



Spaces Between Otherness and Power: The Critical Analysis of Heterotopia in *Uysallar*

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In this presentation...

The aim of this paper is to discuss the possibility of “**heterotopic drama**” through the analysis of *Uysallar* (Wild Abandon).

Uysallar was released on Netflix on 30 March 2022, written by Hakan Günday and directed by Onur Saylak.

Consisting of 8 episodes, the mini-series narrate the midlife crisis of Oktay, an architect in Istanbul married with Nil and has two children (Ege and Ece).

A series of events take place as Oktay attempts to run away from his family, but fails and builds a parallel life for himself as a punk after his return.

Finally, Foucault's notion of “panopticon” is referred to in one of the episode in a conversation between Oktay and Mert, who discuss Jeremy Bentham's panoptic prison project, implying the scriptwriter and the director's conceptual approach to the issue of power as criticized by Foucault.

Uysal equivalent of “Docile” in English, one of Foucault's important concepts in *Discipline and Punish*.

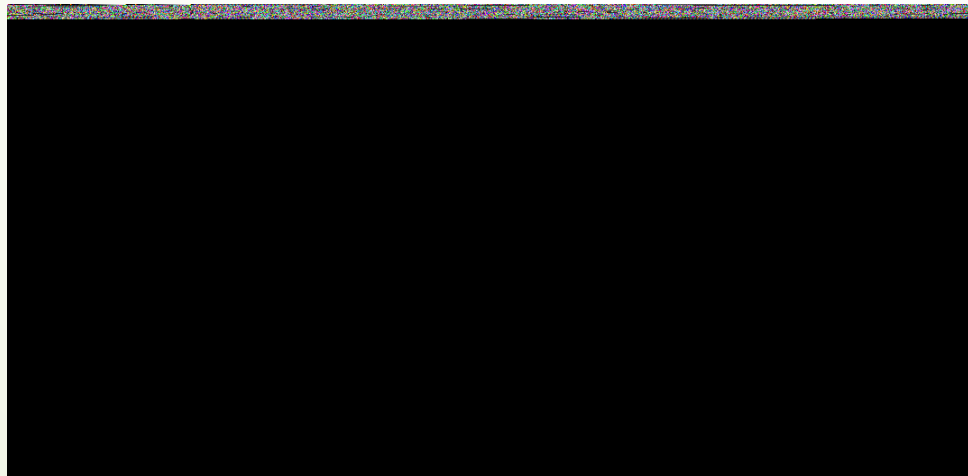
This article argues that Oktay's experiences together with other characters offers an analysis of Turkey's contemporary cultural, political and social developments from a **spatial** perspective.

The Concept of Heterotopia

- ▶ The concept of **heterotopia** featured on the preface of Michel Foucault's "The Order of Things" (1966) and later in Foucault's conversations with architecture students in 1967.
- ▶ The essay was translated into English in 1986 with the title "Of Other Spaces".
- ▶ Although Foucault did not paid more detailed attention to the notion, it was frequently referred by scholars in diverse fields; to analyze Wikipedia (Barnes, 2004), Change.org (Seyidov & Akçay, 2021) the impact of Facebook in education (Hope, 2016), the study the impact of online courses (Gourley, 2015; Willis, 2013), and digital culture (Di Lauro & Johinke, 2017), digital media and cinema studies (Chung, 2017), cultural geography (Chatzidakis et al., 2012).

The Concept of Heterotopia

- ▶ “Space” takes a central role in Foucault’s definition of heterotopia.
- ▶ Heterotopia refers to certain spaces that “defy norms” (Flavin, 2021, p. 327), are “possible rather than imaginary” (Flavin, 2021, p. 328), are distinct places that are also “‘embedded’ in all cultures and mirror, distort and react to the remaining space” (Johnson, 2013, p. 794) and are “deviant and closed spaces, characterised by juxtaposition” (Flavin, 2021, p. 328).
- ▶ “Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold ... Heterotopias are disturbing ... because they shatter or tangle common names ... they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.” (Foucault, 2005, p. xix)



Source:
<https://imchadfarley.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/other-spaces/>

The Concept of Heterotopia

- Foucault argues, "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986, p. 25). (example: museums and libraries, cemeteries)
- "In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26), underlining the argument that heterotopias are closed spaces. (Flavin, 329).
- Saldanha (2008) argues heterotopias are countersites existing in a largely oppositional relationship to mainstream society (p. 2081).
- Heterotopic spaces point out "deviances" from established norms in society, by referring to "cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'different': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and transforming" (Johnson, 2013, p. 790).

