

Cinema and Politics

Cinema and Politics:
Turkish Cinema and The New Europe

Edited by

Deniz Bayraktar

Assistant Editors Aslı Kotaman and Ahu Samav Uğursoy

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and The New Europe, Edited by Deniz Bayrakdar
Assistant Editors Aslı Kotaman and Ahu Samav Ugursoy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images and Tables.....	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Preface	xi
Introduction	xvii
‘Son of Turks’ claim: ‘I’m a child of European Cinema’ <i>Deniz Bayrakdar</i>	

Part I: Politics of Text and Image

Chapter One.....	2
Sacred Word, Profane Image: Theologies of Adaptation <i>Ella Shohat</i>	

Part II: European Cinema: Politics of Past and Present

Chapter Two	40
The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Politics/Psychoanalysis/Cinema <i>Frank P. Tomasulo</i>	
Chapter Three	51
From Salò To Gomorra: The Influence of Pier Paolo Pasolini's Political Perspective on Independent Italian Cinema <i>Giacomo Manzoli</i>	
Chapter Four.....	70
Politics, Realism and Ken Loach <i>John Hill</i>	
Chapter Five	82
Dogville and Manderlay: In Which We Encounter Lars Von Trier's America <i>Elif Akçalı</i>	

Part III: The New European Cinema: Politics of Migration, Creolisation and Hyphenation

Chapter Six	94
Creolised Cinema: Serbian Cinema and EU Integration Process	
<i>Nevena Daković</i>	
Chapter Seven	108
Visual Travels to Other Places: Politics of Migration in Reel	
<i>Levent Soysal</i>	
Chapter Eight	118
Turkish Cinema and the New Europe: <i>At the Edge of Heaven</i>	
<i>Deniz Bayrakdar</i>	

Part IV: Turkish Cinema: Politics of Horizontal and Vertical Mobility

Chapter Nine	132
Different Understandings of Modernity in Halit Refiğ's Birds of Exile (Gurbet Kuşları)	
<i>Zeynep Koçer</i>	
Chapter Ten	142
Yılmaz Güney's Beautiful Losers: Idiom and Performance in Turkish Political Film	
<i>Murat Akser</i>	
Chapter Eleven	154
Allegorical Failure in <i>Sürü</i> (The Herd) And <i>Yol</i> (The Way)	
<i>Eylem Kaftan</i>	

Part V: The New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Nationalism

Chapter Twelve	164
Representations of Imperialism in Turkish Cinema within a Pendulum of Nationalism and Anti-Imperialism	
<i>Kaya Özkaracalar</i>	
Chapter Thirteen	172
Film as the Media and the 'Mediator' in Conflict Transformation	
<i>Müberra Yüksel</i>	

Chapter Fourteen	188
<i>Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali</i> (Last Ottoman Yandım Ali) and <i>Kara Murat</i> ; The Transformation of the Image of Invincible Turk From Comic Strip to Movie Screen <i>Hande Yedidal</i>	

Part VI: The New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Ephemeral Identities

Chapter Fifteen	202
Critical Thoughts on the New Turkish Cinema <i>Zahit Atam</i>	

Chapter Sixteen	221
The Glorified Lumpen ‘Nothingness’ versus Night Navigations <i>Zeynep Tül Akbal Süalp</i>	

Chapter Seventeen	232
<i>Yazgı</i> or <i>Kader</i> : Not of Great Importance, or Taking a Stand Against Kader <i>Aslı Kotaman</i>	

Part VII: New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Remembering and Forgetting

Chapter Eighteen	240
Islamic Ways of Life Reflected on the Silver Screen <i>Özlem Avcı & Berna Uçarol Kılınç</i>	

Chapter Nineteen	258
Venus in Furs, Turks in Purse: Masochism in the New Cinema of Turkey <i>Savaş Aslan</i>	

Chapter Twenty	268
(Cannot) Remember: Landscapes of Loss in Contemporary Turkish Cinema <i>Övgü Gökçe</i>	

Contributors.....	280
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Index	286
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LIST OF IMAGES AND TABLES

Image 1	43
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Shadows	
Image 2	46
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Coffin	
Image 3	49
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Doctors	
Table 1	243
The Islamic Movement's progress in Turkey ¹	
Table 2	247
Three important movies of the period	
Appendix 1	254
Films with Islamic Sensibilities on the Silver Screen 1989-1996	

¹ Kentel, "Journals of Islamic Thought of 1990s and new *Muslim Intellectuals*: Knowledge and Wisdom Umran, Tezkire", Political Thought in Modern Turkey, İletişim, 2004.

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PREFACE

ABOUT THE VOLUME

Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and the New Europe covers a wide range of essays by scholars from different corners of Europe like England, Italy, Serbia and Turkey and is enhanced with contributions from the USA. The themes mainly focus on films, directors and producers of the old European space and beyond. I have tried to categorize the parts with the help of a virtual map of my knowledge about European cinema. The essays on European film movements in part II ‘European Cinema: Politics of Past and Present’, with references to their political, social and aesthetic backgrounds, follows the first chapter by Ella Shohat ‘Sacred Word, Profane Images: Theologies of Adaptation’ that functions as a general introduction to the medium called cinema.

Ella Shohat explores in her paper ‘Sacred Word, Profane Images: Theologies of Adaptation’ the multifaceted relations between texts and images as shaped within a Judeo-Islamic space, and the implications of these relations for film as a medium and adaptation as a practice. In her opinion ‘an imprecise and reductive discourse about cinema as merely a visual medium, then, underestimates the potential of film language to transform ‘The Book’ into multiple realms in which the word, images, sounds, dialogue, music, and written materials all constitute, together, the complex space called cinema’.

