THE SUFI LITERARY SUBTEXT IN KAPLANOĞLU'S *GRAIN* (*BUĞDAY*)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sufism notably affects filmmaking in global Muslim cinema. It cultivates Muslim cinema, film narratives and production to a significant extent. The cinematic renderings of Sufism are manifold in national cinemas and can be seen in the films of Muslim countries in diverse range of forms and styles. These forms have different versions that serve different purposes at different times. For this reason, it is difficult to identify their specific cultural characteristics. However, the shared undertone in the employment of Sufism is well figured as "a cinematic third space in which (neo/post) colonial, patriarchal, and political discourses can be interrogated."[1] Along these lines, films involving Sufism intend to foster a global dialogue from a Muslim perspective through the representation of Sufism in cinema. With these in the background, this article aims to make a content analysis of Semih Kaplanoğlu's science fiction movie *Grain* (*Buğday*, 2017) in order to understand how these debates are deployed through its Sufi literary subtext. Eventually, the employment of Sufism in the filmic text provides a reflection of a culture's imagery and semantic content, which turns it into a valued cultural text. Since, Sufism constitutes a rich system of thought for Muslim cinema, I will begin by introducing how the Sufi worldview dominates most art-house films in the Muslim cinemas of the world. After a section where I follow the course of Sufism in Turkish cinema, I will try to present a content analysis of the Sufi narrative in the film, *Grain,* in order to examine the relationship between Sufism and the film. Finally, after comparing and studying the prominent and apparent manifestations of Sufism and the scenes in the film, the comparative findings related with Sufi literature and the scenes will be thought of together in order to make a reading from the perspective of Sufi worldview.

2. SUFISM IN MUSLIM CINEMA

Sufism, also described as esoteric Islam, mystical Islam or spiritual Islam, derives its name from the Greek word *sophos,* which translates as wise or omniscient, or a sage. The history of Sufism began in the second half of the 7th Century and Sufism is very much alive today. Sufi thought developed a unique vocabulary, which has had an immense influence on the arts and the literature

of Muslim nations. The underlying quality of Sufism lied in its choice to use symbolic expressions to hide their knowledge. The ultimate goal was to separate its thoughts from theoretical sciences such as the Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh* or the Islamic normative science approach, *kalam*; and also to generate a language that can escape the oppression coming from the political power. The applications of the Sufi language in arts still share similar objectives today. Although, it is impossible to give a full definition of Sufism without diminishing its reality, it can be briefly described as a form of spirituality and mystical practice among Muslim societies, which aims at the perfection of the human morality. Sufism has a widespread presence in the cinemas of Islamic countries. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fill this gap and provide a framework of the employment of Sufism in the cinemas of the Muslim countries of the world, a cursory examination of Sufism's presence in some of the major Muslim cinemas will be given.[2] Each country's cinema reflects distinctive aspects of Sufism, meaning that different films present contrasting traits. These traits vary according to the essential qualities of each culture and can be discerned within the narrative structure, thematic focus or aesthetic strategies of the film. For instance, Persian culture is characterized by lyric poetic themes and stylish motifs with strong impacts from the pioneers of Sufi poetry such as Hafez or Attar of Nishapur. In contrast, India reflects Sufism mostly through the musical influence of *qawwalli*[3] furthered with pop culture in Bollywood films. In African countries such as Senegal, Sufism fills in an adaptable cultural space for the syncretic translations of animist religions to Islam, and this is reflected in cinema. Sufism also features in Turkish cinema through its epic and romantic narratives.

Despite this diversity, the displays of Sufism in cinema have some common themes. Among these, the most dominant are the themes of journey and dreams. The importance of the spiritual quest—a concept central to Sufism—commonly translates into travelogues on screen. Similarly, the understandings of the Real, the imaginary and the imaginal in Sufi theory engender poetic and dreamlike visions of the world. The conceptual elements of Sufism are also broadly used for contemplating the individual, modernity, tradition, religion, faith, death, and life, exile, nostalgia, love, identity, rationalism, positivism, capitalism, and even social problems.

Hamid Naficy describes Iranian culture as being suffused and shaped by Sufi poetry, with citations of poets such as Ferdowsi, Sa'adi, Hafez, Rumi, and Khayyam a part of daily life. Naficy attests that for Iranian culture, this mystical poetry provides a paradigmatic worldview and language of exile, embodying a variety of journeys, returns and unifications.[4] Considering that the first feature film in Iranian cinema was shot in 1930, it is possible to see the earliest impacts of mystic culture entering rapidly in the movies with love stories inspired by the famous Sufi-influenced poet Nizami Ganjavi. Among these are the *Shirin and Farhad* (Abdolhossein Sepanta, 1934) and *Layla and Majnun* (Abdolhossein Sepanta, 1937). After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the New Wave of Iranian cinema evolved from the poetic heritage of its culture. Iranian filmmakers brought ancient Persian poetry to life in their works through painterly images and

poetic dialogue.[5] This began with film director Dariush Mehrjui's works such as *The Cow* (1969), and the vision can also be seen in his other films such as *Leila* (1998) and *Pari* (1995). Majid Majidi's films can also be cited as alluding to this lineage; in particular, his film *Children of Heaven* (1997) reflects a theme of spiritual poverty from the work of Rumi.[6]

