Chapter 1

A SHORT HISTORY OF TURKISH CINEMA: 1896-1990

The history of Turkish cinema exhibits similar traits to other national cinemas, but it also has a number of distinctive characteristics. The economic and political conditions affecting the country had an inevitable impact on the film industry. Moreover, audience preferences played an important role in shaping the national cinema.

Regarding the marked characteristics, it is possible to divide the history of Turkish cinema in three distinct periods up to 1990 that I will address in this chapter. The early years cover a relatively long time frame, from the introduction of cinematograph to the country until 1950 – a period in which the figures for cinema were not bright in terms of film production and the content of films. Those were the growing years of Turkish cinema. The section on the early years is followed by the period between 1950 and 1975, when the cinema turned into a distinct economy and films were shaped by the mass audience. Then the final section of this chapter, the survival period of Turkish cinema, comes, which covers the years between 1975 and 1990.

Early Years: 1896-1950

The cinematograph was introduced to the Ottomans at the end of 1896 or early 1897, approximately a year after the first public screening on 28th December 1895 in France. The palace circle (the sultan, his family, and senior bureaucrats) was able to view this seemingly magic invention earlier than the public. The first few movie theatres operated in Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonika. The second declaration of a constitutional monarchy in 1908 (the first was in 1876) had a positive impact on the increase in the number of movie theatres throughout the country. Previous resistance to film entertainment, which took its roots at least in part from Islam, diminished somewhat with this fundamental act in favour

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2 The history of Turkish cinema sections are largely based on my MFA thesis (Yılmazok 2007), and they refer to various sources, among them Özön (1968), Şekeroğlu (1988) and Scognamillo (2003).
3 The exact date of the first film screening in the Ottoman Empire has not yet been clarified by historians.
of democracy and freedom. In addition, the partial take over of the sultan’s authority by the parliament gave way to a more relaxed atmosphere in social and cultural life.

Unlike most European countries and the United States of America in which film industries were created and developed by entrepreneurs, the first cinema institution in the Ottoman Empire was established by the state, by order of Enver Pasha, the top commander of the army and the Minister of War. The Central Military Office of Cinema (CMOC / Merkez Ordu Sinema Dairesi) came into being in 1915. The CMOC had no fixed objectives related to film culture, cinema politics or strategy, but had instead an entirely military mission of shooting and screening troop movements at the front, the operations of military plants, the deployment of new weapons given by allied forces, military training, and other noteworthy events.

Sigmund Weinberg, acting as an agent for Pathé Frères and screening films for the public, had already made an important contribution to the growth of cinematic entertainment in the country. He was then appointed director of the newly established CMOC. Weinberg prompted the CMOC to produce two feature films. However, those projects were interrupted after shooting started: Horhor the Roasted Chickpea Seller (Leblebici Horhor) was ended due to the death of a leading actor and The Marriage of Lord Himmet (Himmet Ağa’nın İzdivacı) after a call for actors to do military service in the ongoing World War I. In 1916, following Romania’s entry into the War against the Ottoman Empire, Weinberg was removed from his position in the CMOC because of his Romanian origin. The Marriage of Lord Himmet was completed by his assistant, Fuat Uzkınay, in 1918. Thus Sedat Simavi, a young journalist, though starting to shoot after Weinberg, became the director of the first publicly screened domestic feature films in 1917, The Claw (Pençe) and The Spy (Casus).\footnote{It is generally accepted that the first Turkish film was the documentary entitled The Demolition of the Russian Monument at St. Stephen (Ayastefanos’taki Rus Abidesi’nin Yıkılışı), said to be shot by Fuat Uzkınay in 1914. However, dozens of documentaries had already been produced after the introduction of the cinematograph to the country by non-Muslim citizens of the empire and by foreigners. Referring to Uzkınay’s Turkish-Muslim identity, 1914 is cited by historians as the starting point of Turkish cinema. It is arguable that the first feature films of 1917 mark a more reasonable starting point insofar as feature films may reflect characteristic themes and style that might be considered more obviously specific to national cinemas.} In addition to the CMOC, some non-governmental organisations whose main mission was to support the later War of
Independence also produced films in order to generate funding. However, by 1921, the total number of Turkish feature films still amounted to just six.\(^5\)

Although the popularity of cinema had grown in terms of screenings soon after the invention of the medium and through numerous well-produced documentaries, the emergence of the first domestic feature films came late compared to Europe and the US. The underlying reason for this gap can be assessed by considering the economic and political conditions of the state in the first place. The empire was in a state of collapse during this period, not only because of the independence movements among its constitutive nations, but also as a result of its participation (and defeat) in military action. Furthermore, the economic situation (and specifically the failure to accumulate capital) did not create an environment hospitable to the production of feature films. It should be noted that there was almost nothing one could call a national film industry in this period.

The years between 1922 and 1938 are known as the ‘Muhsin Ertuğrul period’ since he was the sole director shooting feature films during these seventeen years. This period corresponds approximately to the establishment stage of the Republic of Turkey.\(^6\) After his visit to France and Germany where he had gained experience as both an actor and a director, Ertuğrul returned to Istanbul in 1921. With his encouragement (and that same year), Kemal Seden founded Kemal Film, the first film production company in the country. Following the box-office success of its initial movie, and again with the encouragement of Ertuğrul, Kemal Film founded the first laboratory and studio of Turkish film history, despite the primitive and meagre conditions. Ertuğrul had shot six feature films by 1924, the last two of which were box-office failures, thus forcing Kemal Film to withdraw from the film production business. Ertuğrul went to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for a few years. An important point about these years is that while only non-Muslim women were acting in movies until 1923, *The Shirt of Fire (Ateşten Gömlék)* became the first film in which Turkish Muslim women (Bedia Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyyir) acted.

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\(^5\) The Turkish War of Independence against the occupying powers started in 1919, following the defeat of World War I, and ended in 1922.

\(^6\) Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and victory in the War of Independence, the Republic of Turkey was declared in 1923.
Returning from the USSR, Ertuğrul encouraged the İpekçi Family (previously dealers in textiles, film exhibition and photography) to enter the film production business. Thus, in 1928, İpek Film was founded as the second film production company. As Ertuğrul was the director of the Istanbul Municipal Theatre at the same time, the schedule of film production was arranged according to the theatre seasons. In general, the plays which won audience recognition during the season were filmed in the summer, after the theatre had closed its doors for the holiday. İpek Film was the sole producer of feature films until 1939. The first Turkish talkie - a co-production with Greece and Egypt - was produced in 1931, three years after the introduction of sound to cinema; the name of the film was On Istanbul Streets (İstanbul Sokaklarinda). The studio shooting and the dubbing of this film were completed in France. Having observed great audience interest in this first talkie, Ertuğrul convinced İpek Film to build a film studio. Unlike Kemal Film’s, this studio was equipped with the latest technology of the day.

Although Ertuğrul possessed the advanced film technology, his film language is known to be theatrical rather than cinematic. Since he regarded himself principally as a stage artist (indeed he is the founder of contemporary Turkish theatre), cinema was a secondary profession for him, more like a spare time activity to take place when the theatre was closed. Moreover, what he demanded from actors on the film set was the ‘theatrical truth’. Therefore, the theatre-rooted future film artists who were trained in his crews sustained the influence of theatre on Turkish cinema throughout the 1940s and 1950s, as scriptwriters, art directors, actors, and directors. However, despite his negative influence, it should be noted that Ertuğrul remains one of the outstanding figures in Turkish film history; he brought his theatrical discipline to cinema, encouraged entrepreneurs (Kemal Film and İpek Film) to invest in film production where the state evaded it, and trained many people who continued to work in the film industry for many years after his resignation. Additionally, the appearance of Muslim Turkish actresses, the first talkie, the first co-production and, later, one of the first colour films (in 1953) were all introduced to Turkish cinema by Ertuğrul.

