altyazı

new prospects on ambigious grounds

turkish cinema now

new blockbusters
auteurs on the edge
city and province
faces of nation
film culture

Editor's Note

Altyazı Monthly Cinema Magazine's special issue, "Turkish Cinema Now," presents a brief survey of the prevailing trends in contemporary Turkish cinema. The significance of mapping Turkish cinema today lies in the thriving possibilities it offers to understand the relations between the artistic, cultural and sociopolitical realms in contemporary Turkey. Yet defining such relations and recent processes carries as many difficulties as promises. Turkish cinema is searching for itself. Its new prospects are emerging on ambiguous grounds relating to the heterogeneous and incoherent character of the modes of production, reception and aesthetics. "Turkish Cinema Now" provides an introduction for the contextual, thematic and stylistic features highlighted in Turkish cinema, which is gaining a growing interest in the national and international sphere. We are aware of our limits while presenting this first publication on contemporary Turkish cinema specifically prepared by Turkish film critics for international audiences. We are grateful for the opportunity and cooperation provided by our comrades in ArteEast, and we believe this effort will contribute to an ongoing dialogue between cinephiles from different parts of the world.

ÖVGÜ GÖKÇE

Turkish Cinema Now: An Introduction

Turkish cinema is on the move. Once the most enthralling territory in the cultural realm of the 1960s and 1970s, then partially abandoned in the post–coup d'état climate of the 1980s, cinema in Turkey has undergone a significant rehabilitation since the 1990s. Mapping contemporary Turkish cinema now is more difficult than ever, given its fragmented, ambiguous and multifaceted character; it is, at the same time, very promising, in view of the prospects manifested through new tendencies.

Turkish cinema went through its most productive period, the "golden years," between roughly 1965 and 1975, an era that is referred to as the Yeşilçam (Greenpine) period, after the name of the street in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, where many production companies were located. During this time, 200 to 300 films a year were shot for consumption by the Turkish mass audience. The vigor of the industry, which was efficient enough to extend across Anatolia, mostly depended on genre-based production, particularly melodrama, and the star system.

The end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was a breaking point for Turkish cinema. By 1978, television was established, and families retreated from theaters to their living rooms. In the process, the profile of the Turkish film audience changed drastically: Cinema surrendered to male spectators, who were potential clients for the new trends of cheap exploitation films with sexual content and of *arabesk*—music and films that reflect the angst of the immigrants from Anatolia who have a hard time complying with the moral values of city life. Both of these trends exploded in the video market. In 1980, Turkey experienced a coup d'état, which influenced the cultural realm dramatically. Most of the directors or producers of the old Yeşilçam period slowly cleared off the scene; the indigenous film industry declined and was replaced by the video market. A couple of new directors started shooting some individual films, expressing the inner turmoil of post-coup intellectual stereotypes, but most of these films were considered pretentious and were unable to communicate with the old Yeşilçam audience. Meanwhile, the mainstream survived to some extent, with comedies reflecting the growing social and economic problems along with the changing moral values of the middle class. The cultural climate of the 1980s was marked by liberalization (and Americanization) of the political economy and a rising consumer society. The predominant traits of the 1980s were goods, labels, celebrities, an increased representation of sexuality, a new understanding of the function of media, the rise of the commercial sector, the vast change in the discourses around public vs. private and an insistent denial and ignorance of the political conflicts that led to the coup d'etat.

The Bandit

Summersault in a Coffin

By the 1990s, as liberalism was shifting to globalization, cinema in Turkey advanced with a couple of mainstream, relatively big-budget films. Entrepreneurs following a Hollywood formula onscreen started to draw audiences to some Turkish films, and eventually this slow move brought a big boom with *Eşkıya* (*The Bandit*, 1996). Simultaneously, a small independent film with a very low budget, *Tabutta Rövaşata* (*Somersault in a Coffin*, 1996), paved the way for a new track to be followed by independent filmmakers. By the late 1990s and just after 2000, the two trends—that of mainstream commercial films and independent personal works—became clearer. While new blockbusters leaned toward genre productions (which benefited from icons of popular culture and TV and drew on capital derived largely from the private sector), independent filmmakers adopted an auteur approach, which questioned the premises of filmmaking through self-reflexivity. Some examples for the mainstream films are *Propaganda* (1999), *Kahpe Bizans* (2000), *Vizontele* (2000), *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* (2001), *Asmalı Konak: Hayat* (2003), *G.O.R.A.* (2004), *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, 2005) and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (*The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, 2006). Some films that represent the auteurist approach are Zeki Demirkubuz's *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997), *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001), *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2002), *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006); Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Kasaba* (*The Small Town*, 1997), *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (*Clouds of May*, 1999), *Uzak* (*Distant*, 2002), *İklimler* (*Climates*, 2006); Derviş Zaim's *Tabutta Rövaşata* (*Somersault in a Coffin,* 1996), *Filler ve Çimen* (*Elephants and Grass,* 2000), *Cenneti Beklerken* (*Waiting for Heaven*, 2006); Reha Erdem's *Korkuyorum Anne* (*Mommy, I'm Scared*, 2004) and *Beş Vakit* (*Times and Winds,* 2006); Semih Kaplanoğlu's *Herkes Kendi Evinde* (*Away from Home,* 2001), *Meleğin Düşüşü* (*Angel's Fall*, 2005), *Yumurta* (*Egg*, 2007); Handan İpekçi's *Babam Askerde* (*Dad is in the Army*, 1995), *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (*Hejar*, 2001), *Saklı Yüzler* (*Hidden Faces*, 2007); Ümit Ünal's *Dokuz* (*9*, 2002) and *Ara* (2007); Yeşim Ustaoğlu's *Güneşe Yolculuk* (*Journey to the Sun*, 1999) and *Bulutları Beklerken* (*Waiting for the Clouds,* 2003); Ahmet Uluçay's *Karpuz Kabuğundan Gemiler Yapmak* (*Boats Out of Watermelon Rinds*, 2004).

Despite their fairly incoherent and heterogenous nature, both tendencies of mainstream and independent filmmaking carried cinema as a significant subject for acknowledgment in the cultural domain: The former generated an awareness of filmmaking as a profitable business, and the latter presented diverse experiments in film aesthetics, sustained by international and critical acclaim. Yet one can claim that these two traits, although seemingly opposed, do have the common affinity of representing different aspects of the body of Turkish cinema, as well as challenging it. At the same time, they are both striving to restructure cinema in Turkey. In the last few years, the boundaries between these two traits have become even more blurred, with some productions that stand in the middle. These films employ mainstream storytelling devices next to their directors' personal intents, and eventually create a middle ground by exploring different possibilities in their narrative, aesthetic and production features. Some examples are *Küçük Kıyamet* (*The Little Apocalypse*, 2006), *Takva* (*Takva: A Man's Fear of God*, 2006), *Hacivat Karagöz Neden Öldürüldü?* (*Who Killed Shadows?*, 2006) and *Polis* (*Police*, 2007).

Contemporary Turkish cinema is facilitating a space in which all of these tendencies reflect on particular issues that are debated, reformulated and circulated in the social, cultural and political sphere. In other words, current Turkish cinema is searching for a place for itself, a process that translates into a quest in the filmic space. This quest speaks through the interpretations of urban and provincial life. It takes place in the territories of Turkishness, representing the different faces of the nation and identity through conflicting power struggles. Contemporary Turkish cinema is becoming a space for making meaning in and out of the fictional world by reintroducing well-established practices as well as new suggestions in ways of seeing. It stands as an aesthetic, cultural and institutional medium through which questions on cinema relate to discussions in Turkey's cultural sphere. Turkish cinema is in the process of formulating itself. It is presenting itself as a new prospect on ambiguous grounds, a prospect that will continue to challenge and clarify its uncertain position. ■


G.O.R.A.


