Eurimages and Turkish cinema: history, identity, culture

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Chapter 4

ETHNIC IDENTITIES

The Republic of Turkey was established as a nation-state from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire and composes a variety of diverse ethnicities. The nation-formation process created a series of problematic practices many of which persist today and are still debated in regard to ethnic identities.

This chapter investigates the representation of problematic aspects of Turkish national identity and diverse ethnic identities in Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films. In considering this, firstly an historical account of the establishment of the republic of Turkey as a nation-state will be provided. This will be followed by a discussion of the implicit (banal forms of nationalism) and explicit (contrastive) representations of Turkish nationalism in films. After putting forth the mise-en-scenes of predominant nationalism, the remaining part of the chapter will explore how diverse ethnic identities in Turkey are represented in Eurimages-backed films. The section will focus particularly on the following ethnicities: Kurds, Greeks and Armenians, all due to their historical importance. A short historical background for each ethnic identity will also be provided.

Historical Background

Founded in 1299, the Ottoman state expanded through war and conquest for the next three centuries. The process of expansion continuously added new ethnic and religious groups to those already present in the empire. The millet system was adopted to govern the multifaceted empire – which had spread across three continents by the first quarter of the 16th century and was composed of a diverse range of ethnicities and religions. The term millet literally translates as nation in modern Turkish; however it possessed a different meaning during the Ottoman era, as the system was based on religious affiliation and the word was coterminous with community. Members of each religion/church were treated as separate and unified millets, and the empire was
composed of Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Syriac Orthodox and Jewish millets. Identities were shaped and perceived with regard to these communities. Although in many cases different groups lived in the same town and practised a similar mode of life, each religious community had its own hierarchy, taxation, juridical affairs and even clothing styles. The members of the various communities had the right to elect their religious leaders but these leaders could only earn validity and legitimacy by gaining the sultan’s approval. Possessing some privileges over the ordinary citizens, a religious leader’s function was to ensure his community’s obedience to the sultan. All the Muslims were direct subjects of the sultan, who was at the same time the caliph of Islam – this had been the case since 1517. New churches came to be recognised by the Ottoman authority due to pressure from European powers. This led to the creation of new millets; the number of millets had reached 9 by 1875 and increased to 17 by 1914. The number of written languages present in the Ottoman state also gives us an idea of the diversity of the empire. It has been posited that two dozen languages were used in education and in the publication of books and newspapers in the Ottoman land: besides Turkish, these languages included Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Circassian, English, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Syriac, Urdu and Wallachian (Koloğlu 1999). The number of spoken languages and dialects was presumably even greater.

Ottoman modernist movements, which started with Tanzimat (Reorganisation) in 1839, eliminated the millet system (on paper). With traditional religious and legal institutions failing to meet the requirements of the modern world on the one hand, and seeking to preserve the integrity of the state against the nationalist movements among its ethnic groups on the other, the Ottomans were forced to take a series of modernising steps; these occurred between 1839 and 1876. Another important rationale behind the Tanzimat movement was to prevent European powers (particularly Britain and France) intervening in the internal affairs of the weakened state (especially with regard to the rights of Christian communities). Accordingly, regardless of ethnic and religious attachments, all the citizens were recognised as being equal Ottoman subjects, and the state secured the lives and property of all individuals. Thus the non-Muslims, for

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66 Orhan Koloğlu mentions that Romany and Croatian languages are also said to be used in print but he could not find the proofs.
67 Millet system had paved the way for the nationalist movements in the empire and Greece had already become an independent state in 1832.
instance, were no longer duty bound to pay capititation tax (which the Muslims did not pay), they were allowed to become civil servants and were obliged to serve in the military. Western practices were adopted in terms of law, education, finance and governance institutions, which made for a gradual secularisation process. In the pursuit of creating an Ottoman consciousness, a national anthem and flag were adopted, and paper banknotes issued. However, the reforms and the reorganisation did not serve to attach the non-Muslims to the empire. On the contrary, aggressive reactions on the part of the Christian communities of the Balkan region arose, because they did not want to lose their autonomy. Muslims, on the other hand, were not happy with the enhancement of the rights of the non-Muslim groups.