Before proceeding further, it is important to take note of the relations between the state and Turkish cinema. With the intention of modernising society and holding a place among Western nations, the new republic took a series of important and wide-ranging
actions in the areas of economy, law, education, sports, civil life, and the arts. While some institutions inherited from the Ottoman period were developed and reformed (and some were abolished), totally new and additional ones were formed where needed. In the arts, in addition to the restoration of institutions and the establishment of new ones, many talented students were sponsored by the state to be educated abroad in music, fine art, theatre, and opera. In addition, European experts were invited to Turkey as instructors. However, the state did not sponsor or support Turkish cinema for years - except to reduce taxes in favour of domestic films - but rather seemed to treat cinema as a taxable entertainment facility.

Given that it is known that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic and its president from 1923 until his death in 1938, was fond of films, it is unclear why the state did not invest in cinema. The young republic was surely in need of propaganda like any other emerging revolutionary state. In fact, Atatürk encouraged the few people actively working in film to make a movie of the War of Independence in which he volunteered to take part as a surviving witness. Indeed, there exists further evidence to suggest his positive interest in cinema. For instance, when it was noticed that some parts of his speech in the parliament had been underexposed, he didn’t hesitate to play those parts of the speech for the re-shooting. During the American ambassador’s visit to the farm that was newly founded by his order, he himself guided the camera as a director. Nevertheless, compared to the other arts, there was almost no investment in filmmaking in the early years of the republic. What the state did for other arts was to add to an existing experience; probably to Atatürk and to other senior bureaucrats, there was not ‘a glimmer of hope’ for Turkish cinema. This was one side of the matter; the thorny side was the censorship mechanisms.

The ‘Regulation Regarding Control of Films and Film Scripts’ – unofficially known as the Censorship Code (Sansür Tüzüğü) - came into force in 1939. Given the threat of a European war at the time, the government needed the regulatory power to control films in relation to political propaganda. The Central Film Control Commission (Merkez Film Kontrol Komisyonu) was formed to inspect and release (appropriate) films

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7 For instance, a documentary entitled Ankara, Heart of Turkey (Türkiye’nin Kalbi Ankara) for the 10th anniversary of the Republic was commissioned to Soviet filmmakers.
8 ‘Filmlerin ve Film Senaryolarının Kontrollüne Dair Nizamname’
with respect to this censorship code, the imperious articles of which confined the filmmakers to a very limited discursive space. Members of the commission were appointed by the Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Security, Military General Staff, Ministry of Media and Tourism, and the Ministry of Education. State security was the primary concern of the code. Making political propaganda on behalf of any state was forbidden. In parallel, making propaganda for any political, economic, and social ideology that opposed the national regime and producing films which might be dangerous for the discipline and security of the country could not be permitted. It was impermissible for a film to contain scenes that might be a means of propaganda against Turkey. To support the new secular republic, the inclusion of religious propaganda in a film was also not permitted. On the other hand, it was impermissible to offend the feelings of friendly states and nations or to ridicule any race or nation. The army was protected with a specific article: to depreciate military honour and dignity or make propaganda against the military was forbidden. The most ambiguous ban concerned films which were contrary to common manner, morality, and national emotions. The majority of the problems confronting films and film scripts stemmed from this abstracted article, which was extensively invoked by the Commission against filmmakers. Finally, films were not allowed to incite criminality (Özgüç 1976, 12-13).

The censorship code was derived from a Mussolini-governed Italy’s penal code. In fact, Ertuğrul was the sole director in Turkey at that time and the themes of his films were far from having any ‘unfavourable’ content. Moreover, Ertuğrul’s annual average production was as low as 1.4 films. The ostensible reason for the regulation was to control and monitor foreign films at that particular time. Nevertheless, the code remained unchanged and in force after the war, and until 1986, it hung over Turkish filmmakers like the sword of Damocles. Even the military regimes following the coups did not need to modify or tighten the censorship code.

The abovementioned siege against filmmakers is described by Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy (2000) as the pressure of deep nation on cinema. They point out the function of censorship as a protector of the ‘induced’ Turkish national identity. In the Turkish nation-state that replaced the Ottoman Empire (which was composed of many different ethnicities) the obscure and unconscious mechanisms that Robins and Aksoy call the
‘deep nation’ worked towards the normalisation of cultural homogeneity and against cultural diversity and change. ‘Silence’ and the ‘positive valorisation’ of the group fixed the ties of national belonging and cohesion. The imagined community of the New Turks had its origins in cultural repression which was followed by the silence of a cover up. The ideological viewpoint of the state stipulated a ‘homogenous’ nation that was devoid of class conflict within a Westernised notion of ‘ideal’ citizens. Robins and Aksoy argue that, as a domain of cultural production, Turkish cinema provides an interesting illustration of their general argument. The censorship mechanism was a very effective tool of the ‘deep nation’ and members of the commission saw themselves as the guardians of Turkish national identity. The authors also point out the existence of cinematic works ‘acting out’ the logic of the deep nation after 1990. I will turn to this point in Chapter 4.

The ‘Muhsin Ertuğrul monopoly’ ended in 1939 with the arrival of Faruk Kenç and his first film, *Piece of Stone (Taş Parçası)*. He was followed by a dozen new directors. After shooting his first three films for Ha-Ka Film (which was established in 1934 and produced documentaries exclusively until *Piece of Stone*), Kenç broke with this company and looked for a new producer. The only alternative, İpek Film, was co-operating solely with Ertuğrul. Having received a negative response, Kenç was obliged to shoot his fourth film, *The Sorrowful Spring (Dertli Pınar-1943)*, without sound, and had to dub it in a studio afterwards. This was the method employed for imported films before inland distribution. This dubbing method was widely used by other directors after Kenç’s launch and continued to influence Turkish cinema until the 1990s. This influence manifested itself in several ways. First of all, the shooting schedule of films was shortened and thus production costs declined. This decline in production costs became one of the reasons for an increase in the number of producers. However, the technical quality of the films suffered in turn. Some films were shot outside the studios, on location. Physical appearance began to be considered more important to the professional screen actor, allowing in new actors who did not necessarily possess ‘standard’ voices or pronunciation. Accordingly, stage actors were used to dub the voice work; thus increasingly, ‘beautiful faces’ were united with ‘beautiful voices’. As the lines were prompted to the actor without intonation and repeated after these prompts, visual acting (body language, gesture, and facial expressions) became increasingly artificial. The dubbing of actors by the same
voices gave way to clichés and limited the actor’s range such that performances from one film to the next began to resemble one another.

Another factor that had a controversial influence on Turkish cinema was Egyptian film. The impact of the Second World War was such that the European film market stagnated during the first half of the 1940s. In addition, the Turkish government’s attitude towards European cinema was cautious, for fear of finding fascist or communist propaganda in films emanating from Europe. Therefore, distributors of foreign films in Turkey had to focus on American productions. However, due to the War, American films were imported, not via the shortest route over Europe, but through Egypt. Some Egyptian films were added to the packages along the way. In addition, the cost of importing and dubbing an Egyptian film in the Turkish language was less than producing a domestic one. Moreover, there was a clear market for these productions, especially after the great success of the Egyptian film *Love’s Tears* (Aşkın Gözyaşları) by Mohammed Karim in 1938. In films from Egypt, a Muslim-majority country and an ex-province of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish spectators were seeing people similar to themselves, hearing Arabic music, and recalling their pain and joy through these oriental melodramas. The audience for these films was largely composed of people who were not fond of Western productions. Egyptian films regularly presented famous singers and impressive scenery to the viewers. Initially, only the dialogues were translated into Turkish. However, the screening of films containing Arabic language was prohibited by the government in 1942. The reason for this prohibition derived mainly from the policy of Westernisation being pursued by the new republic; anything associated with Ottoman and Arab cultures was deemed to have an unfavourable effect on the revolutionary measures enacted just some fifteen years earlier. Thus, in addition to the dialogues, the songs of Egyptian films began to be dubbed in Turkish and in this way, the films were increasingly indigenised. Observing that Turkish-dubbed Arab melodramas were attracting large audiences to movie theatres, filmmakers started to produce domestic equivalents. Those melodramas brought box-office successes and played a very important role in the expansion of the film industry.

