Eurimages and Turkish cinema: history, identity, culture

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Chapter 3

THE CASE OF TURKEY: THE STORY AFTER TWENTY YEARS’ EXPERIENCE IN EURIMAGES

This chapter aims to put forth the lived experience of Turkey in Eurimages in its first twenty years of membership.\(^{50}\) The facts will be exposed by referring to statistical data, to the knowledge and observations of professionals who have been part of Eurimages or Turkish cinema and by examining the Turkish-initiative films that have received Eurimages co-production support.

First the scope of Turkish-initiative films will be clarified. Then the data regarding the collaboration of Turkish filmmakers with colleagues from other member states will be displayed and the reasons of the country preferences will be explained. The contribution of Eurimages co-production support to filmmaking practices in Turkey will follow this. Before proceeding to the nationalness of the films, the attitude of the national representative against given projects and the issue of whether he or she makes a veto will be discussed. How national or European Turkish-initiative films are, as well as how much the films deviate from the mainstream in terms of cinematic narration and content, will be discussed afterwards. Films which are said to have an \textit{orientalist} tendency in representation will be addressed in this regard. Then various statistical data will be provided and the audience figures for the films will be analysed. Finally the exhibition and distribution support will be covered briefly and criticisms of Eurimages practices will be looked at.

Co-production, Partners, Contribution

Turkey, a member of the Council of Europe since 9 August 1949, acceded to Eurimages on 28 February 1990, approximately one year after the fund’s establishment, as the 18\(^{th}\)

\(^{50}\) A shorter, and somewhat modified, version of this chapter has been published in SineCine Journal of Films Studies (Yılmazok 2010).
participant. Faruk Günaltay was the person who endeavoured to persuade the political authorities of Turkey in favour of Eurimages membership and he was appointed as the national representative and served for 15 years.

60 Turkish-initiative co-productions had been supported by 12.8 million Euros by the end of 2009.\textsuperscript{51} Although the Turkish co-producer was the minority party in some films such as The Blue Exile, Harem Suare and Wound and a Turkish producer does not even appear in the co-production setup of Waiting for the Clouds, they should be considered (and indeed they are in this study) as Turkish-initiatives, as the directors, themes and landscapes are predominantly from Turkey.\textsuperscript{52} On the other hand Sawdust Tales (Usta Beni Öldürsene-1997) by Barış Pirhasan, Facing Windows (La Finestra di Fronte-2003) and Saturn in Opposition (Saturno Contro-2007) by Ferzan Özpetek - even though their directors are from Turkey - will not be regarded as Turkish-initiative films, for the landscapes and characters are definitely non-Turkish and the Turkish co-producers are the minority party in these projects. 27 projects in which Turkish filmmakers were the minority co-producers (2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd}) have received 5.9 million Euros in co-production support by the end of 2009.\textsuperscript{53}

Out of 87 projects, including 60 as the initiative-taker and 27 as minority co-producer, Turkish filmmakers have collaborated with producers from 22 different countries. The details of the preferred countries for co-production are on Figure 9.

As is discernable, producers from France, Greece and Hungary are the most preferred colleagues as far as the producers from Turkey are concerned in terms of co-operation. There are a couple of possible explanatory reasons behind this fact. In the first place, the producers prefer to work with colleagues either that they already know or are in contact with, or with any eligible company they can find. In the case of acquaintance, what co-producers inhabit certain countries is of more importance than arbitrary national preference. In terms of co-operating with any eligible company, two facts seem to be of importance. Firstly, the producers from the countries with bigger film industries were not eager to co-operate with Turkish colleagues at that time and hence collaboration with the

\textsuperscript{51} For the list of the films those have been supported, the amounts of support and audience figures, see Appendix-D.
\textsuperscript{52} Eurimages denotes Waiting for the Clouds a film without a Turkish co-producer, whereas Ustaoglu Films, the producing company of director Yeşim Ustaoglu, announced it as a co-production of France, Germany, Greece and Turkey.
\textsuperscript{53} For the list of the projects in which Turkish producers are the minority party, see Appendix-E.
producers from smaller countries was indispensible, as Günaltay (2009) explained. He also added that he channeled some of the Turkish filmmakers (who were in search of co-producers to collaborate with) to those countries. Secondly, the legal environments of those co-producing countries come into prominence rather than the co-producers: “because it is very difficult to make co-productions in some countries due to their laws and regulations”, Ahmet Boyacıoğlu pointed out (e-mail interview, 8 Apr. 2009). Beyond or outside these reasons, different motives might emerge for different co-producing country choices and it is worthwhile to try and detect them.

In the case of France, it strikes one at once that the head office of Eurimages is in Strasbourg and to co-operate with a French producer might be helpful for accessing funds. My interviews revealed that this is not the rationale. On the contrary, as Mehmet Demirhan (2009) noted, to collaborate with a producer from one of the big contributor

54 Ahmet Boyacıoğlu served as National Representative of Turkey between 2005 and 2007.
states (France, Germany and Italy) might be disadvantageous because there exist about 8-10 applicant projects on the agenda of the national representatives of those countries for each meeting - in which their citizens are the majority co-producers and they have to deal with such a high number of projects. This does not increase the potential for getting support for a certain film. Moreover, the national representatives do not always act in the same way nor do they necessarily vote for similar projects. Rather, focusing on France’s impetus and leading role in the European film industry explains the phenomenon with greater validity. Following a strong co-production tradition, France makes bilateral conventions with many countries and there is a notable number of French producers sustaining and promoting different genres or types of films in their portfolio to distribute all over the world. Hence they undertake co-productions not only with Turkish colleagues but with many others as well.