Frank Tomasulo points out in his article ‘The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Politics/Psychoanalysis’ that *Caligari*, as an early instance of a genre film, fulfills its major ideological functions: to be symptomatic of the psychosocial contradictions within a given culture. Hence he thinks that more than seeing *Caligari* as a direct reflection of the ‘real’ Germany –Weimar Germany– the film demonstrates how Weimar Germany attempted to signify itself. He concentrates his analysis through three modes of signification within the text’s discourse: the political, the psychoanalytical, and the aesthetic; in short: *Caligari*-as-Hitler, *Caligari*-as-Freud, and *Caligari*-as-Filmmaker.

Giacomo Manzoli's article 'From Salò to Gomorra: The Influence of Pier Paolo Pasolini's Political Perspective on Independent Italian Cinema' discusses the persistence of some Pasolinian 'topoi' in the view of prominent Italian contemporary directors such as Nanni Moretti, Matteo Garrone, Paolo Sorrentino, and Marco Tullio Giordana. He underlines the ability of Pier Paolo Pasolini to draw an interpretative view of Italian history.

In his contribution 'Politics, Realism and Ken Loach', **John Hill** revisits the question of realism and the political purposes to which it may be put. Using the work of the film director Ken Loach as his example, he revisits the debate surrounding the politics of realism that occurred in the 1970s, with particular reference to *Days of Hope* (1975), a series of television films dealing with labour history during the years 1916 to 1926, Hill indicates how the realism debate was largely conducted at a formal level and tended to ignore the specific political, institutional and artistic contexts in which the films appeared. He then goes on to show how the political significance of Loach's work has changed due to the new political, industrial and aesthetic conditions under which more recent films, such as *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006), have been produced and exhibited. Thus, while Loach remains one of the world's most politically committed filmmakers, the political import of his use of realism, Hill suggests, cannot be understood in the abstract but only in terms of the specific circumstances in which it has been employed.

In her article 'Dogville and Manderlay: In which we encounter Lars Von Trier's 'America' **Elif Akçalı** draws from the history of European Cinema in her analysis of the meanings that complete narratives through the choices in the style of narration in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* and *Manderlay*. She finds common stylistic features in both films that achieve the desired meaning of the stories and hint at Lars von Trier's political point of view. Her article analyses how particular stylistic choices –the soundstages and the photographs– contribute to question the values of conformity and hypocrisy which shape the societies in these films.

The European Cinema nowadays is discussed in Part III 'The New European Cinema: Politics of Migration, Creolisation and Hyphenation' from the point of view of new discourses and styles. The essays on German-Turkish and Serbian film approach the complex problem of hybrid, creolised and hyphenated identities.

Nevena Daković's chapter 'Creolised Cinema: Serbian Cinema and EU Integration Process' explores the concepts of creolisation and hyphenation. Her title is 'Subcategorizing and juxtaposing creolized versus hyphenated identity and Balkan versus Europe'. She explores the ways Serbian cinema has engaged with the politics and processes of EU integration. She points out that the Balkan, ex-Yugoslav and Serbian cinema at the turn of the century are exploring the ways films and their directors have often 'pre-empted' political developments –a shift from a politics of nationalism to one of Europeanization.

Levent Soysal in his article 'Visual Travels to Other Places: Politics of Migration in Reel' traces the shifts in our imagination of migration through a reading of *Otobüs* (The Bus, 1974), *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* (What Have I Done to Deserve This? 1984), and *Gegen die Wand* (Head On, 2004). Since the arrival of postwar immigrants in Europe, migration has been theorized and visualized first as a labor story, then a culture story, and finally as a transnational story. Within this intellectual imagination, Okan's *Otobüs* represents the beginning, the move to the West; Almodovar presents a complete theory of migration at the intersection of (inter)national spaces; and Akın takes migrants on a transnational journey of return and figuratively ends the migration cycle.

Deniz Bayraktar's article 'Turkish Cinema and The New Europe: *At the Edge of Heaven*' concentrates on Fatih Akın's *Yaşamın Kıyısında* (At the Edge of Heaven, 2007) which was inspired by the director's hyphenated identity –a search for a soil, for the characters' hometowns, and at the same time an attempt to settle down in Turkey. Akın makes his male protagonist 'Nejat Aksu' into an 'Einsiedler'. Deniz Bayraktar argues that *At the Edge of Heaven* is based on a continuous loss, longing and search which itself becomes the new identity of these 'postmodern cultural nomads' (Çağlar).

Part IV 'Turkish Cinema: Politics of Horizontal and Vertical Mobility' considers two important filmmakers of Turkish Cinema: Halit Refiğ and Yılmaz Güney. The articles discuss the directors' personas, the representation of women in their films, and their political views, and bring up particularly notable ideas on the interplay between issues of gender, identity, and migration.

Zeynep Koçer provides in her article 'Different Understandings of Modernity in Halit Refiğ's *Birds of Exile* (Gurbet Kuşları)' a textual

analysis of Halit Refiğ's *Gurbet Kuşları* (Birds of Exile, 1964) in order to investigate the ways in which the understandings of modernity in the 1930s and 1950s created different gender identities.

Murat Akser discusses in his article 'Yılmaz Güney's Beautiful Losers: Idiom and Performance in Turkish Political Film' idiom and performance as the political discourse of Yılmaz Güney's loser characters and how Güney's political views and performance changes over time as he transforms himself from *the ugly king* of trashy adventure films in the 1960s to an auteur/political director in the 1970s and 1980s.

