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Abstract

Book Summary: *Ecomedia: Key Issues* is a comprehensive textbook introducing the burgeoning field of ecomedia studies to provide an overview of the interface between environmental issues and the media globally. Linking the world of media production, distribution, and consumption to environmental understandings, the book addresses ecological meanings encoded in media texts, the environmental impacts of media production, and the relationships between media and cultural perceptions of the environment. [From the publisher]

Keywords

World Media, Environment, Ecomedia, Turkish Cinema, Eco-Nostalgia, Ecocinema

Disciplines

Communication Technology and New Media | Critical and Cultural Studies | Environmental Education | Environmental Monitoring | Environmental Sciences | International and Intercultural Communication | Mass Communication | Social Influence and Political Communication | Sustainability

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Eco-nostalgia in Popular Turkish Cinema

Ekin Gündüz Özdemirci and Salma Monani

In Rust, Stephen, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt. editors. 2015. *Ecomedia: Key Issues*. Routledge Earthscan series, 47-65.

Introduction

In the opening of the 2001 Turkish film *Şellale* (Semih Aslanyürek), a close-up shot captures the green-white luminescence of falling water, and we hear the voiceover of Cemal's (the protagonist) mother advising her daughter, Şehra to tell her dreams to the flowing water. As the camera tracks down the length of a waterfall, we hear Şehra describe how happy she was in her dream. The camera then pulls back into a long shot to reveal the base of the waterfall, ringed by women. The gentle and haunting notes of a ney, a traditional Turkish reed instrument, fill the soundscape. There is no diegetic sound, yet it is apparent from their gestures and expressions that the women are talking to the flowing water, as if to an intimate friend; all seem animated and sincere.

The dream-like quality is enhanced as the opening scene cuts, along with a tenser tonal shift in music, to sepia shots of a naked Cemal running through deserted streets and alleyways. Then we find Cemal suddenly in a space where the camera pans across ruins overgrown by weeds and littered with untidy reels of film. When Cemal holds up a strip of film, we see that the film is of the women at the waterfall. Then Cemal finds himself naked on a stage before a cheering audience of blind men. We realize that we are in his dream as the film cuts back to color. Through Cemal's voiceover we learn that he is an artist, unable to paint. As he speaks, he evokes his mother's wisdom of telling dreams to the waterfall: "I want to go back, mother, to tell my dreams to the waterfall, to the inner

corner of Daphne's eyes." As the opening credits appear on screen, we see mountain landscapes, industrial skylines, agricultural flat lands, and country roads roll by as if seen from a moving vehicle. Passing them, we arrive with Cemal in his childhood home, the town of Antakya, which lies in the rural belt of southern Anatolia.

The juxtaposition of the peaceful waterfall scene in color with the anxious, sepia-toned dreamscape of Cemal running naked in the streets alerts viewers to the film's central theme, Cemal's negotiations of past with present. Cemal's mother represents his idealized childhood memories and the comfort of home. In contrast, his nakedness, the deserted streets, and the overgrown ruins symbolize the troubles of his present. Because Cemal's story is foregrounded against Turkey's political history of the 1960s, many might also recognize the film as an example of popular New Turkish Cinema. Scholars such as Asuman Suner write that such films often use a nostalgic approach to the past to help Turkish viewers collectively engage with the country's last fifty years of turbulent sociopolitical changes (Suner, 2010). In this chapter, we join current scholarly discussion on Turkish cinema to conversations in ecocinema studies by viewing *Şellale* as an example of Turkish film where nostalgia takes on ecological import. Because their explicit focus is not on environmental protection, films like *Şellale* have not been theorized as examples of Turkish ecocinema; however, they lend themselves quite readily to ecocritical readings. *Şellale's* opening sequence foregrounds such readings through its juxtaposition of natural elements (the waterfall, the weeds, Cemal's naked body, the landscapes of mountains and flatlands) and cultural elements (the women's dream-telling, the film strips and reels, and the moving vehicle that carries us through the varied landscapes).

To better situate *Şellale*'s ecocritical potential, we will first discuss the broad purview of *ecocinema studies*. Second, by highlighting eco-film critics' interests in cinematic appeals to emotion, we will explore the idea of nostalgia as a complex emotion that speaks to ecological sensibilities. Third, we will apply our understanding of *eco-nostalgia* to *Şellale* to consider what such a reading might lend to our understandings of Turkey's national and transnational environmental discourse. Finally, we will summarize how such readings enrich our engagement with both Turkish cinema and ecocinema studies.