Throughout the early 1940s, despite not participating, Turkey suffered the adverse effects of World War II like any other country. Economic and human resources
were made ready, while the army was put on alert. Basic survival needs were met by rationing. Electricity was in short supply and residential areas were often blacked out at night against possible sudden air attacks. The end of the War opened up the possibility of greater democracy, along with economic recovery. The first multi-party election was held in 1946 and the second one in 1950. The import of generators brought about a much needed increase in electricity supplies, thereby making film projection possible even in villages and rural areas. The second half of the 1940s saw an increase in the numbers of producers, directors, and films. While the annual average feature film production in the country was 1.2 during the period 1917-1921, and 1.4 during the period 1922-1938, it rose to 7.0 during the period 1939-1949 (Özgüç 1998-2003, vol. 1). Indeed, the general growth statistics related to cinema continued to rise markedly throughout the fifties and sixties. The number of annually released feature films on average and the distribution of released feature films throughout Turkish film history can be found in Appendix-B.

New directors who entered the cinema and made their first films in the 1940s were composed of two groups: those who came from Ertuğrul’s Municipal Theatre and those who were educated abroad in photography and cinema. Film language remained largely theatrical, but cinematic codes were increasingly present. Unlike Ertuğrul’s mostly Western originated and orientated productions, their stories, locations, characters and other elements were domestic; they were narrating Turkish people and landscapes. Şadan Kamil, who was one of the emerging directors of the 1940s, stated: “We were at the same level as our audience. Therefore, they enjoyed us and we enjoyed them. We walked together” (quoted in Şekeroğlu 1986-88, Episode 6). His comment signals how the relation between filmmakers and the audience was set to constitute a national film narrative in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1948, the state took an important step toward the creation of a domestic film culture when the regulation of municipal revenues was restructured. Accordingly, the tax imposed on film exhibition was set at 25% for domestic productions, and 70% for foreign films. With an approximately 50% decrease in tax imposed on domestic films, this constituted the first positive act of the state in support of Turkish cinema. Thus, ticket prices for domestic films decreased, leading exhibition and filmmaking to become

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9 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
profitable business opportunities. In particular, exhibitors outside Istanbul started to demand more domestic films from the producers. Potential filmmakers were attracted to the art of cinema on the one hand, and business-minded producers to profit on the other, and both caught sight of a rare opportunity. Filmmakers in the 1950s were composed of these two groups of people.

In summary, from the early years until 1950, Turkish cinema suffered the adverse effects of wars and economic insufficiency. Specific factors that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s influenced Turkish national cinema for those and consecutive decades: these were censorship, the dubbing process, Egyptian melodramas, and, finally, tax reductions made in favour of domestic films in 1948.

Films Shaped by the Mass Audience: 1950-1975

In 1950, the second multi-party elections resulted in a change of government. After twenty-seven years in power, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the founding party of the Republic, was replaced by the Democratic Party (DP). The DP was socially conservative, but liberal in terms of the economy. Contrary to the independent foreign policy of the CHP, the DP attempted to build close relations with the US. For instance, Turkish troops were sent to Korea as an allied force of the US to fight against the North Koreans. The reason behind this decision was a desire to join NATO against the ‘perceived threat’ from the neighbouring USSR. An open economic policy helped to accelerate growth and development in Turkey. Transportation facilities were improved through a network of highways, electricity supplies were extended to reach the villages, and migration to industrialising cities, particularly to Istanbul, gathered pace. As a result of US Marshall Aid to assist the recovery of the capitalist bloc in Europe, American commodities came onto the market. The migration of Turkish workers to European countries also started during these years. The other side of the coin was that liberal economic policies were accompanied by censorship of the media and the suppression of government opponents.

Cinema reached the population in rural areas thanks to the provision of electricity and improved transportation facilities. Besides, migrants were introduced to
movie theatres in their new hometowns. Cinema proved to be a hugely important source of entertainment for these two groups. This new audience demanded films in which they could see themselves and identify with the stories. Producers responded to these demands as both films and movie theatres increased in number. Indeed, average annual film production rose to 54 in the period between 1950 and 1959 (Özgüç 1998-2003, vol. 1). At the same time, the Istanbul intelligentsia was unaware of, or uninterested in, the growing popularity of domestic films. Their preference was for foreign productions as the central theatres of Istanbul continued to refuse the exhibition of Turkish films.

There was a wide thematic range in the films produced: pastoral stories, historical epics, the heroism of Turkish troops sent to Korea, the Turkish War of Independence, adaptations of best-seller novels, religious narratives, musicals and comedies filled the film market. The characteristic shared by the majority of these films was their melodramatic mode. The remarkable Memduh Ün, who entered the film business as an actor at the end of the 1940s, and continued in the 1950s as both producer and director, defined the principal trait of cinema in these years as follows: “The formula for commercial success was to bring together the grave, the lyric, the song, and the fight. Therefore, all those factors existed in all my films until I felt ready: graves, songs, Islamic memorial services, belly dances, awful melodramas…” (quoted in Şekeroğlu 1986-88, Episode 18). To assume that the success of melodramas depended solely on ready-made formulae might be misleading. It can be argued that, in addition to commercial concerns, the director, the crew, and the actors of any given film also believed in what they were doing; they were living in the film, feeling it.

The name Yeşilçam (meaning ‘Green Pine’) emerged in the 1950s as a designation for Turkish Hollywood. The name originated in ‘Yeşilçam Street’ in Beyoğlu, the cultural centre of Istanbul where most of the producers were located. More than 120 new production companies emerged in the fifties, some of which went bankrupt. However, there were few studios to meet the production needs of an average of 70 existing producers. This deficit pushed filmmakers to shoot on location. Since the issues related to sound recording had been resolved by the dubbing process in the 1940s, the main problem was to find an appropriate place for the story to be shot, not to build a set. Other infrastructural elements (cameras, laboratories, and crew) of film production were also
seriously lacking. For anyone wishing to enter the film industry as an employee, there was no need for technical qualifications. In some of the small ‘producer-director’ companies, each employee, perhaps even the employer, might hold more than one responsibility. For instance, a producer might take charge of the lighting and still photography in addition to his other duties. While these adverse conditions were a given for most filmmakers, a few of them saw the situation as an opportunity to produce films quickly and in a somewhat slipshod manner. Nonetheless, the first ‘super-production’ of Turkish cinema was made in 1951. Casting more than one thousand soldiers supplied by the army, an orchestra of forty-five musicians, and contributions from professors and students from the Academy of Fine Arts, this film was *The Conquest of Istanbul (İstanbul’un Fethi)* directed by Aydın Arakon.