Eylem Kaftan examines in her article 'Allegorical Failure in *Sürü* (The Herd) And *Yol* (The Way)' how Yılmaz Güney deals with power as a complex category which combines economic, political and cultural relations. Her article looks at the latent content of *Sürü* (The Herd, 1978) and *Yol* (Way, 1981) in terms of their allegorical qualities.

Part V 'The New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Nationalism', focuses more on the relation between cinema and politics, with analyses on representations of nationalism and anti-imperialism, on film as a medium of conflict transformation, and on the transformation of the caricaturized Turkish male protagonist.

Kaya Özkaracalar in 'Representations of Imperialism in Turkish Cinema within a Pendulum of Nationalism and Anti-Emperialism' first puts forward the representation of imperialism in a prominent sample of a round of new nationalist movies. Next, he analyses the representation of imperialism in another Turkish movie from a different era and compares these two representations with a view to linking these differences to different approaches to imperialism.

Müberra Yüksel discusses two films by Derviş Zaim with an interdisciplinary approach. Entitling her article 'Film As The Media And The 'Mediator' In Conflict Transformation', she points out that 'films, as the third party, may reframe the audience's perception of conflicts and enhance their self-reflexivity and moral deliberation to distant others so that they would become conscious about inventing the future with others from a constructivist standpoint.' Yüksel defines *Paralel Yolculuklar* (Parallel Trips, 2004) and *Çamur* (Mud, 2003) as films 'that have broken the 'spiral of silence' on the 'Cyprus issue'.'

Hande Yedidal analyses in ‘*Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali* (Last Ottoman Yandım Ali) and *Kara Murat*; The Transformation of the Image of Invincible Turk From Comic Strip to Movie Screen’ the transformation of the caricaturized, invincible, extraordinarily powerful, fierce patriot till his last breath –the macho Turkish male protagonist– from the 1970s to today and the concepts and values that are carried with these characters throughout these years. She utilizes comic strips and films made from them: *Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali*, (The Last Ottoman Yandım Ali, 2006) and the *Kara Murat* (Black Murat) series of films from the 1970s, both of which aim to arouse nationalistic sentiments.

Part VI ‘The New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Ephemeral Identities’ focuses on important Turkish film directors and the film climate in Turkey from the 1980s onwards.

Zahit Atam explains in his article ‘Critical Thoughts on the New Turkish Cinema’ the reasons for, and the outcomes of, the crisis after the 1980 coup d’etat, through a look at the careers of two directors, Zeki Demirkubuz and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, in his essay ‘Non-conventional Observations on the New Turkish Cinema’.

Zeynep Tül Akbal Süalp analyses ‘The Glorified Lumpen ‘Nothingness’ versus Night Navigations’ –diverse and conflicting tracks in Turkey’s cinema after the mid 1990s. She points out that ‘on the one hand it is the cinema of vacuumed and sealed image subjects of the city with a glorified alienated, remote and lumpen ‘nothingness’, on the other hand it is a search for confrontations and encounters’ which she calls ‘night navigations and dream stalking’.

Ash Kotaman, in ‘*Yazgı* (Destiny, 2001) or *Kader* (Fate, 2006): Not of Great Importance or Taking a Stand against Kader’, focuses on the main characters of Zeki Demirkubuz’s films in terms of their political views and the role of freedom of choice.

The essays in Part VII ‘New Turkish Cinema: Politics of Remembering and Forgetting’, evokes creative discussions about the issues facing the new cinema in Turkey, like Islamic life styles, the dominating masculine discourse, and the sentiments of loss, remembrance and mourning.

Özlem Avcı and **Berna Uçarol Kılınç** consider ‘Islamic Ways of Life Reflected on the Silver Screen’, focusing on the representation of Islamic life styles and the changes in those life styles in contemporary Turkish cinema which started with the definition of ‘Milli Sinema’ (National Cinema) in the 1970s, ‘Beyaz Sinema’ (White Cinema) in the 1990s, and ‘Yeşil Sinema’ (Green Cinema) today.

Savaş Arslan bases his article ‘Venus in Furs, Turks in Purse: Masochism in the New Cinema of Turkey’ on Orhan Pamuk’s Nobel Lecture –*Babamın Bavulu* (‘My Father’s Suitcase’) at the Swedish Academy, Stockholm. Pamuk’s reference to his ‘father’s suitcase’ is used as a metaphor for the new cinema in Turkey that has attempted ‘to open up the father’s suitcase and address masculinity and fatherhood at different levels.’

Övgü Gökçe’s ‘(Cannot) Remember: Landscapes of Loss in Contemporary Turkish Cinema’ studies loss as an emerging sentiment in contemporary Turkish cinema through two recent films, *Bulutları Beklerken* (Waiting for the Clouds, 2003) and *Sonbahar* (Autumn, 2007). It focuses on the films’ aesthetics as the main site ‘that accommodates relationships between loss, remembrance, and mourning.’

With contributions on the politics of text and image, past and present, migration, creolisation and hyphenation, horizontal and vertical mobility, nationalism, identities and memory in European and especially Turkish cinema, I think this volume is ready ‘to begin its journey’.

INTRODUCTION

‘SON OF TURKS’ CLAIM: ‘I’M A CHILD OF EUROPEAN CINEMA’

DENİZ BAYRAKDAR

This volume on *Turkish Cinema and The New Europe* specializes in politics. Most of the articles in this book were presented at the eighth annual New Directions to Turkish Film Studies Conference in 2007. The conference in 2007 was entitled ‘Cinema and Politics’ and included a variety of papers on Turkish Cinema as well as contributions from other countries. It was not an easy task to gather different papers under generic titles hoping to suggest a proper integrated whole. With this in mind, I thought I would begin my introduction with an ‘edited title’: ‘Son of Turks’ claims: ‘I’m a child of European Cinema.’ The questions that this title incites will, I hope, open a way of looking at the relation between cinema and politics, especially within the framework of Europe and Turkey.