Boats out of Watermelon Rinds


Takva: A Man's Fear of God


The Little Apocalypse


Who Killed Shadows

ENİS KÖSTEPEN

The New Turkish Blockbusters

Following the demise of the Yeşilçam production and star system during the 1980s, Turkish cinema did not begin to produce blockbusters again for more than a decade. In this respect, 1996 was a milestone. First Mustafa Altıoklar's historical drama on Hezarfen Ahmet Çelebi (an inventor who made the first human flight in 17th-century Istanbul), *İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında* (*Istanbul Beneath My Wings,* 1996), sold over 500,000 tickets. This was a big success at the time. Reaching such success with only his second film designated Altıoklar as the emerging face of new popular Turkish cinema. Later the same year came Yavuz Turgul's *Eşkıya* (*The Bandit*, 1996). Turgul had been an important figure within Yeşilçam as a scriptwriter and director since 1975. He moved into the advertising sector following the collapse of Yeşilçam in the 1980s; yet he remained one of the few people able to produce films. *The Bandit* sold more than 2.5 million tickets following its release in 1996. It received huge hype as it set a box-office record. The film was everywhere on TV and in newspapers, and it was considered the genuine evidence for the regeneration of Turkish cinema. *The Bandit* is an action-drama that tells the story of Baran, a bandit who is released after serving 35 years in prison. The film interestingly incorporates the nostalgic bandit character into an urban mafia context, and focuses on the clash of tradition with modernity.

In 1999, another important figure in Turkish cinema, Sinan Çetin, produced *Propaganda,* a comedy criticizing the nation-state border system through the story of separated families on the Turkish-Syrian border. It sold more than 1.2 million tickets. As the founder of Plato Film, one of the biggest production companies serving advertising agencies and TV, Sinan Çetin has continued to direct popular films and promote new talents in order to shape a new Turkish cinema. He has not yet been able to create a true blockbuster, however. The biggest hit after *The Bandit* came in 2000: *Kahpe Bizans*—it has no international title, but it could be translated as "The Bitchy Byzantium." Written and directed by the famous comedy writer Gani Müjde, *Kahpe Bizans* is a parody of the Turkish historical epics of the 1970s that depicted Turkish warriors' adventures against the Byzantine empire. The film made it to the 2.5 million–tickets mark but couldn't exceed *The Bandit*, which was still at the top of the list then. ▻

The Bandit

Kahpe Bizans

Vizontele Tuuba

The Bandit and *Kahpe Bizans* are still among Turkey's top ten box-office hits in the last 20 years. The other films in the top ten have all been produced after 2000. Four of the remaining eight films were produced by Beşiktaş Kültür Merkezi (BKM), a powerful new player in Turkish film business. BKM started as a theater company and expanded into film production and arts organizations. Yılmaz Erdoğan, a writer, poet, playwright and actor, was the founder of BKM. In the 1990s, BKM started to produce TV shows; Erdoğan became famous and started doing stand-up shows. Capitalizing on his growing fame, Erdoğan then initiated BKM's expansion into cinema. He wrote, co-directed and starred in the glossy *Vizontele* (2001). The film was the biggest hit after *The Bandit*, selling more than 3 million tickets. *Vizontele* is the story of TV arriving in a remote village in southeast Turkey in the 1970s. It is a comedy with a political twist; so too is its sequel, *Vizontele Tuuba* (2004), which tells the story of a leftist teacher who comes to the same village as an exile appointment, along with his crippled daughter, in the summer of 1980, just before the September coup. In the sequel, the TV in the first film is replaced with a public library that the teacher starts to build in the village. The *Vizontele* series can be thought of as a commentary on the modernization of rural Turkey, where books arrive after TV. Although it wasn't as popular as the first film, *Vizontele Tuuba* was also a box-office hit, with more than 2.8 million tickets sold.

The film that surpassed *Vizontele* was another BKM production called *G.O.R.A.* (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2004). It is a sci-fi parody written by Turkey's most famous stand-up comedian (and once a famous cartoonist), Cem Yılmaz. The film is based on one of Cem Yılmaz's favorite jokes, which he both drew as a cartoon and acted out in a stand-up routine: "What happens when a Turk goes to space?" The Turk in the film is a rug dealer kidnapped by an alien commander, both played by Cem Yılmaz. *G.O.R.A.*'s box-office success set the record at 4 million. It should be noted that Cem Yılmaz, as a friend of Yılmaz Erdoğan, had starred in a side role that delighted the audience in *Vizontele*. In fact, it is possible to say that the two are the creative stars of Turkish blockbusters. They write, direct and play in films, refusing to submit to any producer, and working independently on their own blockbuster projects. Cem Yılmaz wrote the script and co-directed his second project, *Hokkabaz* (*The Magician*, 2006), with Ali Taner Baltacı, which was also produced by BKM and sold 1.7 million tickets. Currently Yılmaz Erdoğan and Cem Yılmaz are two names that guarantee a blockbuster in Turkey.

If one looks through the list of the Turkish blockbusters, the most striking development is the emergence of the thriller as a new popular genre. Although there has not been a huge thriller hit yet, the relative success of *Okul* (*School*, Durul and Yağmur Taylan, 2003) initiated the trend in Turkey. Produced by Sinan Çetin's Plato Film, *School* is a ghost story set in a boarding school. Since *School*'s success, it has become more likely to read about the production of new Turkish horror films in the arts section of newspapers. As followers of the genre's emerging East Asian and American examples, the younger generation of moviegoers is attracted to these local horror stories as well.

Looking at the box-office hits in terms of genres, the one that dominates the list is comedy. Although *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (*The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, Serdar Akar and Sadullah Şentürk, 2005), a purely nationalist, anti-U.S. action movie adapted from a popular TV series, sits on the top of the list with more than 4 million tickets sold, comedies still have a better chance than any other genre at the moment. These films usually cast comedy actors from popular TV series. This is interesting, considering the TV series that dominate the prime time are mostly melodramas. But unlike in the past, melodrama is no longer the most popular genre in cinema, and very few new melodramas are produced today. In this respect, Çağan Irmak's *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, 2005) is significant. The film was not distributed widely in the beginning; the ▷

G.O.R.A.

The Magician

The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq

production company wasn't expecting it to be a blockbuster. With increasing critical acclaim and mouth-to-mouth marketing, though, the film drew huge media attention. With 3.7 million tickets sold, it is the third film in the box-office list after *The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* and *G.O.R.A.* The film revived the weeping audience of the Yeşilçam era, and was hailed as the return of the melodrama. Yet it would be unjust to label *My Father and My Son* only as a melodrama. It also has an important political element: Set in a farmhouse in an Aegean town, it is the story of a leftist man's return to his father's house with his six-year-old boy, whose mother died during his birth on the day of the 1980 military coup.

Another genre that is emerging is the nationalist heroic adventure. The film at the top of the list, *The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, is the epitome and the vanguard of this genre. Like *Deli Yürek-Boomerang Cehennemi*, a box-office hit in 2001 by Osman Sınav, it is an adaptation of a popular TV series. The hit of 2007, with more than 1 million tickets sold is *Son Osmanlı: Yandım Ali* (*The Last Ottoman: Yandım Ali*, Mustafa Şevki Doğan, 2007), which could be seen as the follower of their success. Based on a comic-book series, it is the story of a Turkish hero's fight against the British invasion of Ottoman Empire. It will not be surprising to see more nationalist epics follow.

