TEARS OF LOVE: EGYPTIAN CINEMA IN TURKEY
(1938-1950)

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When the movie *Domu’ al-hubb* (Tears of Love) (Turkish title: *Aşkın Gözyaşları*) (Muhammad Karim, 1936) was first released in Istanbul’s Şehzadebaşı district, the movie theatre’s windows were broken and the traffic was jammed [because of the crowd]. The audience, who had not been able to watch any Turkish films for the last three years, loved this type of movie, which was not much different from those made by our theatre artists, and starring some Arab singers, and people wearing the fez and local dress (Özön 1962a, p. 760).

The Gala Performance

The movie in question was a musical melodrama starring famous Egyptian singer Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab.1 It was first released in November 1938 in Istanbul. As film historian Nihat Özön recalls, its screenings were highly sensational. Thanks to this popularity, it was a box-office hit and was re-released several times throughout Turkey. In its first few months alone, the film, screened in three movie theatres in Istanbul, was attended by some 270,000 people.2 This was the beginning of a new era, as the distributors started searching for more Egyptian films to screen in Turkey. Abd al-Wahhab, whose appeal had already been proven, was the leader in this race. Three of his films, *Yahya al-hubb* (Yaşasın Aşk) (Long Live Love) (1937); *al-Warda al-

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1 Abd al-Wahhab (?-1991), Egyptian singer and composer, who acted in seven films between 1933 and 1946, considered as the greatest musician of his day. For more information see Armbrust 1996 and 2000, el-Shawan 1979 and Abdel-Latif 1981.

2 The movie was screened for 9 weeks in Ferah theatre (Şehzadebaşı) (Cantek 2000, 33). Another sign of the movie’s success is the appropriation of its title by a number of Turkish films in some cases with different plots: *Aşkın Gözyaşları* (aka Şöhr Ömer) (Nejat Saydam, 1959); *Aşkın Gözyaşları* (Zafer Davutoğlu, 1966); *Aşkın Gözyaşları* (Orhan Elmas, 1979). According to scriptwriter Erdoğan Tunağ, his *Çilekçe* (Osman Seden, 1978) was also inspired from *Domu’ al-hubb* (Özök 1991, pp. 154-155).

New Perspectives on Turkey, Spring, 30, pp. 55-52
beyda (Beyaz Gül) (The White Rose) (1933); Mamnu al-hubb (Mennu 'Aşk / Yusuf 'Aşk) (Forbidden Love) (1942), all directed by Muhammad Karim, were screened in Turkey. They were followed by films featuring other famous singers such as Umm Kulthum, Layla Murad and Farid al-Atrash. Even Ipek film company, which distributed mainly American and European films, imported some Egyptian films. Its main competitor, Lale Film, used all the diplomatic means at its disposal to get access to Egyptian films.

Apparently, the company’s owner Cemil Filmer managed to fly to Cairo with a British courier flight despite the fierce conditions of World War II, thanks to his strong connections with the British consulate in Istanbul (Filmer 1984, p. 184-85). The gap left by the lack of local film production was soon filled by intense demand for Egyptian films. It is estimated that some 130 Egyptian films were screened in Turkey between 1938-48 (Öztuna 1976b, p. 341). In Ankara alone, 84 Egyptian films were released during the same period (Çantek 2000, p. 34). The number of Turkish films produced during this ten-year period was only 53 - and of these, 20 were shot in 1947-48. Egyptomania spread to the whole country, and as one writer observes, “Egyptian films were only popular in big cities whereas Egyptian films were shown for weeks even in small towns” (Öztuna 1976b, p. 341).

In this paper, I would like to concentrate on the Egyptian films that were distributed in Turkey during the period between 1938 and 1950, and the success of Domu' al-hubb, which led to an unprecedented increase in the number of Egyptian films screened in Turkey. I will also be evaluating the specific historical, political and social contexts in which these films emerged and the different discourses they generated. By focusing on the cross-cultural reception of Egyptian cinema in Turkey, the paper aims to define the role of international films in the construction of national identity and national cinema.

Setting the Scene

In the 1910s and 1920s, Istanbul, particularly its Pera district, was the most significant market for films in Turkey. However, things started to change in the 1930s as new movie theatres were launched not only in Istanbul, but also in other cities, and within Istanbul in other districts besides Pera (See Tables 1 and 2). In 1948, the number of movie theatres in Turkey had reached 228, up from 129 in 1932. A new audience that had different expectations and tastes from the previous one was emerging. Yet, by and large, cinema was still an urban entertainment form. According to the 1940 census, only 6.4 per cent of the total population of 18 million lived in cities with a population of 100,000 or more.

Table 1: Number of Movie Theatres and Estimated Seating Capacity (1932)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Seating Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izmir</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskisehir</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adana</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cities</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Malik 1933, pp 12-15

Table 2: Number of Movie Theatres and Estimated Seating Capacity (1948)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Indoor theatres</th>
<th>Open-air theatres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Seating Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izmir</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cities</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>65,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>99,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Trade in Commodities - Motion Pictures and Equipment, vol. VI, part 4, no. 21, 1948, p. 2