Varied approaches concerning the relation between cinema and politics focus on policies, eras, countries, mainstream and art cinema productions, transnational examples, changing narratives and identities. Both cinema and politics have actors and directors for their scenes, and in this sense their discourses intermingle. I am particularly attracted by the performances of the ‘actors/actresses’ in both arenas. The politicians, parliamentarians, and social group leaders as well as the actors, directors, and producers with ‘hyphenated/creolised/hybrid identities’ such as German-Turks, directors of Balkan cinema, or Italian filmmakers of Turkish origin give a wide and refreshing perspective to the discussion about Europe in the media. What these ‘mediated identities’ represent goes beyond the limits of the old Europe, towards the different sensitivity of the New Europe.

So, in the beginning of my introduction I am concentrating on what these ‘actors’ have said, and what has been said about them, in the texts and images of these politicians, filmmakers, actresses and authors in

Germany, Austria and other European countries in Turkish and European newspapers. This increasing need to bring ‘our international achievements’ into the foreground is, a continuation of the pride discourse of nation states in a globalized world. The ‘European Champion’ stories of sports stars and beauty queens from the 30s to the 80s have changed slightly into the success stories of politicians and film directors from the 1990s on².

Nuri Bilge Ceylan, after winning several awards in European and other film festivals, was declared the ‘Best Director’ at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008 for his film *Üç Maymun* (Three Monkeys, 2007). In the previous year, again at Cannes, Fatih Akın was awarded best ‘European Film’ for his script for *Am Rande des Lebens-Yaşamın Kıyısında* (At the Edge of Heaven, 2006). He summarized his feelings by saying “....I’m a child of European cinema”³

The criteria for today’s champion actors are getting more complex and our expectations are rising. The interwoven networks of politicians, authors, directors and producers, players, and sports/women are considered to represent a sense of the ‘Turkish Nation’ in Europe compared to, for example, those sports women who represent the ‘national team’ and carry a more ‘nationalistic flavour’. The new group of ‘politics and culture’ –Orhan Pamuk, Cem Özdemir, Fatih Akın, Nuri Bilge Ceylan – do not allow a categorization of their identities as they tend to be either isolated or offer a disposition inclined towards building bridges, both characteristics which enhance their role in society and not their origins.

² Yaşar Doğu (1946, wrestler), İsmail Akçay (1966, marathon runner), Ahmet Ayık (1970, wrestler), Cemal Kamacı (1973, boxer), Naim Süleymanoğlu (1988, weight-lifter), Süreyya Ayhan (2002, marathon runner) or the beauty queens like Keriman Halisoğlu (Miss World, 1932), Günseli Başar (Miss Europe 1951), and Nazlı Kuruoğlu (Miss Europe, 1982). Yılmaz Güney (screenwriter) and Şerif Gören (director) shared the Golden Palm for their film *Yol* with Costa Gavras’ *Missing* at the 35th Cannes film festival in 1982. Metin Erksan was awarded the Golden Bear for his film *Susuz Yaz* (Dry Summer, 1964) at the Berlin Film Festival; the film was also shown at the 61st Cannes Film Festival (2008) in the section “Une Certain Regard” among the classical films, for which section Fatih Akın was the president of the jury. In 2004, Fatih Akın was awarded the Golden Bear for his film *Gegen die Wand* (Against the Wall, 2004). Orhan Pamuk, the prominent Turkish novelist received the Nobel Prize in 2006.

³ <http://www.goethe.de/ges/spa/prj/sog/muk/en3522007.htm>

With this in mind I would like to compare the prevailing discourses of the Turkish and European media on achievements in politics and cinema of the ‘son of Turks’.

‘Son of Turks’

One of the most striking news articles after the elections in Germany in 2008 was written by Judy Dempsey. She entitled her article “Greens in Germany pick ‘son of Turks’ as leader.”⁴

The Green party, one of Germany's main political parties, has elected the son of Turkish immigrants to its top political post, the first time any party here has chosen a leader with an immigrant background. The election Saturday of Cem Özdemir, 42, born in southern Germany of parents who had come from Turkey to work as ‘Gastarbeiter’, or guest workers, during the 1960s, marks a major turning point not only for the opposition Greens, but also for the country as a whole. Even though more than 2.6 million Turks live in Germany, accounting for 3 percent of the population, few have managed to make it to the higher ranks of the professions, including politics and the civil service.⁵

I find this definition ‘son of Turks’ very useful to begin with. *The Guardian* sees Cem Özdemir’s achievement in a parallel way in its editorial ‘In praise of... Cem Özdemir’.

Cem Özdemir, the German-born son of two Turkish ‘guest workers’, was chosen as the Greens’ new leader at the party congress in Erfurt at the weekend. This makes him the first person with immigrant parents to lead a mainstream political party in postwar Germany and also, it appears, the first in Europe as a whole.⁶

In this respect his Turkishness is again amalgamed with his being a ‘guestworker’s son’ and is proffered as the first example of an achievement, not only in Germany but in all of Europe. Abbas Djavadi from Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, discusses the issue through an analysis of the Turkish media’s perception.