Ecocinema Studies as Primer

In the past few years ecocinema studies has exploded as a vibrant field of interdisciplinary inquiry. In doing so, the field has shifted its focus to *all* films, not just ones that intend an environmental message (Rust et al. 2012; Pick and Narraway 2013). Because cinema's stories can influence the way we view and interact with the world (Leiserowitz 2004; Kääpä 2013), and because filmmaking is a resource-intensive activity (Maxwell and Miller 2013; Bozak 2012), such an inclusive understanding of *all* cinema as environmentally grounded, and thus a suitable subject for ecocritical analysis, seems relatively easy to grasp. That said, ecocinema scholars have approached the definition of *ecocinema* in various ways (MacDonald 2004; Willoquet-Marcondi 2010; Ivakhiv 2008; Ingram 2013). As a number of eco-film critics suggest, such definitions are dependent both on the film (its production, distribution, and intended messaging or *encoding*) and on its audiences (their sociocultural, political, and material contexts), and in how these two entities encounter each other. For example, Chris Tong writes:

When we discuss a film, we discuss a film in relation to viewers... For any discussion to take place, the film must have meant something to somebody. In fact, we often view the same film and arrive at different interpretations (2013, 118).

In recognizing the audience, Tong tweaks a definition of ecocinema that was proposed by Sheldon Lu and Jiayin Mi in their edited collection *Chinese Ecocinema In the Age of Environmental Challenge* (2009). Where Lu and Mi describe ecocinema as “cinema with an ecological consciousness” (2009, 2), Tong suggests that ecocinema is “cinema *viewed* from an ecological perspective.” (2013, 118) Such a definition helps explain why many eco-film critics *decode* ecological potential in films that don’t explicitly encode such meanings, such as westerns (e.g., Carmichael 2006; Murray and Heumann 2012), road movies (e.g., Brereton 2006) or science fiction (e.g., Taylor 2013) to reveal myriad environmental themes.

Along with attention to varied media and genres, eco-film critics have also theorized such ecological encounters in multiple ways, drawing on ideas such as critical race theory (e.g., Monani, Chui, and Arreglo 2011), queer theory (e.g., Seymour, 2013), Marxist dialectics (e.g., Hageman 2012; Cubitt 2005), postcolonial, cosmopolitan, and transnational understandings (e.g., Gustafsson and Kääpä 2013), and ecophilosophy, which presents a comprehensive exploration of perceptual, social, and material relations (e.g., Ivakhiv 2013).

In this emerging dialogue, some of the most exciting recent scholarship is the attention eco-film critics give to the role *affect* and *emotion* play in cinema’s ecological potential. While affect is the immediate, visceral bodily response we have

as we watch a film, emotions illuminate our cognitive awareness of such responses. Eco-film critics, like those represented in Alexa Weik von Mossner's edited collection *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (2014) draw on humanistic, social, and scientific disciplines (such as film studies, psychology, and the cognitive sciences) to point to complex ways in which films (through their audio-visual presentations and narrative triggers) work to manipulate audiences' affect and emotion, as well as the ways and reasons why audiences resist, or succumb to, such manipulations.

Şellale employs *nostalgia* as an emotional hook to capture its viewers. But, before examining *Şellale* closely, let's consider the idea of *eco-nostalgia* to better recognize how an emotion can be ecologically pertinent and what this means for viewers of cinema.

Eco-Nostalgia: Nostalgia, the Pastoral, and Cinema

Nostalgia is described as a complex emotion that involves past-oriented cognitive and affective signatures—the mind's way of remembering through visceral engagement with feelings generated by real or virtual triggers of sight, sound or other bodily sensations (Hepper et al. 2012). Deriving from the Greek words *nostos* (“return home”) and *algos* (“longing”), nostalgia engages emotions such as affection and sadness to evoke the loss of a past time, place, or situation. Cultural studies scholar, Svetlana Boym defines the time and place that nostalgia evokes as an “ideal home” (2001).

Nostalgia becomes particularly interesting when we recognize that our feelings for an ideal past are often about how we engage with the present (Hepper et al. 2012, 5). As Liu Wai Yeung writes, nostalgia is about a present sense of “identity along with its

affiliated concepts such as belonging, memory, mode of living, recognition and culture” (2004, 17). In this entanglement of what nostalgia stands for and evokes, scholars also recognize ecological valences. Let us consider at least two ways in which nostalgia transmutes to *eco-nostalgia*—through bodily experience and through semiotics (etymologically and narratively).

At the bodily level, nostalgia is both abstract and yet affectively embodied. Materiality, a key concern for ecocritics, is apparent when we experience nostalgia, whether through a particular visceral trigger—e.g., through smelling, tasting, hearing or other bodily sensations—or through the *felt* emotions nostalgia evokes. Thus, bodily we feel the pain of sadness, or the joy of remembrance. In being embodied, nostalgia is not an abstract emotion but a tangible sensation that reminds us of our own physicality. Through nostalgia, we are nature as much as we are culture. All nostalgia in this sense is eco-nostalgia as it is ecologically bound. However, we can also think of eco-nostalgia in terms of semiotics, which can narrow its meaning to evoking natural environments that surround us.