In the 1930s, the Turkish film industry was still weak, lacking any support or state subsidies. The only film production company, Ipek Film, suspended all production between 1935 and 1938 as the box office figures for its films were far from satisfying. Its sole director, Muhsin Eratlı, had resumed his job as the artistic director of Istanbul’s Municipality Theatre. The last Turkish movie to be screened
was *Batakli Damat Kızı Aysel* (Aysel, the Girl from the Swamphy House) (Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1935). Both the distributors and exhibitors had been complaining about the levy on ticket prices, arguing that audiences were dropping drastically because ticket prices were too high. Eventually, the government accepted their complaints and the tax was reduced from 33 per cent to ten per cent (Filmer 1984, pp.149-50). It was this reduction that encouraged the executives of İpek Film to start filming a new movie, in order to “bring Turkish cinema out of death,” according to producer İhsan İpekçi (1938, p.8). However, Muhsin Ertuğrul’s new film *Aynaroz Kadısı* (The Judge of Aynaroz, 1938) would be another flop and a disaster for İpek Film. Critics slammed the film, and the government banned its circulation outside Turkey. The popular film journal *Yıldız* went as far as to support this decision: “Both the theme and the direction are primitive; besides it includes some scenes involving extreme nudity. Thus, it is quite difficult to comment positively on this movie. In fact, the government acted quite rightly by prohibiting the film’s screening abroad” (cited by Özgüç 1992, p.16). However, the main reason for the failure of *Aynaroz Kadısı* was most probably the unprecedented success of *Domu’al-hubb*, as the Turkish movie was to be screened only a week after this successful release.

**Cinema Goes to War**

Hollywood’s overwhelming dominance in Europe and Turkey was interrupted at the end of the 1930s. German expansionism and growing hostilities in Europe were affecting film traffic. At the same time, awareness about the role of indigenous film industries was growing. In 1939, American productions were excluded from Germany and Italy; however three major American studios—MGM, Paramount and Fox—still kept their German branches open (Segrave 1997, p.105). In addition, some European countries had earlier introduced restrictive measures against US companies. In December 1942, unoccupied France and French North Africa closed its territories to American films. The entire European market was closed to American movies, and major routes for sending films to other countries were also blocked. In 1942, American films could only be shown in Turkey, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Spain and Portugal in Europe (“U.S. Films Barred From Vichy’s Areas”, New York Times, August 6th, 1942). However, the number of new American releases in Turkey was highly limited, and cinemas were screening pre-war films, the old copies of which were often in very poor condition.

Paramount’s vice president John W. Hicks described the war conditions as “the biggest problem the film industry has ever faced” (cited by Segrave 1997, p.120). In the meantime, Turkey was suffering severe economic strains. High military expenditure left little room for other spending, and there were shortages of raw materials and commercial goods. An inflation rate of 350 per cent between 1939 and 1945 drove real urban income down. Wartime speculation and profiteering in the black market increased due to the lack of effective tax assessment (Keyder 1987, pp.110-12). The Turkish press blamed non-Muslim businessmen for all these problems, and launched a campaign against them. The result was the introduction of the Capital Levy on religious and ethnic minorities in November 1942. Minorities had to pay up to ten times as much as Muslims and defaulters were sent to labor camps. The tax, which was abolished in March 1944, affected not only the non-Muslim exhibitors and distributors, but also the movie-going non-Muslim society in Istanbul. Cemil Filmer comments that the Capital Levy led to one of the three most severe crises of the Turkish film industry.

Under these conditions, exhibitors attempted to fill their screening schedules by every means possible. Films distributed by foreign consulates in Istanbul were one of these means. However, in cautiously neutral Turkey, film screening was also a delicate matter, and only a few of these movies were approved by the censors. The Turkish government closed the newspaper *Vatan* for ninety days for publishing a front-page picture of Charlie Chaplin imitating Hitler, from the movie *The Great Dictator* (1940). An official’s reaction to the paper’s editor expresses the prevailing feeling: “Don’t you know that Hitler is mad? Is it right to provoke a madman when he has large armed forces close to your frontier?” (Rubin 1991, p.146). Unable to find any new releases in Paris, movie theatre owner Cemil Filmer traveled to Axis countries Italy and Hungary in search of new films to screen (Filmer 1984,

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4 First shown on December 1st, 1938 at İpek and Saray movie theatres (Gökmen 1991, p.63).

5 For further information see Ökte 1987.

6 The other two being the introduction of Latin script in 1928 and the economic crisis of 1939 (Filmer 1984, p.169).

7 The movie could only be screened in 1949 in Turkey.
The Oriental Wind

As the above-mentioned report noted, films with Oriental settings, whether made in Egypt or Hollywood, were extremely popular. Even in the silent period, among the biggest box-office hits were Rudolph Valentino’s silent classics The Sheikh (Şeyh Ahmet) (George Melford, 1921) and The Son of the Sheikh (Şeyhin Oğlu) (George Fitzmaurice, 1926). His successor, Ramon Novarro, continued the popularity of the genre: Mata Hari (George Fitzmaurice, 1931), starring Novarro with Greta Garbo, The Barbarian (1933) which was retitled as Şeyin Aşkı (The Lover of the Sheikh), and The Sheikh Steps Out (also titled Şeyh Ahmet) (Irving Pichel, 1937) were extremely popular. The latter was first screened in January 1939 in Istanbul, a few weeks after Dom’al-hubb, and became a strong competitor. These movies also inspired a number of Turkish films with similar titles: Şeyh Ahmed’in Gözdesi (Sheik Ahmed’s Favorite) (Çetin Karamanbey, 1955), Şeyh Ahmed’in Torunu (Sheik Ahmed’s Grandson) (Nuri Ergün, 1962) and Şeyh Ahmet (Ertem Göreç, 1968).

In 1939, yet another film with an oriental setting made its way to Turkey. This was a German release in two parts: Der Tiger von Eschnapur (The Tiger of Eschnapur, released in Turkey under the title Mihracenin Gözdesi (The Maharaj’s Favorite)) (Richard Eischberg, 1938) and Das Indische Grabmal (Indian Tomb) (Hint Mezart) (Richard Eischberg, 1938). The film, starring Dutch actor Fritz von Dongen—who later went to Hollywood and was renamed Philip Dorn—was one of UFA’s most expensive projects, and was highly successful both in Europe and across the Atlantic.8 Another successful German product was Ivan Mosjoukine’s White Devil (1930), based on Leo Tolstoy’s Hadji Murad. These films were so popular that they were re-released and screened throughout Turkey for many years.