⁴ Dempsey, Judy, “Greens in Germany pick ‘son of Turks’ as leader, *International Herald Tribune*, 16.11.2008

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “In praise of... Cem Özdemir”, Editorial, *The Guardian*, 18.11.2008

In any case, Özdemir's election to co-chair was hailed as a groundbreaking event in Turkey, where the jubilant media were quick to compare it to another election across the Atlantic: Barack Obama's victory in the U.S. presidential vote on November 4. 'A Historic Day' was the headline of one of the popular Turkish daily newspaper 'Hürriyet', and the liberal 'Taraf' called Özdemir 'Germany's Green Obama.' Özdemir's own supporters had waged an Internet campaign under the slogan 'Yes, We Cem', nodding to the Obama campaign's 'Yes, We Can.'⁷

As Djavadi points out, the Turkish liberal daily newspaper *Taraf* compares Cem Özdemir's achievement beyond Europe with America. *Taraf* defines Özdemir as 'Germany's Green Obama' which is then cleverly echoed by Özdemir: 'If I were Özdemir of the Green's that would be enough for me'. Özdemir continues 'Obama is both white and black and one forgets very easily about that fact... this reality should always be remembered' since he finds this hyphenation crucial. 'For me it is very important, that one day it will be forgotten that we came from Anatolia' says Cem Özdemir. He points out that they are 'more German' than is often assumed.⁸

Cengiz Çandar, a Turkish journalist –who is one of the leading discussants of Turkey's entry into the EU– also draws a parallel between Cem Özdemir and Obama.

Just as Obama's success in 2008 reflects his transformational ability in the US, Cem Özdemir's position as the Co-Party leader reflects Germany's transformation and ability to evolve. The German Greens, by electing Cem Özdemir, gave a transatlantic reply to the American people.⁹

He finds that Cem Özdemir's vertical mobility in politics as a 'black Turk' or as a 'green Obama' gives us hope not because of national or ethnic justifications but for the welfare of democracy. And he sees this also as our expectation from Cem Özdemir, in whose abilities we trust.¹⁰

⁷ Djavadi, Abbas, "Germany's 'Green Obama' Breaks New Ground For Minorities", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 18.11.2008

⁸ DW/Anadolu News Agency: "Almanya'nın Yeşil Obama'sı" (Germany's Green Obama), *Taraf*, 16.11.2008

⁹ Çandar, Cengiz, "Barack Hussein Obama'dan Altı Yaş Daha Genç" (Six Years Younger Than Barack Hussein Obama), *Referans*, 19.11.2008

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Guardian defines Özdemir's reply to the comparison between him and Obama as 'being inappropriate'. Based on the range of the success both have achieved on either side of the Atlantic, *The Guardian* points out that there is a big difference but also poses a hopeful challenge for the future.¹¹

Perhaps one day Mr. Özdemir - who in 1994 became the first Turkish-descended person to sit in the Bundestag - will even manage to draw as big and inspiring a crowd in Berlin as Mr. Obama himself did earlier this year.¹²

‘Sons of Turks’: To which geography of Europe do they belong?

Zülfü Livaneli thinks that Cem Özdemir is a true child of this geography, of this culture, besides being a German.¹³

In his interview in *Bild am Sonntag*, Cem Özdemir claims ‘We, the German Turks, are much more German than some people think’. He thinks that he is bridging the two sides; ‘being the son of Turkish parents’ but ‘a German in his behaviour’. He says that he takes his shoes off entering a house as is customary for Turks, but he finds himself punctual and disciplined in his thoughts even while working in Turkey.¹⁴

Other comments about his success also emphasize the use of Özdemir's achievement in support of the ‘strong nationalistic characteristics of the Turks’. Yunus Altınsoy, European Döner Chamber Director (Avrupa Döner Odası Girişimi Başkanı) finds that Özdemir's achievement shows the results of hard labour more than ethnic origin. He says that ‘We Turks bring with us not only labour but also social and cultural heritage and this enriches the culture of the host country.’ He goes on to discuss how Özdemir's father's generation had to sacrifice a lot and he sees his success

¹¹ “In praise of... Cem Özdemir”, Editorial, *The Guardian*, 18.11.2008

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Livaneli, Zülfü, “Başkan Cem Özdemir” (President Cem Özdemir), *Gazete Vatan*, 17.11.2008

¹⁴ Cem Özdemir's interview in *Bild am Sonntag*, quoted in *Sabah* “Cem Özdemir'in Eşbaşkanlığı Alman basınında” (Cem Özdemir Copresident in the German Press), 16.11.2008.

as the opening of the way to being prime minister, and “the same is also valid for the CDP, why shouldn’t they have a foreign party leader?”¹⁵

There are several success stories of not only ‘sons of Turks’ but also ‘daughters of Turks’. Sami Kohen points out in his column in *Milliyet* that among the elected German-Turkish politicians more than half are women, which is itself above the Bundestag’s average.¹⁶ He also underlines that most of the German Turkish parliamentarians are voted in by non-Turkish voters which means that the majority also views the parliamentarians of Turkish origin as German citizens.

Among these women politicians are Emine Demirbügen-Wegner (CDU) and Ülker Radziwill (SPD) from Berlin, and Alev Korun¹⁷ of the Green Party in Vienna, who are working on projects on migrants, dual citizenship and women’s rights. Radziwill points out “...a politician liberated from his/her ethnic origins could have the chance to realize a similar achievement”¹⁸ referring to Cem Özdemir’s election.

The idea that Turkish politicians are seen by the majority as ‘*einheimisch*’ (native) is felt also by them as members of the society they live in. Hüseyin Araç, former Odense, Denmark municipality member and current Danish parliamentarian for two and a half years says: “We, all from Odensee, we all are Danish.”¹⁹

Nebahat Albayrak, the first Turkish minister in a European government who is responsible for migration policies and juridical institutions, thinks that dual citizenship does not interfere with her bond with the Netherlands,

¹⁵ “Almanya’da Umudun Adı Cem Özdemir” (The Name of Hope in Germany is Cem Özdemir), DW-WORLD.DE Deutsche Welle, 17.11.2008

¹⁶ Kohen, Sami, “Avrupa’da böyle Türkler de var...” (There are also such Turks in Europe), *Milliyet*, 27.02.2007

¹⁷ Alev Korun has been the representative for migrants and integration issues of the Green Party, the Turkish originated Austrian, has been in the third row in the elections along with Beatrice Achalake from Camerun, who works for women rights.

