eken

**Editor:** Ayhan Ergürel, Pelin Esmer, Cem Yıldırım  
**Sound:** Kasper Munck-Hansen  
**Cast:** Nejat İşler, Mithat Esmer

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In *10 to 11*, Pelin Esmer relates the story of her uncle Mithat, focusing particularly on his passion for collecting. Though her film is a work of fiction, casting Mithat as himself helps give the film its unique feel. Mithat accumulates memories from the randomness of daily details – be they quotidian objects, newspapers from days (and years) past, or sound recordings – finding peace among his collection. He spends each day on the streets of Istanbul, gathering the necessary items. Sustaining his passion, however, is getting harder every day: relatives do not understand him, neighbors view his collection as junk, and his deteriorating health begins to trouble him and impede his efforts. Finally, he is forced to pass these errands on to his doorman, Ali. As he replaces Mithat on his wanderings through Istanbul, the experience proves a radical change for Ali, standing in sharp contrast to the years during which he rarely dared to leave his basement home. The route that long bound Mithat to his collection now carries Ali to a much different place.

—Ayça Çiftçi (Translated from Turkish by Berke Göl)



**Pelin Esmer** was born and grew up in Istanbul. After majoring in sociology at Boğaziçi University in her hometown, she attended a cinema workshop and then worked as a first assistant director on a number of Turkish and foreign films. An award winner at the Tribeca Film Festival, *The Play*, her first feature documentary, also competed in San Sebastian and has now screened in more than 50 festivals around the world and has received 14 awards.

### Filmography

2002 *The Collector (Koleksiyoncu)*  
2005 *The Play (Oyun)*

- Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival: Best Film and Best Screenplay
- Istanbul International Film Festival: Special Prize of the Jury

## Autumn (Sonbahar)

Turkey, Germany | 2008 | 106 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish, Hemshin

**Director / Screenwriter:** Özcan Alper  
**Producer:** F. Serkan Acar (Kuzey Film)  
**Cinematographer:** Feza Çaldıran

**Editor:** Thomas Balkenhol  
**Music:** Ersin Çelik  
**Cast:** Onur Saylak, Megi Kobaladze, Raife Yenigül,  
Serkan Keskin, Nino Lejava

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*Autumn* is a meditation on the prolonged loss of a young life against the backdrop of autumn in the mountains of the Black Sea region. Making an allusion to the generation of political prisoners of the 1990s, the film follows Yusuf, who returns home after he is released from prison on medical grounds. Yusuf takes shelter in his mother's house with a slowly growing sickness in his lungs, and calmly goes through fragments of life: a breakfast with his mother, spending time with a childhood friend, an encounter with a Georgian prostitute, helping the neighbor's kid in math. *Autumn* seamlessly interweaves life and death through its beautiful imagery, which juxtaposes Yusuf's weakening body with the defiant power of the Black Sea. An exceptionally modest and lyrical first feature by Özcan Alper, *Autumn* leaves a solid mark on contemporary cinema in Turkey.

—Övgü Gökçe



**Özcan Alper**, born in 1975, studied physics and history at Istanbul University. In 1999, he started work as an assistant director and production manager on several feature and TV films. During this time he also wrote for the magazine *Yeni Film*. In 2001, he made his first short, *Grandmother*, which was shot entirely in Hemshin, an Armenian dialect spoken in northeastern Turkey. This first work won him several awards, which enabled him to make *Autumn*, his first feature film.