In the early 90s, Sufi journeys were very popular in Iranian cinema.[7] We find the emphasis of Sufism in the many movies of Abbas Kiarostami, which are mostly travelogues that illustrate elements of Sufism through the presence of an omniscient guide and the closeness of man to nature and to the present.[8] Kiarostami also uses direct quotes from Persian Sufi poets such as Khayyam, Rumi, and Hafez in titles such as *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987)*; Life, and Nothing More* (1992); *Taste of Cherry* (1997); and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999).[9] Another Iranian influential director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, one of the founders of the new wave of Iranian cinema, also takes his inspiration from Persian poets committed to Sufism.[10] Sufism is evident in his films such as *A Moment of Innocence* (1996), *The Silence* (1998), and *Time of Love* (1990).

Since its emergence, Indian cinema has used elements of Sufism. As mentioned in the previous section, early Bollywood films reflected Sufism in the form of *qawwali* mixed with pop influences.[11] Almost every film in contemporary Indian cinema today includes Sufi-influenced songs (Chaturverdi, Ghanshyam, 2015). The tradition has created Sufi rock, pop, trance, and even EDM, and includes Oscar-winner film composers such as Dileep Kumar. The Indian directors influenced by Sufism in their films are numerous—evidence indeed that "Sufism is in the DNA of the Indian sub-continent," (cited in Chaturverdi, Ghanshyam, 2015). Among the contemporary directors, Bollywood filmmaker-poet Muzaffar Ali can be regarded as one of the pioneers in promoting Sufism in his films. Muzaffar Ali began his profession mentored by Satyajit Ray and established a cinematic perspective which conceives cinema as a visual poetry. His feature films like *Gaman* (1978), *Zooni* (1989) and *Jaanisaar* (2015) all include Sufi elements. Ashutosh Gowariker is also another director using aspects of Sufism in his films; he places a special emphasis on Sufism in his film *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008). The younger director Imtiaz Ali followed this lineage in his films *Rockstar* (2011) and *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017), which touch upon the poetry of the 13th-century Persian Sufi Jalal al-Din. This list can be extended.

In Senegal, the complex processes of "translation" of animist religions to Islam give raise to syncretic interpretations. Sufi mysticism also determines the Islamic perspective in Senegal. Senegalese directors are very attracted to these syncretic forms of cultural interactions.[12] Some Senegalese filmmakers have contributed to this with movies that incorporate Sufism at a narrative and thematic level, such as in Djibril Diop Mambéty's avant-garde movie *Journey of the Hyena* (1973). The film is a travelogue through the streets of Dakar, in which the director's cinematic vision of life in Senegal becomes manifest through the Sufi Islamic imagination. Some other African filmmakers, such as Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako, have followed in the footsteps of Mambéty and reflected a poetic and dreamlike vision of Sufism in their films.[13]

Obviously, Sufism in cinema is not limited to the films of Iran, India and Senegal. One can also find its influencess in the Soviet and Tunisian cinemas. For instance, the last film of the legendary Armenian film director Sergei Paradjanov, *Ashik Kerib* (1988), engages with Persian Sufism through the story of a journey of an Azeri minstrel. Sufism is also still strong in Tunisia, notably in the films of Nacer Khemir. Khemir's famous film *Bab'Aziz* (2005) is an odyssey in the desert that directs the characters to divine love. The film "draws extensively on the thirteenth-century mystical Iranian poets, Attar (author of the celebrated *Conference of the Birds*) and Rumi (founder of the Sufi 'whirling dervish' order), and the contemporaneous Arab-Andalusian Sufi poets Ibn al-Arabi and Ibn al- Farid."[14]

While it is possible to add to these examples, I believe a sufficient framework has now been provided. I believe these examples will be sufficient to provide a broad, panoramic of the influence of Sufism in Muslim cinema worldwide. Let us now focus on Kaplanoğlu's film Grain in order to deepen our enquire into the influences of Sufism in Turkish Cinema.

3. SUFISM IN TURKISH CINEMA

Sufism has played an important role in Turkey since the earliest period of Islam's arrival in the Middle East. As a segmented society, the Ottoman state empowered the widespread dervish lodges to be representatives of the voices and protests of different groups that expressed themselves through the religious ideologies.[15] After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the new Turkish state banned Sufi activity in public by enforcing strict laws that closed down the dervish lodges in 1925. The use of titles and clothing related to Sufism was prohibited, as were Sufi ceremonies. Nevertheless, most leaders of Sufi lodges—namely the Sheikhs—did not oppose the state, and some even supported the reforms and accepted official positions.[16] Many educated Sheikhs produced literary works. These involved philosophy, poetry, literature, and reflections on the changing Muslim spirituality of the new century.[17]