At the etymological level, the idea of nostalgia as deriving from the idea of home resonates with the idea of ecology. “Eco” derives from the Greek *oikos*, meaning “house”, and while scientists consider ecology the study (*logos*) of our earthly house, environmental humanists have considered nature as “our widest home” (Howarth 1996, 69). Semiotic expressions like “Mother Nature” reiterate this alliance of nature as caregiver. Such expressions often extend across cultures. More importantly, as recent works like the edited collection *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire and Hope* (2011) suggest, our language helps not only shape our mental ideas of particular spaces

but also the actual places themselves. For example, Svetlana Boym describes how in the mid-nineteenth century, European and colonial bourgeois added herbariums, greenhouses, and aquariums to transform their urban home spaces and express and satisfy feelings for *pastoral nostalgia* at a time of rapid urbanization (2001, 16).

Relatedly, the pastoral nostalgia that Boym refers to is useful as it spotlights how our language of nostalgia forms narratives that are ecologically salient. Highlighting the countryside as the site of nostalgia, the pastoral narrative usually encapsulates a thematic longing for a closer relationship with the natural environment. As ecocritic, Terry Gifford writes, this relationship is predicated on the basis that a harmonious relationship with the natural environment will encourage a person's inner nature to also flourish (2014, 18). In effect, the pastoral narrative is one of eco-nostalgia. It is also one that most of us can recognize as reflecting a post-industrial longing for a simpler, less hurried way of life.

Box 3.1: Talk About It: The Pastoral Narrative as Eco-Nostalgia

The earliest known written pastoral text is Theocritus's 3rd-century *Idylls*, from which the word "idyllic" comes. In remembering the Sicilian shepherd's song competitions from his youth, Theocritus imbued pastoralism with a sense of nostalgia for the rural life (Gifford 2014; Garrard 2004).

In the mid-nineteenth century, as industrialization swept across the United States, Henry David Thoreau extolled the pastoral narrative through publications such as *Walden* (1854), which described his experiment in deliberate and simple living in the woods of Concord, Massachusetts. Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) and Laurence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) are examples of ecocritical work that engage with Thoreau's pastoral ideas.

Even more recently, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Al Gore, used the pastoral narrative as eco-nostalgia in his famous climate change documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. In describing the scenes that highlight his memories of his rural home, eco-film critics Robin Murray and Joseph Huemann suggest that the film's arguments to address climate change rest on shared *eco-memory* rather than future predictions (2009, 197).

While the pastoral is one way to explore eco-nostalgia, have you experienced a longing for a different kind of nature? For example, that of a city? Or a wilderness area? Or your childhood pet? If so, provide examples you can share it with your classmates.

Cinema often evokes the pastoral narrative to help viewers engage with particular protagonists and plotlines. In movies ranging from Hollywood film adaptations of classic Greek tales such as the *Odyssey* to New Turkish Cinema like *Şellale*, rural landscapes are often depicted as idealized places of tranquility and calm, spaces that stand in contrast to the chaotic discomfort of the present. As protagonists remember their past and seek to return to such spaces, pastoral narratives take on a classic “pastoral momentum of retreat and return” (Gifford 2014, 18). They are literally a story’s sites of “home longing.” However, because many narratives engage a *sentimental pastoral* that feeds into a romantic and simplistic nostalgia for an uncomplicated idyllic past (Gifford 2014, 24), many eco-scholars also highlight the problems of such depictions. An early example of an *anti-pastoral* critique is Raymond Williams’ 1973 *The Country and the City*, which exposes how such narratives perpetuate ahistoric and blinkered erasures of complex socio-ecological relations.

One might argue that sentimental pastoral narratives lend themselves to Boym’s notion of *restorative nostalgia*, which is concerned primarily with preserving a glorified and mythicized past (Boym 2001, 41-55). According to Boym, restorative nostalgia assumes that a particular memory of the past is reality: “Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.” Such nostalgia aims to repaint the past in its original form. In contrast, viewers who recognize the “ambivalences of human longing and belonging” and who do not “shy away from the contradictions of modernity” are able to engage in what Boym calls *reflective nostalgia*. This type of nostalgia is aware of the gap between memory and reality and lends itself more easily

than restorative nostalgia to Gifford's notion of a *complex pastoral*.

The complex pastoral "is aware of the dangers of idealized escapism while seeking some form of accommodation between humans and nature" (Gifford 2014, 26). Despite the sentimental pastoral's focus on a romanticized idyllic place, it can also engage a reflective nostalgia, because longing for the ideal home does not preclude an understanding of the gap between memory and the present. As Boym writes, reflective nostalgia "reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, just as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection" (2014). As long as the idea of a simplified rural past is recognized as such, it can engage a reflective nostalgia. In doing so, it can in Boym's words "be ironic and humorous" as opposed to restorative nostalgia "that takes itself dead seriously" (2014).