As this brief survey reveals, the top three box-office hits in contemporary Turkish film do represent a range: a sci-fi parody, a nationalist action film and a melodrama with political undertones. Still, the popular Turkish cinema does not allow a full systematic analysis; it is a reemerging field decades after Yeşilçam. It is only possible to point toward some tendencies rather than well-defined patterns in contemporary Turkish popular cinema. Despite the presence of these box-office hits, the system of producing blockbusters in Turkey is not structured. There is no formula except the ones embodied by Yılmaz Erdoğan and Cem Yılmaz. Comedy is a dominant genre, but it is not an entirely safe bet for the producers. While melodramas and heroic adventures are rising from the ashes of Yeşilçam, the thriller seems like the newest invention in Turkey. Turkish popular cinema is definitely enjoying a lively era that is open to experiments in commercial storytelling. It is a ground where the rules and formulas for popular filmmaking are being tested, and a time when creative and critical intervention could be effective in structuring new practices and relations for popular filmmaking. ■

FIRAT YÜCEL

Auteur Cinema on the Edge

The *auteur* concept has been a significant topic of theoretical discussion in Turkish intellectual cinema circles. Yet *auteurism* was never as influential as a way of filmmaking as it was in the late 1990s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the directors who had a unique vision of their own (Metin Erksan, Atıf Yılmaz, Yılmaz Güney, Ömer Lütfi Akad, Halit Refiğ) had to respond to the needs of the Turkish film industry in order to survive. Along with the films that reflected their individual vision, they made a lot of genre movies—mostly melodramas—that corresponded to the demands of the audience. After the industry collapsed in 1980s, only a few names (Ömer Kavur, Erden Kıral, Yavuz Özkan) tried to develop a sense of auteur filmmaking.

Even though most of the directors who leaned toward 'art cinema' were influenced by neorealism, the French New Wave and modernist cinema in general, the auteur concept has never been well established in Turkish cinema and film criticism. For intellectuals in search of a collective understanding of cinema, it was a problematic standpoint, a kind of self-indulgent bourgeois identity, that didn't have the necessary political consciousness. Because of this theoretical questioning and the constant dependence on the industry, the situation of the director who tried to reflect his/her intellectual viewpoint in his/her works has always been a sophisticated one in Turkey. Ironically, when directors like Derviş Zaim, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz, Yeşim Ustaoğlu and Reha Erdem came up with films, which significantly point to an effort to develop a body of work in the 1990s, the auteur concept was already passé in Europe; its faults and misconceptions had been realized. As opposed to Europe's, Turkey's historical and cultural context does not allow fully resolved discussions on the question of auteur or "artistic uniqueness" in general.

Although one can claim that these new directors are practicing more or less an auteur way of filmmaking, their in-between situation in terms of their influences and the cultural context in which they are working creates an ambiguity concerning their position. In fact, as will be discussed briefly in each case, this particular ambivalent stance is a significant point that has provided the grounds for artistic freedom and flexibility, and provoked these directors to question the limits of cinema, creating different forms and interpretations of auteur filmmaking. ▷

Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz: Pathways to No Avail

Among the directors who emerged in the late 1990s, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz have received critical acclaim in European cinema circles and drawn attention with the awards they have won in prestigious festivals. Their work is often cited along and compared with the great auteurs of arthouse cinema, such as Tarkovsky, Ozu, Angelopoulos, Bresson and Antonioni. Although they have very distinct narrative strategies, there is something that puts Ceylan and Demirkubuz on the same track: an emphasis on the moving image's futility in capturing the peculiar vastness of life. Both filmmakers hold a cinematic look that degrades its very tool and reveals the incapability of cinema in understanding life and its complexities.

In his first masterpiece, *Mayıs Sıkıntısı* (*Clouds of May*, 1999), Nuri Bilge Ceylan reflects the distance between life and its articulation through a meta-narrative that is about his own endeavor to capture emotions and time. *Clouds of May* invents a story based on Ceylan's own experiences while he was shooting his 1997 debut, *Kasaba* (*The Small Town*). *Clouds of May* is about a director's (consequently Ceylan's) endless and inevitably hopeless effort to capture the profoundness of his parents' life in a small town. In an attempt to eliminate the distance and alienation caused by cultural disjunction (between the city and the province), the director makes up a narrative, an imagined continuity that ties his present self to the past. Yet the means he is using to achieve this intention, the presence of camera and sound equipment, becomes the very thing that exalts the distance. The most adequate example is the scene in which the director secretly installs a microphone in his parent's bedroom to record their casual conversation. His attempt fails; the father crashes on the microphone. The scene beautifully sums up Ceylan's approach to cinema: a medium, which reveals (sometimes humorously) its own incapacity to reflect 'reality'.

With *Uzak* (*Distant*, 2002) and *İklimler* (*Climates*, 2006), Ceylan moves from the provinces to the big city, Istanbul. In *Distant*, a photographer who has transformed himself to an urbanite is visited by his relative, who represents his provincial past. The distance between these characters creates an emotional effect by opening different levels of moral conflicts. In his latest film, *Climates*, Ceylan focuses on a dying relationship. Once again he tells a story about not being able to sustain the continuity of an emotional bond, blending humor with the harshest truths and melancholy. Ceylan, who plays in the film along with his wife, Ebru Ceylan, states that *Climates* was "like therapy: You put all the dark, bad sides of yourself into the films, and you get rid of them—or at least control them in a better way." For Ceylan, cinema is a medium that enables him to say things that he cannot dare to articulate in real life circumstances, a medium that lets him delve into his inner reality, his urban gaze (*Clouds of May*), his self-indulgence (*Distant*) and his masculinity (*Climates*).

If Nuri Bilge Ceylan's frames trivialize their characters' pursuit of permanence and purification, Zeki Demirkubuz's captivate them, as if there's nothing else in the world offscreen: no life, no possibilities. Demirkubuz's skepticism diffused in cinematography is thematically confirmed in the beginning of his second film, *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997), when the protagonist who is just released from prison begs the authorities to let him stay in: The world outside is just another prison. For Demirkubuz's wanderers, there is no 'better place' to go *offscreen*. This point explains why Demirkubuz restricts the narration with his main characters' point of view: He's concerned with a self-tormented inner reality.

Perhaps here lies the difference between Ceylan and Demirkubuz. Their discomfort about cinema as a medium reflects itself in two different attitudes: The former places his su bjects—and himself as a director—in an ample and profound life out of reach; the latter imprisons them both ▷


Nuri Bilge Ceylan


Zeki Demirkubuz


Derviş Zaim


Reha Erdem

mentally and in spatial terms, to such an extent that the director, as the author of the work, also seems to be trapped in the same mental vortex.

Demirkubuz's approach denies the idea of auteurism by rejecting the identity of "director," and claiming that he is just a thinker, like any person on the streets who gets trapped in his own mind full of endless contradictions. In his films, the insufficiency of cinema as a medium to reflect truth shows itself in an almost religious attitude, an attitude that considers life as a hopeless quest for truth. Cinema becomes the ground for this futile pursuit, and its failure is reflected through Demirkubuz's visual style, which is unpolished, simple, consciously inelegant, and at times could even be called "ugly."

Destiny—not as an absolute and general concept but through its substitutes—is what Demirkubuz's characters cling to: something (obsession, jealousy, social acceptance) that will trap them in a mental vortex; something that is *there* all the time, something that gives them not the reason but the inevitable cause to continue their lives. *Masumiyet* reflects this state of mind through a vicious circle of obsessive unrequited love. In *Üçüncü Sayfa* (*The Third Page*, 1999), we watch Musa, who, at the threshold of suicide, falls for his neighbor and finds himself in a fatalistic relationship. Just as he begins to think there's no reason to live, his desire becomes his inevitable cause. *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001), a loose adaptation of Albert Camus's "The Stranger", is about a man who is totally indifferent to the world and people that surround him. *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2002) tells the tale of desperate jealousy. Dispassion and passion strangely mirror each other in their extreme forms; they are merely different substitutions for apathy in the net of a mental cage.