On screen, we find the earliest easing of restrictions regarding Sufism in television, which began to broadcast in Turkey in 1968. Broadcasts involved mostly Sufi music concerts, re-enactments, and documentaries about Sufis. At the time, Turkish cinema, known as "Yeşilçam Cinema,"[18] was very popular and one of the most productive film industries in the world.[19] Islamists criticized Yeşilçam for its dominant cosmopolitan outlook that they saw as overwhelming Turkish culture, and for imitating the narratives of Hollywood and Western cinema, which are not those of Turkish-Islamic identity.[20] This criticism triggered discussions for a new project for Islamic cinema in the early 1970s, which gave rise to a movement called "National Cinema." (Ulusal Sinema) Among the earliest examples of a pioneering director's films is *Birleşen Yollar* (Yücel Çakmaklı, 1971), which is a love story between a rich heroine belonging

to a westernized and degenerated lifestyle and a poor boy who advocates the noble values of a traditional identity. These Islamist films mostly highlighted the evident contrasts between secularism and Islamism by revolving around "the misled westernized portions of the population and the true, proper path of Islamic Enlightenment."[21] After the coup on 12 September 1980, Islamic National Cinema productions became less prominent. In the late 90s, these films began to be replaced with narratives, which involved the stories of people living between secularists and Islamists (e.g. *The Imam*, dir. İsmail Güneş, 2005). Despite an attempted ideological critique, National Cinema was criticized for relying on the inverted vocabulary of secular nationalism.[22] Additionally, these films were mostly concerned with "conveying a religious message rather than engaging in in-depth and critical investigation of Muslim subjectivity."[23]

The problems mentioned above led to a questioning of new idioms in Turkish cinema. Some Muslim intellectuals rejected the adaptations of Islamic culture in these films and argued that the Islamic perspective had not yet been completely reflected in cinema.[24] In the 90s, these intellectuals triggered the creation of a new movement, known as Dream Cinema (Rüya Sineması), which was an attempt to theorize Sufi cinema in order to find a new visual language to reflect the reality of the spiritual in Muslim identity. The thinkers and filmmakers of the Dream Cinema movement mainly treat the notions of Sufism as *denied knowledge* (Homi Bhabha), i.e. knowledge that is rejected as irrational and irrelevant by the dominant secular cultural script. In this sense, they were reacting against economic rationalism and progressivism.

The basis of Dream Cinema's argument lay in the belief of a highly sensory world that can be perceived through imagination and given visual life through cinema.[25] Ayşe Saşa, a former leftist and later a Sufi, was one of the pioneer thinkers of the Dream Cinema movement. By interpreting Ibn Arabi's conceptions of dream, she distinguished between the concepts of "dream as imaginary" (*muhayyel*) and "dream as imaginal" (*tahayyül*). Saşa portrays the "dream as imaginary" as a fictitious dimension of the delimited mental images of the individual, nourished by the fantasies of the Ego.[26] In other words, the state of "dream as imaginary" is attained in the realm of sensory experience, and in this realm, "the image tends to be reduced simply to the level of sensory perceptions and thus to be degraded."[27] For Saşa, the Western or Westernized secular cinema of today mostly reflects this understanding of dream in films—the state of "dream as imaginary" as the fantastic, the horrible, the monstrous, the macabre, the miserable or the absurd. In contrast, Sasa presents to us the "dream as imaginal": an intermediary space between the sensory world and the intelligible world.[28] Henry Corbin explains that the "dream as imaginal" appears as *mundus imaginalis,* or "the imaginal world" in Islamic spirituality. Furthermore, this dream is a cognitive power: an organ of true knowledge that helps us to understand the link between pure spirit and the material body. Corbin emphasizes that this *mundus imaginalis,* which many Sufi writers mention as a lived experience in their works, should not be considered as imagination as we understand it in our present-day language. Instead, it is a cognitive function of

imagination whose standards and rules we have gradually lost touch with.[29] The thinkers of the Dream Cinema movement asserted that cinema is a rich media for reflecting the *mundus imaginalis*. They exemplified what they have meant with many films, which have tried to approach the super-sensory world of the *mundus imaginalis*.

Ayşe Saşa and other writers associated Dream Cinema with the films of directors such as Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alexander Sokurov, Jean-Luc Godard, Satyajid Ray, Akira Kurosawa and foremost Andrei Tarkovsky. Within Turkish cinema, these writers identify with films such as *Sevmek Zamanı* (*Time to Love*, dir. Metin Erksan, 1965, which communicates the Sufi theme of falling in love with the image of the lover using a filmic language reminiscent of Alain Resnais.[30] Another noteworthy film, *Gökçeçiçek* (Lütfü Akad, 1972) narrates a love story set against the backdrop of a nomadic Turkmen tribe's struggle to survive in the early period of the consciousness of land property during the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. The film uses rather feminist language that is ahead of its time. It draws upon a powerful story of a woman's spiritual journey towards wisdom reminiscent of Sufi themes, but also interestingly with some shamanistic elements in the background. Halit Refiğ, another important director in this category, also worked with female Sufi scriptwriter Nezihe Araz in his three films. Ayşe Saşa refers to one of these films, *Hanım* (*Madame*, 1989), as an example of Dream Cinema. *Hanım* draws upon the story of a graceful and lonely old lady in her last days and elaborates on the dimensions of the spiritual and beyond death themes within the background of a cruel and selfish modern society. Additionally, *A Ay* (Reha Erdem, 1988) tells the story of a girl's psychic life and the transcendent reality that she craves to reach through her insightful visions.[31] *Kosmos* (Reha Erdem, 2010) is another remarkable example in which the main character portrays a dervish who is totally disconnected with the material world, turns into a healer.