What lies behind the success of these films in Turkey? Did the Turkish audiences identify with “the gaze of the West (whether embodied by Western male/female character or by Western actor/actress masquerading as an Oriental)” (Shohat 1997, pp. 31-32) in these films, or did they feel differently? It is quite possible that with their spectacular setting and elaborate technique, these films might have offered means of identification and pleasure for the viewers. But more importantly, they were modified significantly to suit the cultural preferences of their target audience with such strategies like local musical accompaniment and dubbing. For example, Turkish distributors replaced Alberto Columbo’s original soundtrack for The Sheikh Steps Out with that of Cevdet Kazan (Cantek 2000, p. 35). In a similar fashion, the Turkish version of The Barbarian (1933) included the local soundtrack of composer Saadettin Kaynak (Mirkelam 2000, p. 27) and Der Tiger von Eschnapur that of Mesut Cemil (Öztuna 1969, p. 125). Furthermore, dubbing helped these films’ popularity. For example, dubbing actor Ferdi Tayfur’s Sheikh, speaking Turkish with an Arabic accent, in The Sheikh Steps Out, was much loved (Mirkelam 2000, pp. 26-27). The same strategies would also be used for Egyptian films, and as a result they would be transformed into a completely different product.

Music Policy and Egyptian Films

Egyptian films made their entry in this environment, when the movie industry was still weak and a new group of spectators was...

8 The movie was a remake of Das Indische Grabmal (two parts) (Joe May, 1921). The same story was filmed yet another time in 1958 by Fritz Lang who wrote the script for the 1921 version.
emerging. International movies released in Turkey were far from catering for the tastes of this new audience. Thus, those films set in the “Orient” were altered significantly through dubbing and a local soundtrack. In the same way, Egyptian films were dubbed and their original soundtracks replaced by local ones. This gave rise to a new industry of musical adaptation. In some cases, Turkish lyrics were written for the original songs, and then these were performed by local singers, and lip-synchronized. More frequently, Turkish artists composed original songs—sometimes inspired by film soundtracks—and inserted them. These original songs are believed to have contributed to the Egyptian films’ success. For example, Hafiz Bahanettin’s (Sesylmaz) “new” score for Domu’ al-hubb was a best-selling record in the 1940s. Another successful “re-arranger” for Egyptian film music was Saadettin Kaynak, who was credited as the musical director for many Egyptian films (Özuma 1976a, p. 332). On some rare occasions, although dubbed into Turkish, a film’s original soundtrack was retained. For example, Unm Kulturh’s first film Widad (1936) [Turkish title: Vedad (Yanik Esire) (Piteous Slave)] was presented in “Turkish with Arabic songs” (Evren 1999, p. 131). In fact, Khultur’s soundtrack for this film sold over 1.5 million copies in East Turkey, under the Odeon label.

Obviously, Egyptian films were more suitable for cultural adaptation as opposed to other foreign films. First of all, they all belonged to the musical genre. They included as many as 8–10 songs each—some films with Abd al-Wahhab contained eleven songs—a fact that hindered the flow of action. Nevertheless, cultural verisimilitude was prior to genre conventions, as the characters never burst into songs in an ordinary setting. Viola Shafik notes, “as with the films focused only on songs, the action was matched to the various musical performances. Their stories usually dealt either with the figure of a singer or a dancer or were set in locations such as nightclubs and theatres” (1998, p.104). Secondly, there were close relations between Egyptian and Turkish traditional music. Interestingly, patronage of the traditional music in the region was transferred from the Ottoman Palace in Istanbul to Cairo in the nineteenth-century. After losing their favored position at Sultan Abdülmecid’s court, many Ottoman composers went to Egypt to work (Erol 1998, p. 11). The reason behind this was discarding traditional music in favor of a Western one in the Ottoman Empire. In 1826, in line with modernizing reforms, Giuseppe Donizetti, brother of the well-known composer, was appointed as the head of the Ottoman Army Band.

The newly founded Turkish Republic continued the Westernization policy in music. The republicans’ cultural policy, as it is theorized and defined in the works of Ziya Gökalp—especially The Principles of Turkism (1923), described as the blueprint for the Turkish revolution—was hostile to traditional music. In The Principles of Turkism, Gökalp praises the material civilization of Europe while opposing its non-material aspects. In order to formulate this, drawing on the ideas of the German sociologist Tönnies, he made a distinction between culture (hars), “the set of values and habits current within a community”, and civilization (medeniyet), “a rational, international system of knowledge, science and technology.” He believed that the road to salvation lay in replacing this civilization with a modern European one, while holding on to Turkish culture (Zürcher 1993, p. 136).

In accordance with this formulation, Gökalp distinguishes three kinds of music in Turkey. The first is what he calls “Eastern music,” or Ottoman (later labeled as Turkish) classical music. This is the product of the Arabo-Persian civilization, based in turn on the civilization of the Byzantines, according to Gökalp. The second type of music is folk music, and finally there is polyphonic western music. Gökalp dismisses Eastern music in favor of a synthesis of Turkish folk music and the musical techniques of Western civilization:

Which one of these, one wonders, is truly our national music? We have seen that Eastern music is not only afflicted, it is also non-national. Folk music is that of our national culture, and Western music is that of our new civilization, so that neither of these is foreign to us [emphasis mine]. Thus our national music will be born from the synthesis of our Folk music and Western music. Folk music has given us numerous melodies, which, if we collect and harmonize in the Western manner, will yield a music that is both national and European (cited by Tekeliğlu 1996, p. 201).

