

FILM REVIEW

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## ***Daha*: “Chasing More Hope, Questing More Humanity”**

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***Daha***

2017

Directed by Onur Saylak

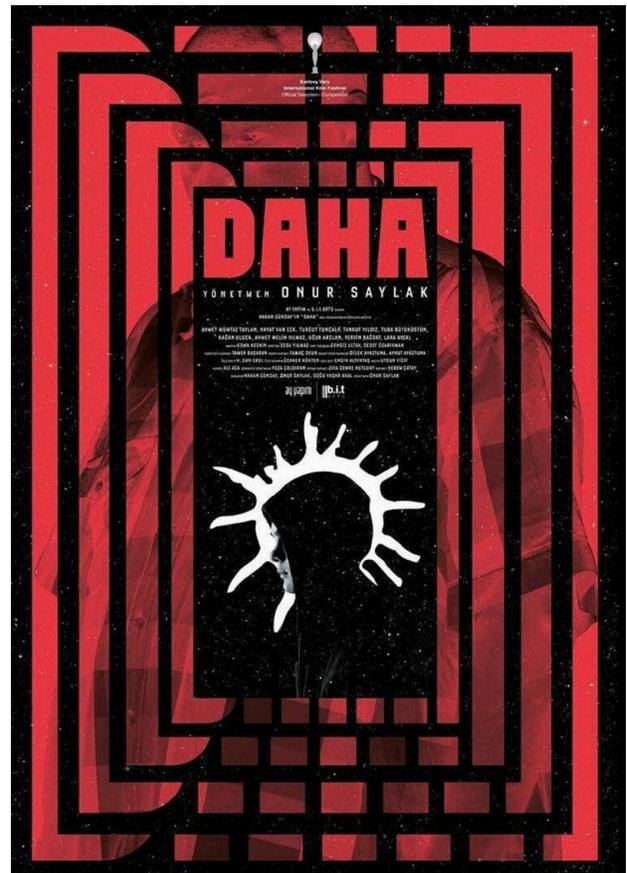
Written by Onur Saylak, Doğu Yaşar Akal,  
and Hakan Günday

Run time: 1 hour, 55 minutes

Original language: Turkish

More information at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5927420/>

The 2017 Turkish film *Daha (More)*, inspired by Hakan Günday’s novel and directed by Onur Saylak, deals with the precarity of migrants in smuggling networks through a troubled father-and-son relationship. It is the second film directed by Saylak, who is also one of Turkey’s best-known actors. Saylak explains that he directed this film with the motivation that cinema should educate audiences and encourage them to confront challenging topics. *Daha* takes place in Kandali, a fictional town on the Aegean coast of Turkey where migrant smuggling is rampant. The film focuses on a smuggling network and the different actors involved: a migrant smuggler, a leader of the safe house, and boat owners. Ahad, the migrant smuggler, and his 14-year-old son Gaza, the leader of the safe house, are the anti-hero protagonists of the film. The plot is presented from Gaza’s perspective, with his narration, and it follows his bleak character arc. At the beginning of the film, the text “*the first tool used by a human is another person*” appears on the screen to draw attention to the theme of exploitation.



In the film, the father Ahad picks up migrants including men, women, and children crossing the Turkish borders, loads them in his truck, and brings them to a warehouse—the “safe house”. He keeps them in this place for a period of time. When the boats are ready

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to embark on a sea voyage, he delivers the migrants to the boat owners so that they can cross the sea by boats. With a domineering personality, he approaches migrants not as human beings but as commodities. He is abusive and disregards their humanity. Gaza, unlike his father, is initially presented as kind and thoughtful. He tries at first to empathize with migrants, while keeping them under surveillance in the dark, overcrowded, unhygienic warehouse. His father wants Gaza to join the migrant smuggling network and work for him. So he manipulates Gaza, trying to make him more ruthless. For example, the father says, “*Do you see the state of the man who left his home and ran away? Empty dream, always empty dream. These are just empty dreams. Do you know what empty dreams do to the people, Gaza? It turns you into an insect. You go into a hole, and you eat each other*”. Ahad’s words shed a cynical light on the desperation of migrants and the callous treatment they endure for the sake of their hope. In the film, the boat owners are appreciably more humane than Ahad. For example, they warn him to reduce the number of migrants per boat, pointing out that overcrowding increases the risk of boats sinking. These exchanges are ominous since thousands of migrants lose their lives every year in the Aegean Sea. Even for those who arrive at their destination, there is no guarantee of hope, as Gaza’s voice dramatically emphasizes: “*What would happen if you could go there? No one would look at you, and no one would hear you. No one would even ask your name. People would hate you so much that real estate prices would drop wherever you settled*”.

The film documents Gaza’s disheartening transformation. This change begins with his father’s insistence that the migrants are drifting towards uncertainty. It continues when Gaza’s effort to attend high school is hindered by his father. Consequently, Gaza becomes increasingly apathetic and insensitive. Although he initially resisted his role in the smuggling networks, he finally accepts it. He says, “*Actually, that warehouse was a sewer. A sewer through which people flow. I was trying not to get stuck. And since I was in charge of a sewer, I said I would be*

*the god of that sewer*”. After first resisting his father’s path, Gaza embraces it, and his treatment of migrants becomes cruel.

In sum, on the one hand, the film draws attention to migrants who are compelled to leave their countries in pursuit of safety and better lives. On the other hand, it highlights the migrant smuggling networks whose actors are indifferent to migrants and approach them only as goods that bring profit. In doing so, the film reveals the relationship between migrants and the smuggling networks that exploit and cause harm, sexual violence, and death. The film conveys that while trying to break through the prison walls that his father built for him, Gaza turns into the guard of the prison and continues his father’s inhuman treatment of migrants.

Such themes related to migrant smuggling networks and related challenges of border governance are broadly treated in academic studies (Başlar 2018; İçduygu 2021; Arslan et al. 2021; Yıldız 2021). These themes have also started to be the subject of films, and *Daha* is one unforgettable example.

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