A high number of co-productions with Greek filmmakers can be explained with reference to the cost advantage of accessing post-production facilities and also in terms of the geographical proximity and cultural familiarity of the two nations. Although Turkey has attained enough by way of advanced studios and post-production utilities in the last two decades, certain technical operations like processing sound recorded films are much cheaper in Greece - sometimes it costs about one quarter of a film’s budget in Turkey. The qualifications of the technical crew, rather than the technology used, have a significant influence upon the artistic quality of the work and make it more apparent. While the qualifications do not vary too much between the two countries, the cost advantage gives the position of priority to Greece. On the cultural and geographical side, the transnational stories which spread to both lands like *The Boatman* and *My Darling Istanbul* required a Greek co-producer, actors and crew. The convenience of transportation between the two countries, on the other hand, also makes things easier. In addition to this, understanding each other comes into prominence in a co-production. The style of filmmaking is common in these two countries, compared to Western or Northern Europe. As Ömer Uğur (director of *Homecoming*) stated: “In Turkey, we develop a story in a short period of time and want to shoot it immediately. We have neither a tradition nor a state of mind for long-term planning. We want things to go on fast, actualize now and here…We can communicate to Greeks and we understand each other easily. They think like us; we come to an agreement immediately and make it. It takes longer, by as much as one year, with the French,
German or Swedish producers” (personal interview, Istanbul, 1 Apr. 2009). Or, as Semih Kaplanoglu (director of Angel’s Fall, Egg, and Honey) stated: “We are close to the Greeks. They are more relaxed, more Mediterranean than us, indeed. There was no Eurimages support for Milk and I worked with French and German co-producers. It was easier to get along with the Greeks, compared to the French and Germans” (personal interview, Istanbul, 30 Mar. 2009). However, Derviş Zaim (director of Mud and Waiting for Heaven), agreeing with the advantages of co-operating with producers from the Balkan countries, stresses how the others add to the value of a project: “Nevertheless the co-producers who serve the purpose and boost a project tend rather to come from Western and Northern European countries” (2003, 70).

The rationale for co-operating with Hungarian producers is the high quality of post-production facilities which reside in that country at relatively low cost. Co-production cases with the remaining countries are on account of acquaintanceship, story requirements, coincidences or just the obligations set by Eurimages. The filmmakers did not complain about a serious problem stemming from co-producing in a bi- or multinational environment, where communication has significant importance as Hetty Naaijkens (co-producer of Split) pointed out: “You can compare co-producing to a big cake and you always have to divide it, some pieces for you and some pieces for them and how can we put all these ingredients together to make one cake? You really need to have very good communication” (personal interview, Amsterdam, 14 Feb. 2010). In general the problems Turkish filmmakers experienced were of the kind of minor nature that any filmmaker might face while executing any given project. On the contrary, director Seçkin Yasar (director of My Darling Istanbul) experienced a serious conflict with her Turkish producer which ended in court and the film was released an immense eight years after the shooting.55

Eurimages co-production support contributed to Turkish filmmakers in a number of ways. Although the first co-production in Turkish film history was done by Muhsin Ertuğrul through On Istanbul Streets with Greek and Egyptian filmmakers as early as in

55 The shooting of My Darling Istanbul was finished in May 1999. As the post-production of the film was not finished in 1.5 years, the director took the producer to court. According to the final court order, the rights of the film were given to the director and scriptwriters at the end of 2005. The director finished the post-production thanks to the support of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and her own funding. The film was released in April 2007 (e-mail interview with Seçkin Yasar, 26 Apr. 2009).
1931, and various co-productions have been made since then, it has not turned into a common practice for Turkish filmmakers and co-productions have not reserved an important place in the Turkish cinema tradition. Whereas the Turkish filmmakers engaged in around a total of 44 co-productions throughout film history before 1990, they have co-produced 37 films in the 1990s - 30 of which were backed by Eurimages.\(^{56}\)

The Eurimages scheme first of all brought in a familiarity with film production in multinational environments which encourages the artists and crews to become closer and to share their experiences. Having partaken once in a multi-national project, it is easier to take on subsequent projects, as Yasar expressed: “I can easily proceed in the future to co-operate with foreign producers thanks to my co-production experience” (2009). Kaplanoğlu verified the positive results of co-productions: “The filmmakers are gradually learning how to co-produce. We see them in foreign markets which was not the case in the past” (2009). Its contribution to co-producing practice has been insomuch that a Cypriot Turkish filmmaker (Deriş Zaim) could engage in a project with a producer from (Southern) Cyprus, a country officially unrecognized by Turkey, thanks to Eurimages. Such a collaboration probably would not have been possible otherwise, i.e. without a supranational roof.

Secondly, Eurimages experience has helped with the technical aspects of filmmaking, especially sound recording and processing, to advance to hitherto unachieved limits. From the 1940s until the beginning of the 1990s, films were shot silently and dubbed later in Turkey and sound recording was a problematic domain in filmmaking. Technical co-operation with other countries introduced the requisite knowledge and practice to improve this.

Thirdly, besides assisting the majority co-producer by undertaking some of the technical work, the minority co-producers considerably contributed to the marketing affairs of Turkish-initiative projects as well. In addition to screening a Eurimages-backed film in the co-producer’s country automatically (usually), the distribution becomes easier to exercise in cinemas and amongst the TV channels of other European countries and even non-European ones, depending on the co-producer’s international relations. To be at the

\(^{56}\) For the titles of the co-produced films, see: Özgüç 1998-2003.
level of the international arena is highly important for a national cinema’s recognition all over the world.

Finally, a vital benefit of co-production support is the advantage of being able to shoot with an extended budget. Zeki Demirkubuz (director of *Destiny*) confirmed this by his own experience: “It is the first time I caught a chance to shoot with a high budget. This was the absolute benefit. My concern or attitude did not change but I could shoot the film in three seasons and thus spare more time for certain pertinent things and be able to enhance the formal quality of the work” (personal interview, Istanbul, 30 Mar. 2009). Moreover, some other directors expressed that they would not be able to shoot those films if they could not get Eurimages support.