‘Ottomanism’ (Osmanlıcılık) as an ideology emerged in the Tanzimat period. Influenced by the French Revolution and dissatisfied by the Tanzimat reforms, a group of intellectuals called the ‘Young Ottomans’ (Genç Osmaniiler) demanded a constitutional and popular democracy. Ethnic and religious diversities were not real obstacles to an integrated society, and they proposed a common Ottoman patriotism. Namık Kemal was the prominent figure in the movement. Their ideology appears somewhat contradictory, since despite arguing for the overcoming of differences in terms of identity in favour of a common land for the citizenry, they laid emphasis on the Islamic characteristics of the Ottoman Empire at the same time, this clearly presented an unfavourable discourse for the non-Muslim communities. The Young Ottomans became the first movement to utilise the media in order to circulate their thoughts. Beyond being an instrument of propaganda, the spread of the newspaper by the 1860s, and of the novel in a later period - following the patterns of Europe in the 18th century – served to promote the emergence of a consciousness both of ‘Ottomanness’, and later of ‘Turkishness’, among the literate citizens: to recall Anderson, “For these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (2006, 25).

Ottomanism failed to bind the communities who were derived from a diverse range of ethnicities and religions around what was essentially an artificial patriotism. The proportion of Arabs and Muslims in the empire increased after the majority of the land in Europe was lost through a defeat by Russia in the war of 1877-78. Uprisings
among the Arab population were to threaten the state during that same period. Under these conditions, Sultan Abdülhamid II defended and supported ‘pan-Islamism’ in order to keep the remaining people in a state of cohesion and unity. Islamic values and the bond among Muslims were praised and the sultan emphasised that he was the leader of all the Muslims as caliph. His pan-Islamism also aimed at achieving a unity in the Islamic world, designed to defend the rights of Muslims who were living in the colonies of Western/Christian states. Another function of pan-Islamism was to block the rise of the ‘Young Turk’ movement.

In a multi-national state, though established and governed by Turks and Turkish Sultans, a Turkish consciousness was not apparent until the second half of the 19th Century. Whereas the Europeans, prompted by the Italians, had named the country ‘Turkey’ (Turchia or Turcmenia) since as early as the 12th century (since the time of the Seljuk state before the Ottomans), “we named our territory as Land of Rum, Region of Rum, Seljuks of Rum or Rumelia due to our mission and claimed to be an empire. This is relevant to Rome” (Ortaylı 2006, 85). Turks, indeed, perceived themselves as being first and foremost Muslims. What is more, the word ‘Turk’ was not an esteemed word, and generally referred to ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘nomad’ peoples (Mardin 2007, 95). The bureaucratic elite, on the other hand, favoured the term ‘Ottoman’ during later periods: “Until the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of being a ‘Turk’, as used in modern parlance, was alien to the Ottoman elites who saw themselves as Ottomans rather than ‘Turks’; the latter seems to have implied ‘uneducated peasants’” (Poulton 1997, 43). Nevertheless, Turkish was the language of administration and was commonly used amongst the imperial subjects as well, though the term ‘Ottoman language’ was preferred from the 1840s onwards. The first constitution (1876), for instance, declared Turkish as the official language of the state and every Ottoman citizen was granted the freedom to take office in public service provided they had knowledge of the Turkish language (Koloğlu 1999).

In a collapsing and shrinking empire, the final cement used to provide solidity and unity to the state was ‘Turkism’, defended by the Young Turk (İöntürk) movement.

