

# Early Republican History in New Turkish Cinema



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By

Deniz Gürgen Atalay

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To my beloved son Cihan who was growing patiently in my belly while I was writing this book, lifting my spirit, filling me with joy and endless hiccups.



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## INTRODUCTION

I developed the idea that evolved into this book more than a decade ago while working on another project concerning the historiographical performance of films. I have been fascinated by historical films for as long as I can remember, and I focused my path in film studies on films that transform the past into an almost tangible experience. The thing that caught my attention for this project in particular was the increase in the number of films that narrate the Independence War and the foundation period of the Turkish Republic produced in Turkey during the 2000s. Undoubtedly, this increase is related to the broad expansion of the Turkish film market in the second half of the 1990s more generally, involving the number of productions, film theatres, and audience numbers. Nevertheless, the increase in the representation of the Independence War and the foundation of the Republic in commercial films during the 2000s is significant when examined alongside the emergent critical perspectives in the 1990s, which challenged the operations of the Kemalist regime during the Early Republican Period.

In the 1990s, critiques of nationalism and the modernization project of the Early Republican Period culminated in revisiting what was considered up to this point the indispensable merits of Kemalist ideology and the founding ideals of the Republic (Gürbilek 1992; Kasaba 1997; Keyman and İçduygu 2003). The transformation in the validity of Kemalist ideology generated a space in which to question the foundation processes. In Turkey, the 1990s signify a time of society's confrontation with the pressures and consequences of the modernist implementations of the Early Republican Period. Hence, such critical attention relocated the grand narrative of the foundation of the Turkish Republic and Kemalist ideology to a space that is convenient for inquiry.

The interaction between criticism of the Early Republican Period in the 1990s and the historical representations of the period in films deserves to be addressed, considering the influence of the contemporary social dynamics on the practice of historiography. With this study I aim to reveal and discuss the impact of criticism which emerged in the 1990s on the historical films that were produced during the late 1990s and 2000s to represent the Early Republican Period.

To this end, I will begin by surveying the concepts of history and historiography in order to discuss and interpret the historiographical performance of historical film. By retracing various theoretical perspectives on the texture of historiography, I will define the practice as an act of construction that is exposed to the current tendencies of society, rather than something that exists as a solid entity apart from its contemporary time. Highlighting the versatile, dynamic nature of historiography that is formed within the conditions of narration, I will locate the notion close to the field of fiction. The aim of such a conceptual “stretching” with regards to conceptualizing historiography has the aim of revealing the distinct impact of the historiographical practice of the fiction film. Fictional narratives of history transmit to the audience the sensual experience of the historical event they represent. Bordwell and Thompson argue through their neo-formalist approach that the audience gains a filmic experience through their effort of making sense of the film (2008, p. 54). In this process, they signify the formal elements of the film medium to transmit the sensual experience to the audience. The filmic experience is built upon the formal qualities that bind the audience, such as the maintenance of identification, the causality of the narration, and the calculated suspension and gratification of the expectations (60). Even though its constructed nature relegates the practice of historiography to the realm of fiction, the historiographical performance of the fiction film is diversified through the sensual experience of the past it transmits.

I accept and espouse the equality of different practices of historiography—whether diegetic or non-diegetic in terms of historical accuracy—based on their constructed nature. However, the historiographical performance of the historical fiction film deserves a distinct theoretical characterization through the generation of the sensual experience. The sensual experience of the past event that is presented by the filmic

representation of history establishes the historical perception of the audience. Through this function, the historiographical performance of the fiction film becomes a powerful element in the broad context of history. The ideas and theoretical framework I utilize to explain the historiographical performance of diegetic films were elaborated in detail in my MA thesis and recently published book *Historiography of World War II Films in Contemporary American Cinema* (2018).

Chapter two of this dissertation, “Historiography and Cinema,” is dedicated to examining and interpreting the theoretical discussions in historiography and film studies in order to support my position on film’s capacity to act as a tool of historiography. For this purpose, I will start by relating the notions of fact, truth, and historical fact within the dynamic social tendencies. The main influences for this chapter are derived from the ideas of Carr (1990), Hobsbawm (2009) and White (2014) on the constructed nature of historiography and how it is reflexive to the current social tendencies. Carr defines narration as an essential tool for historiographical practice. In order to understand the involvement and function of narrative, I will supplement Carr’s work with that of Berkday (2010) and Breisach (1994).

The historian practices historiography through his/her current social, economic, and political social positioning. The perception, and hence the expression, of the historian positions itself through the assenting or dissenting standpoint they establish with the current tendencies in a society. In order to understand and diagnose the significance of the historian’s subjectivity as a part of society, I am guided by Berkday (2010) and Spivak (2006).

Next, I will gather the practices of historiography under the titles of official historiography, independent historiography, and popular historiography to elaborate the influence of contemporary dynamics of society on historiography. By placing the historiographical performance of diegetic film in the popular practices of historiography, I intend to discuss the contact between the social tendencies and the historical representation of films.