While viewers can be self-reflexive in engaging with the pastoral narrative as complex or sentimental, and with eco-nostalgia as reflective rather than restorative, do cinematic texts also help frame these engagements? If so, how? What might we learn about real-world ecologies through such engagements with cinematic eco-nostalgia and the pastoral? To answer these questions, let's turn back to our example of popular Turkish cinema, *Şellale*. By placing the film in its extra-filmic context (the tradition of New Turkish Cinema and the socio-cultural and eco-political concerns of Turkey), we can explore whether and how the film text invites its viewers to reflect on and engage with the ecological conditions of their time.

Eco-nostalgia in *Şellale*

Released in 2001, *Şellale* is a melodramatic comedy that enjoyed box office success in Turkish theaters and fits within the wave of *New Turkish Cinema*, a period of

filmmaking that began in the mid-1990s. As Asuman Suner writes in *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Longing* (2010), New Turkish Cinema arose after a “period of grave recession and crisis” (2010, 26). The 1990s had shrunk the national economy and devastated the film industry, which had languished since a 1980s military coup destabilized Turkey’s fragile democratic apparatus. In the mid-1990s, as Turkey limped to democratic re-instatement, the Turkish film industry began to revive, and by the early 2000s two strands of film—popular film, like *Şellale*, and art film, which gained international repute at film festivals—marked the start of New Turkish Cinema.

In making sense of this period of filmmaking, Suner and others point to some common film characteristics. One of these is the pastoral narrative. Many Turkish critics describe such films as *rural* or *homeland* movies. Turkish art critic Cem Erciyes uses the term *back to rural* movies and states that urban directors in New Turkish Cinema headed into the provinces to recreate and share stories about their childhood experiences (Erciyes 2011). Suner categorizes *Şellale* as one amongst many popular Turkish films that nostalgically look to the provinces as the “felicitous space” of childhood innocence (2010, 26). By locating Cemal’s nostalgic childhood memories at the juncture of the 1960s military coup, *Şellale* represents a critical rupture between an idealized, national past—“a collective childhood”—and the less-than-perfect present (27). While Suner and other Turkish film scholars have highlighted the pastoral narrative as nostalgically configured and thus an important marker to Turkey’s contemporary sense of nationhood and identity, they have not necessarily explored the environmental potentials and problems of such nostalgia.

[Insert Figure 3.1: *Şellale* poster]

Şellale's plot revolves around Cemal's desire to rediscover and restore the creative capacity that fires his artistic work. Disturbed by dreams such as the one from the opening scene, Cemal feels vulnerable and unable to paint. To counter his anxiety, Cemal decides to return to his childhood home in rural Antakya to re-create a sense of individual well-being. Other than two short scenes that place Cemal in the present and bookend the narrative, the film locates itself in Cemal's memories of his childhood. Central to these memories are Cemal's recollections of the town's waterfall where dream-telling served as a cathartic release for the community.

In foregrounding water, a distinctly natural element, as the source of Cemal's nostalgia and inspiration, *Şellale* symbolically evokes eco-nostalgia. Borrowing from traditional Turkish dream-telling lore, *Şellale* presents flowing water as the thread that connects past to present to future: it is through the sustainable flow of a renewable resource that dream interpretation might help one understand the past and/or predict the future. Thus *Şellale* evokes an idealized sense of cooperatively and respectfully co-existing with nature. From the opening scenes of peaceful harmony, to the start of the climax that results in the waterfall being dammed, to the ending scenes where we are back in the present and the waterfall is flowing vigorously again, we can trace not only a tale of nostalgia, but one of eco-nostalgia.

Eco-nostalgia, like the gentle, plaintive music that is *Şellale*'s primary sound track, permeates the film's affective and emotional registers. In recreating Cemal's childhood memories, *Şellale* paints a fond portrayal of rural town life that balances nature with human activity. This balance manifests in simple activities such as women milling wheat or washing clothes by the waterfall, or Cemal freeing chickens from a coop, and in

the town's design, which includes stone courtyards under leafy trees and surrounding golden wheat fields.

A key scene shows Cemal and his sister in a flour mill. Bathed in soft yellow light, with rustic mud floor, and stone grinding wheel, the mill is the background for this exchange between Cemal and Şehra, his sister:

Şehra: The wheat spilled on the floor. Shall we collect and plant it in our garden?

Cemal: It's better to give it to the beggars.

Şehra: But they would want flour, not the wheat.

Cemal: This will be flour if we grind it.

Şehra: How will you turn the mill?

Cemal: Not me, the water will turn it.

Şehra: So is the water more powerful than people?