These examples, although brief and cursory, are evidence that Sufi cinema also exists in Turkey. In modern-day Turkey, Semih Kaplanoğlu stands out as a director who is exploring the spiritual elements of Sufism. As I will try to demonstrate, Semih Kaplanoğlu's *Yusuf's Trilogy* films are a continuum of the Dream Cinema lineage of the 2000s. Kaplanoğlu directed several earlier films such as *Herkes Kendi Evinde* (*Away from Home*, 2001) and *Meleğin Düşüşü* (*Angel's Fall*, 2005), but it is with *Yusuf's Trilogy* that his religious tendency became evident.

Born in 1963, Semih Kaplanoğlu spent his childhood in Izmir, a city in the west of Turkey known for its secularist stance. He grew up in an educated family that was highly interested in cinema. His father was a religious intellectual and a professor who studied medicine in France. His family was a synthesis of conservatism and modernism, and his father described his social position as "a modern Ottoman." When speaking about his childhood, Kaplanoğlu introduces a magical and dreamlike world mixed with stories and miracles told by his grandmother or memories of the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice.[32] In contrast, his memories of Republican primary schools are like a nightmare, which he later portrayed in his film *Honey*.

Kaplanoğlu's university years fell during the worst days of the left- and right-wing student clashes before the 1980 military coup. Unable to affiliate himself with either side, the director had the good fortune to study in the Cinema Department in his university, which happened to be an oasis detached from the political agenda. After school, he worked as a writer in various advertising companies. In his writing career, he published numerous articles on art and cinema in newspapers and magazines. He also worked as a writer and director on the famous TV series *Şehnaz Tango* in 1994. Kaplanoğlu's international recognition as an art-house director came with his second film, *Meleğin Düşüşü* (*Angel's Fall*, 2005). Afterwards, experiencing a deepening in his spiritual life, he began to focus on a cinema rooted in Islamic spirituality. In parallel to the director's understanding of spirituality in Islam, Kaplanoğlu's cinema attempts to portray spirituality in reality. Therefore, Kaplanoğlu describes his films as "spiritual realism."

The movies *Egg*, *Milk,* and *Honey* of *Yusuf's Trilogy* focus on a character's life going backwards in time. *Egg* narrates a phase of adultery of Yusuf (Nejat İşler), an unsuccessful poet who returns to his hometown for his mother's funeral. *Milk* is the story of Yusuf's (Melih Selçuk) coming of age and detachment from his mother, while *Honey* tells the story of a particular phase of Yusuf's (Bora Atlas) childhood at the time of his father's death. Kaplanoğlu wrote the scripts of all three films in two years, creating relations and connections between their stories.[33] The films are autobiographical in the sense that they consist of many of the director's personal memories. All three films explore the theme of death through dreamlike sequences, which signal an ontological status of the "dream as imaginal."

Kaplanoğlu's cinematic style centers on using visual and audio elements to evoke feelings in the viewer.[34] In this context, he does not value closing down the narrative but rather reveals the passing of time.[35] Another important aspect of the trilogy is Kaplanoğlu's focus on the temporal element of cinema, in which he leads the spectator away from the rapid perception of capitalist time towards a sense of "cosmic time," which can be found in nature.[36] Kaplanoğlu uses the medium of cinema to represent the concept of time in Sufism as an organic element which can extend or shrink and become heavier or lighter.[37]

Grain was shot in the USA, Germany, and Turkey over a period of five years. The shootings were combined to create an entire new world and temporality. The film occupies a distinct place in Kaplanoğlu's oeuvre, in the sense that the director's previous films were mostly inspired by his personal and spiritual life merged with the aesthetical and historical memory of Turkey. In contrast, *Grain* reflects the director's mystical worldview and asks an international and thinking audience to consider the implications of going beyond our conventional way of cognition.

4.   *GRAIN*

Grain is based on a parable from the surah Al-Kahf ("The Cave") of the Quran. Although a religious tendency was already evident in the director's previous movies known as *Yusuf's Trilogy*, these movies (*Egg* (2007), *Milk* (2008), and *Honey* (2010)) were domestic productions that attracted a mostly Turkish audience. In contrast, Kaplanoğlu's *Grain* has a more international outlook with its international casts and production. Furthermore, it has a thematic focus of great interest to a worldwide audience, namely a pessimistic future view of the Earth left without agriculture and nutrition. What makes the film unique is the depiction of an ancient parable played out in everyday life in a science fiction context. Additionally, shots from diverse landscapes are edited in such a way that the spatial distribution in the narrative creates a new world. These interpenetrations of spatial and temporal dimensions in the film vividly reflect elements of Sufism.