I argue that through the comparison of diegetic practices of historiography with the non-diegetic practices, the level of credibility stays more or less the same. Therefore, I acknowledge the diegetic practices of

historical representation inherent to the field of historiographical performances. The point where the diegetic historical representations differ from the non-diegetic is the sense of historical experience that the diegetic practices generate.

In order to further illuminate my argument on the notion of filmic experience, I will continue by exposing the significance of diegesis and diegetic space through the definitive work of Bunia (2010). For the survey that touches upon theories to explain the engagement of the audience with the diegesis, I will discuss Metz (1975) and Oudart (1977) on the concepts of identification, transcendence, and suture, and follow that with interpreting Bordwell's (1989) and Bordwell and Thompson's (2008) neo-formalist approach.

Alongside Thompson and Bordwell's neo-formalism, I will elaborate on the notion of filmic experience through the wider context of the phenomenological approach to film studies. For this purpose, I ground my argument on Vivian Sobchack's approach, which establishes phenomenology in film studies, specifically where she highlights the carnal opening of the audience to the film (1997). Laine's work is also significant, notably her conception of entanglement which refers to the audience's "performance" in meeting a film halfway (2013). Laine exposes filmic experience's effects on the body, such as the presence of goose bumps or simply laughter. Laine's emphasis on the bodily experience of film relates to the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty that addresses the integrity of body and mind in the experience of the world (2007). Additionally, I cite Peritore's (1977) work on the utilization of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy as a self-reflexive approach to film studies, and Yates's (2006) exploration of the possibility of the filmic medium to transmit the experience of the filmic event to the audience. By referring to the theoretical perspectives on the filmic experience, I intend to signify the binding characteristic of the fiction films. If fiction film constitutes a sense of experience through its narration, then historical fiction films present the sensual experience of the past period they represent.

Among scholars who work on the historiographical performance of fiction film, Rosenstone defines historical film as just another medium to represent the past (1988), while Tomasulo (1996) considers the audiovisual shift in the representation of the historical event as a characteristic

condition of the postmodern period. Raack's (1983) appraisal of the filmic practice of historiography goes beyond approval, and he designates the historical representation practiced by the film medium as the ultimate historiographical performance.

Rosenstone's and his peers' approaches are valuable for acknowledging the performance of historical films in the field of historiography. However, I argue that their negligence of the distinctive notion of the sensual experience that emerges through the historiographical practice of the fiction film creates a flaw in their approach. In order to elaborate on the significance of the filmic experience in the historical representation, I will employ Sobchack's theory that exposes the consequences of a diegetic representation of history through the film medium. She signifies that the historiographical performance of fiction film abolishes the temporal space between the present and past by the sensual experience they transmit. The sensual experience of a historical event transforms history into a phenomenon happening in the present. As a result, this occasion creates a blur in historical cognition by dragging the meaning to the field of simultaneity (1996, p. 4).

Another significance of the historiographical performance of film resides in its potential to reveal the contemporary dynamics of society through its association with popular culture. If by contemporary culture we understand a field of constant struggle involving discursive constitutions of various ideologies, this too emerges in the narratives of films. By reflecting on theories of culture that contextualize the interaction of dominant ideologies and culture, I will interpret the association between the representation of history performed by commercial films and the textures of contemporary culture for and from which they are produced and presented.

For the survey section that aims to comprehend and interpret the influence of contemporary dynamics on historical films, I ground my discussion on Douglass Kellner's approach, where he presents a substantial analysis of the interaction between ideology in society and artefacts of media culture. For Kellner, the formation of the products of media culture cannot be reduced to a simple process of the reproduction of the discourses of existing ideologies in the form of commodities. Neither are such cultural products tailored to fulfil audience demands by solely

expressing dominant ideologies, nor would they be consumed in a uniform way. Since societies are not homogenic constitutions with identical characteristics, the thoughts, fears and demands of individuals in a given society exhibit stark differences. Hence societies would react to cultural products in various forms of acceptance and rejection (2003, p. 25). A popular text in terms of a blockbuster film or hit pop song might simultaneously be praised or rejected by different groups in society. The popularity of a product in any given society hence points to its intense circulation in the media rather than a society's admiration of it. For Kellner, the discipline of cultural studies seeks to conceive of the alternating forces of dominance and resistance in society through the interpretation of the products of culture. The theoretical perspectives of cultural studies would enable the comprehension of the social dynamics at play through interpreting the cultural products that actively and visibly circulate in society. In order to comprehend the evolution of critical theory to address the sphere of culture and cultural products, I'll retrace the approaches of the Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies.

For Kellner, cultural artefacts that exhibit a wide reach and recognition in societies and are thus consumed by a massive audience are those that keep up with the pulse of the society by resonating social experience. Such products practice social criticism in their narratives and bear the possibility of embodying discourses of social movements while articulating current ideas into attractive forms. Therefore, even though cultural products that are produced to be consumed on a massive scale exhibit the media giants' commercial interests, they also reflect the competing ideologies in society and articulate conflicting positions. The commercial products of any given culture acquire the potential to advance forces of resistance and progress (2003, 17).