Gökalp’s views on music were put into practice by officials. The abolition of religious sects and orders, where traditional Ottoman music was performed and taught, was an important setback for this genre. This was followed by the closure of the Doğu Müziği Şubesı (Eastern Music Section) of the Darüş 1-Elhan (later Istanbul Conservatory) in 1926. And finally, in November 1934, Ottoman/Turkish classical music was banned from radio stations for 15 months. During this time, most Turkish listeners tuned in to Arab radio stations. The attraction of these channels was so widespread that columnist Peyami Safa warned
officials: “Turkish people appreciate the Arabic voice of the Egyptian Radio as their own” (cited by Kocabaşoğlu 1980, p. 94).

Later, in February 1936, the ban on classical music was lifted and the repressive policies on music were withdrawn. This flexibility was also reflected in the movies. The original soundtrack for Muhsin Ertuğrul’s Aynaroz Kadis (The Judge of Aynaroz) (1938) featured traditional music composed by Mesut Cemil (Onaran 1981, pp. 250-51). A year later, a musical film featuring popular Ottoman/Turkish classical music singer Münir Nurettin Selçuk, Allah’in Cenneti (God’s Heaven) (Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1939), aimed to compete with the Egyptian films. The movie’s songs were composed by Sadettin Kaynak, who did some musical adaptations for Egyptian films.9

Before these films, the music featured in Turkish films was largely in line with Gökalp’s formulation: a synthesis of Turkish folk music and Western musical techniques. For example, the music for Bataklı Duman Kızı Ayse (Ayse, the Girl from the Swampy House) (Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1934) was composed by Western-style classical composer Cemal Reşit Rey. Ironically, when the movie was re-released years later, the distributors would insert some Ottoman/Turkish classical music without the consent of the film’s director (Onaran 1981, pp. 241-42). Operetta had also been a popular form, both on stage and screen, since the nineteenth century. Originally based on the opera form, the operetta was an attempt at synthesis between the harmonic structure of Turkish music and Western technique (Aksoy 1985, p. 1222). But operetta music showed much more flexibility in its synthesizing methods than Gökalp had envisaged.

In 1916, the Ottoman Army’s Cinematographic Unit chose composer Dikran Çubukeyan’s (1836-1898) popular operetta Leblebici Horhor Ağası for its first feature film. The movie was never finished because of the severe conditions of World War I. With the coming of sound, a number of operettas were shot in the 1930s by Muhsin Ertuğrul: Karım Beni Aldatrsla (If My Wife Betrays Me) (m: Muhlis Sabahattin), Söz Bir Allah Bir (One is the Word, One is the Lord) (m: Muhlis Sabahattin), Cici Berber (The Cute Hairdresser) (m: Mesut Cemil) in 1933; Leblebici Horhor Ağası and Milyon Axeclari (Money Hunters) (m: Muhlis Sabahattin) in 1934. The most successful of these films was Karım Beni Aldatrsla, whose soundtrack was composed by Muhlis Sabahattin (Ezgi) (1889-1947) (Onaran 1981, p. 209). According to musicologist Bülent Aksoy, Sabahattin “created a form of music catering for the tastes of both traditional and Western music” (1985, p. 1234).

In the late 1930s, with the changes in music policy, traditional music was booming, both in film soundtracks and on records. But the musical genre was also transformed over the years. The strict rules of traditional music were replaced with a new type of composition and performance: unrestricted/free performance (serbest icran).10 A number of Western instruments, such as piano, violin and viola, were integrated into traditional orchestras. This was partly an impact of the music reforms. As Martin Stokes comments, “the music reforms did not simply replace the old structures but provided something new-new forms of music and new ways of representing that music-which continue to coexist with those areas of musical activity which could not effectively be touched by any amount of reformist zeal” (1992, p. 36). The Egyptian films and their music also contributed to these new forms of music in Turkey. Muhammed Abd al-Wahhab, who introduced dance rhythms like tango, rumba, samba and foxtrot into traditional music, was especially influential on Turkish composers. To sum up, the Kemalist reformers’ policies of cultural Westernization let a kind of gap in the market that Egyptian films were much better placed than Western ones to fill.

**Discourse on Egyptian Films**

The unprecedented success of Egyptian films immediately alarmed Turkish officials. The government, with its language reform in 1929, was aiming to eradicate any traces of Arabic from the Turkish language, including the alphabet. The new censorship regulation (19.8.1939) required dubbing and subtitling to be carried out on Turkish soil. Article 10 stated that, “films in other languages should have Turkish rendering. This rendering should be in proper and clear Turkish and/or written clearly” (cited by Onaran 1968, p. 169). Although most of the Egyptian films were dubbed and their soundtracks replaced by Turkish ones, a few were exhibited with subtitles.

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9 Selçuk sings some eight songs in this film.

10 This type of performance later gave rise to a new genre of music labelled as arabshe (arabesque) with reference to the ‘influence’ of Egyptian music. On the discussions about the origins of this genre see Stokes 1992, Chapter 2.
and original soundtracks, as mentioned above. In 1942, the secretariat of the Republican People's Party, which ruled throughout the single-party period, sent an official letter to the Interior Ministry pleading for a ban on screenings of Egyptian films in Adana and Mersin-cities with significant Arab-Turkish population-as these films were "damaging people's feeling towards the Turkish language." After this complaint, in June 1943 the Interior Ministry wrote to the Censorship Committee in Istanbul suggesting a ban on Egyptian films in Kurdish or Arab-populated areas in eastern Turkey: "We believe no films in Arabic - whether dubbed or in the original language - should be screened in Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Hatay, Icel, Adana, Siirt or Mardin." (cited by Tikve 1968, pp. 97-98).