In his latest film, *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006), the prequel of *Masumiyet*, Demirkubuz most profoundly and achingly portrays the trip of the mind locked in itself, like a strange road movie in which there are no paths leading anywhere, or a melodrama with no climax or catharsis. In *Bekleme Odası* (*The Waiting Room*, 2003), Demirkubuz plays a director who tries to adapt Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment." Perhaps, like all his protagonists who fail in life, the film self-consciously portrays Demirkubuz's own failure by examining a director's already lost pursuit of truth and honesty. In an interview Demirkubuz comments on the issues he explores in his cinema such as good and evil, truthfulness and deception: "I don't believe that these issues can be understood anyway. Even if they were grasped, it wouldn't do much good."

Derviş Zaim and Reha Erdem: Drifting Memory

It would be impossible to talk about the contemporary independent auteur achievements in Turkey if Derviş Zaim had not shot his debut, *Tabutta Rövaşata* (*Somersault in a Coffin*), in 1996. Shot with virtually no budget, *Somersault in a Coffin* played a huge role in encouraging new directors to make films with very limited financial and technical resources. With its clever and economical elliptic narration, the film proved the possibility of turning disadvantages in the production process into advantages in uniqueness of style. Yet Derviş Zaim chose a different path. Unlike Ceylan or Demirkubuz, he didn't continue working with small film crews and limited finances. This was his way of challenging the auteur tradition. In each film, he tried different methods of production and budget planning, which always went along with the various types of narrative forms he developed. *Somersault in a Coffin* focused on one character, a homeless car thief, an urban nomad who uses cars as temporary homes then brings them back after an hour or so. In sharp contrast, in his second film, *Filler ve Çimen* (*Elephants and Grass*, 2000), Zaim worked with a bigger budget and created an Altmanesque multicharacter piece that blended different stories in a narrative of political conspiracy.

Compared with Ceylan and Demirkubuz's cinema, which directly reflects their authors' ethical viewpoint, Zaim's is much more contextual; he positions his characters in a certain historical context and investigates how this context affects and manipulates


Clouds of May


Somersault in a Coffin


Innocence

their life. In *Elephants and Grass,* shot after the Susurluk Scandal of 1996, which exposed the links between the mafia and the Turkish state, the context is corruption in the government. In *Çamur* (*Mud*, 2003), it is the ongoing political crisis in Cyprus; and in his latest film, *Cenneti Beklerken* (*Waiting for Heaven*, 2006), it is the power struggles in the Ottoman empire. A significant issue that characterizes Zaim's films appears in the main characters' engagement with art. Zaim's way of making "personal cinema" can be distilled to this point: by telling stories about artists trapped in a historical moment and its oppressive social structure, he reveals the story of himself as a director and an artist.

The various interests that underline Zaim's cinema can also be found in another noteworthy filmmaker from the contemporary era: Reha Erdem. If symbolism and contextual emphasis is the signature of Derviş Zaim, Erdem's style lies in his unique touch in editing that has central significance in narrating his stories. With the means of repetition, collision and interconnectedness (visually and aurally), Erdem concentrates on forming a cinematic universe, which has its own logic and language. Beautifully shot in black and white, Erdem's debut *A Ay* (1988) creates a timeless Istanbul stuck between past and present, dream and reality, made-up of fragments of memory and a child's illusions about her mother.

His second film, which came a decade later, *Kaç Para Kaç* (*A Run for Money*, 1999) signals the implementation of Erdem's experimental editing into a more upfront narrative: the story of a man whose life falls apart with the interference of a great amount of money. Yet it is *Korkuyorum Anne* (*Mommy, I'm Scared*, 2004), in which Erdem shows his expertise in utilizing the story not toward a closure, with events waiting to be tied with each other (in other words, merely *découpage*), but as a vessel that contains words and visions waiting to be multiplied and circulated. Along the curved paths of what on the surface appears to be a comedy of errors, he manages to talk about issues such as hidden fragility of men, adults who cannot detach themselves from their mothers, and the simple irony of being human. In his fourth feature, *Beş Vakit* (*Times and Winds*, 2006), Erdem turns his camera to the province, examining the coming-of-age story of three children along with the issues around family roots and patriarchal norms that pass through generations of men and their children. With its meditative plan sequences, *Times and Winds* shows Erdem at his best in creating a timeless mood, and confirms that he can incorporate long shots in his narration style, which usually favors experimental editing.

Although each of these filmmakers values artistic autonomy and freedom, all four are also extremely aware of the weakness, deficiency and deceptiveness of film language and cinematic representation. Hence, what motivates them to carry on filmmaking is this consciousness of the inevitable lack that is inherent in film language rather than the hierarchical power of auteur status. While deploying stories that speak about both Turkey's contemporary social conflicts and its past, these filmmakers operate with not only creativity but also the awareness of its absence. This confrontation is what continues to make them unique. ■


Fate


Fate


Climates


Mommy I'm Scared

SENEM AYTAÇ & GÖZDE ONARAN

Search for Identity in City and Province:

Istanbul and "the Rest"

*"The midpoint of Istanbul is cinema." **
Orhan Veli

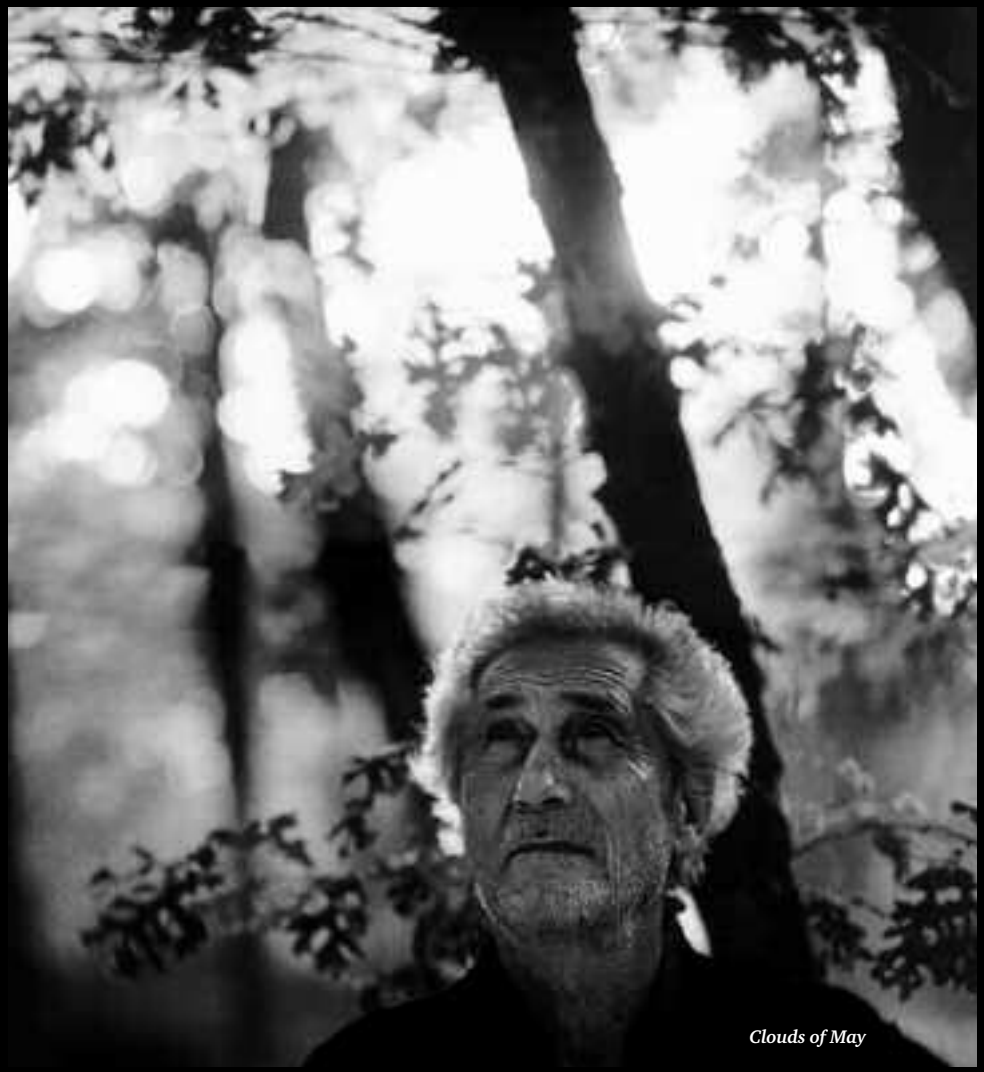
The urban in Turkish cinema refers almost exclusively to Istanbul. Located at the intersection of Europe and Asia, Istanbul has frequently been used as a metaphor—the gate to western civilization, urbanization and modernity. Urbanization and modernization have been perceived as identical processes, and, in the Turkish context, (mis)interpreted as Westernization. Therefore, urbanization has been a highly problematic process for Turkey. Within this context, the notion and image of Istanbul was established as the quintessential urban city, representing all these processes and concepts in cinematic explorations of the new identity of the young Turkish Republic.