The field of popular culture is a valuable ground for understanding the cultural productions that keep up with the pulse of the society by resonating with social experiences. To elaborate on the texture of popular culture, I turn to the illustrative studies of Raymond Williams (1984) and John Fiske (1989). The space of culture as both the source and outcome of all intellectual and creative activity forms the ways of engagement with the discourses of social, economic and political conditions in society. Culture is a contested terrain that harbours dominant and resistive tendencies,

ideological inclinations of the past and present, towards a carving out of the future. Popular culture in its dynamic nature could be perceived as the culture of the contemporary, the pulse of the society. It consists of the prominent ideas and ideological tendencies that are in conflict in society. It forms the contemporary impulses of engaging with the cultural environment and influences the cultural practices in a given time and space. By identifying commercial film as a formation intrinsic to the field of popular culture, I intend to signify the ability of such films to reflect contemporary social tendencies. The commercial films relate to popular culture through their effort to catch the pulse of the society in order to reach a large audience. Through such an effort, the films keep up with the dynamics of popular culture. By detecting the prominent dynamics in popular culture, the commercial film creatively engraves the fears and fantasies of the audience in the narration (Kellner, 2003, p. 207). The stylish lacework aims to attract the attention of the audience by portraying and healing socially conflicting fields; in other words, they inhabit the space where the shoe pinches in society.

Once the commercial film narrates a historical event, the representation of the past bears the characteristics of the contemporary culture in its historiographical practice. Hence the filmic representation of history in commercial films reflects the contemporary perspectives in its expression. By the same token, the historiographical performance of commercial films influences the historical perceptions of society through both the effect of filmic experience and their wide circulation. The representation of the past in commercial historical films is bound to shift in accordance with emergent discourses in order to trigger social change.

In order to identify the characteristics inherent in commercial films, I turn to the work of Bordwell and Thompson (2008), Bordwell (1989), Stringer (2003), Elsaesser (2001) and Schatz (2003). Through these discussions I will comment on the texture of commercial film and designate the opening numbers of a film in the film theatres as the most tangible value to ground my argument on commercial properties. The aim to reach a large audience coincides with large-scale distribution in movie theatres. The commercial films blanket the movie theatres with the claim that they will be sold in great numbers.

In order to progress on the path to expose the impact of the 1990s criticism on the historical films that represent the Early Republican Period between 1996 and 2011, I will continue with the interpretation of the 1990s criticism.

The third chapter is dedicated to understanding the 1990s criticism that challenges the nationalist and modernist implementations of the Early Republican Period. For this purpose, I will initially examine work on the Early Republican Period and the founding principles by attributing significance to republicanism, nationalism, secularism, and the modernization project. To reveal the foundations of Kemalist ideology, I will follow Ezel Kural Shaw and Stanford Shaw's (2002) narration of the Early Republican Period in their distinct Kemalist approach and challenge their interpretation through the critical perspectives of Kadioğlu (2011), Keyman (2011 and Uzer (2011).

1990s criticism of the foundation process gains significance through the frequency and the contextual variety of the perspectives used to criticize the reformist implementations of the Early Republican Period. Understanding the critical dynamics of the society around the 1990s that question the Kemalist ideals of the foundation process is important for the scope of this study, which is designed to reveal the impact of such criticism on the filmic historiography of the period.

To elaborate on the framework of 1990s criticism, I will start by discussing the impact of Turkey's economic exposure to globalization through the 1980s following the ideas of Bora (1995) and Keyman and İçduygu (2003). Next, I will interpret the discursive roof of "modernization from above" that signifies the oppressive implementations of the Kemalist reforms during the Early Republican Period. The critical discourse defines the modernization process as a project enforced on the society by the Republican elite through the rules and regulations implemented in the context of modernist reforms. The penetration of the critical discourse of "modernization from above" in culture is reflected in the artistic productions of the period as well as the academic discussions to theorize the sociopolitical sphere of 1990s Turkey. In order to understand the cultural and ideological dynamics of the society during this time, I will rely on the theoretical discussions and cultural analyses that came forward during the 1990s on the sociopolitical and economic climate of the period.



In Kasaba's portrayal, the Republican promises of the "enlightened and prosperous tomorrows" had begun to be questioned by the 1980s, as the younger generation that came after the Early Republican Period grew suspicious of the implementations of the foundation process (1997, p. 18). For Gürbilek, in line with Kasaba, the social tendencies of Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s were marked by the emergence of doubt of the Kemalist ideology, and hence paved the way for the statements that challenge the reformist implementations of the Early Republican Period (1992, p. 106). The experience of modernization in Turkey is designated by the reformist implementations of the Early Republican Period. For Keyder, A major pitfall of the project resides on the cognition of modernization as a synonym for Westernization (1997, p. 34). Accordingly, the modernizing elite's determination to reach the modern practice of life by embracing Western values leads to the alienation of the society. The lack of a reciprocal relationship between the Republican elite and the rest of the population for the will, design and execution of the modernization project sets forth the null participation of a large portion of society. This social detachment evolves into a relationship that conditions obedience to state policies and regulations.