Amid all these discussions, Domu'al-hubb (Tears of Love) and other Egyptian films were received differently by specific audiences. Here, I would like to evaluate the range of and relation between discourses about the films circulating within this cultural and social formation, as Andrew Higson suggested (1989, pp. 44-45). In this context, the tension between intellectual and populist discourses is quite apparent. Egyptian films were criticized harshly by intellectuals. However, some popular film journals praised the films, at least in terms of their style. The tension between these two discourses is still evident in discussions on Turkish cinema.

**Intellectual Discourses**

Ever critical of Turkish popular cinema, the intellectual elite tended to dismiss Egyptian films altogether. The leftist monthly Yeni Adam suggested that there were strong parallels between Egyptian movies and orientalist Hollywood and European films, arguing that the former were the latter plus local soundtracks. The journal’s film critic Hüsamettin Bozköy argues that European and American films that made orientalist films were under the influence of exoticism and "created imaginary characters that are non-existent." Bozköy writes, "the worst but most profitable type of business is the one that appeals to the masses’ feeling of conservatism, horror, lust, dream and miracle. In fact, all these feelings are something to be got rid of, rather than encouraged. But no film company has dared to act accordingly, and they bolster up these feelings instead of repressing them" (cited by Abisel 1994, p. 39). According to him, Domu'al-hubb is a film that is "presenting love of death instead of life," and "pacifying rather than activating, fostering suicidal tendencies and cynicism." Turkey, a country striving for progress, is not a suitable place for this sick romanticism," Bozköy argued. However, the film’s unprecedented box office success did not surprise him, and he argued that it was due to: "Promotional activities; a group of fundamentalists that are proud to be part of the Orient; a group of hypocrites who represent themselves as revolutionists, but behave as Orientals in their private life; all urban lower classes that did not have any artistic education; and film companies which dubbed these movies with the aim of making a profit" (ibid., p. 39).

Representation of the East as the place of backwardness and emotionalism has a long history. This implicit assumption is the basis of orientalist criticism. However, it is not only Egyptian films' themes and style that were criticized. The very "authenticity" of these movies was also questioned. Egyptian cinema was quite cosmopolitan and not indigenous enough, some critics claimed. For example, film critic and historian Nihat Özön believes it was a Turkish actor and director who laid the foundations of Egyptian cinema: Vedat Orfy (Bengü), or Wadad Orfy as he is known in Egypt- a “discovery” that was also cited by other critics (Makal 1996, Özgün 1995). This was an “irony of fate” given the influence of Egyptian films in Turkey, Özön states (1962b, p. 759). In these writings, Orfy resembles a colonial master who brought cinema to ignorant Egypt, which in turn strikes back with its releases in Turkey. In fact, the young and adventurous Orfy went to Egypt to film the story of the Prophet in 1926. Receiving complaints from religious authorities, the project was halted. After starring and co-directing Layla (1927), he shot a few features in Egypt; but his efforts are not any more significant than those of local pioneers.11

Critics also draw strong parallels between Egyptian and Turkish films in terms of their melodramatic structure. The themes and scripts of Egyptian films resemble those of Turkish cinema and the Egyptian films “use music and [belly] dancing without any significant narrative motive. So much so that they look like filmed revues. Even those films that claim to be realistic turn into melodramas in the end. Young girls who are raped, betrayed wives, people transformed with urban decay... To sum up, all these scripts are structured around ‘fate’” (Özön 1962b).

These themes are also shared by some early Hollywood films, especially by serial melodramas or the "variety films" of the 1930s. However, these films were not criticized by the same writers as Egyptian films. There might be several reasons for this: First, American and European films were not conceived as being as culturally threatening as Egyptian ones, since the "West" was the role model for Turkish modernization. Second, Egyptian films had a wider appeal compared to other international releases thanks to successful dubbing and their "adapted" soundtracks. There were also serious concerns about the dissemination of Arabic culture among Turkey's Arabic-speaking communities.

Another type of reaction among non-mainstream periodicals was to ignore Egyptian films completely. Theatre and film magazine *Perde ve Sahne* (1941-1947), edited by Muhsin Ertuğrul and his wife Neyyire, does not include a single column on popular Egyptian films. The only exception is the readers' column, where a particular reader who asked for information on the Egyptian film industry was given a blunt reply: "Why on earth do you want to go to a drama school in Egypt? Do you want to act in Arabic? You said you could not complete your education because you didn't have enough money? So how would you travel to Egypt? We suggest you make an effort to finish secondary school and then apply to the State Conservatory in Ankara, instead of dreaming" (*Perde ve Sahne* 6, 1941, p. 23).

**Popular Discourses**

The positive approach towards American and European cinema was shared by mainstream film magazines. But in these magazines, columns devoted to Egyptian films were increasing steadily, as readers demanded more information on films and actors. One of the most popular film magazines of the 1940s was *Yıldız* (Star), which was published fortnightly between November 1938 and 1950. *Yıldız* mainly covered Hollywood productions, with articles and news items on Hollywood films and stars, as well as fiction tie-ins for popular films. The magazine often gave limited space to European and Turkish films.

One can observe the growing interest in Egyptian cinema in the 1940s from the readers' page of *Yıldız*. Many readers asked for the autograph of their favorite Egyptian stars. Some even claimed to be relatives of Egyptian stars and asked for recognition. Thanks to this interest, the magazine would hire a correspondent in Cairo and extend its coverage of Egyptian cinema.