In a parable in the Quranic surah Al-Kahf, Allah instructs the prophet Moses to reach the junction of the two seas and meet the One (Al-Khidr), who is more learned than him. The prophet finds Khidr and obtains permission to travel with him, on condition that Moses promises to be patient and not question his actions. Thereby, Moses and Khidr embark upon a journey in which their companionship evolves into a master-apprentice relationship that allows Moses to apprehend the real nature of knowledge. *Grain* takes this parable and replaces Moses with a scientist, Erol Erin (Jean-Marc Barr), and Khidr with an ex-scientist, Cemil Akman (Ermin Bravo), against the backdrop of an agricultural disaster in the near future.

The story begins in a city protected from immigrant raids by electromagnetic walls along its borders. The city appears to be governed by a corporation, Novus Vita, which also controls agriculture through the cultivation of genetically modified crops. When the agricultural production of grain seeds is hit by an unknown genetic problem, Erol Erin comes across Cemil Akman's thesis, which predicts the coming genetic crisis. Similar to the odyssey of Moses and Khidr, Erol finds Cemil and persuades Cemil to let him accompany him. Erol's journey becomes a quest for self, informed by Sufism. At the end of the film, Erol succeeds in finding the natural seed, but appears to remain bewildered by the ontological questions concerning knowledge.

a.   Names of the Characters

A first hint of the film's Sufi influences lies in the names of the main characters, beginning with Erol Erin. As a proper noun, Erol comes from the old Turkish *er* and *ol*, meaning respectively "man" or "individual" and "ability." The word *er* evokes many meanings; most importantly, it means "private soldier," "a soldier without ranks," "individual," "hero," or "man." *Er* is an important concept in Sufism, and is mostly conceived not as a gender identity, but as a state of being that one can reach after a difficult struggle of the education of the Ego (*nafs*). The surname Erin also refers to a verb from old Turkish, *erinmek,* which means "to spend time aimlessly" or

"to lack the desire or energy to do something." When combined, the name Erol Erin carries the meaning of "not having the desire or energy to become a man/individual." In Sufism, only the mature individual is conceived as a real human. Ibn Arabi interprets different levels of creation with hierarchies and categories in his writings. According to him, the idea of return to God means the progression of the soul through a complex series of gradually ascending spiritual stations. In order to move from the stage of potentiality towards an actual realization of the matured human, the believer needs to realize the totality of the descriptions of God's attributes (the divine names of Allah).[38] One should also keep in mind that the character Erol Erin, in the film represents a prophet, namely Moses. In Sufism, the prophets that came before Prophet Muhammad describe incomplete earlier stages of his perfected state. Sufis justify this narrative by basing it on some hadiths. [39]

The name Cemil is derived from one of the attributes of Allah, *al jameel*, which carries the meaning of "the beautiful," or "the source of all beauty in creation" in Islam. The character's last name, Akman, comes from Turkish *ak,* meaning simply "white,"[40] and *man*, which comes from English or French +*ark* and is used mostly as an ending to add the meaning of "guide or leader" in Turkish. When combined, the name Cemil Akman carries the meaning of "the illuminated leader/guide who totals all the beauties." This description brings us back to an important term from Ibn Arabi. William Chittick writes that the Sufi path is all about the "ethics" or "character traits of God," meaning the divine names:

> The divine names must be actualized in the proper relationships, the names of beauty preceding those of wrath, generosity dominating over justice, humility taking precedence over magnificence, and so on. The perfect equilibrium of the names is actualized by the perfect assumption of every trait in the form of which human beings were created. In a word, perfect equilibrium is to be the outward form of the name "Allah," the Divine Presence. The person who achieves such a realization is known as perfect man *(al-insan al-kamil),* one of the most famous of Ibn al-'Arabi's technical terms.[41]

Thus the names of the main characters in the film constitute a link to the understanding of disciple and master in Sufism. Semih Kaplanoğlu describes his film as the story of an aspirant who longs to find the answers to the questions of existence.[42] In these contexts, Erol Erin becomes an aspirant to elevate his morality and knowledge. Cemil Akman, on the other hand, becomes someone who has already walked a distance along this path. The perfect human being, who is a guide in Sufism, is generally described with the metaphor of a mirror. The master is the one who shows only what is visible to the disciple like a mirror.[43] When viewed within this framework drawn by Sufism, Erol actually sees himself in all his experiences with Cemil. Along these lines, the story of Erol (Moses) and Cemil (Khidr) becomes a story of confronting/not confronting oneself in search of meaning.

In the parable of his journey with Moses, Khidr damages a ship full of people in it in order to make it sink, kills a small child, and restores a wall which is about to collapse. In each of these

incidents, Moses loses his patience and breaks his promise to Khidr by questioning his actions. After the third broken promise, Khidr tells Moses that they must part ways and explains the reasons for his actions. Accordingly, none of Khidr's actions were of his own accord but were the instructions of Allah. Khidr caused the ship to sink in order to save the people from a tyrant king; he killed the child because he was destined to be a wicked one for his family; and he restored the wall because there was a treasure hidden under it that belonged to two orphan boys. The treasure was intended to be safeguarded until the boys reached maturity. The adaptation of the parable in the film begins after Erol and Andrei cross the magnetic walls to find Cemil in the dead lands. Each event in the parable also takes place in the film.