¹⁸ “Almanya’da Umudun Adı Cem Özdemir” (The Name of Hope in Germany is Cem Özdemir), DW-WORLD.DE Deutsche Welle, 17.11.2008

¹⁹ “Hüseyin Araç: Hepimiz Danimarkalıyız”, (Hüseyin Araç: We Are All From Denmark), *Türk Medya*, Odensee, 06.06.2007

that a Turkish passport is for her “the meaning of her identity, character and soul.”²⁰

The discrepancy between the original and new identity plays a crucial role for the discourses and rhetoric of politicians of Turkish origin but it is, moreover, a dilemma for the general Turkish population in Europe in terms of language and education. The main issue is whether to integrate or assimilate -a choice which gives rise to anxiety. This discussion even embroils ‘the veiled Turkish women’ in German politics –an issue initiated by Left Party parliamentarian Sevim Dağdelen and SDP member Mechthild Ravert.²¹

Turkish-Austrian ÖVP parliamentarian Şirvan Ekici in her speech in Yozgat about Turks migrating in the 1960s to Europe points out how

Turks went to Europe to work there for 1-2 years and came back to have land and a house, but they understood in the 1990s that they are European and they are permanently in Europe. The biggest problem of Turks in Europe is education.²²

She presents Turks living in Europe with a tough task:

Turks living in Europe are the identity card for Turkey on the road towards joining the European Union. We represent Turkey voluntarily. Turkey’s entry into the EU is a secondary issue; the EU perspective has brought a dynamism to Turkey.²³

Looking at politicians and parliamentarians’ discourse on making a living and career in Europe, the Turkish identity is amalgamated in sayings like ‘We are more German, we are more Danish’. This dedication of the European Turks to the new country is a ‘new identity model’ in my opinion, for they tend to build the dynamic character of the ‘new European citizen’. The Belgian-Turk vice president of the municipality Gent, Fatma

²⁰ “Nebahat Albayrak: Türk Pasaportu Benim Herşeyim” (Turkish Passport means so much to me) Türk Medya, Amsterdam, 05.06.2007

²¹ Özkan, Fadime, “Almanya hâlâ acı vatan” (Germany is still a Homeland of Sorrow), *Yeni Şafak*, 07.11.2006

²² İhlas Haber Ajansı (Ihlas News Agency): “Türk Asıllı Avusturya Milletvekili Şirvan Ekici Yozgat’ta” (Turkish Deputy of Austria: Sirvan Ekici at Yozgat), Haberler.com, 26.07.2007

²³ Ibid

Pehlivan, thinks that they function like a bridge between the Turkish population and the European country they live in even as they are attached to Turkey. Murat Kalmış, Delmenhorst parliamentarian finds that Turkey has difficulties in articulation and, similarly to Fatma Pehlivan, he sees his function as that of a bridge between Europe and Turkey.²⁴

Another side of this new identity is constituted by the media, especially by the media conglomerates. Aydın Doğan, the owner of the Doğan Group (one of the largest media holding companies in Turkey) was honored with the ‘Goldene Victoria’ medal by the German Journal Publishers Society for his contribution to German and Turkish relations. The award was given by prime minister Angela Merkel. Aydın Doğan stated:

For 40 years we have been for integration. For 40 years our newspapers in Germany and Europe, as well as Euro D and Euro Star TV channels have followed an integration-supporting broadcasting policy. Cem Özdemir’s election to co-chair in the Green Party is in terms of integration a great success.... Fatih Akın is another beautiful example. As a Turkish-German filmmaker he enriches the international culture.²⁵

In this picture of Angela Merkel and Aydın Doğan, one can read further what is meant by ‘for 40 years we have been for integration’. The ‘actors’ of politics and the media are engaged in a ‘victorious’ event.

Steve Austen, one of the members of the initiative ‘A soul for Europe’, points out that politicians are missing ‘culture’ as a value. If communication within the EU and for countries around the EU should lead to a better communication for citizens, and if this is the only way to ensure the EU’s success, then one must define every criteria from a cultural perspective. Austen recommends fostering a younger generation that perceives cooperation as a cultural concept. The other option is to strengthen the borders between nation states in his opinion –other supporters of this view are Hans Dietrich Genscher, Timothy Garton Ash, Bronislaw Geremek, and Richard von Weizsäcker.²⁶

²⁴ Cinal, Yusuf and Acar Yavuz, “Fatma Pehlivan’a Hizmet Madalyası” (Service Medal for Fatma Pehlivan), *Hürriyet*,

²⁵ “Özdemir’in seçilmesi uyum için başarıdır” (Election of Özdemir is a success for integration), *Hürriyet*, 19.11.2008

²⁶ “Soul for Europe” Panel, Istanbul Technical University, 05.11.2007

How do director/producers/actors position themselves in Europe?