**National Representative and Blockage**

The national representative’s role is of importance in the sense of guiding the filmmakers throughout the application process. The national representative does not make a pre-election of the applicant projects. Expressing that he is ethically against pre-election as it would mean a kind of censorship and is also against the philosophy and spirit of Eurimages, Günaltay added: “I thought of supporting every project coming from Turkey in an indifferent manner, provided that they are not racist, pornographic, fanatic or against democratic and humanistic values. Therefore I essentially supported all projects from Turkey, even if I was not convinced that they were the best projects on the agenda of Eurimages or they had a critical dimension (2009). The subsequent representatives of Turkey confirmed that they also never made pre-elections with regard to applicants and that is the case for the representatives of all the other states as well. Notwithstanding, some filmmakers expressed that they felt a kind of blockage from Turkish representatives in the past against young directors who intended to demand Eurimages support for their first features.

What they did was to direct the filmmakers to appropriate paths throughout the formal process. Demirhan stressed two points which exemplify exceptional cases: The first case is if the number of applicant Turkish-initiative projects outweighs the possible funding. For instance, when there are four projects on the agenda of comparable artistic
quality and it is apparent that only two of them can get the support, he mentioned he would look at which director(s) need(s) it more; he would place the priority of his efforts on the project(s) coming from younger director(s) rather than for the project(s) from acclaimed director(s) whose film(s) were supported by the Fund before. By conducting himself in this manner, Demirhan said, there might therein be a contribution to the emergence of new talents: “I can explain it to the parties and my rationale will not be arbitrary for sure” (2009).

The second exceptional case is that wherein the national representative’s intervention in the process might be needed as a blockage for those projects which aim just to make propaganda, not art, Demirhan expressed. He added that a film surely can be critical over social and political issues but what comes first is its aesthetic quality. His approach is understandable - the priority of formal aesthetics is over and above content in the study and evaluation of art. Furthermore, the main financial source of the Fund is the annual fees paid by the member states and no authority wishes to be subverted by an opportunity offered by itself. Günaltay, on the other hand, expressed he did not take the dominant taboos in the country into consideration as a cinema representative in Eurimages, since art cannot be something done under restrictions and it is rather insubordinate by its very nature. He attached importance to the artistic culture of self-criticism - projects questioning or criticizing Turkey should come from Turkey, not from outside. For instance, he was criticized in some of the media, regarding the Eurimages support for Journey to the Sun of Yeşim Ustaoğlu - which is critical of the predominant nationalist ideology in Turkey about the Kurdish question – and Istanbul beneath My Wings of Mustafa Altıoklar – which exhibits the religious conservatism in the 17th century Ottoman state and the sultan as a bisexual individual. “That is a democratic attitude. We composed an image in the eyes of other European countries that Turkey does not block support for a project which criticizes the state. I am pleased and proud of that” (Günaltay 2009). Nevertheless, the media ignored Journey to the Sun, distributors were unwilling to engage in and the filmmaker had to distribute it with her own efforts, notwithstanding there was no hindrance by official authorities (personal interview with Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Istanbul, 29 June 2010). Two critical films on the other hand, Big Man Little Love and Innowhereland, had certification problems with the state authorities (Pösteki 2005).
In any case, a considerable number of films questioning the official ideology of the state or the established ethnic, religious and gender identities in Turkey have been produced with Eurimages support in the past twenty years. Approximately half of the Turkish-initiative films speak politically or touch upon politics and political issues. National identity, after all, is a political concept by its very nature and I will discuss the ethnic, religious and gender dimensions of it in Part II.

Nationalness versus Europeanness of the Films

It is a valid question to ask to what extent the films supported by a supra-national fund such as Eurimages are indigenous or national and to what extent they are transnational, universal or non-domestic. Definitely the most comprehensive and clear answer to that question can be provided by the examination of the films backed by the Fund.

Firstly, it should be noted here that there are practically two types of co-productions. One is the type where the co-producing parties entirely get involved in the project, i.e. artistically and technically. The other type is mainly financial in that the necessary fund for the film is raised in different countries but the film is national in terms of its content - that is, a national film of the majority co-producing country. A striking majority of Turkish-initiative films fall into this category. According to Olla, two reasons behind this fact might be: (1) the lack of co-production experience which Turkish filmmakers have had, and (2) the unprivileged position of the Turkish language in Europe. Countries like France, Germany and Italy have a long history of co-productions and this experience creates the condition for a cross-fertilization of cultures in the stories and in general they have a more mixed content contributed to by both or all co-producing countries. I have stated in the previous section the low number of co-productions Turkish filmmakers engaged in the past. On the language side, languages like English, French and German have the advantageous position of being spoken by more than one nation and thus the films in those languages have more chance of distribution outside the co-producing countries and are more open to transnational contexts. On the contrary Turkish is not the official language of any member state in Eurimages except Turkey and spoken in a few countries such as Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Norway, Bulgaria and Greece by a small number of immigrants or minorities. Therefore the Turkish-initiative
films inevitably narrate stories that aim at the audience in Turkey in the first place.

Nevertheless this does not necessarily mean they are not universal. The filmmakers care about being perceived by worldwide audiences as they themselves intend to be; this is in the nature of filmmaking. Hence there exists self-control to some extent in terms of being understandable and accessible universally. The filmmakers also consult their projects with their colleagues or with some people with different ethnic and national profiles from both inland and foreign countries at the scriptwriting stage. Some of the filmmakers said that their films narrate the stories of Turkey as co-productions but they belong to the common culture of humanity after being released. They observed that different audiences all over the world appreciated them at the various international festivals. Ersin Pertan (director of Love under Siege), referring to this issue, defined his work as a European film, but added: “We are not European; we cannot be. Even if we want to be, Europeans do not accept us. We are not Eastern; we are not close to Eastern or Arabic culture. We are a people of a culture which is peculiar to us. A journey to our roots reveals that the Byzantines influenced the Ottomans more than the Sumer, Hittite or Urartu cultures” (1997, 97).  