The method of Sufi hermeneutics is to produce meaning evolving out of language. It is designated as going against the literal perceptions of conventional Islamic theology. Ibn Arabi's works belong to a well-developed tradition of Islamic Neoplatonism and "manifests itself in a vast, complicated system of ranked entities, stations and sub-realities."[44] With the same method, Ibn Arabi begins explaining the parable with the etymology of the name Moses. According to Ibn Arabi, the name Moses comes from the Coptic words *mu* and *sa,* meaning "water" and "tree." Subsequently, he places emphasis on Moses' relationship with the basket. Moses, when he was a baby, was put and left in the river. Ibn Arabi interprets the boat as the corporeality of Moses. Moses himself is the Ego (*nafs*) thrown into a river of knowledge, which resulted in the disembodiment of his perception. In Sufism, the ego is perceived as the personal truth of the self. According to Ibn Arabi, each thing knows and sees only itself. Therefore, the imaginary and the real, the inside and the outside are different. Each action is endogenous to love but might possibly be perceived to the direct contrary, whence it indicates the image, not the reality. If each thing knows and sees only itself, Moses actually sees himself in all that happens in the parable. In this way, Sufi hermeneutics introduces Moses as representing the image/knowledge and Khidr as representing the meaning/insight. Whatever is experienced in between these characters refer to the past events in Moses' life, which are projected back to him with their meaning by Khidr (Cemil Akman in the film). In this context, whenever Erol reacts to Cemil's actions, he is in effect confronting his own experiences.

b.   Breath or Wheat?

Throughout the film, the audience is confronted with a question: "Breath or wheat?" (*Nefes mi? Buğday mı?*) For conscious viewers, this is an obvious allusion to an anonymous Sufi parable. The parable features two famous Turkish Sufis, Yunus Emre and Hacı Bektaş Veli (Haji Bektash Veli).[45] [46] Yunus Emre, who is at the time a simple peasant, goes to the Sufi lodge of Haji Bektash Veli to ask for some wheat because of a season of scarcity in his village. Haji Bektash Veli answers him with a question that he repeats several times: "Would you like breath or wheat?"[47]

Yunus Emre insists on the wheat. In the end, Haji Bektash Veli orders his students to fill Yunus Emre's carriage with wheat and send him back to his village. On his way back, Yunus Emre grasps that he has made the wrong choice and goes back to express his regret. Nevertheless, Haji Bektash Veli does not accept him as his student and sends him to another teacher for his spiritual nourishment.[48] Sufi hermeneutics consider this parable as a symbolic text. Accordingly, wheat symbolizes Yunus' will to gain mundane, rational knowledge, while instead; Haji Bektash Veli offers him the path to wisdom.[49]

We encounter the question "Breath or wheat?" several times in the film. The first time is in a scene where Erol finds Cemil's daughter Tara in their house. Tara is working on a high-tech computer, writing words in an unknown language. She remains silent to Erol's questions, but as he gets up to leave, she turns and asks him, "Breath or wheat?" He answers, "Wheat!" She smiles and silently returns to her work. The scene jump cuts to Erol sleeping in a fetal position in the wheat fields. The second time, the question comes from Cemil, when Erol insists on following him. The third time is in the Sufi lodge, when the question comes from Cemil again. And the fourth time, Erol repeats "Breath!" to himself in the final scene where he realizes that he asked for mundane instead of spiritual knowledge.

What emerges when we relate the frame presented to us by the Sufi parable and the scenes in the film, is about the choice that Erol desperately makes on his own journey. Throughout all the scenes, when Erol is confronted with the question, he is left with desperation, resourcefulness, and weakness. Wheat and breath is closely linked with the split Turkish identity of Erol which is pro-Enlightenment rationalist and secular on the one side and implicitly Eastern on the other side. In the final scene, Erol finds the promised wheat, which was what he asked for. Erol may prove his point and reach his limit rationally when he finds the wheat but his words reveal his pain of being without a narrative.

c. The unity of being and the m particle

Kaplanoğlu uses extreme wide shots of the landscapes that make us perceive human figures as small and lonely. These shots mostly present Erol as if he is confronting the cosmos. The cosmos is an important concept both in Kaplanoğlu's cinema and Ibn Arabi's notion of the Unity of Being. Ian Almond explains the notion of the Unity of Being as an attempt by Ibn Arabi to re-ascribe the origins and ontic status of all things to God whilst at the same time preserving their ontological individuality.[50] Chittick explains the concept as being fundamental to Ibn Arabi's view of the world as "the renewal of creation at each instant" (*tajdid al khalq ma'al-anat*). According to Chittick, human beings are faced with two different basic realities:

There is the Real Being (*al-wujud al haqq*), called 'God' in theological language, and, on the other, the self-disclosure *(tajalli)* of that Being. Everything other than God (i.e., the cosmos in its

infinity) is that Being's disclosure of its own characteristics and qualities.[51]