In the films of the 1930s, Istanbul, especially the Beyoğlu area, was pictured as highly "civilized" and modern, with elegant gentlemen and chic ladies having fun at nightclubs and socializing at receptions and dinners. Istanbul was "the land made of gold," promising wealth and a good life, which was meant to serve as an example for the rest of the country. People in rural areas were to admire this lifestyle and change their surroundings—as well as themselves—accordingly. Thus, from very early on, in films such as Muhsin Ertuğrul's *Şehvet Kurbanı* (*The Victim of Lust,* 1939), Istanbul and "the rest" have been considered in opposition to each other.

"The rest" has been called *taşra* in Turkish, which can be translated into English as "the province" with a much broader connotation, including provincial towns, villages and even cities: It is simply *everywhere that is not Istanbul.* Anatolia, being literally on the other side of the Bosphorus—on the Asian continent—is defined as the Other of European and/or Western Istanbul. During the early years of the republic, *taşra* was represented as backward and underdeveloped; its people as ignorant and the space as claustrophobic, a site of imprisonment, boredom, deprivation and even depression. Nothing ever happens "there," and never will.

The wide gap between the conceptions of *taşra* and Istanbul led to a drastic increase in the migration rates to the city. However, with the city failing to offer what it promised, representations of Istanbul and *taşra* became much more diverse as well as problematic during the 1960s. Istanbul ceased to ▷

* Orhan Veli (1914–50) is a famous Turkish poet known as "the poet of Istanbul" in Turkish literary culture.



Clouds of May

Istanbul Tales

The Small Town

be a utopian ideal and became the land of crushed dreams. The sentiments of those who suffered most from this disillusionment found their expression in what could be called *migration films*: a genre that became popular during the 1960s and continued until the 1980s. In these films, Istanbul has been disputed and redefined through the eyes of the immigrant. In contrast with earlier films, Istanbul is more than a mere backdrop or setting; it functions as a character, usually as the antagonist. The city becomes a trap where all hope is lost and one has to betray his/her values to be able to survive: a crime capital in which men are pushed into illegal activity and women fall into prostitution. The impressive panoramic views of the Bosphorus are replaced by deserted storage spaces of factories, or the dark and dirty back alleys of Beyoğlu populated by fallen people. *Taşra*, on the other hand, is a site of nostalgic longing that epitomizes innocence and purity.

One of the most widely discussed films from this period is Halit Refiğ's *Gurbet Kuşları* (*Birds of Exile*, 1964). The film tells the story of a family that migrates from Maraş to Istanbul by selling all they own, in hope of getting their share from the abundance of wealth the city offers. However, after a great deal of hardship and sorrow, the family accepts defeat and decides to return. Similar patterns emerge in many films, such as L. Ömer Akad's migration trilogy, *Gelin* (*The Bride*, 1973), *Düğün* (*The Wedding*, 1973) and *Diyet* (*Blood Money*, 1974). Migrating from the province, the characters struggle with and within the city. Their stories are infused with a sense of conflict between urban and rural morality, and urbanization is eventually conceived as being identical to corruption. This underlying conflict manifests itself in the immigrants' insistence to preserve their traditional values, and their stubbornness in trying to reestablish the traditional life they have abandoned, in the city. In most narratives, though, they eventually are defeated by the all-consuming city: the immigrants either get assimilated, or they pack up and leave.

During the 1960s and 1970s, shantytowns began to appear in Istanbul. Put up and populated by immigrants, these places gave rise to heated debates: urban elites were blaming the immigrants for turning the city into a *taşra* space, holding them responsible for corruption and the increase in crime. This social phenomenon further widened the gap between the urban and the *taşra*. But with *taşra* now within Istanbul, the point of fracture shifted to notions of origin or birthplace. Embodied by the opposition in space, class conflict became more visible than ever. Most films from this period set in shantytowns try to reconcile the hostility toward these places by representing rural people as warm, honest, merciful, cheerful and having a strong sense of solidarity; however, such depictions usually don't go beyond a romanticized view of *taşra* and its people.

Breaking away from the mainstream tradition of Yeşilçam, social realist directors such as Yılmaz Güney dealt with the harsh realities of rural life and immigration by portraying characters who suffered from poverty, social injustice and marginalization as well as alienation. The most widely discussed films from this period are *Susuz Yaz* (*Dry Summer*, Metin Erksan, 1964), *Hazal* (Ali Özgentürk, 1979), *Yol* (*The Way,* Şerif Gören, 1982), *Sürü* (*The Herd*, Zeki Ökten, 1978) and *Hakkari'de Bir Mevsim* (*A Season in Hakkari*, Erden Kıral, 1983). These films do not simply represent *taşra* as the Other of Istanbul, but deal with it in its own right. Most importantly, they establish *taşra* as an actual place, rather then a romanticized and idealized locus existing only in the imagination of urbanites. Furthermore, while earlier films, even those that romanticize *taşra*, never actually depict the place itself, these films make *taşra* visible by shooting on location in *taşra* settings.

The tendency to romanticize *taşra* reemerged in contemporary Turkish cinema during the 1990s. In films such as *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2000), *Dar Alanda Kısa Paslaşmalar* (*Offside*, Serdar Akar, 2000), *O da Beni Seviyor* (*Summer Love,* Barış Pirhasan, 2001) and *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, Çağan Irmak, 2005), special attention was given to provincial life. Indirectly these films function as a critique on the transformations that ▷

Confession

Times and Winds

Turkish society went through in hope of becoming modern and Westernized. However, there is also an ambivalence in their manner: While being nostalgic about *taşra*, the films never propose a definitive return to *taşra*. In particular, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's black-and-white film *Kasaba* (*The Small Town*, 1997) and Reha Erdem's *Beş Vakit* (*Times and Winds*, 2006) are significant in this respect. On the one hand the beautiful, highly stylized cinematography of both films aestheticize *taşra,* while their charming simplicity and enticingly mellow pacing romanticize *taşra* life. Yet *Times and Winds* implicates *taşra* as a place of deprivation by associating it with a lethargic state of prolonged childhood, while *The Small Town* presents it as a claustrophobic space of entrapment. These films reflect a longing for a home, an identity and a sense of belonging, all of which have been lost and may never be retrieved. The awareness of the impossibility of a return to such a life invokes a feeling of being lost, or of being stuck in-between: being neither completely urban nor rural, western nor eastern, modern nor traditional.