To Sum Up:

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- Heterotopias are not utopias, but they nevertheless show the possibility of other spaces, that challenge the existing power relations.
 - **There is no consistent pattern or path to follow but their existences indicate 'ruptures in ordinary life, imaginary realms, polyphonic representations' (Defert, 1997: 275 as cited in Johnson, 2006, 87)**

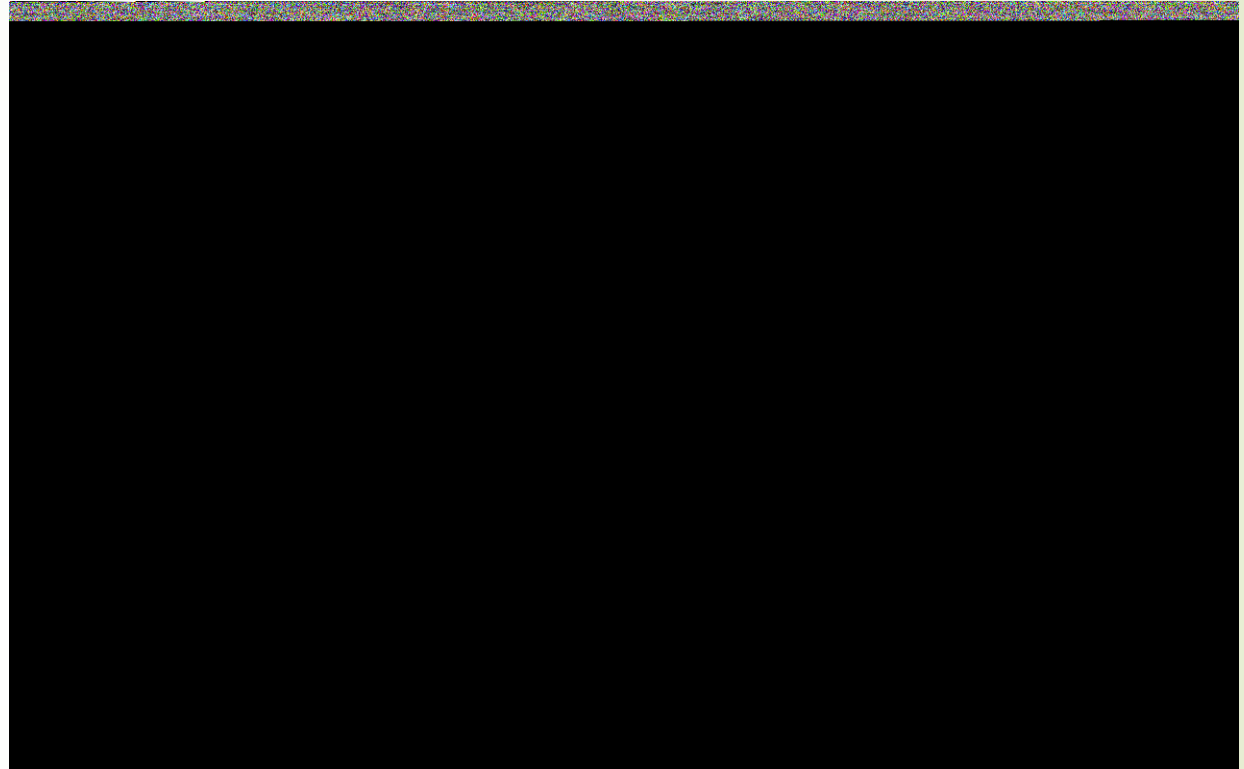
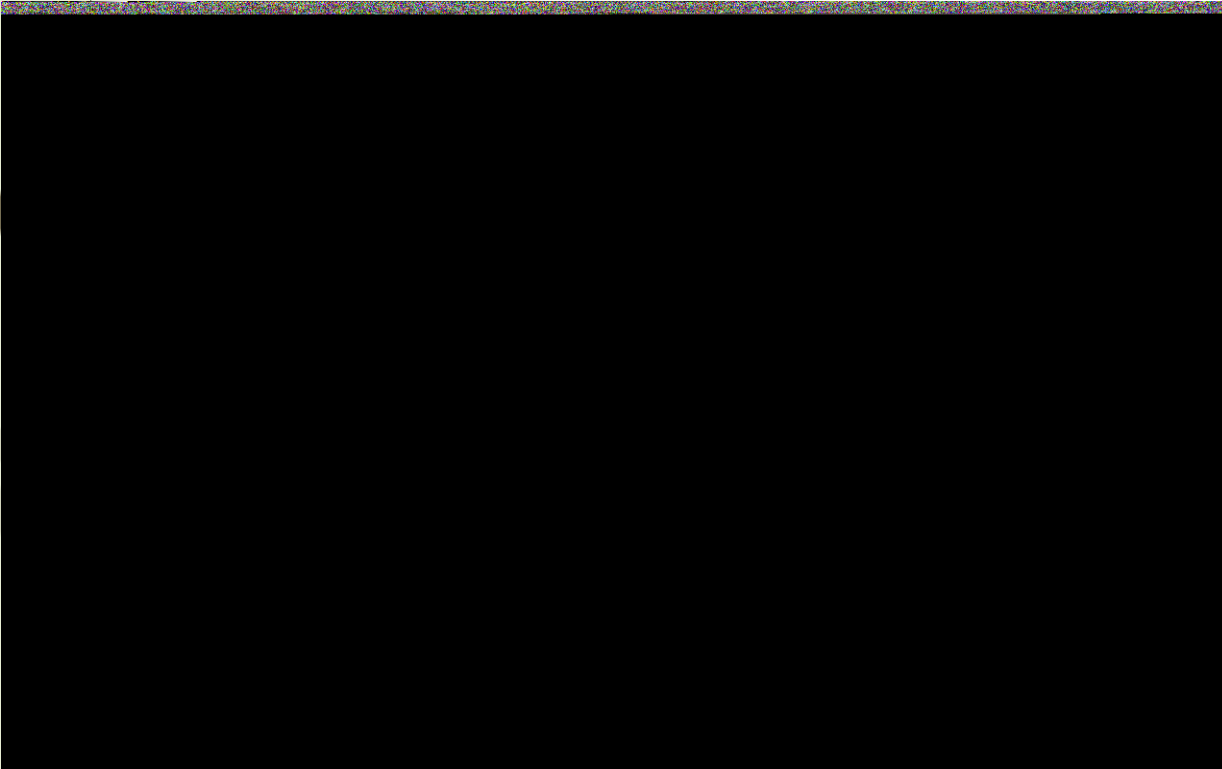
Uysallar