Cemal: Of course it is. Otherwise, would we tell our dreams to the waterfall?

Through such instances and its central focus on a respectful relation between local people and the waterfall, *Şellale* manifests ecological qualities such as cooperation and goodwill in its depictions of rural life.

The film constructs a narrative of returning home as parallel to a narrative of returning to nature. This is most obvious at the end of the film, when we return to the opening scene of local women telling their dreams to the waterfall. Here, as Cemal's mother turns to the camera the image freezes, transforming into a painting. As the camera pulls back to a long shot, we are back in the present. Cemal sits thoughtfully beside his easel in front of the waterfall. We understand at this moment that recounting his childhood memories here at the waterfall has inspired Cemal to restart painting.

In these final moments, we see a burst from the waterfall, as if the dam that held it back has been breached. As the camera pulls back further, we see Cemal's joy, his own release, as he walks, arms outstretched, face upturned into the waterfall, whose height dwarfs him and whose spray envelopes him. The music that was heard at the start of the film and throughout its course fills the soundscape and echoes the haunting, dream-like quality of the film's start. The film does not reveal whether the waterfall's recovered flow is just a part of Cemal's imagination. Even so, the event embraces an ecological message—one that not only gives nature the dominant presence but also, in Cemal's embrace of the water, seems to be about “some form of accommodation between human and nature” (Gifford 2014, 26).

At the same time, because *Şellale* is framed as lighthearted melodrama, even as its ending is uplifting, its narrative tells a story of loss and recovery that weaves together risks to human *and* nature alike. Specifically, the waterfall's original vibrancy and recovered flow bracket an event that results in its damming. Though portrayed comically, the damming scene is a crucial moment in the film. In this scene, a national government representative and a local committee stand in front of the waterfall and present the dam to the villagers as a part of the industrialization initiatives that will improve the town's living conditions. The representative starts his speech by praising God, the United States, and the deputy standing next to him. As he speaks the camera pokes fun at him, angling a close-up view of his behind, and we see his discomfort in pants that obviously don't fit right. The ceremony involves dynamiting rocks upstream to block the flow of water. At the waterfall, the group hears the blast and observes the decreased flow in the waterfall. In the ensuing silence, they all look at the deputy, the head of local hierarchy, who only

says: “Oh gosh.” The words foreshadow the collective realization of the enormity of the change. Shortly afterwards, in a scene between Cemal and Şehra that is set before the waterfall, Şehra becomes upset as she realizes that her dream-tellings will be affected by the waterfall’s new state. She asks morosely, “What would happen to us if we don’t dream?” Cemal answers: “You can never tell. Maybe we would die.”

[Insert Image 2: Cemal and Şehra under the waterfall.]

The damming and this conversation mark the film’s turn from comedy to drama. In the scenes that follow, Cemal’s father is imprisoned and Şehra is injured and dies. In using the damming as the catalyst for these events, *Şellale* ties its viewers’ emotional responses towards its characters to the fate of nature within the film, and thus evokes an ecological commentary that transcends the boundaries of Cemal’s imagination and points to national and transnational eco-politics.

Şellale highlights a period in Turkish history (the 1960s) characterized by immense social and environmental change, partly driven by Turkey’s push to modernize and industrialize. These changes started in the 1950s as those in national power aggressively pursued Turkey’s “westernization” agenda. Industrialization was a primary cause for urban migration and also involved rural development projects that were not always beneficial to local populations. *Şellale* alludes to the problems of rural development where outsiders (specifically the federal government and Americans) impose on locals with promises of modernization but without attention to modernization’s downsides. The damming draws attention to the threats rural communities faced at the time, and continue to face due to Turkey’s continued instability in economic progress.

Box 3.2: A Snapshot of Turkey's Economic Development Policies as Environmental Threat

Turkey's foreign-dependent economic policy since the 1950s has affected the country's environment. Because urban areas have been the center of industrialization and tariffs did not protect domestic rural production against imports, many people abandoned their rural lives and migrated to the cities in search of work. In Istanbul, the population increased from 1.3 million to 1.5 million between 1955 and 1960 (Keyder 1999, 208). Rapid urban growth included poorly managed shantytowns and damaged existing historical infrastructure and ecological resources.

Recent environmental protests towards urban historical locations such as Emek Cinema being razed to develop shopping areas, or the disruption of the sole forest near Istanbul for a bridge project, speak to continuing conflicts between economics and the environment. The project to destroy Gezi Park, the green area of the city center, is perhaps the most internationally famous example of such tensions. Environmental demands were part of a much larger, interwoven protest for sociopolitical change in June 2013. Even if Gezi Park is saved, the discourse of economic progress continues to threaten understandings of Turkey's environment.

For a better understanding of Gezi Park manifestations see the documentaries *The Beginning* (Serkan Koç, 2013) and *Gözdağı* (Can Dündar, 2014).