### Filmography

- 2001 *Grandmother (Momi)* (short)
- 2002 *Voyage in Time with a Scientist (Bir Bilim Adamıyla Zaman Enleminde Yolculuk)* (documentary)
- 2005 *Rhapsody and Melancholy in Tokai City (Tokai City'de Rapsodi ve Melankoli)* (documentary)
- 2008 *Autumn (Sonbahar)*

- Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival: Best Film, Jury Special Award
- Locarno Film Festival: The Art and Essay Cicae Prize
- Antalya International Eurasia Film Festival: NETPAC Special Jury Award
- Tbilisi International Film Festival: Best Director
- Sofia International Film Festival: Best Director
- Ankara International Film Festival: Best Film, Best Director and SİYAD Turkish Critics' Award



## Dot (Nokta)

Turkey | 2009 | 78 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director / Screenwriter:** Derviş Zaim  
**Producers:** Derviş Zaim, Baran Seyhan (Marathon Film, Sarmaşık Sanatlar)  
**Cinematographer:** Ercan Yılmaz

**Editors:** Ulaş Cihan Şimşek  
**Music:** Mazlum Çimen  
**Cast:** Mehmet Ali Nuroğlu, Serhat Kılıç, Settar Tanrıöğen, Şener Kökkaya

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*Dot* is the absorbing fifth feature by the experienced filmmaker Derviş Zaim, one of the pioneers of the new Turkish cinema of the 1990s. The film stands out as a visual experiment. Its stark imagery set entirely against the white backdrop of Tuz Gölü (Salt Lake) in central Anatolia, and its strong, coherent style imitates *ihcam*, a calligraphy technique in Islamic arts that involves writing in one uninterrupted movement. As much as the film's style alludes to this technique, its narrative is also concerned with Islamic calligraphy: a gifted young calligrapher becomes involved in the theft of a valuable ancient Quran and tries to redeem himself in the desolate landscape of his conscience. In *Dot*, Zaim continues to invent a film language that relates to traditional art forms and makes a valuable contribution to the growing aesthetics of Turkish cinema.

—Övgü Gökçe



Born in 1964, **Derviş Zaim** graduated from Boğaziçi University with a degree in management and went on to earn a M.A. in film and cultural studies from the University of Warwick in the U.K. The first feature he wrote and directed, *Somersault in a Coffin*, won several national and international awards. He followed this with the award-winning *Elephants and Grass* and then *Mud*, which won an award at Venice. He currently teaches film at Istanbul Bilgi University and Boğaziçi University.

### Filmography

1996 *Somersault in a Coffin (Tabutta Rövaşata)*  
2000 *Elephants and Grass (Filler ve Çimen)*  
2003 *Mud (Çamur)*  
2004 *Parallel Trips (Paralel Yolculuklar)* (documentary)  
2006 *Waiting for Heaven (Cenneti Beklerken)*  
2008 *Dot (Nokta)*

- Cairo International Film Festival: Best Digital Film
- Antalya International Golden Orange Film Festival, National Competition: Best Director, Special Jury Prize, Critics' Award
- Istanbul International Film Festival, National Competition: Best Director
- Bursa International Silk Road Film Festival: Best Director

## Milk (Süt)

Turkey, France, Germany | 2008 | 102 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director:** Semih Kaplanoğlu

**Producers:** Semih Kaplanoğlu (Kaplan Film),  
Guillaume de Seille (Arizona Films), Bettina  
Brokemper, Johannes Rexin (Heimatfilm)

**Screenwriters:** Semih Kaplanoğlu, Orçun Köksal

**Cinematographer:** Özgür Eken

**Editor:** François Quiqueré

**Sound:** Kasper Munc-Hansen

**Cast:** Melih Selçuk, Başak Köklükaya, Rıza Akın,  
Saadet Işıl Aksoy, Alev Uçarer, Şerif Erol

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*Milk*, the second film of Semih Kaplanoğlu's "Yusuf Trilogy," following 2007's *Egg*, tells the story of young Yusuf's internal struggle over leaving home. Although he is dependent on his home, his routine, and what is secure and well-known to him, Yusuf also desires to get away from the familiar, to face the "new" that is hidden behind the mountains and buildings of his hometown. In *Milk*, Kaplanoğlu has traced a nuanced path between these two states of being: the security of home and the urge to drift away from it. The film thus appears as an expression of the inner world of Yusuf, in which his fears and fascinations are mixed together. The film uses every face, every image, every place, every ray of light that burns his eyes to draw out the ups and downs in Yusuf's soul.