Throughout the film, we are constantly confronted with the theory of the "M particle" that exists in everything in nature. The first time we hear about the particle is when Erol participates in a meeting in at the company Novus Vita. The meeting is about genetic chaos brought about by genetically modified seeds. We understand that after each two or three harvests, GMO seeds become corrupted. In this meeting, Erol Erin learns about a fellow scientist, Cemil Akman, who was fired because of his metaphysical, ethical and theoretical thesis titled *Genetic Chaos and the M Particle*. The thesis predicts the coming genetic crisis and speculates about the existence of an M particle, which is only present in naturally bred crops. Erol becomes fascinated by Cemil's thesis and begins to search for Cemil Akman. We receive more details of the M particle when Erol discovers the records of Cemil Akman's defense at his trial. In his speech, Cemil states that the M particle is present in everything in the cosmos apart from seeds cultivated by humans. "We are unable to create the first of anything. We cannot create a seed. Even if we do, it deteriorates because the property that exists in the air, in the soil does not exist in this seed. Thus, the seeds we produce cannot be a part of the cycle that makes life possible. They do not carry the M particle, and because of this insufficiency they cannot be the part of the common memory. Every genetic intervention carries the risk of breaking the cycle of millions of years as in the bond between the first and the last rice. The results of my research have shown me that there is nothing in this universe that does not carry the M particle."

One can easily assume that the M particle represents the Divine Essence. In Ibn Arabi's thought, Essence is a more complex notion than traditional understandings of the concept, since for Ibn Arabi, to predicate his Essence is to constrain Him."[52] Within this framework, Ibn Arabi openly states that for Sufis, "there is no disputing the fact that the Essence is unknown."[53] Ian Almond explains the idea of the Real or Essence as something that

> "... can be so easily dismissed as just another one of the "infinitist theologies" which Derrida regards as a closet logocentrism. There are certainly moments in the *Fusus* where Ibn Arabi's description of God resembles Derrida's description of the text as a constant play of forces, "producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself . . . fissuring [the text] in every direction and thoroughly delimiting it."[54]

Perhaps the most important aspect of Ibn Arabi's system is his definition of God, which cannot fit within any descriptions of God that we could make. It is always *deferred*, as in Derrida. Given this perspective, one has to think twice before considering the conveyed message of the film as essentialist in the traditional sense. It is also possible to find the decentering Subject in many Sufist works. Once again, one can ask what the M particle represents in the movie. The M particle is not the center of things; it is unknown. It is only possible to perceive it's meaning, but this meaning also constantly changes or is *deferred.*

5. CONCLUSION

So far, except for Emily Jane O'Dell's article in 2020, I have not come across a study that focuses on Sufism in cinema "as a cultural repertoire of practices, dispositions, symbols, and spiritual results."[55] O'Dell explores that the use of Sufism in Muslim cinema functions "as a floating signifier to organize social, political, or religious meanings."[56] Although it is beyond the scope of this article to fill this gap and describe a framework of Sufi cinema among the many predominantly Muslim countries of the world, a cursory examination of Sufism has been tried to be attempted. In most Muslim cinemas around the world, Sufism is reflected in both popular and art-house films. Muslim filmmakers clearly find Sufism to be a rich means of reflecting their native spiritual perspective. While the cinematic rendering of Sufism varies according to its adaptation in each culture, the themes of journey and dream are the most common elements of Sufism in Muslim films. We can also see this very same dream theme being explored in the works of Turkish cinema. Turkey's Dream Cinema movement, emerged in the 1990s, visualizes Muslim spirituality through the notion of "dream as imaginal" borrowed from the thought of Ibn Arabi. The employment of "Dream as imaginal" in cinema indicates a different sensory and cognitive way of recognition. It is possible to see this idea that is pivotal in the films of Semih Kaplanoğlu, as we tried to demonstrate.

Kaplanoğlu's film *Grain* is an explicit attempt to portray the spiritual perspective of a Muslim towards the contemporary world and the world of the near future. While the classical Islamic version of the parable and the storyline are connected, *Grain* is actually informed by two different interpretations of the parable. The first interpretation is from thematic engagements from the thirteenth-century Sufi hermeneutic scholar Ibn Arabi, and the second interpretation is from Turkish Sufism with traces of narrative values. This article argues that these two interpretations are distinctly present in the movie *Grain*. From this perspective, *Grain* constitutes an example of the kaleidoscopic diversity of practices, ideas and beliefs presented in Islam; it also presents Sufism as not simply a metaphysical phenomenon but also a conception of the world or a human response. These cinematic texts can namely be considered as genuine efforts in order to tackle with the dreads and dualities produced by the post-colonial legacy of the international system as well as ahistorical metaphysical tensions. What the movie *Grain* offers us is to see the world from the eyes of a dervish/believer. A Sufi sees the world in a reciprocal relationship between God and the people. This is a world in communication with inner and outer worlds at the same time. In this world, the dualities melt into each other to reach a meaning/narrative. Even though, Erol is in this chaotic moment of swaying between these dichotomies, he has no power or resource to be able to reach a meaning or a narrative yet.

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[1] Emily Jane O'Dell, "Mystics in the Movies" in *New Approaches to Islam in Film*, ed. Kristian Petersen (New York: Routledge, 2021): 112

[2] See Kristian Petersen, "Reframing the study of Muslims and Islam in film" in *New Approaches to Islam in Film*, ed. Kristian Petersen (New York: Routledge, 2021): 112 In her introduction article, Petersen identifies the few studies that exists in this area.