Further readings on the urbanization and modernization process of Turkey: Çağlar Keyder, ed., *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal and İpek Türeli, ed., *Orienteering Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Kemal H. Karpat, *The Gecekondu: Rural Migration and Urbanization* (Cambridge University Press, 1976).

Şellâle also touches on the destructive effects of global food politics on local production, a cause of increased urban migration. The barber, Selim, portrayed as clearly anti-imperialist, criticizes the American dried milk that is distributed free of charge in Turkish schools as part of the Marshall Plan and warns Cemal not to drink the “unreliable milk.” Selim says that invasions are made by unreliable food instead of weapons; according to him dependence on imported food instead of local systems causes a loss in independence.

Drawing attention to the disruption of a local, sustainable way of life, Cemal's longing for his pre-dam past configures the natural environment as co-victim in this

narrative of loss. But through his fond memories of the past, nature also figures as a mediator in Cemal's process of recovery, and, as the final scene suggests, engenders its own restoration.

Because Cemal's pre-dam memories show a rural existence in tune with nature's rhythms, *Şellale* can be criticized for generating a *sentimental pastoral* that is romantic and idyllic despite external threats. Scholars such as Suner see this sentimentality as a way that popular Turkish films avoid a complicated past, instead feeding simplistic longings for a "lost paradise" (Suner 2010, 37). Suner further suggests that the film's conflicts are simplistically portrayed as "before/after" or "insider/outsider" (local villagers versus external forces like the government or the U.S.).

As Suner acknowledges, however, *Şellale* does escape being a story simply of restorative nostalgia. For one, Cemal's memories are couched in humor, rejecting the seriousness of restorative nostalgia. In addition, Cemal's memories are not just of a glorified past. Along with the pleasurable memories of his childhood, Cemal must confront the trauma of his sister's death. It is only by *reflecting* on the related events that Cemal can face his present. We suggest that even as the film presents a reflective nostalgia, it also generates a glimpse at reflective eco-nostalgia that moves away from sentimental pastoralism into the possibilities of complex pastoralism.

Such complexity comes late in the film, post-dam, and arguably confronts the idealism of Cemal's pre-dam eco-nostalgia. It is most apparent in a scene that culminates a subplot woven into the film. Throughout the film, we have been presented with a bit of comedic side-action, a young woman laughingly running away from a young man with a cleaver in his hand. The couple is shown periodically traversing the town's locales as

other action is foregrounded. Towards the end of the film as we move from scenes of the town recovering from Şehra's death we re-encounter the couple.

The two take off through the golden, stonewalled fields; the man yelling he will kill the girl when he catches her because she keeps running away from him; the girl laughing as she runs away. The camera cuts to the barber in the town plaza excitedly announcing the coup d'état that is being enacted across the nation. When the camera cuts again, in long shot, we see the young woman and man running towards us, and along a path by a stream, in the cool shade of dense trees. As she nears us, she rounds a corner, and he manages to grab at her clothes, ripping them, as he falls. When they both rise and straighten, the sound track, which is now of a radio broadcast announcement of the coup, fills the airwaves.

In the following shot-reverse-shot sequence the woman backs against a tree, smiling up at the man. He pauses, then yells out “aaa” and raises his cleaver. She closes her eyes in a moment of fear as the cleaver lands in the tree trunk next to her head. Opening her eyes, she smiles. The camera tracks back, as now, both hands free, the man grasps at her hand, pulling it towards him. When she lets him, the torn clothes she holds up fall away, revealing her breasts. He pulls her to him and they embrace, falling to the leaf-littered dirt ground. Here the camera, in medium shot, rests on her, revealing in her face and gestures the pleasure she feels.

[Insert Figure 3.3: The young woman and her cleaver-wielding man.]

The scene takes place in the outdoors, where the natural environment figures prominently and our two humans find themselves in the joy of a basic animal act. The ecological resonances of the encounter are even more striking when considered in light of

the pantheistic Greek legend of Daphne and Apollo that this story references. The historical legends of Antakya, also known as Antioch from Hellenistic times, incorporate the story of love-struck Apollo (by cheeky Eros' arrow) as he chases the water nymph, Daphne. In the legend, when Apollo finally catches her, Daphne, who wants nothing to do with Apollo, begs her father, a river god for help. Heeding her call, her father transforms her into a laurel tree. Her tears are believed to flow through the waterfalls in Antakya. *Şellale's* adaptation of the story in the constant chase and final encounter between the young woman and her cleaver-wielding man alerts us to this legend, as well as its narrative of blurred boundaries between human and non-human nature.