To the question of whether actors define themselves in Europe as coming from Turkey or being born in Turkey, the actress Serra Yılmaz, who sees herself as belonging to Istanbul although she works in Italy, has pointed out²⁷ that in order to achieve success in the West, both Easterners and Westerners have to live in the West. Neco Çelik calls himself a second generation ‘Gastarbeiter’²⁸ though he was not born in Turkey but is a child of ‘Gastarbeiter’s. For him Kreuzberg is his ‘vatan’ (fatherland). Yet, concerning others’ expectations of the ways in which the *East* inspires his acting, Neco Çelik answers “I learned through the channel of art that I’m a foreigner”.²⁹ This comment underlines how global marketing values have pushed the identity of ‘being a foreigner in a Western country’ as the edge of the advertising envelope. Most actors feel Europe moreover in the culture politics of Central Europe which is getting more nationalistic and conservative; hence the gap is widening between EU politics and local governmental politics. Serra Yılmaz thinks that the idea of an integrated Europe will require investment in the politics of culture. Here the space takes on a crucial role in the making and survival of the European identity; most actors think of their attributed spaces as their ‘vatan’ (homeland), such as Istanbul, Vienna, Berlin, Paris and Rome.

On the subject of European expectations of art cinema, a good example can be found in Serra Yılmaz’s recollection of the 1987 Venice Film Festival which was her first international film festival experience outside Turkey.

The expectations of Europeans from Turkish cinema in those years were focused on ethnic elements, Turkish male violence, migrants who move from somewhere to nowhere, and films with more universal themes were not welcome.³⁰

²⁷ Yılmaz, Serra, “Avrupa’da Yaşayan Türk Sanatçıların Sanatsal Serüvenleri” (The Artistic Adventures of Turkish Artists), Çalıştay, Istanbul Technical University, 05.11.2007

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

She goes on to say that an Italian journalist wanted to interview her, not about the cinema but rather about politics.

This is not done with actors from Western countries. This is another imprisonment of ours. For a long time this attitude was common. Now topics have changed but I still feel under the umbrella of another country's representative status. This happens in general to the cultural workers of the third world.³¹

Another imprisonment of the 'cultural workers' –as the new generation after the 'guestworkers'– is the questioning of their origins. Ferzan Özpetek answers a question on why he films in Italy although 'he is a Turk':

"It is not important where you are born or make films. What is important is how the film looks, which feelings accompanied its creation. For example Fatih Akın was born in Germany and made his films in Turkey. I realised *Hamam* in Turkey. I also want to shoot in Turkey..."³²

Ferzan Özpetek was honoured in 2008 with the 'Italian Solidarity Higher Honour Medal' in a ceremony in the Italian Cultural Centre in Istanbul. The Italian Ambassador, Carlo Marsili, counted Ferzan Özpetek among the most prominent directors in the world and called him the star of Turkish Cinema and 'a Byzantine Roman'. He pointed out that Özpetek, 'From his first film in 1996, *Hamam*, up to his latest film, *Un giorno Perfetto*, gave life to his films in Italy where he has lived for 31 years.' Marsili underlined that Özpetek's film career is the result of the profound bond between him and Italy, where he sought citizenship. The love he imparts in presenting the city on film has earned him the label "City Ambassador of Rome."³³

Looking at the Turkish media's feedback concerning Ferzan Özpetek's achievements beyond Europe, it is obvious that the Turkish media expects him to use his original identity. Serfiraz Ergun writes in her column in the Turkish daily *Milliyet* that she received an invitation from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The invitation letter announced Özpetek's

³¹ Ibid.

³² Cihan Haber Ajansı, "Türkiye'de film çekmeyi çok istiyorum" (I want to shoot film in Turkey), Haberler.com, 12.10.2008.

³³ "Her şey 31 yıl içinde oldu" (Everything has happened in 31 years), haberler.com, 26.10.2008.

screening as follows: ‘MoMA in cooperation with Cinecitta presents the films of Italian director Ferzan Özpetek.’ Ergun criticizes Ferzan Özpetek’s, being labelled as Italian and finds it a pity that his original identity is not mentioned.³⁴

The Turkish media seems to a large extent to use the origin of directors as part of the ‘fairy-tale-success stories’ keyword’ which is again based on legends of ‘national pride’. Serra Yılmaz, who is in my opinion the ‘alter-ego’ of Ferzan Özpetek, in her roles bridging Rome and Istanbul in his films and in her life, finds that things get ‘news value’ if they are somehow justified/certified in Europe.

The films of five Turkish directors were chosen for the Toronto International Film Festival which counts among the best. In the 33rd year of the festival, Ferzan Özpetek participated from Italy with *Un Giorno Perfetto*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan with *Three Monkeys*, Fatih Akin with *New York I Love You*, Yeşim Ustaoğlu with *Pandora’s Box* and Semih Kaplanoğlu with *Milk*.³⁵

Here again, Ferzan Özpetek is emphasized as being ‘from Italy’ even though the Toronto Film Festival, which selected Turkish directors’ films in particular, and in its role as one of the best film festivals in the world, should be able to better define Ferzan Özpetek’s nationality.

A similar attitude can be seen in the Cihan News Agency’s republication of a news item by Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*, where the name of the newspaper lends credibility to the story: “*The Guardian*: Reha Erdem’s *Times and Winds* is one of the best films of the year.”³⁶

News pieces in Turkey discussing Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s award for ‘Best Asian Director’ in the Asian Pacific Film Awards described these awards as the ‘Oscars’ of Asia and Australia. This example shows this basic need to compare each success according to international success categories, such as the Oscar awards.

³⁴ Ergun, Serfinaz, “Ünlü İtalyan yönetmen Ferzan Özpetek” (The Aclaimed Italian Director Ferzan Özpetek), *Milliyet*, 20.11.2008.

³⁵ Anadolu News Agency, “Türk Yönetmenler İzleyici İle Buluşuyor” (Turkish Directors Meet Audience), haberler.com, 07.09.2008

³⁶ Cihan News Agency quotes Peter Bradshaw’s title, “The Guardian: “Reha Erdem’in ‘Beş Vakit’ Filmi Yılın En İyi Filmlerinden Biri” (Reha Erdem’s “Five Time’s a Day” is One of the Best Film of the Year) , 29.08.2008

Although Turkish Cinema has seen a certain increase in its success in recent years, overall there is still a problem in categorizing the works of Turkish directors even in south-east European cinemas.