- *Uysallar* narrates the story of Oktay (Öner Erkan), an architect working in a company based in Istanbul's business district. Together with his wife, Nil (Songül Öden) and children, Ege and Ece, he lives in a luxury residence in a gated community.
- During his childhood, he was treated badly by his father Olcay (Uğur Yücel) (who was a former military personnel), and was a punk-rock fan. Despite his dreams to live as a protesting character, he left Ankara, where he spent his childhood, and set up a family in Istanbul as an architect. Frustrated with his life, Oktay wishes to pursue his dreams to be a punk, sneaks out at nights to hang out with other punk people, and meets them at "**ANAKARA**".
- In the first episode, Oktay meets Berhudar (Haluk Bilginer), who is a state officer in charge of building a prison complex, claimed to be "the largest" one in Europe.
- The episodes depict Oktay's encounters and conflicts mainly by visualizing several spaces, which can be evaluated as heterotopias.

Methodology

- This paper engages in an analysis of *Uysallar* from a semiotic perspective.
- In the semiotic analysis taking into account the visual and textual signs, three main coding frames were established as constituting heterotopic representations:
 - 1- The Urban Space
 - 2- ANAKARA
 - 3- Prison Construction Site

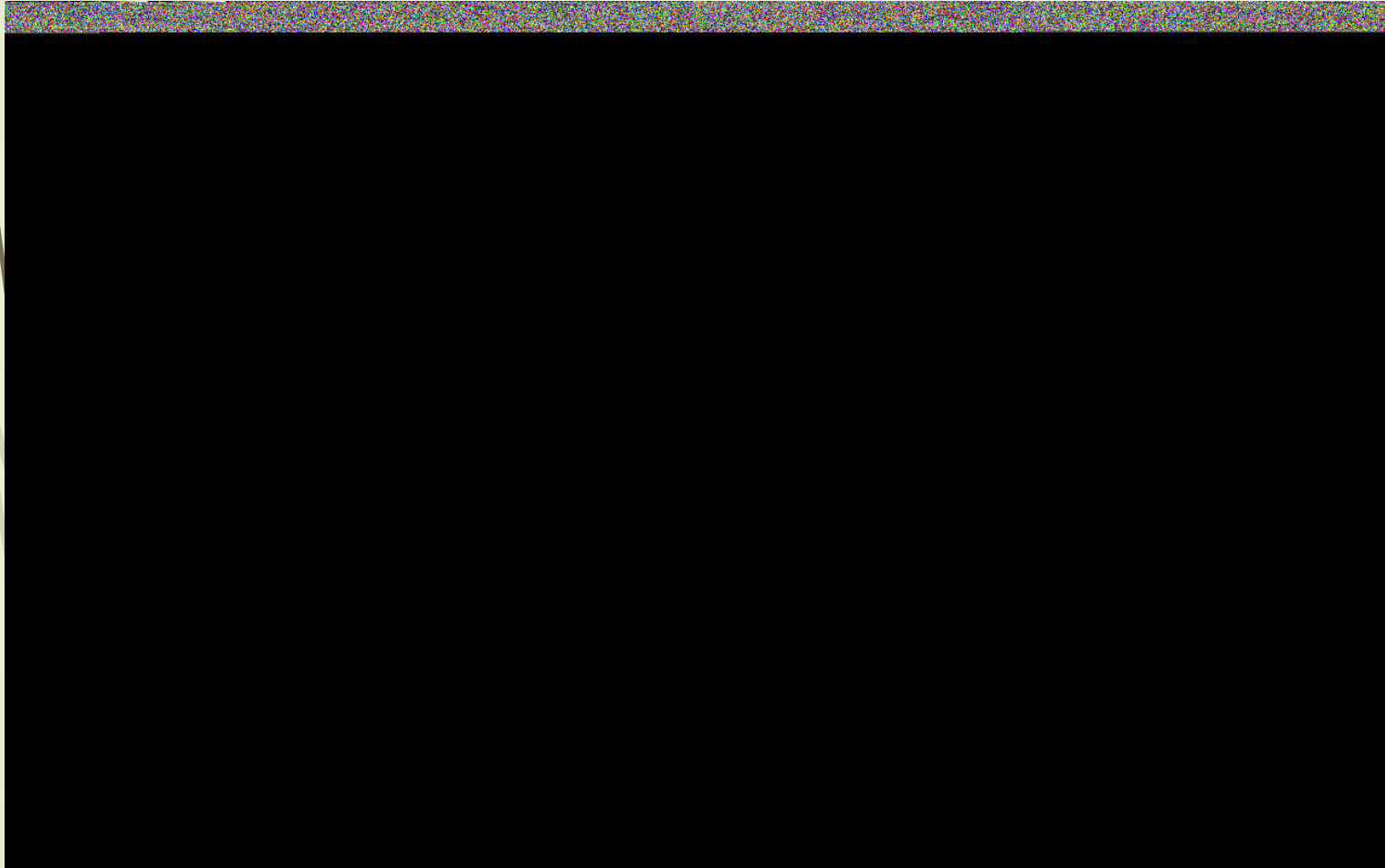
The Urban Space



- Throughout the episodes, there is a constant “fog” over Istanbul.
- There are TV discussions whether this is actually a “fog” or “air pollution”.
- The fog is a political metaphor signifying political and social polarization.

Visual 1: (Episode 3, 32.50) Visual 2: (Episode 7, 24.50)

The Urban Space



- Uysal family is not involved in a critical reading of the fog, as in one of the scenes, they are dressed in white, attending a lunch in an upper-class restaurant, while there are fights going on between the police and the protestors about the fog whose voices can be heard from the restaurant. However, they are completely insensitive to the protest, signifying their upper-middle class privilege.
- In this regard, the city is not completely dystopic, but it shows the possibility of resistance as an alternative space, setting up the heterotopia.