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68 The official language system was abolished and a multi-language system was adopted temporarily, from the Imperial Reform Edict of 1856.
Although they paid lip-service to Ottomanism, their Turkist, centralist and modernist ideology aimed at abolishing the *millet* system which was based on a diversity of religions. The unionist faction in the Young Turks supported the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası, established in 1889) which successfully overthrew Abdülhamid II in 1908, and enacted the Constitution of 1876 which he himself had cancelled in 1878 on the grounds that the country was at war with Russia. The CUP led the country until 1918, first indirectly controlling the government and later acting as the executive body. Ziya Gökalp was a renowned nationalist ideologue who heavily influenced the CUP. Unlike the Turanist (*pan-Turkist*) ideology which defended the unification of all Turkic peoples from the Balkans to China under one state, Gökalp’s view was non-irredentist. Although emphasising the importance of Islam as a part of Turkish culture, he proposed the abolishment of the dominance of religion in social and political affairs. For Gökalp a nation was “not a racial or ethnic or geographic or political or volitional group but one composed of individuals who share a common language, religion, morality and aesthetics, that is to say, who have received the same education” (1968, 15). *Turkishness* replaced Islam gradually as the primary source of identity after 1908 and the Turkification policy was begun. The language in formal education was made Turkish in secondary and high schools, and Turkish was enforced as the compulsory language in work places. The creation of a Turkish bourgeois was established, and the autonomy of the *millet* was limited. The irredentist faction of the CUP led the country into WWI, which brought about the final collapse of the Ottoman state.

The war brought a profound defeat upon the Ottoman Empire, as it did for Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria. The leaders of the CUP, who were responsible for the entrance into the war, fled, and the country was invaded by Greece and the allied powers Britain, France and Italy. The Treaty of Sevres that was signed projected the partition of Ottoman lands amongst the aforementioned powers, and an Armenian state in the Eastern part and an autonomous Kurdish region in South Eastern Anatolia were formed. Kurds would decide later on whether to be an independent state or not. The treaty could not be realised, as the War of Independence – led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – started in 1919 and was successfully won in 1922. Taking into consideration the past adventurist-irredentist dreams, the land was envisaged as being within its natural borders,
a defendable region. This position was declared by the ‘National Pact’ (*Misak-ı Milli*) at the beginning of 1920. Such a vision was achieved to a large extent except in Western Thrace (now in Greece), Mosul and Kirkuk (now in Iraq) and Batumi (now in Georgia). Anatolia had already been seen as the land of the Turks after the loss of the Ottoman hold on the majority of the Balkan region. However, the national forces which had fought in the War of Independence were not ethnically homogenous (non-Turkish ethnicities like Kurdish, Circassian and Laz groups were included) and the National Pact did not mention Turks but only Ottoman Muslims.

Following the end of the war, both the National Assembly government in Ankara (the legitimate representative of Turkey as the leader of the resistance movement) and the Ottoman government in Istanbul (which had signed the Treaty of Sevres) were invited to Lausanne for the peace negotiations. Thereupon the sultanate was abolished by the National Assembly on 1 November 1922, and the sultan fled the country. The Treaty of Lausanne is a significant document that brought international recognition to the new Turkish government. Signatories to the treaty were Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State of the one part and Turkey of the other part on 24 July 1923 – the treaty abolished every type of foreign control (financial, economic, judicial and military) over Turkey and defined the minorities and their rights. Only the non-Muslims were covered under the term of ‘minority’, just as the Ottoman *millet* system regarded them as different *millets*, but all the Muslims as one. The problems related to ethnic identities since the establishment of the republic, especially in terms of the Kurdish question, are largely analysed in the light of this historical context. Besides some other civil rights for the non-Muslim citizens, the Treaty of Lausanne had guaranteed the equality of status of all the inhabitants (*Treaties of Peace* 1924, 971-72):

- The Turkish Government undertakes to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion… (Article 38)

- Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems. All the inhabitants of Turkey, without distinction of religion, shall be equal before the law… (Article 39)
Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely therein. (Article 40)