Dina Iordanova brings up this dilemma in the introduction to *The Cinema of The Balkans*.

Turkey was not included in our selection (it features in the *24 Frames* volume on North Africa and the Middle East), but at moments I felt that Turkish cinema could also have been considered here as well.³⁷

Reading her views about the cinema of the Balkans we can trace the reason behind her difficulty in including Turkish Cinema in her volume:

Yet the endeavour has not been particularly successful, mostly on account of the Balkans' presumed incompatibility with the truly European, which can be traced back to the Ottoman legacy that is declared as inherently non-European and is identified as a major obstacle for the South East periphery to belong to the 'real' Europe.....³⁸

I agree with Dina Iordanova and would like to enhance her comment with the perspective of a Norwegian journalist who happened to have been picked up with me at Belgrade airport by a Serbian guide in 2007. On the way to our hotel she said 'Here, in Belgrade, the border of Europe ends'. The next day we found ourselves together again at the Conference on 'Education Art and Media in the European Integration Process' where I presented a paper on Fatih Akin's *At the Edge of Heaven*.

In this context I find Rose Fenton's ideas about borders very useful. As an artist she points out that artists do not know borders, they are there 'to explore the world and share their ideas through their artwork.' Referring to the thoughts of a Kenyan playwright she says "... no culture is an island for itself and is influenced by other cultures and histories. This awareness is the base of bridges we would like to construct on different cultural borders."³⁹

³⁷ Iordanova, Dina, "The Cinema of the Balkans", Wallflower Press, London, 2006, p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁹ "Soul for Europe" Panel, Istanbul Technical University, 05.11.2007.

In a sense, categorizing by drawing borders forces people to go into shelves for the sake of better governance in general, but there are people like these ‘actors’ of the New Europe who are questioning these types of rigid formulas. Neither the approach of the Turkish media, which justifies ‘European Turks’ -only after certain achievements- nor the isolation of a conservative European perspective are acceptable.

There are also media which question the identities of the ‘son of Turks’ with more empathy. *The Gate* describes Fatih Akin thus:

.....He confuses us. We say so because we cannot accept him either as a Turk or German. He is like someone from here, he shoots in Turkey but is at the same time a ‘foreigner’.....We all know it is inevitable that we are obsessive about people’s origins. The conversation starter between people who are just meeting, ‘where are you from?’ is a sign of this obsession. If you ask Fatih Akin the answer to this question is unknown. He neither says ‘I’m a Turk’ nor ‘I’m a German’ and he finishes the discussion by saying ‘I’m glad to be able to enunciate the identity crisis I’m experiencing in film.’

His family is from the Black Sea region. His parents migrated to ‘Germany, a bitter homeland’. He was born in 1973 in Hamburg. The family speaks Turkish at home; even Turkish customs and tradition prevail in his family life such as going back to Turkey for the summer holidays when he thought that they were going to his family’s country. Then this attitude changed with time. And then the contradictions began and he finds himself between two cultures. For good, his cinema gains in value because of this in-betweenness. He looks through this ‘space/gap’ at such an angle to the west and east, and tells us important things about the issue of ‘identity’ which we cannot fully differentiate sometimes.

Fatih Akin says essentially **‘one has to be a human being first of all’**.....He wants to understand Turkey, this country, and wants us to understand him. For example his emphasizing his last film as a ‘Turkish film’ was done with this intention.....⁴⁰

Fatih Akin describes what he does: “I come from this European auteur thing, I’m producing the stuff I’m doing, I’m writing the stuff I’m doing, I’m directing the stuff I’m doing. In the end it’s me on the front line, you know?”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Hazar, A. Deniz, “Farklı Kültürlerin Naif Renkleriyle... Ferzan Özpetek” (With Naive Colors of Different Culture...Ferzan Özpetek) *The Gate*, December 2008

⁴¹ Kulish, Nicholas, “Fatih Akin: A filmmaker who builds bridges across cultures”, *International Herald Tribune*, 10.01.2008

Finally, the European ‘actors’ of the cinema and politics that incorporate a Turkish background are disseminating a new identity for themselves. This identity can be summarized with some keywords which define this ‘new Europeanness’: a common human ideal, culture beyond the limits of borders, freedom of creativity, and overlapping borders via civil society’s experiences. People in this ‘New Europe’ tend to belong to cities instead of countries (like in the medieval ages) –Rome, Istanbul– a commonality between Ferzan Özpetek and Fatih Akin.

The discourse of the media about these ‘actors’ is more problematic, as the media always tends to categorize and fix identities as part of global marketing; they feel the urge to put the actors into shelves.

I personally prefer Orhan Pamuk’s strategy of constructing a *Museum of Innocence* (Masumiyet Müzesi, 2008) wherein he has shaped his book on obsessive love as a cinematic experience for the reader. To map identities via objects and spaces in the city, that is similar to what Fatih Akin does in *At the Edge of Heaven* with telephone books and post-its.

New Europe exists in the books, films, and songs of the new generation without borders since ‘Europe’ no longer exists. Enis Batur points out that Europe is postponing the definition of body and soul and that causes stress, “as if there is a curtain which keeps us from seeing, and perhaps if the curtain opens we could see that there is no Europe.”⁴²

The discourse of the politicians of the ‘younger generation’ and the actors shows the knowledge and experience of mapping text and image through performance.

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⁴² “Soul for Europe” Panel, Istanbul Technical University, 05.11.2007