In a context in which the numbers of films, spectators and producers all increased, new directors - namely Lütfi Akad, Atıf Yılmaz, Metin Erksan, Memduh Ün and Osman Seden – emerged; they made more qualified films than the sector average. The emergence of so many new names in the fifties should not be seen as a mere coincidence. Considering the absence of a substantive, national cinematic heritage, the question of how they developed a film language and aesthetic style arises. The answer may be found in their own commentaries: they were viewing the works of foreign masters, especially Hollywood movies, and adjusting their productions according to audience reactions. İlhan Arakon, one of the outstanding cinematographers, recalls, “We were viewing the films of Muhsin Ertuğrul, but also the masterpieces of world cinema in the next movie theatres directed by John Ford, Frank Capra, Lubitsch, Pabst, and René Clair” (quoted in Şekeroğlu 1986-88, Episode 3). According to Atıf Yılmaz, “We learned by doing, again and again. It didn’t come suddenly. We didn’t have much knowledge of cinema back then. We were estimating and saying ‘we haven’t been able to do that part properly, let’s do it better next time’. That was all” (quoted in Özcan 2001, 15). Lütfi Akad’s words support Yılmaz: “There was an experience but it was irrelevant to film art. It was an experience of filming the theatre. That is to say, shooting a theatre scene and making a film are totally different things. I don’t know if it was because of instinct or foresight, but we found it shouldn’t be that way and tried to develop a cinematic language” (quoted in Şekeroğlu 1986-88, Episode 7). Taken together, these three quotes suggest how various factors came together and combined with audience preferences to form a national film culture.
Audience preferences for foreign films tended mostly toward Hollywood productions. Halit Refiğ, a critic who became one of the outstanding directors of the 1960s, provides the following insight: “This language, under the influence of Hollywood (the foreign cinema most often viewed by Turkish audiences) film language, was formed by the production particularities of Turkish cinema. A language that is plain, less pretentious, and which seeks to reach its goals via shortcuts...” (1971, 22). Thomas Elsaesser’s analysis of the relation between national cinemas and Hollywood verifies the case of Turkish cinema: “Hollywood can hardly be conceived, in the context of a ‘national’ cinema, as totally other, since so much of any nation’s film culture is implicitly ‘Hollywood’” (1987, 166).

In the 1950s, filmmakers began to innovate in two particular areas of cinematic narration. One was in camera movement. In films made by directors still under the influence of theatre, the camera was stationary, its position and angle unchanged. The subjective and objective camera angles with different consecutive shooting scales were not only new, but fostered greater spectator engagement with the film. Secondly, filmmakers started to benefit from more creative editing techniques. In addition to these changes, acting entered a new phase. Because stage actors were insufficient in number for the growth in film production, actors began to be cast according to the type required by the script. The new actors, who did not have stage training, were instructed by directors as to how to act.

Notable films from these years include: Akad’s In the Name of the Law (Kanun Namına-1952), The White Handkerchief (Beyaz Mendil-1955), and The Lonely Ones’ Quay (Yalnızlar Rıhtımı-1959); Yılmaz’s The Dream of the Bride (Gelinin Muradi-1957) and The Fallow Deer (Alageyik-1958); Erksan’s The Lord of Nine Mountains (Dokuz Dağın Efesi-1958); Ün’s Three Friends (Üç Arkadaş-1958); and Seden’s The Enemy Has Blocked the Road (Dışman Yollar Kesti-1959). In In the Name of the Law, the camera was out on the streets for the chase scenes, bringing a new feeling of excitement to audiences. The visual aesthetics and narration of The Lonely Ones’ Quay remain noteworthy although it was a box-office failure due to the characteristics of its story, its heroes, and its milieu which were unfamiliar to the audience. The Dark World (Karanlık Dünya-1953), Erksan’s first film, was censored for its representation of rural poverty and
the shortage of wheat. Unfavourable scenes were cut and replaced by scenes from an American documentary in which modern agricultural machines were mowing wheat in abundance. *Three Friends* was highly significant as an example of a successful fifties melodrama. It treated the daily lives of three friends living in a deserted, ruined mansion and struggling to survive: one has a rabbit that draws papers on which the customers’ fortunes are written; the second friend is a photographer who takes pictures of people on the streets with his portable camera; and the third one is a bootblack. They exert their best efforts and sacrifice their interests to help a young blind girl obtain a surgical operation. Although it deploys the melodramatic form without questioning the reasons for social inequality, *Three Friends* does not overtly dramatise poverty. With its genuine depiction of ‘types’ and experiences familiar to spectators, the film provides a powerful representation of friendship, solidarity and hope. *Three Friends* marked a milestone in Turkish film history, most particularly because its success made the intelligentsia in Istanbul more aware of domestic films.

![Fig. 1. Dir. Memduh Ün, *Three Friends* (*Üç Arkadaş*), 1958.](image)

The first of three military coups in the history of the Republic of Turkey took place on 27th May 1960, ending ten years of DP rule. The new constitution that came into effect in 1961 was more liberal than the previous one (Constitution of 1924). The democratic rights of individuals were widened and some institutions (for example,
universities and the State Planning Organisation) gained an autonomous structure. A Constitutional Court was established to ensure that governmental acts did not violate the constitution, which had been the case during the 1950s and the main declared reason for the military coup. In accordance with the principle of a ‘social state’ embedded in the constitution, workers gained the rights to strike and form unions. However, the censorship of cinema remained in effect and unchanged. Moreover, the post-coup liberal atmosphere deteriorated in the second half of the 1960s. By 1968, in keeping with the tumultuous political climate elsewhere, a student movement emerged, but a second intervention from the army - not a direct coup but a memorandum to government - came on 12th March 1971. There was another change of government, followed by the suppression of opposition in the following years.

Economic growth and industrialisation had accelerated in the 1950s and continued to do so in the 1960s, causing an increase in migration from towns and villages to metropolises, especially to Istanbul. The official figures indicate that between 1950 and 1970, the population of Istanbul nearly tripled.\(^\text{10}\) In the early 1970s, squatter settlements emerged around industrialising cities and gave voice to Arabesk music and culture.\(^\text{11}\) Worker migration to European countries, mostly to Germany, also accelerated in the 1960s.

The increase in the number of film spectators is proportionally greater than the increase in the overall population. According to data based again on Istanbul, while the average number of films viewed by an individual was 11.8 in 1950, it rose to 22.3 by 1970. Official figures show that by 1970, for the whole of Turkey, there were 2,424 movie theatres providing 1,164,769 seats (DİE 1973, 7). However, the actual number of movie theatres is thought to be more than three thousand, if you include the unregistered ones. Approximately half of these were open-air theatres operating during the summer season. As two examples, Bartın (a town at the Black Sea coast with an approximate ten thousand population) was hosting four indoor and six outdoor cinemas in the 1960s, and Eskişehir

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\(^\text{10}\) According to census data, the population of Istanbul was 1,166,477 in 1950, 1,882,092 in 1960, and 3,019,032 in 1970 (State Institute of Statistics Turkey 1973, 2-3).

\(^\text{11}\) The kind of music named Arabesk emerged first as the voice of migrants living in the suburbs of metropolises. Its sound was derived from Arabic tones, while (pessimistic) lyrics addressed the dreadful and unfair conditions of life. It has never been seen as ‘genuine’ Turkish music and is disdained by the elite. This music attracted young males first and then became more widespread, eventually creating its own culture.
(a city with a 209,000 population in central Anatolia) hosted fifteen indoor and sixteen outdoor cinemas in this period (Büker 2002).

Given that the population of Turkey was about 36 million in 1970, it is indeed indisputable that cinema was the top entertainment facility. It was a cheap and familial activity. Pierre Sorlin (1996) describes how cinema became part of daily life in 1960s’ Italy, so much so that people were cycling miles to see films and were evidently eager to talk about them. Numerous examples of film enthusiasm in 1960s and ‘70s Turkey also exist. The majority of this mass audience came from the lower and middle income classes. Film production reached its highest level in the 1960s and 1970s. The annual average reached 193.1 in the period between 1960 and 1974 (Özgüç 1998-2003, vol. 1-2) and more than 370 new production companies were established (Scognamillo 2001). Turkey became a mass-production plant of movies. However, in an economy where a lack of capital - not only in the film industry but in every realm of production - was the leading problem, the achievement of such a high rate of film production might seem surprising. It is certainly the case that producers were hardly meeting the costs of their films. If a film was unsuccessful at the box-office, it was nearly impossible to shoot the next one. There was no support from outside the industry, nor were the banks willing to issue loans for such a risky business. However, there was a demand for new films. Thus, a system whereby regional operators played a central role in film financing emerged by the end of the 1950s and continued into the 1960s, and this became a major factor in the industry.