For Gürbilek, the cultural expressions in the 1990s reflected the postponed desires of various social groups in society in order to meet the ideals of the imagined modernity. Through this ground, she identifies the social experience of Turkey in the 1990s as the "return of the repressed" in society (1992, p. 102). In the broad context of the criticism in the 1990s, the Islamic Resurgence along with the Kurdish struggle for acknowledgement gains prominence. Keyman and İçduygu signify the Kurdish discourse of ethnic difference that uncovered the illusion of homogeneity in society and the unity of nation. In addition, the secular foundation of the Republic becomes permeable to criticism with the Islamic Resurgence that gained rapid reputation and power in cultural, economic and social fields of 1990s Turkey (2003, p. 232). In line with Keyman and İçduygu, Güalp interprets the rise of Islamic conservative ideology in the 1990s as a result of the secularist oppression through the "Top Down Modernization" process during the Early Republican Era (1997, p. 56).

As Gürbilek indicates, the oppression of the modernization project is not exclusive to the religious, ethnic, and cultural minorities in Turkey

during the foundation process, but also includes the urban society through the ambition to catch up to the standards of Western civilization (1992, p. 14). In her account, the modernization project classified the values and daily practices in society through their consonance with the customs of Western civilization and defined the distinction of centre and periphery accordingly. The designation of the periphery reciprocally called for a modern regulation that certainly involved a series of oppressions (1992, p. 104).

The lack of mediation between the Republican vision of a modern Turkish nation with actual social conditions generated the gap that precludes the chance of dialogue. The dialogue between the ruling elite and the masses in Keyder's perception would have created the space to enable negotiation (1997, p. 39). However, the lack of interaction culminates in the authoritarian positioning of the modernizers, which ultimately results in the emergence of resistance. The ethnic, religious, and cultural identities that are ignored and oppressed during the course of the modernist reforms of the foundation project eventually become the grounds to generate resistance and challenge the implementations of the Early Republican Period in 1990s Turkey.

The challenge towards the implementations of the Early Republican Period was reflected in the popular culture since it became one of the key dynamics to designate social tendencies in 1990s Turkey. In order to expose the reflection of the 1990s criticism on popular culture, I turn to Stoke's interpretation of Sezen Aksu's musical album *Işık Doğudan Yükselir*, which highlights the significance of the piece that manifests the recognition of multi-culturality and appraisal of ethnic diversity in Turkey (2010, p. 131). In a similar perspective, Gürbilek's work on the penetration of identity politics in Turkish TV series during the 1990s (2001, p. 91) and the literature to signify the rise of the representation of ethnic and religious identities in the New Turkish Cinema will be included (Dönmez-Colin 2008; Karanfil 2006; Mersin 2010; Suner 2010).

By retracing the discussions of the period, I assemble the main grounds of 1990s criticism under four topics. The first is "ethnicity criticism" that asserts the negligence and oppression of the ethnic and religious minorities through the nationalization project. The project aims for a homogeneous unity in the nation and a citizen identity designed accordingly. Next,

“secularism criticism” asserts the oppression of the Islamic conservative groups in society through the implementation of the secularist reforms. The reforms aim to diminish the authority of religion from public affairs and everyday life. Third, “modernization from the above criticism” asserts the state-centric management of the modernization project that leads to the disintegration of the society. The 1990s criticism signifies the divergence in the society through the dichotomies of centre versus periphery, modern versus backwards, Turkish versus minority, and Muslim versus non-Muslim. And finally, “inferiority criticism” asserts the self-oppression of the society through the failures in accomplishing the duties to reach the level of Western civilizations. The demands of modernist progress in Kemalist ideology culminate in a sense of inadequacy that leads to the subjection of society against the Republican elite. I will utilize the conceptualization summarized above to analyse the engagement of the historical films that represent the Early Republican Period between 1996 and 2011 with the 1990s criticism in the fourth chapter.