Certain contemporary films that deal with this in-betweenness focus on urban(ized) characters who go through an identity crisis, trying to conceal, even repress their *taşra* past. Films such as *Uzak* (*Distant*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002), *Mustafa Hakkında Herşey* (*All About Mustafa*, Çağan Irmak, 2004) and *İtiraf* (*Confession*, Zeki Demirkubuz, 2002) thematize such a renunciation of the *taşra* past. *Distant* portrays two characters that mirror each other: Mahmut, who supposedly has now become an urbanite, and his relative from the village, Yusuf, who has just arrived in Istanbul. Yusuf functions as the personification of *the return of the repressed* who constantly reminds Mahmut of what he has been trying to deny: that he too actually comes from *taşra*, that he is not purely urban.

In the late 1980s, Beyoğlu once again began to attract the attention of directors. This time, however, the interest was due to its sordid, decayed texture: Beyoğlu became the dwelling place of prostitutes and drug addicts, making it, for certain directors, the object of the romantic fascination. For instance, Yavuz Turgul has been drawn to the allure of Beyoğlu and its subcultures. In *Muhsin Bey* (1987), *Eşkiya* (*The Bandit*, 1996) and *Gönül Yarası* (*Lovelorn*, 2005) he intriguingly depicts Beyoğlu as the battleground for the conflicting values of *taşra* and Istanbul. Various other films, such as *Dönersen Islık Çal* (*Whistle If You Come Back*, Orhan Oğuz, 1993), *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* (Atıf Yılmaz, 1993) and *Ağır Roman* (*Cholera Street*, Mustafa Altıoklar, 1997), also portray the urban milieu of the marginalized in an aestheticized manner, asserting them as grounds where various subcultures flourish. Ümit Ünal's 2005 project *Anlat İstanbul* (*Istanbul Tales*) brought together five directors to shoot stories set in Istanbul's marginalized areas. The film portrays Istanbul from the vantage point of its neglected inhabitants, shedding light on their stories, as well as the seedy neighborhoods, run-down apartments, even sewers they dwell in. Such films usually have an antiestablishment stance and critique the mainstream culture, which has become intolerant especially toward ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, transsexuals, leftists, etc.

Since Istanbul, as all big cities, is ever-changing and rapidly growing, it seems almost impossible to comprehend it as a unified and homogenous whole. Therefore, its representations are also diverse, ranging from films such as *Organize İşler* (*Magic Carpet Ride*, 2005), which advertises Istanbul as a tourist attraction, to *Hayatımın Kadınısın* (2006), which evokes a sense of nostalgia for Istanbul of "the good old days." Furthermore, diaspora directors such as Fatih Akın and Ferzan Özpetek have been adding their takes to the manifold depictions of Istanbul by rendering it a mysterious, erotic and exotic city. Contemporary Turkish cinema reveals particular tendencies in the depiction of *taşra* while it manifests Istanbul as an elusive and vast space/place that can be comprehended only in pieces and fragments. ■

BERKE GÖL

Faces of the Nation in Contemporary Turkish Cinema

As Turkish cinema gained momentum after the mid 1990s, there was also a steady increase in the number of films touching on political issues. After the 1980 military coup, both economic difficulties in the film sector and legal constraints in the cultural sphere meant very few political films were made, and even fewer of them were popular with audiences. *Eşkıya* (*The Bandit*, 1996), directed by Yavuz Turgul, was a landmark in this sense. The film—which openly touched on Turkey's foremost issue, the Kurdish problem, via the story of an old Kurdish bandit and his search for his lost love in metropolitan Istanbul after many years of imprisonment—was both a critical hit and a record-breaking box-office success. Since then, there has been an increase in films that deal with political issues, though very few achieved simultaneous critical and box-office success.
In this new period of relative abundance, especially since the year 2000, one can observe two main tracks in contemporary Turkish film: individual efforts by independent directors focusing on Turkey's unresolved issues, and mainstream political films. Independent directors bring in their distinctive views and try to present an in-depth discussion of the issues they handle, while in mainstream cinema, the general tendency is toward reproducing the dominant ideology.
Since the late 1990s, the Kurdish issue has been taken up in a number of independent films: *Güneşe Yolculuk* (*Journey to the Sun*, 1998), by Yeşim Ustaoğlu, focused on discrimination against Kurds through the story of two friends, one Turkish and one Kurdish; *Fotoğraf* (*The Photograph*, 2001), by Kazım Öz, told the story of a Turkish man and a Kurdish man who were about to join the opposite sides of the war; the documentary *Dûr* (*Uzak*, 2005), again by Öz, reflected on the solitude of an evacuated Kurdish village; *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (*Hejar*, 2001), by Handan İpekçi, revolved around the friendship between a Turkish judge and a Kurdish girl; and Uğur Yücel's *Yazı Tura* (*Toss-Up*, 2004) examined the after effects of military service in southeastern Turkey. Other issues of importance regarding the state of the nation were also of interest for directors with a critical approach: the exceptionally high taxes forced on minorities during World War II in Tomris Giritlioğlu's *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* (*Mrs. Salkım's Diamonds*, 1999); Greek migration from the Black Sea region during World War I in Yeşim Ustaoğlu's *Bulutları Beklerken* (*Waiting for the Clouds,* 2004); and the issue of Cyprus, a constant source of conflict between Turkey and the European Union, in Cypriot-Turkish director ▷

Derviş Zaim's *Çamur* (*Mud*, 2003). What these films and those mentioned earlier have in common is the fact that they take on subjects that have rarely been discussed on screen until very recently, and the directors' determination to deviate from the official story. As a consequence of their bold attempts, although they received international praise through festival screenings and prestigious awards around the world, many of these films had difficulties in terms of domestic screening opportunities, and some had to struggle with censorship.

Journey to the Sun is significant because it was made at a time when the Kurdish issue was still largely a taboo. Images of the evacuated village, markings on Kurdish people's houses, discrimination against Kurds (and those who look like Kurds) and torture by the police made it an instant cause of controversy. The immediate response was to label the film as antagonistic to the Turkish nation, but some called attention to the humanism in the film's attempt to discuss the issue. *Toss-Up*, made six years later and in a relatively liberal period, used popular faces and took up the issue along with the problem of masculinity and the psychological damage the state causes in individuals. These two films represent the divergent aspects and the changing conditions of the Kurdish issue. Though all these independent films still remain largely as individual efforts, the growing tendency to question national identity and the assumptions of the nation-state should not be overlooked.
On the other end of the spectrum, mainstream cinema rarely questions national identity. In popular political films, national identity is almost always taken for granted. References to founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish War of Independence and national symbols like the flag; dialogues glorifying the Turkish nation; and gags and jokes about being Turkish all serve to cover up the difference between ethnic Turkish identity and Turkish citizenship, functioning to confirm the illusion of the official ideology that everyone living in Turkey is ethnically Turkish. This is the case for most of the films that top the box-office charts.

In popular Turkish cinema of recent years, it is possible to trace two distinct tendencies among films dealing with political issues. On the one hand, there are action films like *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (*The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq,* 2006) and *Son Osmanlı: Yandım Ali* (*The Last Ottoman: Yandım Ali*, 2006), telling tales of imaginary national heroes; on the other, comedy flicks like *Maskeli Beşler: Irak* (2006) and *Emret Komutanım: Şah Mat* (2006), which are presented as pure entertainment with no political aspirations. In both categories, nationalist ideology becomes manifest sometimes through the glorification of protagonists, sometimes through plot development or didactic dialogues.