In the system of ‘regional operators’ (bölge işletmeleri), the country – excluding Istanbul - was divided into the following six regions: Adana, İzmir, Ankara, Zonguldak, Erzurum, and the Black Sea. Before starting a film, regional operators would lend producers a certain amount (in some instances up to 80%) of the total cost, in advance as cash or as a bond. Those were funds accumulated by exhibitors through ticket sales from earlier films. Thanks to this financial support, the producer was able to pay the cast and crew, and meet some other costs as well. In exchange, the operators were given the distribution rights for the film in their region for a certain period, or they were granted a percentage of the film’s box-office revenue so as to have their loan repaid. This mechanism greatly contributed to the growth of the film industry. It also provided filmmakers with very significant information about audience preferences insofar as the
producers in Istanbul became aware of the reactions, demands and tastes of audiences via regional operators. The most important preferential criteria concerned the starring actor and actress, followed by the themes. Moreover, topics for discussion between the regional operators and the producer might extend to whether a given film would be shot in colour, part colour, or black-and-white, and might even stipulate the duration of the film. The various regional audiences were not always consistent or in agreement as to their preferences. In such cases, the producers would aim to strike a balance between them or give priority to those regions supplying the greatest support for a particular film. This system is very similar to the one practiced in India, then and now, as the filmmaker Shaji Karun (2002) suggests. The mechanism offered a good deal both to producers and regional operators, ensuring box-office successes. However, for directors in search of innovation or independence from the mainstream, this was a restrictive system.

Conditions were different in Istanbul where films and movie theatres were divided into three categories in what was called the ‘combined system’. Films in the first category were screened in ‘first class’ theatres, second and third category films in second and third class theatres respectively. The first category theatres were mainly in the city centre. Classification of the films and exhibition dates were determined before the season. There was no capital support for the producer in this system, but screenings of the films were guaranteed. A domestic film had little chance of being screened in a first category theatre.

The 1960s saw prolific numbers of films being produced, but conditions were as poor as in the 1950s. For instance, in 1966, a year in which 238 films were released, the sum of studios, sets and laboratories was as low as thirteen. This figure climbed to seventeen by 1972, the top production year with 300 films (Özgüç 1998-2003, vol. 1). Printing machines and montage sets were out of date and there was a shortage of trained personnel who could use these devices. With negative film stock in short supply, a black market emerged. On average, 6,000 meters of negative and 18,000 meters of positive film stock were used for each movie. Given the fact that 3,000 meters yield approximately 109 minutes (35mm film, 24 frames per second), Turkish cinema was limited to an average of two repetitions for each shot, and six exhibition copies to travel the entire country. These quantitative constraints, which were substantially more severe than anything faced by
Hollywood and European producers, forced Turkish filmmakers to expend the minimum amount of stock at every phase. Shots were kept as short as possible, while rehearsals were numerous. Scenes from other movies might be added where needed. Indeed, there were some movies for which the consumed negative film stock was less than the length of the printed positive copy.

The increase in the number of films forced the directors, crew, and actors to work overtime. Some directors had to shoot two films at the same time, while others were obliged to start a new film before the post-production process of the former had ended. Scriptwriters regularly played ‘catch up’ with shooting schedules: while the film was being shot, they were busily writing the next (to-be-shot) scenes. Some scripts were written in a few days, even overnight. Similarly, some films were shot in a few days. While the industry was surviving, thanks to the sacrifices of its labour force, the result was a decline in technical and aesthetic quality. If one reason for producers not investing in film technology was a lack of capital, the other was a lack of audience engagement in technical deficiencies, in favour of a focus on stars and themes.

The first colour films of Turkish cinema had been produced in 1953: Epidemic (Salgın) by Ali İpar and The Carpetmaker Girl (Halıcı Kız) by Muhsin Ertuğrul. The audience showed little interest in these two films and in the few that followed. Given the high cost of this new technology, colour production was postponed until the second half of the 1960s. However, neither the technical infrastructure of the industry nor the knowledge of its personnel was sufficient to make colour films in the 1950s and 1960s, and even in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the ratio of colour films to total production gradually increased after 1966 and all of the 225 films released in 1975 were in colour.¹² Filmmakers gradually found ways to meet the increased costs incurred by the introduction of colour. These included: replacing the expensive colour negative stock with a cheaper brand; shooting the film on a higher quality brand and printing it on a cheaper one; printing black-and-white shot films on colour strips to obtain sepia tones; and even shooting on photographic negatives. Problems related to lighting, make-up, and artistic designs were more noticeable on colour film. Since the directors and the cinematographers did not have detailed knowledge of this new technology, the picture quality of colour film was poor in

¹² It should be emphasised that some of the films classified as colour were not totally, but only partially, in colour.
comparison to the earlier black-and-white productions.

By the 1960s, Turkish cinema had developed a star system. The relative importance of stars gradually increased so that films came to be known and marketed by the stars’ names. The regional operators, while communicating with the producers about audience preferences, were emphasising the star names. Increasingly, film themes were decided upon according to the stars who were to be cast. Scriptwriters likely felt the eye of the spectator looking over their shoulders as they penned screenplays and adaptations. As Susan Hayward (1993) notes, spectators imposed their own expectations on the stars; stars were the mediators between the real and the imaginary. Thus the stars had to repeat performances of particular types or figures. The star system not only led to the domination of ‘type’ over ‘character’ in Turkish cinema, it guaranteed its continuance. Vocalisation of the players by the same voices (due to the dubbing system) further cemented this situation and minimised the dramatic talent required of actors. To be ‘beautiful’ was enough. Close-ups were often cut, while camera angles were chosen to reflect the stars at their best. These considerations regularly outweighed the necessities of dramatic content. Many stars intervened directly, requesting preferred shooting angles and scales. Some of them even held authority in deciding on the director and could change him or her. As a consequence of their increased importance, the stars’ wages rose dramatically, up to 40% of a film’s total production budget. However, the wages of other key personnel (directors, cinematographers, minor players, crew etc.) did not rise proportionally. On the contrary, producers were obliged to decrease other budgetary items in order to balance the rising costs. As the demand for stars grew, so did their workload. Indeed, most of them had little or no break between the completion of a film’s shooting and the start of a new one. Increasingly, production schedules were planned according to the availability of the stars. Time pressure on the filmmakers often caused shooting to be rapid and sloppy.

An exception to the star system was the Yılmaz Güney phenomenon. Starting his career as a scriptwriter and actor in 1958 and later continuing as producer and director, he became, by the mid-sixties, a star-not-like-a-star. Unlike other ‘handsome’ male actors, Güney was known as the ‘Ugly King’, a rather ‘touchable’ hero of the people, a champion of the weak and poor in his films. While his action films were appreciated in Anatolia, they were rarely shown in the central theatres of Istanbul. Alongside these films and
thanks to the profits generated by them he began to produce social-realist films by the 1970s: these included *Hope (Umut-1970), Friend (Arkadaş-1974), Anxiety (Endişe-1974), The Herd (Sürü-1979), The Way (Yol-1982), and The Wall (Duvar-1983)*.