—Fırat Yücel (Translated from Turkish by Oytun Kal and Zeynep Güzel)



**Semih Kaplanoğlu** was born in 1963 and graduated from Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, with a degree in film and television in 1984. After graduation, he worked as an assistant cameraman on several award-winning films. In addition to filmmaking, Kaplanoğlu has published numerous articles on contemporary art and cinema, and between 1996 and 2000 wrote a column entitled "Encounters" for the national daily *Radikal*.

### Filmography

2000 *Away from Home (Herkes Kendi Evinde)*

2004 *Angel's Fall (Meleğin Düşüşü)*

2007 *Egg (Yumurta)*

2008 *Milk (Süt)*

- Granada Film Festival: Best Actor
- Istanbul International Film Festival, International Competition: FIPRESCI Award



## My Only Sunshine (Hayat Var)

Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria | 2008 | 121 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director / Screenwriter / Editor / Sound:**  
Reha Erdem  
**Producer:** Ömer Atay (Atlantik Film)  
**Cinematographer:** Florent Herry

**Music:** Orhan Gencebay  
**Cast:** Elit İşcan, Erdal Beşikçioğlu, Levend Yılmaz

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*My Only Sunshine* marks the fullest realization yet of Reha Erdem's signature style. Although it displays many of the conventions of a coming-of-age film, it is not possible to describe *My Only Sunshine* within the boundaries of that, or any, genre. The seemingly familiar story of a fourteen-year-old girl turns into an uncanny experience through the expert manipulation of the soundtrack. As a result, the Bosphorus, where the film is set, becomes a place that is simultaneously very familiar and eerily strange. The sounds of giant oil tankers and the unbroken wail of sirens merge together with the continuous murmurings of a teenage girl; samples from Turkish Arabesque music of the 1970s are then added to this "harmonic cacophony" in such a way that they dictate the pathos of the movie. Erdem's idiosyncratic use of sound design and his deliberately "artificial" characters and settings together provide him with a unique style that is hard to include within any cinematic school. As the teenage girl Hayat attempts to cope with the lack of love around her through her incessant mumbling, it is exactly the impossible mix of sounds that guarantees the novelty of both the experience and the emotional response that this film provides.

—Abbas Bozkurt



**Reha Erdem**, born in 1960, graduated from Paris 8 University with a degree in film studies. He obtained a M.A. in plastic arts at the same university. In 1989, he shot his first feature-length film, the French-Turkish co-production *Oh Moon*. He has written the script for all his films except *Mommy I'm Scared*, where he was credited as co-writer. He has also made several short films and directed the stage play, *Maids (Les Bonnes)*, by Jean Genet.

### Filmography

1981 *Oh Moon (A Ay)*  
1995 *Song of the Sea (Deniz Türküsü)* (short)  
1999 *Run for Money (Kaç Para Kaç)*  
2004 *Mommy, I'm Scared (Korkuyorum Anne)*  
2006 *Anytime in October (Ekime Hiç Bir Kere)* (short)  
2006 *Times and Winds (Beş Vakit)*  
2008 *My Only Sunshine (Hayat Var)*  
2009 *Kosmos* (in post-production)

- Antalya International Golden Orange Film Festival: National Competition SİYAD (Cinema and Film Critics Association of Turkey) Special Prize
- Berlin International Film Festival: "Der Tagesspiegel" Reader's Jury, Best Film
- Istanbul International Film Festival, National Competition: FIPRESCI Award



## On the Way to School (İki Dil Bir Bavul)

Turkey | 2008 | 81 mins | Color | 35mm  
Kurdish, Turkish

**Directors:** Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Doğan  
**Producers:** Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Doğan  
(PERI-SAN Film)