Barış Pirhasan (director of Summer Love) pointed out in an interview in 2005 that particularly the Turkish films of the early 2000s should be located in European cinema:

The recent Turkish cinema is for sure a European cinema: look at the sources, look at what the filmmakers - including myself - have been influenced by. This is a new breath in European cinema which will be named sooner or later. Though Turkey seems a very different cultural region, Turkish cinema can be grasped in European cinematic context. The crucial point is we should not expect every individual’s work to reflect his or her typical culture. The recent Turkish cinema productions, for instance, embrace international themes or dimensions from a peculiar point of view while focusing on topics which are so-called ‘European’. (189)

Some directors, on the other hand, do not assess their films in terms of national

57 Sumer, Hittite and Urartu are the old civilizations established in or around Asia Minor between the 4th millennium and 7th centuries BC.
cinemas or as a part of European cinema. Semir Aslanyürek (director of *The Road Home*), for instance, expressed the fact that: “None of the films I made belong to a specific nation; they are all human stories” (personal interview, Istanbul, 4 Apr. 2009). Özer Kızıltan (director of *Takva: A Man’s Fear of God*) noted that: “For film, for visual art, there is no such thing as being Turkish or German. It is universal and it should be that way. There may be local differences but the basic rules and language of cinema are universal. The story of *Takva* concerns Turkey but it might as well be a narrative of a Buddhist temple or of a fundamentalist Jewish environment as well (personal interview, Istanbul, 31 Mar. 2009).

A close look, however, at the films herein reveals that the majority of them are profoundly national in that the stories, the images, the signs, the characters and the context clearly belong to Turkey, including the ones in which the shooting locations are indefinable (i.e. wherein a spectator does not know Turkey and cannot discern which country it is). The tradition of narration is followed which was set in the 1950s and has been described by Halit Refiğ as ‘a language that is plain, less pretentious, and which seeks to reach its goals via shortcuts’ (1971, 22) (and was shaped under the influence of Hollywood – just like the other national cinemas - by the audience’s taste and the economical and technical constraints of the film industry). The film language also occasionally displays the ornamental attractions thanks to the possibilities provided by the improvement in cinema technology.

There are two exceptional types of films which do not fit in with the abovementioned nationalness. The first group is the films that formally diverge from the majority. As Eurimages has essentially been a place to apply for difficult projects (contextually and formally) which do not have much of a chance in terms of commercial success, some of those films deviate from the narrative tradition as defined by market rules. Films like *Rosa I Love You, The Blue Exile, Clock Tower, Angels’s Fall, Climates, Egg, Three Monkeys, Honey* and *Once Upon A Time in Anatolia* for instance, display the particularities of what Gilles Deleuze introduced as time-image in which ‘time is no longer subordinated to movement, but movement to time’ (2003, 106): “We no longer have an indirect image of time which derives from movement, but a direct time-image from which movement derives. We no longer have a chronological time which can be
overturned by movements which are contingently abnormal; we have a chronic non-chronological time which produces movements necessarily ‘abnormal’, essentially ‘false’” (129).

As Patricia Pisters (2006, 176) encapsulated from Deleuze, in action cinema of movement-image (first cinema: Hollywood genre cinema) the action is followed through one or two central characters who are confronted with a challenge that is overcome in the course of the actions whereas modern cinema of time-image (second cinema: auteur cinema) is often an idiosyncratic reworking of class genres (sometimes with non-professional actors) and pays more attention to the socially less fortunate but the stories are also universal, talking about the human condition in general.

The films mentioned above display one or more of several false continuities, banalities of everyday life, re-collection images or crystal time which are particular to time-image. Directors of these films expressed in various interviews that they were influenced by or appreciate one or more of the masters whom Deleuze referred to in order to disclose time-image: namely Ozu, Bresson, Antonioni and Tarkovsky. Such films, as they are not well appreciated by the mass audience, would have hardly had a chance of being made (or little chance of screening even if they were) a few decades ago when the film industry was dependent solely on market rules. Although the landscape is Turkey in those films, they not only differ from the majority of the domestic films in terms of their narrative style, but also the feelings and sentiments they invoke are dissimilar to the mainstream and they are thus nick-named as ‘festival films’. However, the prestige that a national cinema needs is ensured thanks to the international awards won by them which in turn bring recognition and more interest to the films from Turkey and serve to nourish the national film industry. Among many other awards given to Turkish films, the Best Director award in Cannes 2008 was given for Three Monkeys and the Grand Prix in Cannes 2011 for Once Upon A Time in Anatolia won by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and the Golden Bear in Berlin 2010 for Honey won by Semih Kaplanoğlu are the outstanding examples.
Before proceeding to the second group of films that are open to questioning as ‘national’ films, I have to remind the reader that Eurimages has on several occasions been the subject of heated debate in Turkish cinema circles. Its role and – if indeed there is any influence on national films have been questioned, but these arguments have in general lacked a comprehensive perspective and many have extrapolated their conclusions from single examples (films). For instance the Fund has been claimed to approve easily the films that are concerned with the infringement of human rights, political tremors and Southeastern [Kurdish] problem (Güven 2005) or to support at large the projects which treat the adverse and backward facets of Turkey (Mete 2005) that appeal to the orientalist consciousness of a Western mind (Mete, quoted in Tunca 2005). Those arguments were holding the Turkish representative in Eurimages responsible for such films. However, more or less the same conception of the Fund continued during the later representatives’ terms of office: “Eurimages has a lot of money, as long as you revile at Turkey!” (Güven 2006). On the other hand Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films have been advocated to express the land and people of Turkey and their emotions through cinematic language (Özgentürk 2005). The claims against Eurimages imply that (other) Europeans expect certain themes or characteristics from a Turkish film, i.e. they wish to see Turkey in accordance with the codes in their minds and thus only appreciate the films which represent the Turkish people and land via unfavourable stereotypes or contexts. We cannot, however, infer an exact response by asking this question to individuals. Examining
all the films that have been supported by Eurimages is definitely the best method of finding answers to this question.