We get a fleeting glimpse of the complex pastoral in the way the legend's reference in *Şellale* prompts viewers to face the contradictions of such blurrings. Specifically, in merging violence with pleasure, it prevents viewers from becoming engrossed in an "idealized escapism" and instead prods them to consider how to face less than ideal situations. Apollo, seeking his ideal love, is confronted with her demise as lithe, womanly water nymph. In confronting his loss, he venerates the laurel tree, raising its status in Grecian culture as a symbol of honor. In *Şellale*, violence simmers in the couple's encounter--inherent in the material presence of the man's cleaver, which connotes a fearful affective resonance, and the broadcast's staccato announcements, which for many in Turkey, represent the beginning of intense eco-social disruption. Even though the scene is a heavy-handed way of symbolizing the end of an era of "collective childhood innocence," its reference to the Apollo-Daphne legend complicates simplistic eco-nostalgia "before/after" interpretations and prompts viewers to consider how one might, like Apollo, still engage the natural world, even love and venerate it, despite its

compromised fall from the ideal. One might even argue that the woman's pleasure in her man's advances, in contrast to Daphne's loathing, speaks to this possibility of building compromises within a world of shifting nature-human relationships.

Astute viewers might take the complex pastoral resonance of these scenes into the final waterfall scenes that follow and close the film, reflecting on the gap between Cemal's eco-nostalgic longings and the reality of the dammed waterfall. In this case, reflective nostalgia, which recognizes nature as home, yet is able to face the realities of shifted nature-human relationships might productively serve to help rebuilt a sustainable, perhaps even non-hierarchical, relationship between these two entities. *Şellale* fleetingly exposes such possibilities through its ecocritical engagements.

Conclusion: *Şellale* as an Invitation into Ecocinema Studies

We began this chapter by suggesting that *Şellale* has ecocritical valences. In describing how, we have explored a number of important concerns in ecocinema studies. First, through the concept of eco-nostalgia we are able to connect Turkish film scholarship on nostalgia with ecocinema studies' interests in ecology. In doing so, we expand the view of both areas of research—demonstrating how ecological concerns weave themselves into narratives that have been theorized in other contexts by Turkish film scholars. Thus, while Suner and others recognize the pastoral narrative as common to popular Turkish cinema, further attention to such narratives complicates a simple, sometimes dismissive understanding of the pastoral as purely sentimental. Likewise, bringing Turkish cinema to the attention of eco-film critics opens ecocinema studies to a national cinema that has been underrepresented in the field. In extending our attention to

other popular Turkish films, we might engage a second concern of ecocinema studies' interest--national and transnational cinema.

We have already briefly touched upon this second ecocinematic concern in our exploration of *Şellale's* commentary, but we can further consider whether the prevalence of nostalgic pastoral themes in Turkish cinema is indicative of Turkey's collective ecological anxieties and hopes. While the pastoral narrative is prevalent today, rural themes harken back to an earlier Turkish cinematic period, **Yeşilçam** that began in the 1950s and lasted until the 1970s military coup, after which Turkey's film industry more or less disappeared. Most Yeşilçam films (which were also classic melodramas) centered Istanbul as the site for drama, portraying it as a metropolis that reflected the hopes, anxieties and desires associated with Turkey's modernization (Abisel et al. 2005, 77). Within this tradition, films known as *immigration films* portrayed Istanbul as the uncanny and cruel center of the struggle for life.

It is not until the wave of New Turkish Cinema in the mid-1990s that the rural landscape becomes a popular setting for stories. This shift in focus might be attributed to Turkey's own engagement with Western environmentalism post-1980s. As free market economics and consumerism shaped more affluent, Westernized urbanites, the idea of escaping from the "unnatural" city into the open spaces of the countryside entered popular discourse. In the "back to rural" stories of New Turkish Cinema, the countryside is the place where the ecological aspirations of the urbanite unfold. This is quite different from a common Yeşilçam narrative where rural protagonists confronted the ecological dilemmas of urban life, and suggests a changing landscape of environmental preoccupations that permeate Turkish discourse.

Third, and also related, the pastoral narrative might be popular in Turkish cinema, but what might it mean to engage the urban narratives of contemporary Turkish film? Twenty-first century Turkish environmentalism is part and parcel of the urban landscape. This is perhaps best recognized in the recent and intense Gezi Park demonstrations of 2013. Beginning as a protest against development projects that would overrun this urban green space, the Gezi Park demonstrations resulted in one of the largest social movements in Turkish history. The images of young people hugging trees in protest is engraved in collective memory; reflections of these anxieties can be further explored by ecocritically engaging Turkish cinema's urban narratives.

Fourth, while our focus has been the pastoral narrative in popular Turkish cinema of comedic melodrama, our exploration makes room for ecocinema studies' various genre interests. For example, Suner and other Turkish film scholars also point to New Turkish Cinema's art film industry. As independent film many of these art films might be recognized as slow cinema, with narrative and cinematic conventions that yield their own ecocritical nuances, and that are worth exploring further.