[3] A style of Muslim music associated with Sufis.

[4] Hamid Naficy, "The Poetics and Practice of Iranian Nostalgia in Exile," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 3 (1991): 286.

[5] Khatereh Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

[6] Michael Pittman, "Majid Majidi and Baran: Iranian Cinematic Poetics and the Spiritual Poverty of Rumi," *Journal of Religion & Film* 15, issue 2 (2012).

[7] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[8] Alberto Elena and Belinda Coombes, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* (London: Saqi, 2005).

[9] Sheibani, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema.*

[10] Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon, "Makhmalbaf's broken mirror: The sociopolitical significance of modern Iranian cinema," *Durham Middle East Papers* 1357-7522 no. 64 (2000).

[11] Debarati S Sen, "Bollywood is soaking in the Sufi Spirit," Times of India, January 7, 2017, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/music/news/Bollywood-is-soaking-in-the-Sufi-spirit/articleshow/55354195.cms.

[12] David Murphy, "Between Socialism and Sufism: Islam in the Films of Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambety" *Third Text Journal* 24, issue 1 (January, 2010): 56.

[13] David Murphy, "Between Socialism and Sufism," 67.

[14] Roy Armes, "The Poetic Vision of Nacer Khemir," *Cinema in Muslim Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 77.

[15] Halil İnalcık, "Tarihsel Bağlamda Sivil Toplum ve Tarikatlar," in *Bursa'da Dünden Bugüne Tasavvuf Kültürü 2*, (Bursa: Bursa Kültür Sanat ve Turizm Vakfı Yayınları Bursa Kitaplığı, November 2003).

[16] Başkan Berol, *From Religious Empires to Secular State: Secularization in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 62.

[17] Mustafa Kara, *Metinlerle Günümüz Tasavvuf Hareketleri* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2013): 163.

[18] The name *Yeşilçam* translates as "Pine Tree Cinema," and refers to the name of the street in Istanbul in which film companies were located.

[19] Asuman Suner, "The New Aesthetics of Muslim Spirituality in Turkey: Yusuf's Trilogy by Semih Kaplanoğlu" in *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation*, ed. Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[20] Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (Oxford University Press, 2011): 128.

[21] Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 257.

[22] ibid.

[23] Asuman Suner, "The New Aesthetics," 21.

[24] The Muslim intellectuals associated with this movement are Ayşe Saşa, Sadık Yalsızuçanlar, İhsan Kabil, and İsmet Özel.

[25] Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux* 6 (1972): 11.

[26] Ayşe Saşa, *Yeşilçam Günlükleri* (Istanbul: Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2002): 94.

[27] Although not stated in her book, Ayşe Saşa paraphrases Henry Corbin in order to explain the dream: Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux* 6 (1972): 12.

[28] Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis," 11.

[29] ibid.

[30] Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey*, 175.

[31] Ayşe Saşa, *Yeşilçam Günlükleri*, 95.

[32] Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yusuf'un Rüyası, Söyleşi: Uygar Şirin* (Istanbul: H Yayınları, 2017).

[33] Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yusuf'un Rüyası*, 137.

[34] Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yusuf'un Rüyası*, 146.

[35] Asuman Suner, "The New Aesthetics," 24.

[36] Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yusuf'un Rüyası*, 164.

[37] Semih Kaplanoğlu, *Yusuf'un Rüyası*, 163.

[38] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 2005)

[39] These are some well-known hadiths such as: "I was in Adam's dough." "I was sent only to complete good morals."

[40] The word *ak* mostly carries the meaning of "heavenly light" or "illumination" in Islam.

[41] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2009): 27.

[42] "Semih Kaplanoğlu: Buğday Filmi Bir Talip Olma Hikayesi," Dünya Bizim, accessed April 1, 2022, http://www.dunyabizim.com/soylesi/27486/semih-kaplanoglu-bugday-filmi-bir-talip-olma-hikayesi.

[43] https://arsiv.nefesyayinevi.com/etiket/mursid/

[44] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*: 13.

[45] Haji Bektash Veli is a mystic saint who lived and taught from approximately 1209 to 1271 CE in Anatolia.

[46] "Not much is known about Yunus Emre's life. He is mostly told to have been grown up in the circles of Turkish Sufis that had slowly emerged after the Seljukid conquest of eastern and central Anatolia (i.e., after 1071)." Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011): 329.

[47] *Breath* is a word used for "spiritual blessings" (*himmet)* or "the inspiration of the saints" in Sufism.

[48] John Renard, *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 150-160.

[49] Mustafa Özçelik, *Bizim Yunus* (Eskişehir: Odunpazarı Belediyesi Yayınları, 2010).

[50] Ibn Arabi is widely named "the Great Shaykh." The citation is from Ian Almond, ibid.: 14.

[51] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*: 45.

[52] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*: 18.

[53] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*: 15.

[54] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*: 21.

[55] Kristian Petersen, "Reframing the study of Muslims in film" in *New Approaches to Islam in Film*, ed. Kristian Petersen (New York: Routledge, 2021): 5

[56] Ibid.