In the last two parts of chapter three, I discuss the rise of political Islam in the 1990s in relation to the identification of the oppressive implementations of the Early Republican Period and the emergence of a defensive Kemalist reaction that aims to preserve the validity of Republican ideals and Kemalist ideology. In order to interpret the rise of the conservative right in politics as a consequence of criticism of the Early Republican Period in the 1990s, I support my argument with studies by Keyman and Koyuncu (2005), Keyman and Gümüşçü (2014) and Bilge Yeşil (2016). To discuss the emergence of a defensive Kemalist reaction, I follow Özyürek’s study on the transformation of Kemalism after 1990s in *Nostalgia for the Modern* (2006). There she thoroughly explains the Kemalist reaction to the rise of political Islam formed through the privatization of Republican ideals and imagery as a subjective defence system in Turkish society from the 1990s to the first decade of the 2000s. In her study, she focuses on the reestablishment of the secular state ideology in the public sphere that solidifies in the form of the national flag, Atatürk pins, Atatürk pictures and posters of the Early Republican Period, and many more significations including the tattoo of Atatürk’s signature. The stress between the criticism in the 1990s that led to the emergence of identity politics involving minorities and ethnic groups and significantly

the rise of political Islam and the consequent emergence of Kemalist defence maintained its impact on the sociopolitical tendencies of Turkey until the 2011 elections.

After 2011, the core of the political debates in Turkey went in another direction, detaching from the 1990s criticism to challenge the oppression of the modernist and nationalist reforms of the Early Republican Period. The ruling party as the incarnation of the rise of political Islam in the 2000s became a major target for the Kemalist reaction through its critical position against the oppression of the modernist and nationalist reforms of the Early Republican Period. Although the rise of political Islam and the critical perspectives towards it from various directions, including the Kemalist and ethnic groups in society, continued in the years to follow, and the focus of the discussions departed from the core of “modernization from above.” In the aftermath of the 2011 elections, the critical perspectives to question the politics of the ruling party shifted ground and relocated to the impacts of its contemporary politics rather than its criticism of the modernist and nationalist implementations of the Early Republican Period. For this reason, I draw the border of my study around the year 2011 in order to assess the impact of 1990s criticism to challenge the implementations of the Early Republican Period and the Kemalist reaction against it. The end of 2011 is the “finish line” for the selection of the historical films that represent the Early Republican Period in order to interpret the impact of the 1990s criticism on the historiographical performance of the films.

I track the impact of 1990s criticism on the commercial historical films produced between 1996 and 2011 that represent the Early Republican Period in chapter four. For this purpose, I start with a brief survey of the Independence War Films produced in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic in the broad context of the historical films of Yeşilçam. I include Özgüç’s resourceful survey of the history of the representation of the Independence War in Yeşilçam Cinema (1992). To draw the wider context of the historical films in Yeşilçam Cinema I will pay special attention to Scognamillo and Demirhan’s portrayal (2005). I also turn to the insightful analyses of Maktav (2006) and Mersin (2011) to expose the nationalist tendencies that infiltrate the narratives of Yeşilçam’s Independence War films.

In the following subchapter, I will identify the method accommodated in this study to expose the engagement of the commercial historical films that narrate the Early Republican Period with the critical perspectives rising in the 1990s. For the selection of the films analysed through their historiographical practice of the Early Republican Period, the initial limiting factor is applied via the historical period the films represent. The historical films that narrate the stories taking place during the Independence War and the foundation of the Republic will be selected. For the purposes of my study, the beginning of the Early Republican Period will be designated as 1919 with the official initiation of the Independence War, while the end of the period will be marked by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death in 1938. For the temporal framing of the films produced after the 1990s, the year 1996 is utilized in accord with the periodization of the New Turkish Cinema (Çetin-Erus 2007, p. 125; Gürata 2010 p. 132). The ending line for the selection of the films is drawn in 2011, as mentioned above through the shift in the context of the struggle between the rise of political Islam on the premises of 1990s criticism and the emergent Kemalist defence against it.

Among the historical films that narrate the incidents during the Early Republican Period, I specifically selected those fictional films that represent the past through a diegetic sphere. Accordingly, the documentaries and docudramas produced between 1996 and 2011 will be excluded from the framework of the study. The significance attributed to the diegetic formation in the historical films is grounded on the constitution of the sensual experience towards the historical event narrated in the film, as mentioned above. The main formal qualities that constitute sensual experience are the coherent cause-and-effect relationship that is consistent with diegetic gravity, the calculated suspension and gratification of audience expectations, and finally the ending designed in a closural form (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, p. 60). The historiographical performance of the film's creation of a sensual experience of the past will be evaluated through the utilization of formal qualities of the narration mentioned above.

The next criterion for the selection of the historical films to represent the Early Republican Period is assigned through the commercial characteristic of the films based on their responsive structure to the pulses of the society and hence their capacity to reflect social tendencies. The

designation of the commercial characteristic is drawn upon the scale of a film's release that exceeds two hundred screening copies for the opening weekend. According to this criterion, the films *Cumhuriyet (The Republic)* (1998), *Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali (The Last Ottoman: Knockout Ali)* (2007), *Veda (Farewell)* (2010), *Dedemin İnsanları (My Grandfather's People)* (2011) and *Hür Adam: Bedüzzaman Said Nursi (Free Man)* (2011) will be analysed in the study.