**Screenwriter / Cinematographer:** Orhan Eskiköy

**Editors:** Orhan Eskiköy, Thomas Balkenhol  
**Cast:** Emre Aydın, Zülküf Yıldırım, Rojda Huz,  
Vehip Huz, Zülküf Huz

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*On the Way to School* is an extraordinary film that documents the contradictions of modern Turkey and its historical debate on “the west” versus “the east” – namely, the Kurdish problem. A chronicle of the journey of a young, first-time Turkish teacher from the western part of the country who is sent to a remote Kurdish village in the southeast to be the sole teacher in the village school, *On the Way to School* witnesses the frustrations of its main character and the difficulties of teaching kids who do not speak Turkish. It does so with a purely realist cinematic approach that effectively conveys the fine line between fiction and documentary. With its simple, modest stance and strong sense of humor, *On the Way to School* sheds a light on a long history of intricate social, political, and cultural problems, and proves to be a revelation in its appeals to the heart and the mind.

—Övgü Gökçe



**Orhan Eskiköy** was born in 1980 in Istanbul. He graduated from the Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Communication of Ankara University. He is currently working at the Centre of Distance Education as a video production expert, and is independently producing documentaries.

**Özgür Doğan** was born in 1978 in Varto. He graduated from the Department of Radio-TV and Cinema, Faculty of Communication of Ankara University in 2001. He is employed as a research assistant at the Middle East Technical University, and is working on independent documentary video production.

### Filmography

2001 *Each Dream is a Shattered Mirror*  
(*Hayaller Birer Kırık Ayna*)  
(short documentary)

2004 *Mothers and Children* (*Anneler ve Çocuklar*) (short documentary)

2004 *Suffering* (*Sancı*) (documentary)

2006 *Together* (*Birlikte*) (short documentary)

2008 *On the Way to School* (*İki Dil Bir Bavul*)

- Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival: Yılmaz Güney Award



## Pandora's Box (Pandora'nın Kutusu)

Turkey, France, Germany, Belgium | 2008 | 112 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director:** Yeşim Ustaoglu  
**Producers:** Yeşim Ustaoglu, Muhammet Çakıral, Serkan Çakarer, Behrooz Hashemian, Natacha Devillers, Catherine Burniaux, Michael Weber  
**Screenwriters:** Yeşim Ustaoglu, Sema Kaygusuz

**Cinematographer:** Jacques Besse  
**Editor:** Franck Nakache  
**Music:** Jean-Pierre Mas  
**Sound:** Philippe Bluard  
**Cast:** Tsilla Chelton, Derya Alabora, Onur Ünsal, Osman Sonant, Övül Avkıran

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Three adult siblings – two sisters and their younger brother – set out on a journey from Istanbul to Turkey's Black Sea Region, hoping to find their aging mother, who is reportedly lost in the mountains surrounding her village. This unexpected voyage stirs up a whirl of family resentments, as they each learn to cope with their mother's progressive symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The sibling rivalry only grows as they bring their mother, Nusret, into their hectic middle-class lives in Istanbul, introducing her into a space seemingly at odds with the peace and compassion she would need in the last days of her life. Instead of the expected generational dramatics, the film shifts course to show the unusual bond that develops between Nusret and her urban teenage grandson, Murat, a genuine and unbiased human connection. Throughout their final journey together, Nusret and Murat's relationship transcends language and memory, shaped by the contours and conspiracies of social class and the divide between the rural and the urban.

—Zeynep Dadak



After shooting several award-winning shorts in Turkey, **Yeşim Ustaoglu** made her feature film debut with *The Trace (İz)*. The film was presented at numerous international festivals, including Moscow and Gothenburg. Yeşim Ustaoglu also received international recognition for her 1999 film *Journey to the Sun (Güneşe Yolculuk)*, which won many awards both in national and international film festivals.