As already noted, a mechanism for censorship was put in place in 1939. By the 1960s, its effects on Turkish cinema had become clearer. Those filmmakers seeking to express direct or indirect political concerns were caught by this code. Moreover, any representation perceived to be ‘immoral’ or ‘obscene’ by the Central Film Control Commission was not permitted. Filmmakers dealt with this problem in two ways: one solution was self-censorship and the other was to trick the Commission. Firstly, self-censorship required adopting the mindset of the censor and anticipating which scenes of the film might be objectionable. In addition, ‘unfavourable’ (leftist) writers had their names deleted from the credits supplied to the Commission or used pseudonyms in order to avoid potential problems. Another way of tricking the Commission was to prepare two different scripts: a censored one for the Commission and another one for shooting. After the completion of shooting and in post-production, films were edited in accordance with the approved (censored) script to gain consent for exhibition. However, the film screened for the public was the uncensored one. Although filmmakers found ways to evade it, the censorship system, restrictive and obstructive in nature, remained an important factor shaping the national character of Turkish cinema. Hence the great majority of films presented little opposition to the official ideology of the state. In addition, conservative representations of gender relations were preserved.

Approximately three thousand films were made between 1960 and 1974, most of which stand as examples of mediocrity. Most films were melodramas, but there were numerous genres, including comedies, which drew from melodramatic themes. The indigenisation of foreign sources was a commonly adopted way of creating films. The key project of indigenisation was to adapt the stories, heroes/heroines, characters, types, locations, behaviours and endings in a way that Turkish people could easily recognise and approve. Heroes and heroines should represent the social and moral norms of an average Turkish citizen, as audiences might not approve certain ‘extreme manners’ in a domestic film, while they might have tolerated them in foreign equivalents. The moral norms

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13 I will address the concept of ‘national character’ later in this chapter.
depended on the identity that the hero or heroine represented. If he or she was a rural ‘type’, the audience (both urban and rural) often had a more conservative attitude, whereas urban heroes and heroines might have been granted more tolerance, because their behaviour was deemed ‘normal in the big cities’. The expectation was of realistic gestures and manners as a means of fostering the audience’s ‘belief’ in the story.

_Güllü_ (1971) by Atıf Yılmaz is an outstanding example of indigenisation, the theme of which was adapted from _La Ragazza con la Pistola_ (Girl with a Pistol-1968) by Mario Monicelli. In _La Ragazza con la Pistola_, Assunta (Monica Vitti) is kidnapped by Vincenzo (Carlo Giuffrè) and they sleep with one another. The next morning, Assunta realises that Vincenzo, being against marriage, has left for Britain. With the encouragement of relatives and other inhabitants of the town, Assunta acquires a pistol and leaves Sicily to find and kill Vincenzo, who has defamed her. In _Güllü_, on the other hand, Fikret (Ediz Hun) – the son of a big businessman - is found and treated by a peasant girl named Güllü (Türkan Şoray) after having an accident in a car race in the Black Sea region of Turkey. They fall in love and we understand that they sleep together following Fikret’s marriage proposal. However, after returning to Istanbul, Fikret notifies her by letter that they cannot marry. With the encouragement of her mother and other inhabitants, Güllü leaves her village (carrying a pistol) for Istanbul to find and kill Fikret in order to save her reputation. While Assunta meets a rugby player, a boy who is on the verge of committing suicide, and a surgeon in Britain, Güllü meets a journalist who helps her in Istanbul. Assunta speaks Sicilian Italian and beginner’s English; Güllü speaks Turkish with a Black Sea regional accent. In the end, Assunta finds Vincenzo but she does not kill him; instead she sleeps with him again and finds he is now in love with her. She takes her revenge by leaving him alone in Britain and returning to Sicily. Güllü finds Fikret but does not take revenge the way Assunta does. She marries him and they embark upon a happy married life together. The ending, unlike that of _La Ragazza con la Pistola_, had to be marriage because for Turkish audiences of the day (urban or rural), it would be highly unusual for a woman to seduce a man and then leave him. Successful indigenisation of the story made _Güllü_ distinct from the original _La Ragazza con la Pistola_.

In essence, most of the adapted films ‘became native’. Unless denoted in the credits, it was nearly impossible to realise that a particular film was an adaptation of a
foreign work. As Sorlin notes in the case of Italy, “the manner in which they assimilated and re-used this material was theirs and it is their appropriation of various cinematic sources which has made up Italian national cinema” (1996, 172). This statement can be applied equally well to Turkish cinema. Exceptionally, as a few examples, foreign source materials (whether novel, play, or story) were filmed without converting or adapting the original. Those films were not able to win audience recognition because of two factors: firstly, there were economic pressures which meant that to keep production costs low, the costumes and sets had to be altered. Secondly, Turkish audiences did not accept well-known Turkish actors cast as foreign characters, bearing foreign names and wearing foreign costumes.

A range of sources were tapped and exploited to create a huge bulk of films: adaptations of popular novels (native and foreign), theatre plays (mostly foreign), and comic books (native and foreign); the indigenisation of foreign (mostly Hollywood) films; serial films bearing the name of the hero/heroine; remakes of some old native films; and original scripts. Out of all of these, higher-quality films also emerged. Some were filmmakers’ or scriptwriters’ original works and some were outputs of a collaboration between filmmakers and authors. In the case of collaboration, either the authors’ novels or stories were filmed, or they wrote original scripts.

In the 1960s, Halit Refiğ, Duygu Sağiroğlu, and Yılmaz Güney emerged in addition to the outstanding directors of the 1950s (Akad, Yılmaz, Erksan, Ün, and Seden). These directors made some of the greatest films in Turkish film history, mostly during the next two decades. Erksan may be considered the first auteur and probably the most creative and avant-garde director in Turkish film history. Beyond the Nights (Gecelerin Ötesi-1960) was the first social realist film and it issued a challenge to the ‘one millionaire in every district’ slogan of the Democratic Party government. In opposition to the slogan, the film argues that the consequences of the inequality brought about by those millionaires might well be the emergence of some young people who have to commit crimes in order to realise their worth as free human agents and as economic actors in a hostile environment. The Bitter Life (Acı Hayat-1962) treats the social and economic problems faced by a low income couple in the context of urbanisation. The Revenge of the Snakes (Yılanların Öcü-1962) and Dry Summer (Susuz Yaz-1963) represent rural realities with
overt political references. Both of these films experienced problems with the censorship authorities. *Dry Summer* achieved the first international success for Turkish cinema by winning a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. *Time to Love (Sevmek Zamanı-1965)* narrates a painter’s love of the image of an affluent girl. The girl’s realisation of his love and her response are ultimately useless because the painter is not in love with her, but rather her image (a photographic portrait). Drawing from Eastern Sufism, this fascinating film also brings the class matter into question. The film was rejected for exhibition by movie theatres on the grounds that it would be of little interest to audiences. *Immortal Love (Ölmeyen Aşk-1966)*, adapted from Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, displayed expressionist features. *The Well (Kuyu-1968)* was probably the first feminist film in Turkish cinema with its treatment of a rural woman’s struggle for the freedom to live with a man of her own choosing.

![Image of a film poster showing a woman in a black and white photograph and a man in a green hat standing in front of it.](image)

*Fig. 2. Dir. Metin Erksan, Time to Love (Sevmek Zamanı), 1965.*

Akad’s *The Law of the Border (Hudutların Kanunu-1966)* displayed the realities of people living near the south eastern border of Turkey. *Red River-Black Sheep (Kızılırmak-Karakoyun-1967)* narrated the love between a shepherd and Agha’s daughter and their struggle to be united. *Licensed to Love (Vesikalı Yarım-1968)* is an outstanding high quality melodrama. While focusing on the love between a greengrocer and a B-girl, the film addresses the tensions between modernity and feudalism, urban and rural, family and the outer world, new and old, and social centre and periphery. The Immigration
Trilogy (Göç Üçlemesi), composed of The Bride (Gelin-1973), The Wedding (Düğün-1973), and Blood Money (Diyet-1974), narrate the tragedies of families newly arrived from the country and adapting to life in the city. O Beautiful Istanbul (Ah Güzel İstanbul-1966) by Yılmaz exposes bourgeois precociousness with sharp humour.