In these mainstream films, nationalism is often an excuse for the actions of the protagonists. Violation of international law, secret operations by shady organizations and ruthless killings are shown to be legitimate or forgiveable as long as they are for a "sublime" cause like avenging a certain hostile act by the "enemy" or saving the nation's honor. The most blatant examples to this can be seen in the openly anti-American *The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq,* which is the sequel to a popular television series about Polat Alemdar, a fictitious ex–secret agent who works on his own. The film version, which made headlines like "In Turkish Movie, Americans Kill Innocents" worldwide upon its release in early 2006, is about the avenging of "the Hood Event," in which American troops imprisoned 11 Turkish soldiers in Northern Iraq in July 2003, covering their heads with sacks. The incident gave rise to a diplomatic crisis, and it was widely considered by the local media as an insult to Turkey and the Turkish army. The revenge taken in this film had a cathartic effect on its viewers, offering an imaginary restoration for the army's—and the nation's—honor. The film ended up the biggest box-office hit in the history of Turkey, selling over 4 million tickets.
In the historical action movie *The Last Ottoman: Yandım Ali*, the story takes place in British-occupied Istanbul of the 1910s. The protagonist, Yandım Ali, is a selfish hoodlum until he meets Mustafa Kemal, already a national hero at the time for his legendary performance in the Battle of the ▻


Journey to the Sun


Toss-up


Maskeli Beşler: Irak


The Walley of the Wolves: Iraq


The Last Ottoman: Yandım Ali

Dardanelles. The film portrays the English and the French as cowards and Istanbul's ethnic minorities as treacherous foreigners among the Turks, providing Yandım Ali with an "amusing" adventure fighting against them, and it ends with the beginning of Turkey's war of independence. Both *The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* and *The Last Ottoman: Yandım Ali* legitimize a hostile approach toward foreigners and Turkey's minorities—Kurds, Armenians, Istanbul's Greek population, etc. *Maskeli Beşler: Irak,* which adapts a popular film series of the 1960s to a comic adventure in present-day Iraq, and *Emret Komutanım: Şah Mat,* which is the film version of a TV series set in the army, have humorous stories with occasional, abrupt dramatic moments emphasizing love of country, sacredness of the flag and idolization of military uniform. Regardless of their genre or visual style, all these mainstream films support and reproduce nationalist ideology.

In the rapidly evolving sociopolitical circumstances of the world in general and the Middle East in particular, Turkey's national image inevitably changes. The political atmosphere in Turkey in the 2000s and the fresh escalation of nationalism paves the way for nationalist blockbusters, but also for critical independent films. There are other critical films that have grown out of this political climate—like *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, 2005) and *Beynelmilel* (*International*, 2006)—that do not directly address the problems of the nation but nevertheless touch upon Turkey's vital issues. The different faces of nation and nationalism continue to manifest themselves in the realm of Turkish cinema. ■

ÖVGÜ GÖKÇE & GÖZDE ONARAN

Film Culture in Contemporary Turkey

Contemporary Turkish film culture has regenereated itself in various ways since the 1990s. The gradual increase in the number of Turkish films produced each year, along with the audience's growing interest in seeing big-budget productions, has created an attention to new marketing and public relations strategies, such as using billboards in urban centers, wider promotion efforts on private TV channels and targeting new fields of profit such as film soundtracks. *Eşkıya* (*The Bandit*, 1996) was a turning point in this respect. As the first Turkish box-office hit of the 1990s, *The Bandit* turned into a social phenomenon due to its word-of-mouth marketing and drew great attention with the reopening of an old movie theater in Urfa, a southeastern city where a part of the film's story takes place (the theater was closed afterward, though, due to high rent).

Although *The Bandit* and a couple of other box-office hits created an expectation for a dynamic local film scene, the dominance of foreign films and corporate distribution companies continued for another decade. Theaters have grown in accordance with the globalized culture and capital. Numerous multiplexes emerged in new urban shopping malls while some old and established movie theaters lost attention and were abandoned. The success of big-budget Turkish films such as *Kahpe Bizans* (2000) and *Vizontele* (2001), which nearly matched foreign films at the box office, influenced the distribution scene as well. The popularity of these films mostly depended on stars who were well established on television, thus opening a channel for human resources and money to flow back and forth between TV and cinema. Some international companies associated with the distribution of foreign films, such as Warner Bros. or UIP, became interested in distributing big-budget Turkish films. Meanwhile, established local companies expanded their business by getting into different branches of film production. For instance, Fida Film, which has been the sector's leading marketing company for more than 40 years, has started producing Turkish box-office hits in the last couple of years. At the same time, fairly old and leading Turkish distributors such as Umut Sanat and Özen Film, which also run movie theaters in big cities, have also produced a couple of Turkish titles since the late 1990s.

A significant change in the distribution scene occurred in the last few years with the emergence of new players that target audiences for lower-budget international films. Established one after ▷

the other in 2001 and 2002, Chantier Films and Bir Film have brought a new approach to the range of international films distributed to Turkish audiences. Founded by a small group of cinephiles, Bir Film remarkably expanded its position in the market over the last couple of years by distributing huge numbers and copies of films. Bir Film focuses on independent American films, distinguished examples from European cinema and critically acclaimed titles in film festivals worldwide. Increasing the circulation of films by buying TV and DVD sales rights, the company brought in films from various countries, ranging from Korea and Iran to Japan and Romania, and reached audiences particularly in Istanbul and Ankara.

The evidence of a growing film culture in movie theaters has culminated in the expansion of film festivals. The longest established and most prominent festival in Turkey is the Istanbul International Film Festival, which is organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts. The festival started as a film week in 1982 and rapidly grew into a large event consisting of a national and an international competition, plus various special sections with screenings of classics as well as contemporary films, documentaries and shorts. The festival also introduced international organizations such as Eurimages and EFDO to the Turkish film market. The festival of greatest interest for the national film market is the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, which is supported by the Ministry of Culture and, for the last three years, organized by TÜRSAK (the Turkish Foundation for Cinema & Audiovisual Culture). The festival is presenting the third International Eurasia Film Festival and hosting Eurasia Film Market—so far the only film market in Turkey, now in its second year. Particularly with the developing Turkish film industry in recent years and the increase in the festival's prizes, the Golden Orange Film Festival has become indispensable for all Turkish directors, who prefer Antalya as the venue for their premieres. Other significant national festivals include the Ankara International Film Festival and the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival, which also have competition sections for national short films. For short films specifically, though, the most prominent fest is the Istanbul International Short Film Festival, initiated by IFSAK, the established foundation for photography and film more than 40 years.