### Filmography

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1984 <i>To Catch a Moment (Bir Anı Yakalamak)</i> (short) | 1999 <i>Journey to the Sun (Güneşe Yolculuk)</i>                        |
| 1987 <i>Magnafantagna</i> (short)                         | 2004 <i>Life on Their Shoulders (Sırtlarındaki Hayat)</i> (documentary) |
| 1990 <i>Duet (Düet)</i> (short)                           | 2004 <i>Waiting for the Clouds (Bulutları Beklerken)</i>                |
| 1992 <i>Hotel (Otel)</i> (short)                          | 2008 <i>Pandora's Box (Pandora'nın Kutusu)</i>                          |
| 1994 <i>The Trace (İz)</i>                                |   |

- San Sebastian International Film Festival: Best Film "Golden Shell," Best Actress "Silver Shell" (Tsilla Chelton)
- Fajr International Film Festival: Christal Simorgh, Special Jury Prize, Best Performances (Tsilla Chelton, Derya Alabora, Övül Avkıran)
- Amiens International Film Festival: Best Performance (Tsilla Chelton)

- Valecises International Film Festival: Best Actress (Tsilla Chelton)
- Istanbul International Film Festival: Best Actress (Derya Alabora)
- Antalya International Golden Orange Film Festival: Best Supporting Actress (Övül Avkıran)
- Thessaloniki International Film Festival: Crossroad Best European Project

## Summer Book (Tatil Kitabı)

Turkey | 2008 | 92 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director / Screenwriter:** Seyfi Teoman  
**Producers:** Yamaç Okur, Nadir Öperli (Bulut Film)  
**Cinematographer:** Arnau Valls Colomer  
**Editor:** Çiçek Kahraman

**Sound:** İsmail Karadaş  
**Cast:** Taner Birsel, Tayfun Günay, Harun Özüağ,  
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*Summer Book* is the story of a family who runs an orangery in southern Turkey; their small lives in the provinces, their ordinary secrets and little troubles are all shown with a striking simplicity and a palpable atmosphere. Bearing the autobiographical stamp of Seyfi Teoman, the film's writer/director, *Summer Book* looks at the provinces from the inside and tries to come to terms with it. After the father of the family dies, leaving questions about some missing money and a mysterious mistress, the three characters of the film – ten-year-old Ali, his brother Veysel, and their uncle Hasan – will have to spend a long, hot summer making some serious choices about their lives. A troublesome state of deprivation intertwines their stories into a single journey, in which ultimately all the blame will be put on the province.

—Gülengül Altıntaş



**Seyfi Teoman** was born in Kayseri, Turkey, in 1977. After studying economics at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, he lived in Lodz, Poland, for two years, studying film directing at the Polish National Film School. His short film *Apartment* (2004) has been screened at numerous international film festivals. He directed his first feature, *Summer Book*, in 2008. The film premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and has since received awards at many international festivals. At the moment, he is working on his second feature, *Our Grand Despair*, which has been supported by the Hubert Bals Fund and was selected to the 2009 Cannes International Film Festival's L'Atelier.

### Filmography

2004 *Apartment (Apartman)* (short)  
2008 *Summer Book (Tatil Kitabı)*

- Istanbul International Film Festival, National Competition: Best Film, FIPRESCI Award
- Taormina International Film Festival: Special Jury Prize
- Slovakia Artfilm International Film Festival: Best Film (Blue Angel Award)
- Serbia Palic European Film Festival: FIPRESCI Special Mention
- Montreal World Film Festival: Bronze Zenith
- European Film Awards Festival: Nominated for European Discovery



## Wrong Rosary (Uzak İhtimal)

Turkey | 2009 | 93 mins | Color | 35mm  
Turkish

**Director:** Mahmut Fazil Coşkun  
**Producers:** Tülin Çetinkol Soyarslan, İsmail Kılıçarslan, Tarık Tufan, Mahmut Fazil Coşkun (Hokus Fokus Film)  
**Screenwriters:** Tarık Tufan, Görkem Yeltan, Bektaş Topaloğlu

**Cinematographer:** Refik Çakar  
**Editor:** Çiçek Kahraman  
**Music:** Rahman Altın  
**Cast:** Nadir Sarıbacak, Görkem Yeltan, Ersan Uysal