Eurimages decisions for co-production support might be perceived and expressed as approving easily the films that are concerned with the infringement of human rights, political tremors and Southeastern problem, as claimed by Güven. It might also be seen as a matter of an artistic culture of self-criticism, as Günaltay stated. Moreover, the cultural objective of the Council of Europe is ‘to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity’ (2009) and its cinema support fund encourages filmmakers to ‘reflect and promote the contribution of diverse national components to Europe’s cultural identity’ (2003). Besides, films that openly incite against human rights are considered to be ineligible for support. That is to say, human rights are an important concern for this supra-national organisation. As I have mentioned, the representation of ethnic, religious and gender identities as diverse components of Turkish national identity will be analysed in detail in chapters 4, 5 and 6. The claims of orientalism, however, necessitate a close examination of the films at this point.

It is true that there is a second group among Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative projects that it is difficult to label ‘national’ films since they narrate Turkish society through the eyes of a foreigner, i.e. a Westerner, which invokes the term Orientalism as used by Edward Said. A discourse emerged in the post-enlightenment period, orientalism is the construction of the Orient by the West in an unequal relationship of power and cultural hegemony. It creates and maintains the essentialist idea that the Orient is the backward, exotic and inferior ‘other’ and exists for the superior European. To quote Said, orientalism can be “regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient” (1995, 202). “The Orient that appears in Orientalism” states Said, “is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire” (202-03). Stereotyping is the prevalent way of orientalist representation, which draws on a good many clichés. As Hall argues, “stereotyping reduces people to a few, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature” (2003, 257). Accordingly, speaking for cinema, the subjects and objects of the Orient are suited - by the one who
produces the representations of them - to the consciousness of the Western spectator. There are a few Turkish-initiative films backed by Eurimages, notwithstanding that they were shot by Turkish directors, which can be said to exhibit characteristics that are particular to the orientalist approach.

*Steam: The Turkish Bath* is the most debated film in this regard. The main focus of the film is the emergence of a gay relationship between an Italian and a Turkish male. I will address this issue in Chapter 6 under the section of LGBT identities and place the emphasis on orientalism here. Except for the director (Ferzan Özpetek) and the milieu, there is almost no clue to the film being ‘made in Turkey’. The spectator is allowed to see Istanbul and the people of Turkey only through the eyes of the Italian protagonists, Francesco and Marta. The representations are made in clichés of a kind that might first and foremost come to the mind of a Westerner about Turkey. For instance, when Marta and Francesco discuss in Rome going to Istanbul to sell the bath that they have inherited from Madame Anita, Marta says that Francesco should go because he will be the one to be respected there as a male. Likewise we hear Madame Anita writing in her letters that the women of Turkey should work two times as much as European women should in order to obtain the same things. On Francesco’s first day in Istanbul, we see a veiled woman in black in the background. Thus we are told the women by and large are secondary and are of lesser value in that oriental ‘other’ country. We watch a wedding ceremony and a circumcision feast in the film like a documentary prepared for a tourist. Zozo, the Turkish lawyer of Francesco, is represented as an untrustworthy swindler, which is essential to an orientalist narrative. ‘Turkish hospitality’ is represented through the family that lives as tenants of Madame Anita, and one would think in a positive way. But the family members ceaselessly insist on presenting offerings to their guests. However, representing them as continuously insisting on serving something to their guests transmits the message that the East exists for the West, even if the director does not intend to be understood in this way. The orientalism of the film is also observable in the architectural paradigms and mise-en-scène, as Mary P. Wood states: “The protagonist’s home in Rome is a high-level, modernist apartment contrasting with the house and bath he inherits in the old quarters of Istanbul, characterized by dark, closed, mysterious spaces, jumbled streets, labyrinthine passages, spyholes and sexual ambivalence” (2007, 128). In brief, the film, with its representations of stereotypes and the feeling it creates in the spectator, cannot escape the
criticism of being orientalist in representation.

A few other films deserve attention for some of their scenes that render them open to criticism with regard to orientalism. *Harem Suaré* depicts the women in the imperial harem in the last years before its closure and cannot escape the criticism for it reminds us of women posing for the colonial painters and photographers of Europe as the ‘exotic’ orient. Moreover Özpetek (1999), the director of the film, defined the harem as a space where the East and the West are blended in cohesion, and he devotes the two naked scenes of women to orientalist painters. *Robert’s Movie*, another film in the same vein, appeals to Islamic mysticism and shows Mevlevi who perform the sema ritual, in a crude stereotyping of Turkey. The protagonist, John Kelly, does not think of returning to his home city New York because of his love for this country (Turkey), its mysticism and its dervishes. Three of the five leading roles are performed by non-Turkish actors and the characters speak mostly in the English language in *Robert's Movie*. It is more like a foreign film shot in Turkey rather than being national in character. Director Canan Gerede, referring to *Cahiers du Cinema*, admitted it was not, indeed, a Turkish film: “Speaking of style, Cahiers du Cinema for instance, defined it as ‘the best sample of new American cinema’ from the film language point of view” (Gerede and Altan 1992, 67). Furthermore she points out that in *Robert's Movie* Istanbul is recorded through the eyes and sensations of a foreigner (quoted in Karakaya 2002, 176). In *Split* by the same director, Sol, the heroine from Iceland, goes to the village of Halil in Anatolia. However, she covers her head in the village while she does not do the same thing in Istanbul. We see her boyfriend from Iceland on the other hand, freely drinking beer. It gives the impression that women have to cover themselves in rural areas of Turkey whereas men have the right to act the way they want – similar to the message given in *Steam: The Turkish Bath*. Other than that, the majority of the signifiers that belong to Turkey are represented in a negative manner in *Split*. Likewise, in *Wound* almost everything that Hülya – the protagonist sent to Turkey by her uncle - encounters in Turkey is negatively represented; she is a member of a Turkish minority in Germany and wants to return there, where she is used to being. Interestingly, maybe coincidentally, all of the directors of the above-mentioned films live abroad, all in Western countries.