Interestingly, *Yıldız* was launched around the time when *Domu‘ al-hubb* was released. In its third issue there is an anonymous review:

*Aşın Güzəşərlər (Domu‘ al-hubb)* successfully stages a story of love and betrayal. The scenes set in Egypt are quite attractive, as they were shot over a beautiful and interesting natural background, and promote Egypt as a tourist country. The direction is quite sophisticated. However, there are a few deficiencies regarding the mise-en-scene ... The most interesting point about the movie is that the cast comprises of Egyptian *fellaheen* (peasant) types. The best example of this is [the leading lady] Mrs. Necat (*Yıldız* [1938] 1: 3, p. 6).

Here we have a more positive account of the movie compared to the intellectual discourse. *Yıldız* has no significant objection to the film's melodramatic plot. The direction and the technical quality are acclaimed. Representation of Egypt as a tourist country is also something praiseworthy for the magazine. However, an orientalist overture is apparent in the comments on the film's cast. The presence of *fellaheen*, a term that is often used negatively to describe Egyptian peasants, is seen as a factor elevating the film's realism. Thus, the use of this term might be regarded as a sign of surprise, rather than a belittling expression. After all it was the first time the critics saw local characters instead of Hollywood stars like Valantino and Navarro in a movie set in the Middle East. Probably that is why they were struck by the casting.

There are also comparisons between Turkish and Egyptian films in the pages of *Yıldız*. This time, they are not considered alike, and Egyptian films are described as superior to Turkish ones: "Among the Balkan and Near Eastern countries Turkey has pioneered in almost every field, including cinema. But today we have to admit the fact that our Egyptian brothers are much more advanced in this field. Today Egyptian cinema has achieved remarkable progress. We might regard their themes as apathetic or extremely romantic, but this is because they aim to appeal Egyptian people" (Yurdatăp 1939, p.7). As in this example, the plots of Egyptian films are often criticized by *Yıldız*. But instead of dismissing them as "fostering suicidal tendencies and cynicism," it is their populist impulse that is discussed. The films' most evi-

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12 For example, see readers column in *Yıldız* (1949) 2:15, p. 45.
dent success is their technical quality, according to Yıldız. And this is because Egyptian filmmakers were trained abroad: “In technical terms, Egyptian films are as advanced as European ones, and they almost reach the standard of American films. This is because Egyptians who are operating in the Egyptian film industry used to work in European and American studios for years. They started working in their own country after mastering their trade” (Yurdatap 1939, pp. 7-8).

This view of a hierarchical structure ranking American, European and other cinemas is very much in line with Yıldız’s overall editorial policy. Hollywood is considered as the leader of the world film industry, followed by European and then other cinemas. Curiously, in this hierarchy, Egyptian cinema is almost equated with European cinema. There is an implicit criticism of Turkish cinema, which ranks lower according to the magazine. In some cases, the criticism and comparison is much more explicit, as in the case of the review of a Turkish film, Bir Dağ Masali (A Mountain Story) (Turgut Demirağ, 1947):

Not only Americans but Egyptians, who started filmmaking only recently, spend millions on a single movie. In Turkey the average cost of a movie is between 30,000-35,000 Turkish liras. An Egyptian film costs almost four times more, not to mention the millions spent by the Americans. When the meat’s cheap, don’t expect a good stew [a Turkish proverb]. Films made with so little money will obviously have some deficiencies (Çalapala 1946, p. 6).

In the 1940s, Yıldız magazine reserves approximately one out of every seven page for coverage of Egyptian cinema. It often shares the orientalist approach of the intellectual discourses, however it is much more careful in distinguishing different aspects of a movie, such as plot, mise-en-scene and casting. Overall, the Egyptian films’ technical quality is often praised and considered superior to Turkish films. Even their much-criticized romantic plot lines are justified as engaging for local audiences. In contrast, intellectual discourses label Egyptian films as “inferior” or “sick” mainly because of their themes and props such as songs and belly dancing.

13 Fritz Kramp, a German citizen, was appointed as the artistic director of Mısır studies in 1935. He later directed Umrah Khatum’s first film Wedad (1935). And, before the launch of Mısır studies 4 Egyptians were sent to France for education (Khan 1963, p. 28).

14 The author ignores the fact that both Hollywood and Egypt made significant profits from international distribution. Whereas Turkish films were only distributed in the domestic market.

The intellectual and popular discourses also reveal the ambivalent nature of the representation of Arabs in Turkish history. Etienne Copeaux’s studies on Turkish history textbooks show that there is a significant distinction in the use of the words “Muslim” and “Arab.” Muslim defines sameness, whereas Arab signifies the other. The word “Arab” is often used in the context of conflicts and wars. The three periods where the “Arabs” are referred were: the pre-Islamic age, the invasion of Central Asia by the Arabs, and the Ottoman-Arab conflict during World War I. However, the extension of Arab civilization into the Mediterranean region is defined as a “Muslim” breakthrough, and here Turks are also identified with these Muslims (Copeaux 1998, p. 98). The interchangeable use of the words “Arab” and “Egyptian” in film magazines reflects this ambivalence. For example, when Nişat Özen comments on Domu’ al-hubb as a movie that introduces “some Arab singers, and people in fez and local dress,” the word “Arab” refers to the “Arab-as-the-other” in history textbooks. On the other hand, Egyptian had a more neutral meaning in these writings.

**Substituting Turkish Films**

Finally, I would like to discuss the range of sociologically specific audiences for Egyptian films, and how these films were used in particular exhibition circumstances. Although there are very limited sources on the numbers of audiences and box-office figures, we can make some assumptions from marketing strategies in different media and audience expectations. The districts where movie theatres were concentrated, and the specific conditions of exhibition, also give us some clues.