Next to these fairly big festivals, the emergence of some smaller festivals with thematic focuses and unconventional content have gained interest in big cities. A rather new event, !f Istanbul AFM International Independent Film Festival is important because it gives priority to independent and alternative films. Each year the festival includes controversial sections such as "Sex on Screen" or "Akt!fist." It is also noteworthy that !f Istanbul is currently the only festival in Turkey that has a rainbow section, screening LGBT films. The first (and so far the last) gay and lesbian film festival of Turkey, OutIstanbul, was held in 2004. After a group of nationalists threatened to bomb the movie theaters, screenings were held under police security. However, the festival was not given permission by the artistic activities commission the following year. Two festivals that aim to increase women's visibility and participation in cinema are the Flying Broom Women's Film Festival and the Filmmor Women's Film Festival. Flying Broom is the first, established in 1998 by the NGO of the same name. The festival is a member of the European Women's Film Festivals circuit and initiates cultural projects in addition to the festival. Filmmor, on the other hand, has been organized by the Filmmor Women's Cooperative for six years. In addition to most of these festivals, which show some documentaries, the Association for Documentary Filmmakers has been organizing the most significant event for documentaries for the last 10 years: 1001 Documentary Film Festival. Moreover, the private sector's increased interest in arts and culture also contributed to the increase in festivals with a thematic focus, such as the Akbank Short Film Festival, sponsored by Akbank, or the Bonus Comedy Films Festival, sponsored by Garanti Bank. More thematic festivals include the Istanbul International Meeting of Cinema & History and the Istanbul International Children's Film Festival. ▻

Vizontele Tuuba

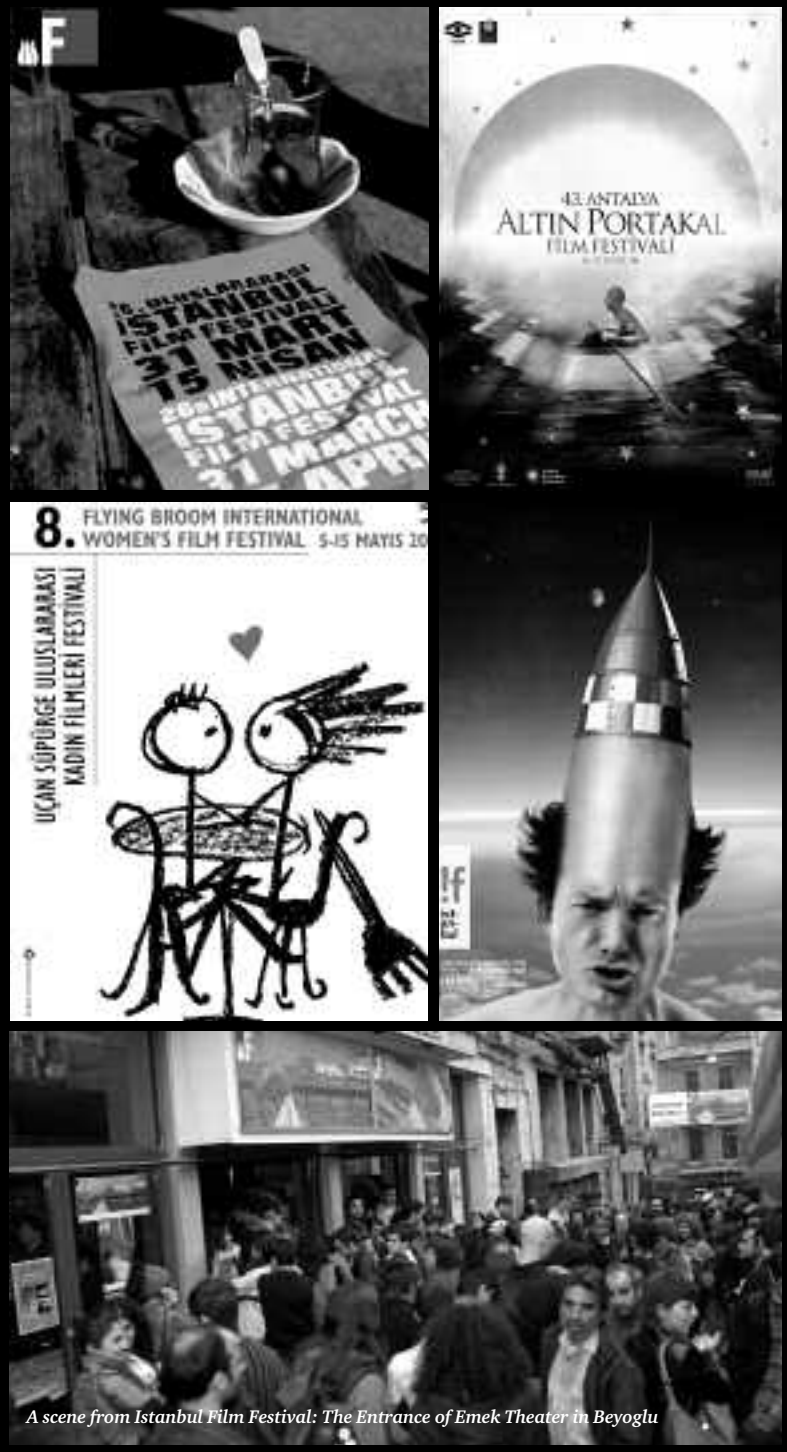
The Magician

In recent years, the government has increased its support of filmmakers and film festivals through the Ministry of Culture, which offers funds for script development, film production and organizing festivals. Many municipalities are also becoming a source of significant financial support for local festivals and for filmmakers inaugurating film culture in central Anatolia and the eastern parts of Turkey. The Festival of European Films on Wheels is organized by the Ankara Cinema Association, and it screens classic and contemporary European films in Turkish cities such as Izmir, Bursa, Samsun, Kayseri, Malatya, Gaziantep and Kars. A very significant initiative in southeastern Turkey is Diyarbakır Film Days, during which films shot by local people in neighboring cities such as Batman, Mardin and Elazığ are screened. Organized by the local center for arts and culture, the festival presents panels and workshops held by national film critics and professionals, with a focus on short films.

Film culture in contemporary Turkey is mostly focused around the youth, with an increasing number of short-film competitions or screenings supported by universities, private companies and state-financed institutions. Looking at the contents of these events, one can observe a growing interest in documentary and experimental filmmaking.

The interest in cinema is cultivated mostly in film clubs of public universities, with regular screenings and workshops. Boğaziçi University Mithat Alam Film Center is an exceptional example, with its regular screenings, panels, workshops, seminars and publications, as well as the Turkish Cinema Oral History Project, initiated mostly by student volunteers. The center has been organizing the Hisar Short Film Festival since 2005 and releasing a DVD of the selected competition films.

And perhaps the most prominent change that has occurred in the last several years is the immense expansion of the number of people interested in writing about film. With the emergence of a great number of websites on film, such as Beyazperde.com and Sinema.com; international magazines that have started Turkish branches, such as *Empire* and *Total Film*; and a couple of independent film magazines, among which *Altyazı* constitutes the most acclaimed example, young people who were not at first experienced in film criticism have found grounds to write about film. Contemporary Turkish film culture is witnessing the rise of a new generation that is putting effort into different sectors of film production, organization and film criticism, thus creating one of the most dynamic phases yet for cinema in Turkey. ■



A scene from Istanbul Film Festival: The Entrance of Emek Theater in Beyoglu

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Övül Durmuşoğlu. Curator and critic. She loves to deal with visual arts through her cinematic memory. She was among the curators of the Nightcomers Programme for the 10th International Istanbul Biennale, and just received an international award for young curators from Italy. Published in magazines N. Paradoxa (London), Paletten (Gothenburg), Kulturrise (Vienna), Muhtelif (Istanbul/Berlin). She lives in Istanbul and Vienna.

Övgü Gökçe. Scholar and film critic. She has been working on Turkish cinema and international cinemas for several years. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Ohio University School of Interdisciplinary Arts, and writing her dissertation on historiography of sentiments in contemporary Turkish film. Her first short film Uyku Sonra (Sleep and Then, 2004) is widely screened in national and international film festivals.

Berke Göl. Film critic. Studied psychology in Boğaziçi University. Received a master's degree in cultural studies in Istanbul Bilgi University with a thesis on Kemalism in literature. He writes, edits and translates for catalogues. He has been working for Altyazı Magazine since 2003.

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

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