As distinct from the films using an orientalist approach, *Rosa I Love You* is itself
a work that looks like a foreign film, rather than looking at Turkish society through the
eyes of a foreigner. Işıl Özgentürk (1992), the director, expresses that the film is adapted
from a novel by a Turkish author (Sevgi Soysal) and composed by the labour of a Turkish
director and crew and she also emphasises the importance of national identity, but there is
almost no sign that the film is a Turkish one. First of all, the milieu is indefinite; it is
impossible to conceive which country it is. We are told that Rosa was a princess in her
childhood but she becomes the mistress of a baron in her adulthood. A man tells Rosa that
a piano was playing in the chateaus in the past. Such concepts as princesses, barons and
chateaus, however, do not exist in Turkish culture and history. The only sign of it being a
Turkish film is the scene in which Rosa drinks rakti with three men who are clients of her
pension and later they perform a Turkish folk dance. Nevertheless this scene remains
unique in the wholeness of the film, inasmuch as a later picnic scene in which Rosa joins
three men looks just like something from a French film.

Relying on the Turkish-initiative films of the past twenty years that have been
financially supported by Eurimages, a Fund in which representatives of European
countries make the decisions, it is hard to say that culturally unfavourable contents or
scripts/images which ‘throw dirt at Turkey’ are expected or appreciated by the European
decision makers. This is because, for one thing, the majority of those films represent the
Turkish people and the land just as they are. The films which adopt an orientalist manner
of representation are exceptions, and their number is as low as 5 out of 59 films - those I
have mentioned above.

In brief those films, the great majority of which are profoundly national, verify
the Eurimages criteria which do not allow pornography nor violence nor the infringement
of human rights and which encourage the filmmakers to reflect and promote the
contribution of diverse national components to Europe's cultural identity. One can,
nonetheless, claim that those criteria obstruct the artistic creativity of certain projects. For
the projects which do not fit in or which violate those criteria, other possibilities of
funding (national support, sponsor companies, TV sales or just the box-office returns) are
still open.
Speaking Statistics

Statistical data for the admissions of Eurimages-backed Turkish initiative films in Turkey show a heterogeneous distribution. While some of those like *The Bandit* and *Goodbye* – which attracted more than one million spectators to movie theatres - have been appreciated by the audience, the majority reached a number of spectators less than 100,000. Films such as *Nude, Please Don’t Go, Split, Wound, My Darling Istanbul, Encounter, Tales of Intransigence, Angel’s Fall, On the Way and My Only Sunshine* have been seen by less than 10,000 people, which is too low a number for cinematographic productions. As a matter of fact, the average admission per domestic film has been 278,160 during the 1990-2011 period (572 films) and Eurimages-backed films have an average of 184,221 whereas the films which did not get that co-production support (513 films) have 288,964. Especially those films which received support from Eurimages in the first five years of Turkey’s membership (1990-1994) have an average admission as low as 30,130 per film. The average of domestic films during the corresponding period is not as high as the general average of the last twenty years but nonetheless it is approximately two times that figure: 61,090. The average admissions per Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative film in periods of five years can be seen in Figure 11.

![Fig. 11. Average Admissions per Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative Film.](chart.png)

58 For the table, see Appendix-D.
59 Since the years of support decision and release differ, the figures of 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1997 are taken into account which correspond to the release years of the films that were supported between 1990-1994.
Rienstra has explained that the Board of Management paid little attention to the box-office potential of the projects in the initial years of the Fund and this seems to have changed in later years: “This could be one reason I could think of; there was too much criticism of the Fund on the grounds that the films supported by Eurimages didn’t find an audience. So it is very much possible that the Board chose to opt for more audience-friendly films during recent years because they wanted these films to be seen and recognized by a larger audience. That is very much possible. At that time the Board didn’t care about audience results. At the beginning it was just not a major consideration” (2009).

The relatively high average admission figure between 1995 and 1999 arises from the fact that top-three Eurimages-backed box-office films – *The Bandit*, *Goodbye* and *Cholera Street* – received co-production support in this period. Among those, *The Bandit* in particular has a special place in Turkish film history in that it is the first domestic film to come into contact with a large number of spectators after the fall of Turkish cinema started at the end of the 1970s. Released in 1996, the success of 2.5 million admissions gave the hope to the filmmakers that was needed: a domestic film should not necessarily be a box-office crash. *The Bandit* was like an oasis in the desert for the audience who had been stuck between Hollywood productions and highly personal, symbolic and ‘boring’ domestic auteur works. Yavuz Turgul, director of *The Bandit*, had stated two years before that film, in the midst of a barren film industry: “To me, Turkish cinema signed its own death warrant the day it lost its commercial character” (quoted in Tankuter 1994, 29). And years after its disappearance, this film made use of the classical structure of the *Yeşilçam* narrative style – to which the mass audience had been used to - within the context of a modern love story and with strong characters. The film focuses on a bandit who was captured on the mountains of South Eastern Turkey and sent to jail 35 years ago after his best friend informed the authorities. After serving the sentence, the bandit is free and goes to Istanbul in the hope of taking vengeance upon his best friend, who has married with the bandit’s beloved in the meantime. Besides the story, the acutely realistic acting of the players increased the attraction of the film for the audience. The other few films which reached relatively high levels of audience numbers (*Cholera Street, Goodbye, Borrowed*...)

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60 The admissions for a total number of 9 domestic films were approximately 3 million that year indeed.
Bride and Bliss) are the ones that followed the classical narrative tradition as well.

The films which experienced box-office crashes, on the other hand, either made use of experimental/symbolic narration (To Walk on Fire, Nude, Rosa I Love You, Clock Tower, Mud) or ‘difficult themes’ (Graduate of Insanity, My Darling Istanbul, Innowhereland, Children of Secret, Waiting for the Clouds, Angel’s Fall) or the characters and the language were simply unfamiliar to a typical Turkish audience (Robert’s Movie) – it was beyond a matter of being good or bad films. Those box-office crashes can be grasped by the fact that new sources of financial support available after 1990 put an end to the obligation on filmmakers’ to satisfy the needs or preferences of mass audiences and accordingly provided them to care less for the box-office figures. That is to say that filmmakers have been enjoying the freedom of creativity in style and content much more in recent years compared to those of the past. Besides that benefit yielded by the new sources of funding (including Eurimages), however, what Tunç Başaran (director of Please Don’t Go and Graduate of Insanity) said draws attention to the heart of the economy of film production: “Some of my colleagues say they cannot make movies because it is too expensive. They don’t want to invest their own money. If you don’t take the risk in a project, you can’t make it good. If you fund the budget using outer sources and the film costs nothing to produce, then you don’t care too much about the result” (1998, 69). This was the now-disappeared risk factor for a filmmaker wishing to connect with his/her audience.
The 60 Turkish-initiative projects have been shot by 39 different directors, 7 of whom are women corresponding to 11 films. Ali Özgentürk is the director whose projects have received co-production support the most (5 films). The number of Turkish-initiative projects to receive Eurimages co-production support per year is between 1 and 5, which makes an average of 3 films.