In fact, the customers for new movie theatres appearing in the 1940s were being introduced to the cinema for the first time in their lives. That is why producer and movie theatre owner Hürem Erman thinks that the Egyptian films, thanks to their influence on Turkish audiences, had an important role to play in movie-going culture: “For example, before Açık Gözyaşları (Domu’ al-hubb), let’s say Mrs. Ayşe and Nurhayat from Akşaray, with some conservative motives and under the influence of superficial advice, did not step outside their doors to go to movie theatres. What Abd al-Wahhab and Yusuf Wahby achieved was to drag them out of their houses. This basically led to the emergence of the movie-going habit” (Dorsay et al. 1973, p. 26). Here...
Erman suggests that these first-time moviegoers would go on to watch Turkish films in the 1950s and 1960s.

During the 1940s, Egyptian films were almost "substituting" for Turkish ones, a fact that is evident in films' promotional materials. A newspaper ad for the Ankara Movie Theatre, screening Allah'in Kudreti (The Power of God), states that the movie and the songs are in Turkish (Türkçe sözü). Under the name of film's stars Yusuf Wahby and Amina Rizq, it reads: "The songs are performed by [popular Turkish singers] Safiye Ayla and Mustafa Çağlar with the musical accompaniment of a traditional music band [saz heyeti]" (Ulus, November 21, 1948). Here the local performers are emphasized as much as the stars. In an advert...
for Salahaddin-i Ayyubi and Richard the Lion Heart the emphasis is even more striking (See Figure 1). The advert makes no mention of the director and the cast. Below the sign reading “In Turkish with Turkish Music,” the composer of the Turkish soundtrack and Turkish performers are credited. In general, Egyptian films were marketed with the emphasis on local composer and performers. In most cases, the original title, the director and the cast were not credited (See Figure 2).

While Turkish films were non-existent, these films were presented as local products. It was not only the familiarity of the Egyptian stars, but also the voices of the - well-promoted - local performers that attracted audiences. The marriage of these two, despite the problems of lip synchronization, was highly successful, and probably much cheaper than producing films starring the local singers. As for the images of Egypt, we can observe an ambivalent perception. On one hand, these images were considered as exotic and touristy, but on the other hand it is quite possible that some viewers saw reminders of life during the Ottoman Empire.

The End of an Era

The popularity and the ambivalent reception of Egyptian films were a matter of great concern for many. The US Department of Commerce described them as the most important competitor of American films, even though they were far smaller in number than films supplied by such competing countries as the United Kingdom and France. This was due to the marked preference shown by the general public for dubbed Egyptian films:

In the Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara regions, United States films are definitely preferred, while European films and particularly British films meet with favor. ... In the rest of the country United States films, although well received, do not meet as much favor as Egyptian films, and it is mainly those United States films which deal with adventure or mystery which are best received by the public (World Trade in Commodities-Motion Pictures and Equipment, vol. VI, part 4, no. 21 [1948], p. 2).15

Ironically, according to an MGM survey, Turkish audiences, together with those in India, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon, were defined as hav-

15 American serial films were quite popular in second-run theatres, in the 1940s.

ing almost opposite tastes to Americans. Among the company’s six movie categories-action (six subtypes), drama, drawing-room comedies (dialogue-oriented), musicals, mysteries (crime, spy, detective, etc.) and slapstick (physically oriented) comedy- musicals were said to be the most popular genre, followed by action and drama. The survey was based on a figure of the yearly gross average for each nation in these six categories, and new films were ranked in comparison to these average figures. Based on these surveys MGM also rated nations into seven groups, with the first group having tastes closest to Americans, and the last group farthest removed (Segrave 1997, p. 197).

Meanwhile, local film producers were also complaining about Egyptian films’ effect on the Turkish film industry. A 1947 report on the industry, signed by 12 members of the Local Film Producers’ Association, pleads for urgent measures to be taken by the government. The report claims that the most valuable gain from these measures would be “the loss of popularity and market share of Near Eastern films that have conquered Turkey.” In fact, “the Egyptian film industry owes its dominant position to the lack of this type of measures,” the report claims. These measures include, lifting taxes on film negative and studio equipment, and decreasing the levy on ticket prices (Yerli Film Yapanlar Cemiyeti, 1947).

The government was quick to respond to these suggestions. In July 1948, local municipality taxes on Turkish films’ screenings were reduced from 75 percent to 20 percent. As a result, movie theaters screening international films were paying 41 percent tax from each ticket sold, while theaters screening Turkish movies were paying 20 percent (Özön 1995, p. 47). Obviously this move increased the demand for Turkish films, and the number of Turkish films produced tripled from six in 1946 to 18 in 1948. The effect of this tax reduction played a significant role in the decrease of film imports. The margin of profits from foreign films fell drastically as the local film industry grew steadily. As a report in World Trade describes: “It is known that domestically produced films ordinarily have much longer runs than imported films. Since they are shown in small towns where admission prices are considerably lower, the number of admissions they attract is growing at a much faster rate than attendance at imported films. Actually it is reported that all imported films show a tendency toward declining attendances” (World Trade in Commodities, July 1949: p. 3).