ANAKARA

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- During his underground life, Oktay meets a group of Punk people living in the street and takes them to an abandoned building, waiting to be destroyed in an urban regeneration project that Oktay is involved.
- He and his fellow Punk, nicknamed Moloz, name the place **ANAKARA**.
- In ANAKARA, they live an equal life, without any authority figures, socialize with other dissidents, and facilitate a commune life as a prototype of an ideal society. He feels freedom for the first time in his life. Visuals: Episode 4, 34.00, Episode 5, 18.00

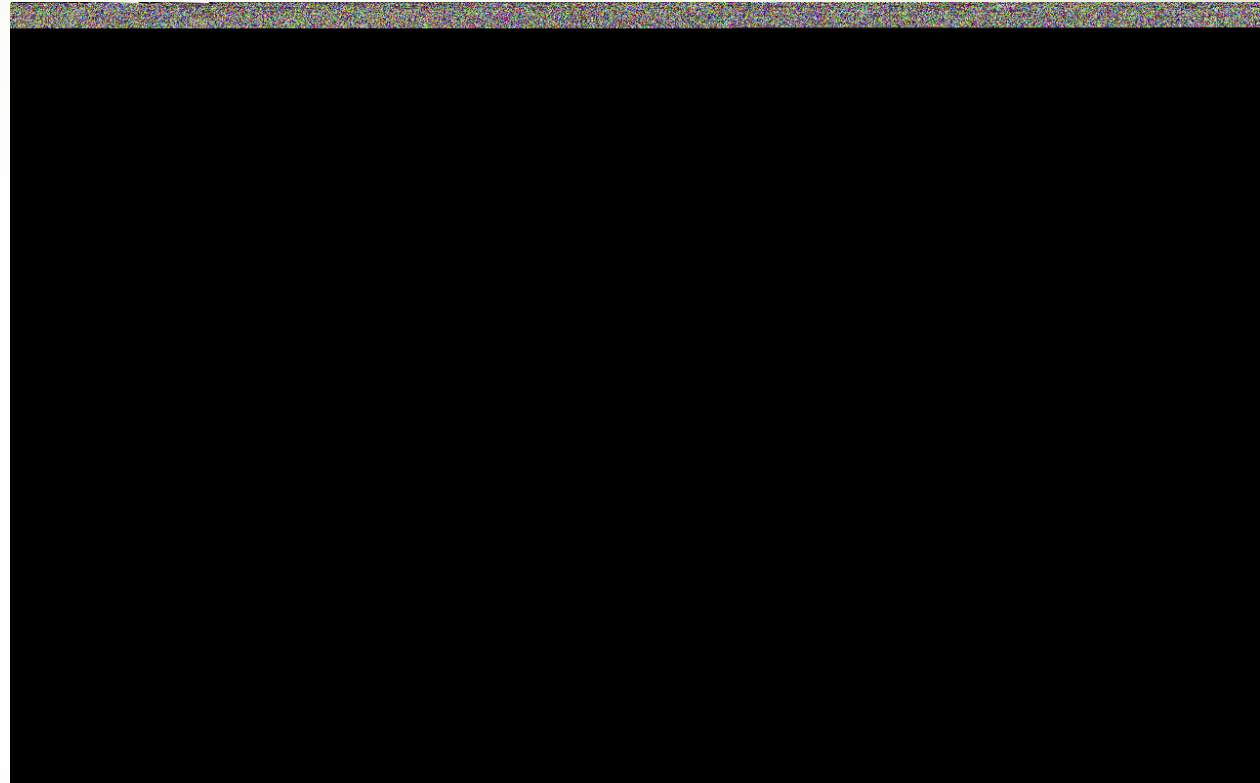
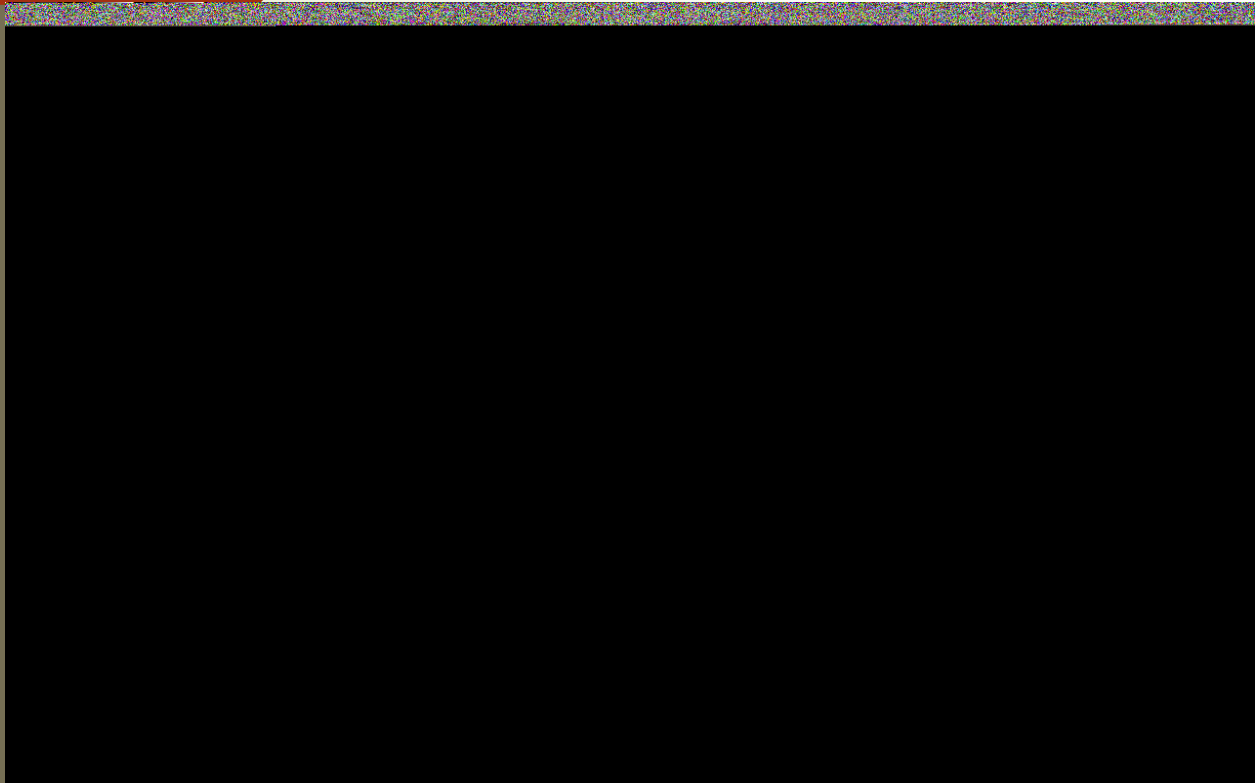
ANAKARA