The film analysis conducted in this study is characterized by an approach that is conscious of film form, acknowledging it as a significant tool in meaning production alongside the interpretation of the dialogue, voiceover and inner voices. Since meaning is produced through the formal elements, the analysis performed on them will provide a substantial interpretation of the films. For the designation of the formal elements, I will adhere to Bordwell and Thompson's depiction of contrast and affinity, space, line and shape, tone, light, colour, rhythm and movement (2008, p. 70). The interpretation of the formal qualities will involve both the in-frame applications in terms of composition and the relation in between the shots in terms of editing.

The analysis of the impact of the 1990s criticism towards the nationalist and modernist implementations of the Early Republican Period on the representations of commercial historical films will be performed through the assessment of 1990s criticism. The engagement of the historical representation of the Early Republican Period in the films with the critical concepts of the 1990s will be categorized by "acceptance and accommodation," "not containing" or "rejection and defence," and will reveal the positioning of the film in the contesting field of culture and politics from 1996 to 2011. In the last part of chapter four, I will juxtapose the engagement of the films with 1990s criticism in order to expose its impact on the historiographical practice of the films. The representation of the Early Republican Period in the commercial films will provide insights on the impact of 1990s criticism on the dynamics of society during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. Finally, in chapter five, and the concluding chapter, I will interpret the outcomes of the analyses.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CINEMA

The aim of this chapter is to offer a perspective for the film medium's historiographical performance by touching upon the relevant literature. The theoretical frameworks articulated in this chapter are mostly derived from the portrayal and discussions in my previous book *Historiography of World War II in Contemporary American Cinema* (2018). The revisiting of the historiographical performance of the fictional film in this chapter seeks to extend the conceptualization of the sensual experience of the past that is transmitted through film by a phenomenological approach, and discuss the consequences of such impact within the conditions of popular culture.

Here I will first portray the texture of history as a constructed material, one that is far from an inborn solid entity. Historiography as a narrative expression of a historical event expressed in the present inevitably contains present conditions within its constitution. Consequently, different historiographies of the same historical event may offer different perspectives that are themselves susceptible to current social tendencies. However, a shift in social tendencies is not the only agent that can transform historiography. The positioning and point of view of the historiographer herself can alter historiographical perspectives.

By highlighting the versatile, dynamic nature of historiography that is formed within the conditions of narration, I position the discipline of historiography as one close to the field of fiction. Even though its constructed nature in my view relegates the practice of historiography to the realm of fiction, diegetic historiography diversifies itself through the sensation of historical experience. Diegetic historical narrations reveal the sense of historical experience through various techniques, such as the use of closural narrative structures or the maintenance of identification with the audience.

The practice of historiography grounds itself on the selection and establishment of historical facts in narration; hence the debates on solid historical accuracy or credibility are incoherent when considering the nature of historiography. From this perspective, when focused on the issue of historical accuracy and credibility, the historical representation of diegetic narration stays on an equal level with the non-diegetic practices of historiography. The difference between diegetic and non-diegetic practices does not surface on the issue of credibility but does so in the sense of historical experience when diegetic representations are bound to memory. In the case of diegetic historical films and novels, these may set examples for historiography that are conducive to transferring a sense of historical experience. Therefore, in the scope of this chapter I will endeavour to bring the concept of historiography closer to the field of fiction as much as possible by emphasizing its constructed nature, so as to draw a distinction between the space of historiography and diegetic historical representation that brings along with it the sensation of historical experience.

## **History**

Is fact possible? What is truth? Is there or has there ever been a phenomenon that remained stable under every condition and in the exact same position? Has there ever been a thought or a solid object that kept its stability when approached from various angles through different views? According to contemporary tendencies to reflect on notions like truth and fact, such stability is not possible.

Here I will approach the notions of fact and truth as relevant but as having separate meanings. I take fact as the end product, the overt result of the incident. Let us imagine there is a collapsed empire. The collapsed position of that empire is a fact. It no longer exists. The truth goes above and beyond the fact. The truth arises from the combination of the fact and the construct built around the fact according to its acknowledgement. The truth is the conveyor of the fact so it can be understood. In this sense the fact is stable, but the truth that encloses it is changeable. Once the tendencies affecting perception shift, the formation of the items that compose the truth evolves accordingly in order to keep producing a certain meaning.



In the context of history, the approach towards fact and truth would be considerations of the past. Nelson Goodman in “Words, Works and Worlds” defines “fact” as a docile and obedient servant rather than a solemn master (1975, p. 58). The designation of truth by the incorporation of fact depends on the approach. Goodman conceptualizes the height of the viewing stand, the angle of approach, even the capacity of sight relative to the registration of the truth. In order to exemplify the dependent characteristics of truth to the perspective in which it is being approached, he applies non-normative questions such as: “Did the sun set a while ago or did the earth rise?” or “Does the sun go around the earth or the earth go around the sun?” (p. 58). The answer is simple: it depends. But the challenge in handling the dependent characteristics of the truth arises in the phase of expression. Even though both expressions in the case of the sun and earth refer to same phenomenon, Goodman delves into the question of expressive manipulations, asserting: “As meanings vanish in favor of a certain relationship among terms, so facts vanish in favor of a certain relationship among versions” (p. 59). The “bound variable” characteristic of fact reveals its dubious nature, but it would not be appropriate to reduce the notion to mere relativity. The solid existence of fact would remain as the result. A dead king is a dead king. But the relative signification differs in the narration of how he died, why, and even by whose hand. In this way, Edward Hallett Carr’s groundbreaking question in his book of the same name, *What is History?* (1961), offers insights into understanding the nature of historical fact. Is history a holly board on which all the events and happenings take place on simultaneously? Is it a creature or a creation?