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Musa, a young muezzin from Ankara, is assigned to a mosque in Galata, Istanbul. He moves into an old Beyoğlu apartment and soon develops a naive affection for his next-door neighbor – a sad, quiet woman. He discovers that her name is Clara, that she is Catholic, and that she works in a nearby church. On a visit to her church, Musa meets Yakup, a secondhand bookseller, who hires him to help with books in Ottoman. While Musa's undeclared and unrequited emotions continue to grow, Yakup carries a heartbreaking secret from his past and, for reasons of his own, stalks Clara. *Wrong Rosary* tells a slow-paced, simple story. The steadiness of the camera, the minimal amount of dialogue, and the careful editing together create a tranquil atmosphere. Unlike its predecessors, which typically discuss the complex and ever-changing role that religion plays in contemporary Turkey's problematic process of westernization, *Wrong Rosary* does not present faith as a source of constant battle, and therein lies its significance.

—Berke Göl



**Mahmut Fazil Coşkun** was born in 1973. Coşkun studied film at the University of California, Los Angeles, and received his M.A. degree from Istanbul Bilgi University. He works professionally as a documentary and commercial director, producing such documentaries as *Lighthouse* (1997), *Moon Dreams* (1998), *Gazel* (1999), and *Aliye*, which won the 2002 Director of the Year award from the Turkish Writers' Union.

### Filmography

2009 *Wrong Rosary (Uzak İhtimal)*

- Istanbul International Film Festival, National Competition: Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor
- International Film Festival Rotterdam: Tiger Award
- Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival: Best Director, Best Actress, Best Actor

# About *Altyazi*

Founded in 2001 by a group of cinephile friends, *Altyazi* is one of Turkey's leading monthlies on cinema. In 2004, the magazine was integrated into Boğaziçi University as Mithat Alam Film Center's publication and began, at that point, to play a more dynamic role in the film culture of Turkey. As an independent magazine with nationwide circulation, *Altyazi's* mission has been to offer original and critical coverage of current cinema for Turkish audiences. In addition to its rather crowded editorial board, *Altyazi* actively aims to open a space for everyone – from students to cinephiles, from academics to directors – to express their thoughts on cinema. Straddling mainstream and art cinema, the magazine covers not only theatrical releases and festivals within Turkey, but international festival highlights as well.

With the expansion of its board in 2006, *Altyazi* also started to participate actively in a number of other film-related projects: writing and editing catalogues; curating film programs, sections, and sidebars; and organizing events in cooperation with festivals and institutions such as !f Istanbul, Festival on Wheels, Istanbul Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), and the Istanbul Modern Museum. Recently, *Altyazi* prepared the booklet for the DVD box set of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films. *Altyazi* members also periodically design and offer film seminars at Boğaziçi University's Mithat Alam Film Center and in cooperation with nonprofit organizations, such as Anadolu Kültür A.Ş., in cities across Turkey.

*Altyazi* participates extensively in the events related to Turkish cinema on the international scene. In September 2007, *Altyazi* published the catalogue for the Zeki Demirkubuz retrospective held at New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center, organized in collaboration with ArteEast and the Moon and Stars Project. This was quickly followed by the booklet *Turkish Cinema Now*, prepared for the Cinema East Film Festival, also in New York. Most recently, in cooperation with IFFR and the 2009 Crossing Europe Film Festival in Linz, *Altyazi* prepared a "Young Turkish Cinema" program, accompanied by an extensive booklet about the selection and a panel.

In 2007, *Altyazi* members Nadir Öperli and Yamaç Okur founded Bulut Film, a production company dedicated to developing independent film projects, and produced their first feature, *Summer Book (Tatil Kitabı)*, written and directed by Seyfi Teoman – also a former *Altyazi* member. This enterprise was made possible in part thanks to *Altyazi's* will and belief in combining film production with the critical analysis of cinema. *Altyazi* desires and encourages the type of collaboration it has enjoyed in the past as it seeks further projects and as it plans and works to continue its multifaceted endeavors in the future.