58 out of the 60 films are features and 2 are creative documentaries. All of the features are dramas in the broadest sense. 15 of them are period films whereas the cinematic time is in the present in the others. The runtime of the films varies from between 86 to 123 minutes, meaning they are not extremely long, except one: *Once Upon A Time in Anatolia* which is 157 minutes long. As the majority co-producer takes the initiative and has more influence on the content of the film, scriptwriters of all the films were from Turkey except the co-writers of *The Blue Exile*, *Steam: The Turkish Bath*, *Harem Suaré* and *Waiting for the Clouds*. Co-operation between countries is observable also in the critical technical crew duties like those of the director of photography and those of the editor: 24 of the directors of photography and 16 of the editors have non-Turkish nationality. The case is different when it comes to acting; only 7.1 per cent of the 5 leading roles (21 out of 295) are performed by non-Turkish actors.

![Fig. 13. The Number of Turkish-initiative Co-productions Supported by Eurimages in Years.](image)

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61 Ali Özgentürk (2005) stated that he received Eurimages co-production support for *Balalaika* but returned it later during the shooting because he found another co-producer who was able to finance the remainder of the film. *Balalaika*, however, will be regarded as a Eurimages-backed film since it was initially approved for support, shot and released.
The location in most of the films is set in various parts of Turkey, mostly Istanbul. In some films, even though we know that the landscape is Turkey (since they are Turkish stories shot on locations in the country), there is no clear sign, image or dialogue (if there is, very little) affirming the country and its identity. Thus such films as *To Walk on Fire*, *Rosa I Love You*, *Clock Tower*, *The Hunter* and *Angel's Fall* can be classified in the ‘indefinable locations’ category. As co-productions between two or more countries, some films, on the other hand, narrate transnational stories spreading in relevance to at least one country outside Turkey. *Steam: The Turkish Bath* (Italy), *Split* (Iceland), *The Boatman* (Greece), *Romantic* (Bulgaria), *Wound* (Germany), *Harem Suaré* (Italy), *My Darling Istanbul* (Greece), *Balalaika* (Russia and Georgia) and *Waiting for the Clouds* (Greece) are in this category. *Mud* is an exception in the sense that the whole story is narrated in Cyprus; there is no part from Turkey. *Letter*, *The Time of the Heart* and *Justice* inform us about immigrations to United States, Australia and China respectively, and *Goodbye* speaks of a woman in Cuba, so as to emphasize a transnational dimension of the narrative, even though we do not see those lands. Rifat of *Please Don’t Go* is killed in Korea during the war and Robert of *Robert's Movie* comes from Beirut and buys a train ticket to Germany but cannot go. We do not see these lands either, though they have been mentioned.

**Exhibition and Distribution Support**

Co-production support has an important place in Eurimages as an overwhelming majority of the funding is reserved for it. That is why I have focused on it at length. Since the other states have access to the possibilities of the MEDIA programme, only the member states of Eurimages which are not members of the EU benefit from exhibition and distribution support. This is the rationale behind the minor proportioning of those funds. Nevertheless, they offer a certain level of contribution to movie theatres and distributors in Turkey. Starting to benefit from it in 1994, the exhibition support has constituted 12.4% of the total support Turkish cinema has received in the French Franc period (before 2001) and 23.4% of the total support in the Euro period by the end of 2009.62 Out of the four countries whose movie theatres receive exhibition support, Turkey takes the largest

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62 For the details, see Appendix-F.
portion from the Fund, as 25 cinemas in 14 cities benefitted from it in 2009. Although the amount of annual support reserved for movie theatres in Turkey has increased in recent years, the allocated amount per cinema has been reduced due to an increase in the number of member cinemas. The amount per cinema has received an amount between 10,000 and 20,000 Euros annually in recent years except 2009, when there is a sharp decrease. As a matter of fact, that mentioned amount barely corresponds to a movie theatre’s rent for two months at the centre of Istanbul (personal interview with Temel Kerimoğlu, Istanbul, 6 Apr. 2009) or half of the annual electricity cost of running the theatre (personal interview with Adalet Dinamit, Istanbul, 6 Apr. 2009). An increase in the amount of fees Turkey pays to the Fund will probably induce an increase to the amount allocated to movie theatres in turn. In any case, the obligation of cinemas to schedule half of the year for European films feeds the spread of alternative film culture outside Hollywood. Murat Çiçek, manager of a chain two cinemas of which benefit from the support, stressed its importance: “If we didn’t get such a support, we would probably exhibit just half of the European films we exhibit now” (2009).

Regarding the distribution support, 20 Turkish films have been distributed in 52 countries thanks to it by the end of 2009. Among these, *Three Monkeys* (9 countries), *Takva: A Man’s Fear of God* (8 countries), and *Distant* (6 countries) have been distributed in the highest number of countries. On the other hand, 41 different Turkish distributors have benefited from distribution support to distribute 282 films in Turkey whose directors are from 26 different countries. French films/directors occupy the first rank (109 films) in this category.

**Criticisms**

As a supranational organisation of many parties that supports films financially where conflicting interests compete against each other, Eurimages cannot escape criticism, and this can be grouped into three topics.