Carr makes a distinction between facts about the past and historical facts (1990, p. 13). Historical fact is a piece of solid information. It is evidence, like a sealed letter with ambassador’s handwriting, or the signed document of a pact. In order to make sense of that piece of information, it should be wrapped in narration. Therefore, any one piece of historical fact needs to be padded here and there with the facts of the past. The fact of the past distinguishes itself from historical facts in the concept of validity. W. H. Walsh takes a similar position in “Truth and Fact in History Reconsidered.” For Walsh, the past is inconvenient for observation because of the conductive manner historical evidence exhibits through the

act of interpretation. Going one step further than Carr, Walsh claims that historical evidence cannot be valued as an “unvarnished transcript of past reality” (1977, p. 55). “The remains,” as Walsh refers to the historical evidence, are flexible, unfinished and controversial; they are significant only with the addition of narration.

Facts about the past belong to the certain period of time in which they have been produced. They make sense and they are valid only for that period. They have a lifespan that depends on the circumstances that created them. Once those circumstances disappear, the facts of the pasts are no longer viable, or even legible. Then, historical facts are redressed through the acquisition of myths that arise from current social tendencies in order to maintain the meaning that was there before.

The feeling of sustaining and developing the heritage by taking each step on the same path has great importance for the sake of progress. Eric Hobsbawm argues in *On History* that even the most revolutionary societies hunger for cutting-edge innovations, and that “novelty” is synonymous with “improvement” (2009, p. 27). Hobsbawm designates history as a permanent dimension of human consciousness, associating the composition of social institutions within its context. History as the permanent dimension of human consciousness, or the collective continuity of experience, encourages expansion to flourish. In order to continue the sense of the regular experience of growth, history shall be coherent or legible within the present. Societies change, evolving in various ideological, economic, and social ways. For Hobsbawm, history is a pattern for the present (2009, p. 14). When social transformation occurs, history has to be reconstructed accordingly in order to maintain coherence between the past and for the sake of improvement in the future. The transformation would *feel* like improvement as long as the present looks like progress over the past.

In this process, Carr determines the selection and organization of facts as the most important operational method of influencing viewpoints (1990, p. 11). Historical facts are investigated and selected according to intention and buttressed with facts from the past in order to form a comprehensible narration. Carr emphasizes different levels of importance that are applied through commentary (p. 123), writing: “The facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts of history only in the virtue of

the significance attached to them by the historian” (p. 120). “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or content” (p. 11).

Carr argues that in the process of constructing a historical narrative, the installation of historical facts and the other facts of history (facts he designates as un-historical) happens intentionally (p. 103). A fact of history that is only valid for the time of the event, as Carr explains, can be advanced to the position of a historical fact by the importance devoted to it by the historian (p. 103). Comparing history to “an enormous jigsaw puzzle with a lot of missing parts,” Carr (p. 12) counters the belief of the existence of an objective and autonomous historical fact free from the interpretation of the historian. “The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him” (p. 9).

## Historiography

The search for a methodology to maintain a readily accessible and comprehensible historical knowledge has a respectable history of its own. Fatmagül Berktaş argues in *The Gender of History* that in the sixteenth century, close source analyses of document-based driven approaches in historiography were significant (2010, p. 15). Her study distinguished itself through accurate work on historical records and aimed to find and preserve any possible historical data. In the eighteenth century, this document-based orientation shifted towards one that put forward literary properties. As Berktaş states, this tendency rose under the influence of the Enlightenment, and was consciously trying to depart from previous political emphases on historiography, with the intention of embracing multiple layers of society.

With the nineteenth century came the inevitable influence of modernist scientific reason, and here historiography became an independent academic discipline that acquired its own critical methodology. The leading figure of this approach was Leopold von Ranke. Ranke emphasized the impartial and objective properties of the historiographer in determining the close study of historical sources as the rule of historiography (Berktaş 2010, p.

15). The difference of Ranke's approach from the understanding of historiography in the sixteenth century was to consider the historiographer's existence and the generation of her/his point of view through the time and place s/he belonged to. The methodological direction that arose through the acceptance of the historiographer's subjective approach placed historiography near the border of modernist scientific disciplines (p. 16).