Like all other imported films, the number of Egyptian films
screened was decreasing significantly. The high tax rate on imported films made Turkish films more desirable for exhibitors. The number of Egyptian films (including features, shorts and newsreels) reviewed by the Istanbul censorship board in 1947 was 36 (World Trade in Commodities-Motion Pictures and Equipment, vol. VI, part 4, no. 21 [1948], p. 2). However, this fell to four in 1948 and six in 1949. This number was a little bit higher elsewhere in Turkey, but the number of imported Egyptian films finally dropped to one or two in the 1950s (Tekeli 1968). Although some sources (Makal 1996, Özön 1962b, Öztuna 1976b, Ozlak 1991, Stokes 1992, Tekelioglu 1996) claim that Egyptian films were banned in 1948, the statistics do not support these claims. In fact, Egyptian films were only affected by the levy decrease on Turkish films, though they were banned in certain parts of Turkey in 1943, as stated above.

### Table 3 First-run feature films exhibited in Istanbul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>1948*</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Dubbed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104***</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Between September and December
** Between January and June
*** 30 of these films were dubbed

The government’s intervention with taxes coincided with another move in Turkish policy that would have a significant effect on cinema. Turkey, which had remained neutral throughout World War II, was strengthening its relations with a US government that was pouring large sums of money into Europe under the Marshall Plan. As a result, 80 percent of screen time in Turkey was held by US products in 1951. The only minor challenge to Hollywood and Turkish films would come from India in the 1950s. Raj Kapoor’s popular Awara (The Vagabond) (1951) would break all box-office records in 1954. However, other Indian films would never be as successful. The Turkish movie industry, now producing an average of 50-60 movies annually, would not be affected by them.

### Egyptian Films and Turkish Cinema

As explained above, the success of Egyptian films in Turkey was due to a number of factors. First of all, lack of government support delayed the emergence of a local film industry. One can argue that the single-party government (1923-1946) considered American and European films very much in line with its Westernizing policies, and did not feel the need for any other means of propaganda. However, the popularity of Egyptian films changed this attitude, and the much-needed support came in the form of taxation policies. Meanwhile, thanks to the dissemination of cinema throughout the country, a new audience with different tastes from that of the elite, upper-class spectators of Istanbul would emerge. The local film industry was far from serving the needs of this audience until the late 1940s.

The indigenization of Egyptian films through such strategies as dubbing and inserting local soundtracks also increased their popularity. In this context, these films were substituted for Turkish films and marketed as local products. Finally, the hard-line music policy, with its ban on traditional music on the radio, may have had some impact. Although some writers claim that the closure of major routes for film traffic in Europe during World War II gave Egyptian films an advantage (Özön 1962b, p. 758), this should not be considered a major factor. Egyptian films made their entry at an earlier period and the popular demand proves that their circulation was a deliberate choice.

Nevertheless, especially in the critical discourse, rather than a dominant role model, Egyptian cinema was like a “floating signifier” that all the “negative” aspects of Turkish cinema were attached to. It is often considered as the progenitor of a number of tendencies. According to Öğuz Makal, these films “took director Muhsin Ertağrul, who worked under the influence of Western theatre and art, back to

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16 An ‘empty’ or ‘floating signifier’ is variously defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecified or non-existent signified. Such signifiers mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean. (Chandler 2004)
the ‘Orient’” (1996, p. 42). Nihat Özön suggests that it was Egyptian films that “spoilt the tastes of both the audiences and the filmmakers” (1962b, p.760). Most commentators claim that these films gave rise to certain genres such as musical melodramas and religious films, as well as the musical style of nüfus. On the other hand, within the popular film criticism, the comparison between Egyptian and Turkish cinemas was evaluated with reference to American and European hegemony, and Turkish cinema was conceived “backward” as opposed to other film industries. In both discourses, the idea of national cinema has been shaped by the dominant conception of the culture as a unified entity. In fact, since Siegfried Kracauer’s seminal work on German cinema, From Caligari to Hitler (1947), national cinemas were often evaluated in a context isolating their mixed nature and cross-cultural or transnational disclosure. In most of these studies, the national cinema is proclaimed as a unique identity and a stable set of meanings, identifying a hegemonizing, mythologizing process, as Andrew Higson describes (1989, p. 37).

In this study, I have tried to offer a model emphasizing images of diversity instead of images of unity in national cinema. This model conceives national cultures and identities not as fixed and homogeneous entities. It assumes a process of cross-cultural interaction between different cinemas that are constituted in and through their relations to each other. In this process, constant competition and comparison takes place between international and national films. This is most evident in the policies regulating international film distribution and exhibition. As I have demonstrated in this article, international films get into national circulation through a selective process, which aims at protecting the cultural autonomy against the threat of domination.

The international films have also consumed in various different contexts by the audiences. They generate a number of discourses which shape the construction of cultural identity and national cinema in a given place. By focusing on the cross-cultural reception of Egyptian cinema in Turkey, the article defined the role of international films in this construction process. As explained, the specific historical, political and social contexts in which these films emerged had an important role to play in this. These form the points of identification constructing the cultural identity of cinema in Turkey and reveal what has been reconstructed as “indigenous” or “culturally local” to Turkey and what has been defined as “exotic” or “foreign,” at a certain historical moment.

As I hope this study has demonstrated, instead of presenting a coherent and unified image of a nation, the cinema in the context of a particular nation-state has always been in-between. Rather than a gathering of mixed national and cultural identities this in-betweenness involves a long process of negotiation and intermingling. As such, a “national” cinema can be seen as a transnational entity efficaciously mixing the other cinemas and cultures. I believe the ways in which the Turkish cinema appropriated and transformed the dominant discourse of other cinemas can prove insightful for social sciences. The investigation carried out aimed to reveal the instability and non-essential nature of the culture and identities which manifest themselves within the process of appropriative reception, translation and rewriting. This fact alone deconstructs nationalist claims of essentialism and homogeneity and shows the fundamental interdependence between cinemas.

REFERENCES
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON TURKEY

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