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- However, the tensions arise as Oktay's friend from the company, Mert (İbrahim Selim) find out the place and turns it into a party area as an alternative, sub-culture entertainment.
- In the end, Oktay is frustrated, punk people leave the place, and the communal life dream ends.
- Anakara signifies the possibility of an alternative life space, which is not actualized, is surrounded and commercialized by capitalism, but at least shows that it can be possible to imagine alternative lifestyles and places in the existing relations of power.

Prison Construction Site

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- The construction site is a crucial metaphor in the episodes exposing the power dynamics between Oktay and Berhudar.
- As a state officer, Berhudar represents the official state ideology and is also a father-figure to Oktay, replacing Oktay's father and acting like one.
- Berhudar claims to build "Europe's largest prison complex", which is an implicit political critique. He engages in a constant "enemization" of the local people living around the site, accusing them of preventing the construction of the complex by "allying with the enemies". Visual 1 Episode 1, Visual 2: 10.45, Episode 3, 10.30

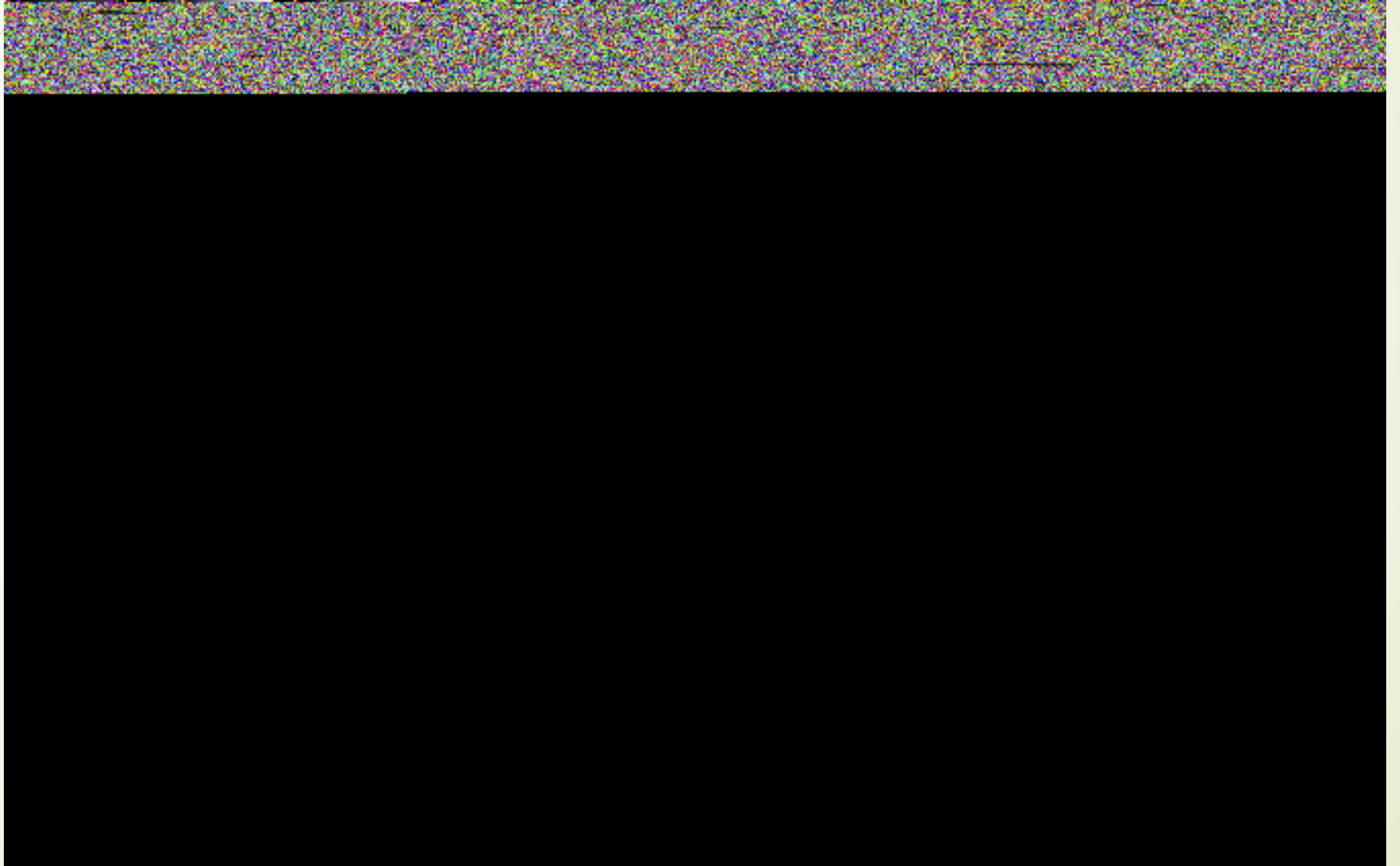
Prison Construction Site

- The metaphor of "prison" and "imprisonment" is frequently employed in the narrative; Oktay's friend Mert, who is working in the construction site as an engineer, fears imprisonment because of the content of his tweets which are not revealed to the viewers.
- Through the end of the series, it is understood that Berhudar suffers from severe depression as his family left him, and this was the reason that he constantly delays the construction and does not return to Ankara.
- In sum, the prison construction is an unfinished process, it points at a place where there are possibilities to resist dominant political identities, functioning as a heterotopic place.

Conclusion

- The series ends while the *Uysal* family is trapped in the construction site and confronted with their guilts, secrets and plots against each other within the family.
- The prison paradoxically becomes a space for Uysal family to engage in an open and equal conversation with each other.
- In sum, the city, Anakara and the prison construction sites are employed in the narrative as heterotopias of deviance, which are not utopic or dystopic, but point at the possibilities for alternative existences, initiates criticisms to existing system of power relations.
- Heterotopic Drama?

References



References