As Berktaý points out, twentieth-century historiography as practiced in European and American universities was a substantial profession beset with constant challenges. However, the twentieth century was also the era in which the hopes of the Enlightenment collapsed under the strong influence of the Second World War. It was the mood for disappointment – a time for reassessment – and even the most durable pillars of truth were under interrogation. Predictably, the optimistic belief in historiography's medium-specific property of exposing the truth under the correct methodology was also being challenged in the postmodern period. The dependability of historical data and the validity of historic texts from ancestral annalists stood on one side of the question, and the possibility of the objectivity and impartiality of the historiographer on the other.

The postmodern perspective acknowledged the historian as an interpreter and historiography as narration. The belief that scientific knowledge produced historiography was collapsing; therefore it could not have dominance over other types of narration. Ankersmith (1989, p. 138) in *Historiography and Postmodernism* criticizes the flexibility of the postmodern approach towards the historiographical performance that is vastly bound to the historian's interpretation. He points to the dominance of the historiographer that disables the access of historical cognition (p. 140). In his criticism of postmodern approaches to historiography, he considers the methodological tendency of the Annales School as an exception. For Ankersmith, the Annales School succeeded in introducing novel paths to exhibit historical cognitions (p. 138).

The historiographical approach of the Annales School is significant for its challenge towards the totalitarian epistemology of the Rankeian model. In *Achievements of the Annales School*, Foster characterizes it as a new social science that associates historical data within the wider social and economic context (1978, p. 62). In this attempt the function attributed to

the historiographer would be to identify and signify the system of networks between incidents and conditions, just like a biologist examining the process rather than the urge of the physicists to reach the ultimate law. Within this methodological approach, the Annales School aimed to reach and exhibit a certain historical cognition with the least possible distortion. The general tendency of the Annales tradition was towards a micro analytical perspective. In Foster's explanation, the Annales School's historiography highlights the tendencies and transformations of a social group in a given time and space and aims to interpret them through the wider social context (p. 64).

For Harsgor, the Annales School's departure from the fundamental function of historiography is its ability to present an orderly framework of a given period, as described in *Total History: The Annales School* (1978, p. 9). The fundamental deficiency of the Annales School's historiographical approach lies in its tendency to ignore the cultural and political hierarchies that dominate and structure the perspective towards history. Hence, the historiographical approach of the Annales School in Harsgor's consideration renders an illusion by claiming to expose direct historical cognitions (p. 10).

Lorenz in *Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives* points out postmodernism's approach to the stereotypical character of the fragmentary perspectives (1999, pp. 30–37). He conceptualizes postmodern approaches in terms of methodologies that are designed for specific social conditions that emerge in a given society within national borders. For him, the situation and nation-specific presence of such methodologies contradict the pluralist claim of postmodern historiography. Hence the borderline between pluralism, relativism, and scepticism diminishes along with the cognition of history. According to Berkday, the postmodernist approach to historiography was in defining it as a branch of literature that is based on historical data (2010, p. 17). Historiographers defended their position against postmodernist criticism by standing by their methodological interpretations while highlighting their responsibility for giving voice to the past.

Even though the criticism of postmodern conceptions of historiography challenges the characteristics of such methodologies, it is clear that the context of history has evolved far away from modernist conceptions. The

tendencies of historians to look for absolute knowledge of the past yield to a perspective that considers the historiographer's subjectivity in the act of historiography, one that is always partial.

In historiographical performance, the historiographer finds and constructs a series of reasons that s/he attaches to the initiation of the event s/he is documenting. The act of forming a consistent document about the past that proves itself through the given historical data finds ground in the need to be meaningful. What constitutes meaning in this context is narration, the art of expressing the sentiment of the idea, and the information. Human beings narrate while they think, talk, and write. Information or an idea as an abstract form cannot exist as pure substance and cannot be transferred to the minds of others by telepathy as such. We communicate by expressing the sentiment of an idea with others. The structuralist analysis of semiology focuses on the production of meaning in language (Barthes 1977, p. 9). As the context of syntagm points out, the expression of a meaning depends on the selection and placement of the words (p. 12). The process of selecting, ordering, and accentuating the words in an order to transfer the meaning is its narration.

In *What is History?*, E. H. Carr asserts that historians constantly endeavour to arrange past human experiences by attaching to them a cause-and-effect relationship (1990, p. 88). In this perspective, history is acknowledged as a constitution composed through the organization of past incidents in a causal order. The historical document needs narrative in order to be comprehensible. The construction of narration involves establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between the statements. Hence the comprehension of a historical document requires a bond of cause and effect that ties the events to one another in time. The resulting event has to be explained with the reasons that caused it. Carr underlines the rejection of irrelevant data about past in the act of composing a logical and rational document (p. 147).

According to Carr, the historian's point of view and intention effect the causes s/he attaches to the historical event as well as the decision(s) made about which events to document as historical fact. "The causes determine the historian's interpretation of the historical process, and his interpretation determines the selection and marshaling of the causes" (Carr 1990, p. 103). The decision on the historical fact to build upon relies on its