Firstly, although a certain percent (currently 17%) of the estimated project budget is supported, a common belief among Turkish filmmakers is that a Turkish-initiative

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63 For the full list, see Appendix-G.
project cannot receive an amount of support more than 300-350 thousand Euros. This is verified by the statistical data. The co-production support that Turkish-initiative projects have received actually varied in amount between 42,145 (Saint Ayşe) and 330,000 (Once Upon A Time in Anatolia) Euros, excluding Waiting for the Clouds, The Blue Exile and Harem Suaré which got 350,000, 457,347 and 487,837 respectively; as mentioned before, there appears no Turkish producer or the Turkish producer was the minority party in those three projects. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the contribution Turkey has made to the Fund, the amount that the supported projects get is perceived as fair by the filmmakers.  

The projects in which Turkish co-producers are the minority party, on the other hand, have received support of between 39,637 and 578,500 Euros.

The second common criticism of the Fund is that the application process is highly bureaucratic and requires too much paper work. I learned through my interviews with both the Eurimages authorities and the national representatives of Turkey that what is demanded by the Fund are documents which are already supposed to be prepared by the producers and the complaints about bureaucracy and paper work are not particular to Turkish producers; such complaints come from almost all countries. Olla expressed that what they actually demand is the English or French translation of the documents in addition to what they are expected to have prepared in a co-production set-up: “We do not ask anything that they shouldn’t already have if they are good producers: for instance the co-production agreement, or for instance a budget, or for instance a financial plan or a schedule. Those producers who are complaining of administrative burdens usually indicate two things: if they don’t have those materials it means either they are not good producers or they are not ready to come to us. Or the second possible reason - if they don’t have it, what they would declare is false” (2009).

Rienstra agreed with these criticisms but stressed the inevitability of the bureaucracy:

I think they are absolutely right but the point is that this was a fund which was set up within the framework of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe is a very bureaucratic organization. One should understand that we were dealing with

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64 For the annual fees Turkey paid to the fund, see Appendix-H.
member states’ money and we were highly held accountable for all of our expenses and support amounts by our member states. And another fact is that on the national level, when I was the director of the Dutch Film Fund, I knew the filmmakers, I knew the producers. I knew which one was reliable, which one was not. And for which one I had to be careful and for the other one to say ‘I can trust you’. But on the international level we don’t know and we are entirely dependent on the judgment of the national representatives, who are not always all that objective. We have always asked – because we discussed this very often - for them to submit a project in one fold, just one copy, and we copied it for the Board. And if the file was incomplete it was our fault. So we only said ‘Ok we have 15 member states; you bring 15 copies of the file. It is your responsibility’. Maybe it is bureaucratic, yes, but I think this is unavoidable… I have seen procedures in France and Germany and I can faithfully say that we are not all that bureaucratic. (2009)

Even though the bureaucratic process aims at a tight control of the budgets in such a monetary affair, these criticisms point out that there has been a considerable number of inflated budgets through the applications or false submissions for payments, due to a system which pays a certain percent of the estimated budget and thus encourages the producers to exploit the Fund. Ellis-Jones replied that they were more sensitive and cautious about certain projects: “There are tight budgets, which have little realistic room for manoeuvre, fair budgets and loose budgets, and it’s the loose ones that we are most keen to re-examine with care” (quoted in Finney 1996, 110). Ali Özgentürk, producer/director of 5 films and producer of 1 Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative film, stated that Eurimages was less bureaucratic initially but its later bureaucratic attitude compelled some filmmakers to produce fake documents; the submitted documents are more realistic in recent years, he added (personal interview, Istanbul, 18 Dec. 2010). In a similar vein Özgentürk (2010) pointed out that high bureaucratic mechanism of Eurimages created ‘sleeping producers’ in the past – producers who do not engage in co-production entirely but appear on paper just to meet the Eurimages requirements.

Thirdy, there is a commonly held belief that Eurimages will not support a director who is shooting his or her first feature, which is partly true. Rienstra explained this: “In
generally I think Eurimages has not very often supported first films in the past because usually they have wanted projects with filmmakers who have a good reputation and very often it was difficult for first time directors to get a film in co-production with two other countries. How can you convince other producers? This is not easy” (2009). Notwithstanding the fact that a striking majority of the directors of Turkish-initiative films are relatively experienced filmmakers, Tayfun Pırslimoğlu (director of *In Nowhereland*) and Bahadır Karataş (director of *The Master*) got support for their first feature film projects.

**Conclusion**

A comparison of the paid annual fees and the support given to the Turkish film industry - filmmakers, movie theatres and distributors – reveals that Turkey has effectively benefitted from Eurimages funding in the past twenty years (see figures 14 and 15).65

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65 The source of the data is Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey.
As is discernable on the graphs, Turkey paid 47.50 million French Francs between 1990 and 2000 and received support amounting to 73.25 million. After the currency turned into the Euro in 2001, the paid amount and received support since then have been 8.09 and 10.63 million respectively. An annual support which is slightly higher than 1 million Euros is not a big amount in the film industry as a whole but it is helpful for the professionals who depend on such support.

Turkish filmmakers have collaborated the most with colleagues from France, Greece and Hungary in the first twenty years of membership. Eurimages co-production support has contributed to Turkish cinema particularly in terms of familiarity with co-productions, technical aspects, marketing affairs and extended budgets. Exhibition support encouraged movie theatres to screen more European films. Distribution support likewise has contributed to the screening of a higher number of European films in Turkey as well as screening of Turkish films in other European countries.

A close look at Turkish-initiative films backed by Eurimages reveals that the majority of them are national, for they include cultural signifiers that belong to the people and land of Turkey. Nevertheless a few films exhibit evidence of an orientalist approach. The majority of the films display the classical cinematic language that was set in the 1950s and 1960s whereas some filmmakers embraced a different style which can be termed as ‘time-image’, to refer to Deleuze.

Out of those new financial sources, Eurimages has been the place to apply for more difficult projects in which ethnic, religious and gender identities are represented in a more questioning and critical manner. I will focus on these in the subsequent three chapters.