[Insert Box 3.3: A Selected Turkish Filmography]

Box 3.3: A Selected Turkish Filmography

Yeşilçam Immigration Films: *Birds of Exile* (Halit Refiğ, 1964); *The Return* (Türkan Şoray, 1972); Lütfü Akad's trilogy *The Bride* (1973), *The Wedding* (1974) and *Blood Money* (1974).

Independent New Turkish Art Films: *The Small Town* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 1997); *Clouds of May* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 1999); *Times and Winds* (Reha Erdem 2006); *Egg* (Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2007); *Milk* (Semih Kaplanoğlu 2008); *Autumn* (Özcan Alper 2008); *Summer Book* (Seyfi Teoman 2008); *Kosmos* (Reha Erdem 2010); *Honey* (Semih Kaplanoğlu 2010) and *Winter Sleep* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 2014).

New Turkish Films with Urban Settings: *Block C* (Zeki Demirkubuz 1994); *Somersault in a Coffin* (Derviş Zaim 1996); *Innocence* (Zeki Demirkubuz 1997); *Laleli'de Bir Azize*

(Kudret Sabancı 1999); *A Run for Money* (Reha Erdem 1999); *Elephants and Grass* (Derviş Zaim 2000); *Distant* (Nuri Bilge Ceylan 2002); *Istanbul Tales* (Ümit Ünal, Ömür Atay, Selim Demirdelen, Kudret Sabancı, Yücel Yolcu 2005); *Magic Carpet Ride* (Yılmaz Erdoğan 2005); *Pandora's Box* (Yeşim Ustaoğlu 2008).

New Popular Turkish Rural Films: *Offside* (Serdar Akar, 2000); *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2001); *Vizontele Tuuba* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2004); *My Father and My Son* (Çağan Irmak, 2005); *Ice Cream I Scream* (Yüksel Aksu, 2006) and *The International* (Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Muharrem Gülmez, 2006), *Ecotopia* (Yüksel Aksu, 2011).

Further Readings: Murat Akser and Deniz Bayrakdar, ed., *New Cinema, New Media: Reinventing Turkish Cinema*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); Agnieszka Aysen Kaim, "New Turkish Cinema-Some Remarks on the Homesickness of the Turkish Soul," *Cinej Cinema Journal*. Special Issue 1 (2011): 99-106; Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); Gönül Dönmez-Colin, "New Turkish Cinema- Individual Tales of Common Concerns," *Asian Cinema* 14/1 (2003): 138-145.

Fifth, our analysis has focused primarily on emotion, a perceptual dimension that the filmic text works to evoke, and through this we have touched on material and social contexts. However, our analysis leaves room for ecocinema studies' interests in approaches that begin from material or social contexts. We might engage the material ecologies of Turkish filmmaking, or the social ecologies of race, gender, class, and other aspects that govern the who, what, and how of ecocinematic representations. Similarly, one might think of other ways of considering the perceptual dimension of filmic ecologies. For example, ecocinema audience reception studies can consider the reactions of Turkish audiences as they engage with these films.

Our analysis of eco-nostalgia in one popular Turkish film, *Şellale* is just one example of the myriad productive ways eco-film critics are grounding cinema studies in ecological considerations. It is an attempt to push the boundaries of ecocinema studies' outwards and in doing so invites you into the ongoing conversations of this recent, but rapidly burgeoning field of ecocritical media inquiry.

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Keywords

Ecocinema studies	Pastoral (sentimental, complex)
Ecocinema	Anti-pastoral
Encode <i>versus</i> decode	New Turkish Cinema
Affect <i>versus</i> emotion	Yeşilçam
Nostalgia (restorative, reflective)	Immigration films
Eco-nostalgia	Rural / Homeland movies

Discussion Questions

1. Explore the cinematic language (light, sound, camera angles, color etc.) of a film that you believe takes an eco-nostalgic approach and discuss how this cinematography contributes to the ecological and nostalgic narrative of the film. Can you categorize the film as restorative or reflective in its eco-nostalgia?
2. Think of a movie that you believe has a strong emotional hook. Do you think the emotion has an ecological valence? Research ecocritical scholarship and analyze the film to support your response.
3. *Şellale* references the Greek legend of Daphe and Apollo to connote an ecological resonance. Can you think of another filmic example that similarly references a story that comes from much older traditions than filmmaking? Explain how the

story lends symbolic significance to the film, and if this significance has ecological dimensions.

4. Engage in an ecocritical exploration of a cinema of a country other than the United States. (Major studios like Hollywood are more transnational than national in their production and distribution.) Would you describe the examples you encounter as rural or homeland movies? Do the films have an urban feel? What might these representations suggest about a nation's culture, sociopolitical circumstances, and environmental concerns?

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