# Authors' Biographies

**Senem Aytaç** has been on the editorial board of *Altyazı* since 2004. After graduating with a degree in psychology, Aytaç studied film and television, receiving her M.A. degree with a thesis entitled "The Present as Nightmare: Dystopian Sentiment in Contemporary American Film." She organizes and teaches film seminars at various institutions.

**Abbas Bozkurt** has been writing film reviews for *Altyazı* since 2007. He joined the editorial board in 2008 and recently became the administrative coordinator of the magazine. He received his B.A. degree in psychology from Boğaziçi University in 2008 and is currently studying in the M.A. program in critical and cultural studies of the same university.

**Ayça Çiftçi** has been on the editorial board of *Altyazı* since 2005. She received her M.A. degree in cultural studies from Istanbul Bilgi University with a thesis focusing on the films of Kazım Öz, and currently is a teaching assistant in the TV reporting and programming department of the same university. She organizes and teaches film seminars at various institutions.

**Zeynep Dadak** is a doctoral candidate and lecturer in the Cinema Studies department at New York University. Her dissertation, "A Maudlin Cinema: Arabesk Film and Culture in Turkey," studies Arabesk film in Turkish cinema. Dadak has been on the editorial board of *Altyazı* since 2004. As a filmmaker she recently co-produced the documentary *For the Record: The World Tribunal on Iraq* (2007) with Başak Ertür, Alisa Lebow, and Enis Köstepen.

**Övgü Gökçe** is one of *Altyazı*'s first film critics and has been on the editorial board since 2004. She has been working on Turkish and international cinema for several years. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Ohio University's School of Interdisciplinary Arts, writing her dissertation on the historiography of sentiment in contemporary Turkish film. Gökçe's first short film, *Sleep and Then* (*Uyku Sonra*, 2004), has been widely screened at national and international film festivals.

**Berke Göl** has been on the editorial board of *Altyazı* since 2003. He studied psychology in Boğaziçi University and received a Master's degree in cultural studies at Istanbul Bilgi University with a thesis on Kemalism in literature. Göl writes, edits, and translates for film catalogues.

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**Enis Köstepen** is a founder and a member of the editorial board of *Altyazı*. He has worked as a producer and an assistant director on several documentaries and short films in Turkey. He is currently a Ph.D. student in anthropology at the New School for Social Research in New York. He co-edited, with Zeynep Dadak, the catalogue for the Zeki Demirkubuz retrospective at New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center, *Altyazı*'s first international collaboration.

**Gözde Onaran** has been a member of the editorial board of *Altyazı* since 2006. She studied psychology at Boğaziçi University and later received an M.A. in media ecology and film production from New York University. Presently, she is a Ph.D. candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, and is teaching film classes at various universities in Istanbul.

**Özge Özyılmaz** received her M.A. degree from Bahçeşehir University with a thesis entitled "Co-existence: Construction of Temporal and Spatial Experience in the Films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan." She is writing her Ph.D. thesis on the reception of Hollywood in Turkey at Istanbul University, also working as a teaching assistant at İstanbul Bilgi University. She frequently writes for *Altyazı* and *Yeni İnsan Yeni Sinema* magazines.

**Yeşim Burul Seven** is a film critic and lecturer in cultural and film studies. She co-produces and hosts *Sinefil*, a weekly radio show on cinema, at Açık Radyo (Istanbul). She has a B.A. in psychology from Boğaziçi University and an M.A. in media and communication studies from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Currently, she is writing a Ph.D. on transnational cultural practices at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam.

**Fırat Yücel** is one of the founders and the editor-in-chief of *Altyazı*. Yücel writes film criticism and articles for several magazines and newspapers and is the editor of If Istanbul Independent Film Festival's catalogue. He received an M.A. in cultural studies with a thesis on youth angst and identity in 1990s cinema and is currently a Ph.D. student in Istanbul University's Radio-TV-Cinema department.

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