Birds of Exile (Gurbet Kuşları-1964) by Refiğ narrates the tragedy of a family which moves to Istanbul with the great hope of becoming rich. Four Women in the Harem (Haremde Dört Kadin-1965) is a period film which focuses on Ottoman political life during the last days of 1899. Made with the collaboration of the prominent author Kemal Tahir, the film draws each inhabitant of a Pasha’s residence to correspond to a certain element of society. The scene depicting a lesbian relationship in the harem was extremely courageous for 1960s Turkey, and was attacked by conservative groups. The Unending Road (Bitmeyen Yol-1967) by Sağiroğlu is another film that suffered under the system of censorship; it was only screened after a two year battle. The film stunningly depicts the harsh realities faced by the unemployed migrants of Istanbul. Hope (1970) by Güney addresses the poverty of a coachman (and his family) when his only horse dies. The coachman sustains his hope in search of a hidden treasure chest, but his destiny is despair. Those Awakening in the Dark (Karanlıkta Uyananlar-1964) by Ertem Göreç is the first film made about working class unionisation.

The national character of Turkish cinema can be observed especially through the films welcomed by the mass audience.\(^{14}\) As we have seen, those films were made as a consequence of a series of factors, such as censorship, dubbing methods, the Egyptian melodramas of the forties, tax reductions in favour of domestic films in 1948, the film language of Hollywood, the system of regional operators, the star system, and the economic insufficiencies of the film industry. The films that bear the national character of Turkish cinema, in this sense, were viewed by the whole family as long as they did not involve overt sexuality and worked to highlight socially accepted norms and values such

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\(^{14}\) My usage of ‘national character’ is based on the work of Otto Bauer who provisionally defined the term as ‘the complex of physical and mental characteristics that distinguishes one nation from others’ (1996, 40). Therefore, with regard to cinema, by the term ‘national character’ I refer to the characteristics of films which reflect a common taste of the mass audience of a country and also to the characteristics of the national film industry that produces those films. As a cultural production shared by the mass audience, such films naturally represent the nation to a large extent, as the ‘reflective approach to representation’ in the Introduction - reminded us by Stuart Hall (2003). Yet questions of how a film is national or how a film represents the nation, I argue, differ from the concept of national character. Rather, how and why those films (which are shared by the masses, by the majority of a national cinema’s audience) are formed in this or that specific way should be the question regarding the national character of a cinema tradition. Distinctive and similar characteristics of national cinemas can also be addressed in this manner.
as love, family, friendship, and sacrifice. In most of the films, there was a clear concept and culture of neighbourliness, and social ‘types’ in the films resembled ‘real’ people that the audience might know and see in daily life. The concept of love was of primary importance insofar as most films pursued a narrative relating to love in some way. Films drew their narrative properties not from the novel, a relatively new form, but from old folk-tales. In this sense, themes and actions often strayed far from reality (although the types were realistic); people found the things they desired in films. Following miraculous coincidences and progress, films ended as the spectator wished; justice and catharsis were achieved. These were ‘contemporary tales’ containing ‘types’ rather than ‘characters’. Representing the narrative elements in particular patterns resembled the symbolisation in folk-literature, thereby capturing the cultural characteristics of a people on the screen. However, although ethnic minorities might occasionally be seen, the nation was represented as devoid of any conflict, a view consistent with the official ideology. Both the urban and the rural were represented realistically, but the problems regarding industrialisation and urbanisation were only seen in a handful of exceptional films. Gender relations were represented in melodramatic forms that situated women and men in traditional roles where females were passive and secondary to the male protagonists. Regarding style, as Refiğ (1971) points out, the film language was simple and unpretentious, and often delivered in a kind of shorthand. The running time of most films was not too long, usually one hundred minutes or less. Starring actors tended to represent particular types or ideals and were frequently shot in close-up.

In the 1960s, with the increase in film production and the development of a film culture, the first institutions related to cinema emerged, as did a series of theoretical debates. A film cultural organisation, Kulüp Sinema 7 (Club Cinema 7), was founded by Sami Şekeroğlu in 1962. In 1964, this club launched Film, the first cinema journal. Finally, in 1967, Club Cinema 7 became the Turkish Film Archive. Thanks to Şekeroğlu’s valuable efforts, thousands of domestic (and also foreign) films have been preserved as a cultural heritage, and the masters of Turkish cinema came together in the nation’s first film school which opened its doors in 1974.15 A film museum also exists under the same structure today. Another organisation in the service of the film industry is the Antalya

15 The current name of the school is Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Department of Cinema and Television.
Film Festival which began awarding ‘Turkish Oscars’ in 1964, and is now one of the longest running film culture organisations. Additionally, the Turkish Cinémathèque Association (Türk Sinematek Derneği) was founded in 1965 with the financial support of the Eczacıbaşı Group, one of the leading businesses in the country. The association brought together film critics who considered Turkish cinema to be deficient and inadequate, and set forth an idea of ‘universal cinema’ as a target for filmmakers. The critics’ forum was the journal Yeni Sinema (meaning ‘New Cinema’), published by the Turkish Cinémathèque Association. By the mid-sixties, a split between filmmakers and critics had hardened and was generating serious debates.

Despite the negative assessment of Turkish cinema by many critics, some filmmakers, inspired by the views of the author Kemal Tahir, were in search of a truly ‘national cinema’ (ulusal sinema). Halit Refiğ was the spokesman of the movement and defended his views in the book Ulusal Sinema Kavgası (meaning ‘The Fight for National Cinema’). According to Refiğ, what the Cinémathèque circle called ‘universality’ was in fact a discourse leaving the nation vulnerable to cultural imperialism. The concept consisted of values derived from the specific historical experience and conditions of the dominant nations - values which were then declared to be ‘universal’ and exported from the centre to the margins. To name the individualistic and Christian values of the West as ‘universal’ was a colonialist approach. To express it in the words of Ernesto Laclau (1996, 24), the universal had found its own body which was still the body of a certain particularity (i.e. the European culture of the nineteenth century) and expressed itself as a universal human essence.

According to Refiğ, in a country like Turkey the main contradiction was not between the classes, but between East and West. Having a different history and economic structure, it was impossible for Turkish society to aspire to ‘be like the West’. Provided that filmmakers realised this fact, they could and should make ‘national cinema’. In Refiğ’s view, the Turkish films made thus far were not products of a ‘national cinema’, but of a ‘people’s cinema’ (halk sineması) - the films made thanks to the financial support of the mass audience through the box-office returns. The establishment of the Turkish Film Archive by Şekeroğlu should also be counted as an act which underpinned the idea of ‘national cinema’. Alternatively, a group of Islamic filmmakers headed by Yücel
Çakmaklı put forward the concept of *milli sinema*. According to this group, films should rather focus on Turkish-Islamic values. The efforts to debate over national cinema remained useless as against the fact that the vast majority of Turkish films were indeed bearing a national character. The *milli sinema* movement on the other hand went into decline and re-emerged at the end of the 1980s under the name *beyaz cinema* (*white cinema*), but its influence was limited to a definite Islamic audience. I will return to the concept of white cinema in Chapter 5.

**Survival: 1975-1990**

By the second half of 1970s, the economic and political environment changed for the worse. Following the military intervention in 1971, the suppression of opposition groups caused the student movement to go further underground. State intolerance, the emergence of contra organisations, and an economic setback nurtured an environment for terror. The imposition of martial law extended to many cities. Numerous young activists and some well-known intellectuals were assassinated. Ordinary people were afraid to walk out on the streets.

Television broadcasting, having started in 1968, was beginning to reach remote villages. While in the early years of broadcasting it was a privileged device of the upper class, the number of television sets increased dramatically in the 1970s. Indeed, by 1980, television ownership was twenty-five times more than in 1972. Compared to cinema, TV was cheaper to consume. After a reasonable fixed cost, the only variable cost was in increased electricity consumption. Moreover the worsening economic conditions and rises in transportation costs made going out for entertainment (including to the cinema) more difficult and expensive. Thus families, the main audience for cinema, gradually quit the movie theatres and stayed at home to watch TV.

Nevertheless, cinema retained some advantages over television, particularly in terms of what could be shown on screen: explicit sexuality, violence, *Arabesk* music, and

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16. ’Milli’ is an older word corresponding to ‘national’.
colour.\textsuperscript{18} Thus producers (especially minor ones) who were losing their mass audience, started to use those advantages in order to fill seats. A new type of audience, composed of young/single/uneducated males, was attracted to movie theatres. In addition, 16mm film stock, which was much cheaper than 35mm, penetrated the market in the second half of the 1970s. Most of the films that addressed the new type of audience were shot on 16mm stock. Of the 195 films released in 1979, for instance, 131 were 16mm sex-comedies (Scognamullo 2003, 160). These films drove family audiences still further from the theatres. It is noteworthy that although every detail of the films was diligently examined by the authorities, those sex comedies almost never experienced any problem with censorship. Indeed, Turkey remains the sole Muslim-majority country to tolerate such films.

The new audience for Turkish cinema was smaller than the former one. As a result, the number of films decreased, some movie theatres closed, and there was a general decline in the regional operators system. Whereas the majority of film genres continued to be represented, the polarised socio-political climate did bring a growing number of political films. Melodramas and comedies similar to those of the 1950s and 1960s were still being produced. However, the endurance of such films could not mask the fact that the previous unity of themes and style in Turkish cinema had started to dissolve.

The third military coup (12\textsuperscript{th} September 1980) was the most remorseless and effective one. It transformed the country to an extent that is still being felt - in politics, in the economy, the education system, and indeed, in all cultural aspects. The activities of political parties, labour unions, associations, and other political organisations were terminated following the coup. The parliament was closed and the country was governed by military leaders for three years. Many people were sent to prisons and files were opened on more than a million by the authorities. In such an environment, with no visible opposition, new economic policies were easily pursued. There was an increase in import and export trade, while the incomes of the working class and inflation were decreased. There were moves to privatise State Economic Enterprises. As a result of these new economic policies, the distribution of income deteriorated throughout the 1980s. \textit{Arabesk} culture, which had emerged in the suburbs of industrialising cities in the 1970s, now

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{18} While colour TV broadcasting officially started in 1984, all films in cinemas were in colour by 1975.}\end{footnote}
spread wider in these desperate conditions. This culture, mainly expressing itself in music, took ‘bad destiny’ as a given and called on its addressee to rebel not to the political-economic system, but to that (abstract) destiny. The lyrics of almost all Arabesk songs are similar in this respect.

The crisis in Turkish cinema which had started in the second half of the 1970s became more visible by the 1980s. The numbers of film spectators and movie theatres, which in 1970, were approximately 247 million and 2,424 respectively, decreased to 62.6 million and 941 in 1980, and to 19.3 million and 354 in 1990 (DİE 1973, 7; TSI 2010, 92). Moreover, for the first time since the 1950s, the audience for foreign films exceeded that for domestic films. In connection with these shifts, the number of films continued to decrease from an annual average of 166.4 productions between 1975 and 1979, to 112.4 in the 1980s. The production of sex comedies ceased after the coup, but violent and Arabesk films continued to be made.

By the beginning of the 1980s, video operators replaced the regional cinema operators. Immigrant Turks in European countries, attempting to preserve their own culture and maintain contact with the homeland, helped to create a demand for videos. With the spread of video players in Europe, they began to demand Turkish films for home consumption. As Sonja de Leeuw (2005) puts it, renting video movies from the home country invoked nostalgia (recalling the “there”). Thus, at the end of the 1970s and for the first time, video operators sought to import Turkish films to Germany. In response to this demand, producers started making video films and releasing video editions of cinema films after the season. Shortly thereafter and then throughout the 1980s, video became popular in Turkey as well. Similar to regional operators, the video operators supported producers financially and had temporary rights to the distribution of films. Some film producers founded their own video production companies. This system led to the emergence of a video dealer on every corner and the screening of films in cafés, pubs, tea gardens, etc. without paying a copyright fee to the filmmakers.

With the demise of the regional operators and the star system, any remaining unity of themes and narrative finally collapsed. Directors started to choose narrative styles according to thematic concerns or to develop new narrative approaches. Nevertheless,
films with *Arabesk* content and violent films (these two compose the great majority of 1980s’ production) retained a formal unity. The majority of *Arabesk* productions took their title from a popular song performed by the singer in the leading role. Grief for a beloved woman was at the core of these musical dramas. Typically, the singer performed a few songs from a new album, with album and film released close together so as to deliver mutual commercial benefit. Violent films, on the other hand, were a continuation of those productions that appeared in the late 1970s and resembled the B-movies being produced elsewhere in the world. While some directors of the 1960s and 70s had to make films of these two popular genres, others formed their own production companies to make more personal films. Some made both. In the 1980s for example, Atıf Yılmaz’s films addressed the freedom and emancipation of women. A slower and unconventional narrative style was adopted in many of such more personal/intellectual films. At the same time, comedy-dramas maintaining the style and content marking the period 1950-75, continued to be produced. These films were made for the mass audience, including families. Although the size of this audience had fallen sharply, it continued to drive ideas of ‘national film character’.

The 1980s saw a renewed preoccupation with character and thus, the replacement (to a certain extent) of stars by players. The new aspect ratios, such as 16:9 and 1.85:1, were preferred for some personal/intellectual film projects. In addition, since these films’ principal addressee was not the mass audience, but rather festivals and the European market, the quality of both sound and picture had to achieve certain standards.

In 1986, a ‘Law on Cinema, Video and Musical Works’ was passed. With this new legislation, film copyrights began to be protected. The Central Film Control Commission was abolished and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism gained the authority to control and register films. Although this law abrogated the censorship commission, local governors still had the authority to ban films. Nevertheless, censorship of films decreased gradually and only a few films have been banned or censored since 1990. This law is the second concrete state action taken in favour of Turkish cinema since the tax reduction of 1948.

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19 ‘Sinema, Video ve Müzik Eserleri Kanunu’.
Conclusion

Although the first cinema institution was established by a state organ, the army, Turkish cinema has not been supported, but rather has been perceived as a taxable entertainment facility by the state for many years. On the part of private enterprise on the other hand, capital accumulation has been lacking. Indeed, in the early years, it is impossible to describe Turkish cinema as an industry. It is more accurate to identify some emerging factors – such as censorship, the dubbing process, Egyptian melodramas and tax reduction in favour of domestic productions - which influenced the filmmaking practices of the following periods. Beginning in the 1950s - but especially gaining pace in the 1960s and lasting until the mid-1970s, it is possible to identify a very definite, intensive, and productive era, during which a national film industry became discernable. The financial support supplied by the mass audience was the impetus behind the growing film business. That was the heyday of Turkish cinema which also made possible the emergence of artistic works. Following an era of mass production, the film industry struggled to survive by producing films for a new audience from the mid-1970s to the end of the 80s – a period witnessed gradual dissolve in narrative styles and themes.

After 1990, there were a number of innovations made to filmmaking practices derived from the use of new financial sources, including Turkey’s membership of Eurimages. These developments will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.