After warfare lasting ten years (in the Balkans, WWI and the War of Independence), Turkey had a different demography in 1923 compared to that of the pre-war period: “Some 2.5 million Anatolian Muslims lost their lives, as well as between 600,000 and 800,000 Armenians and up to 300,000 Greeks. All in all, the population of Anatolia declined by 20 per cent through mortality, a percentage 20 times as high as that of France, which had been the hardest-hit country among the European belligerents in the World War... The migratory elements meant a net loss to the population of Anatolia of about 10 per cent, which should be added to the 20 per cent loss due to mortality” (Zürcher 1993, 171)

Two groups in the National Assembly struggled for power just before the dawn of the declaration of the republic. On the one side were the pro-Ottomans who supported the continuation of monarchy with a parliamentary check on power. This group was Islamist and envisaged a multi-ethnic and a de-centralised state. On the other side were Mustafa Kemal and his supporters, who posited a modern, secular and centralist nation-state. The success of the latter caused the new republic to diverge from the Ottoman culture and its concomitant practices. Six arrows, also known as Kemalism, were adopted as the guiding principles of the new republic. They were: republicanism; nationalism; secularism; populism; etatism; and revolutionism. Nationalism, the focus of this chapter, has been at the heart of debate surrounding ethnic identities in Turkey as a problematic issue, since it is an inseparable part of the conceptual underpinnings of the republic.

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69 The first four principles were adopted by the Republican People’s Party (the governing single-party from 1923 until 1950) in 1927 and the last two in 1935: according to the principle of republicanism, the people, which is constituted of equal citizens, is the source of political sovereignty; nationalism establishes the unity of the nation, its sovereignty and independence not on an ethnic or racial basis but with regard to Turkish citizenship; secularism is the segregation of mundane and religious affairs; the principle of populism depletes the privilege of one social class over others; etatism, adopted in the context of 1929 world economic crisis, means the investment of state enterprise in the areas which the private sector evades; revolutionism meant continuously adapting the system to the needs of contemporary civilisation standards.
Mustafa Kemal defined the ‘Turkish nation’ as ‘the Turkish people forming the Turkish republic’ (Karal 18). According to the article 88 of Constitution of 1924, “Everybody in Turkey, without distinction of religion and race, is called ‘Turk’ with regard to citizenship” (TBMM 2010). Ernest Renan provides the following conditions for being a ‘people’, which is pertinent in the case of Turkey: “To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people” (2006, 19). The War of Independence had been won in the contemporarily very recent past, and the republic had been established in order to achieve new phases in the modernisation process. Hitherto the inhabitants of Turkey had already constituted a ‘people’; the next step was to transform that people, the majority of who saw themselves as members of the worldwide Muslim community, into a nation. This was not to be an easy objective for the founders of the republic. At this point, Ernest Gellner’s argument becomes deeply relevant: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist - but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on” (1964, 168). To put it another way, “It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round” (Gellner 2006, 54). Despite the absence of a Turkish consciousness, the people who established the republic were named the ‘Turkish nation’. That was the achievement of the mission which was only quasi-achieved by the Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress. Being a state established on the ruins of an empire which collapsed due to the uprisings triggered by its multi-ethnic structure, the new republic emphasised national unity and encompassed ethnic non-Turks within the umbrella term ‘Turk’.

‘Turk’ was to be a type of nationalism based on territory rather than ethnicity, in the terms described by Anthony D. Smith – a model (civic-territorial) which requires a historic territory, a legal-political community, equality of the members and a common-civic culture and ideology. The people of Anatolia had shared the same land and history for one thousand years. The republican revolution had already brought the equality on the basis of citizenship. It was the unity of the legal-political community to be promoted, which was emphasised through the common traits of the shared culture (‘pre-existing differentiating marks’ in Gellner’s terms), inspired by Ziya Gökalp’s cultural Turkism. In his writings, Gökalp stressed the role of education in building a unified culture and a
common national consciousness. The creation of a cohesive sense of Turkishness would require a unified pedagogy of nationalism. Gökalp even deployed his non-Turkish ethnic origin as an example: “I would not hesitate to believe that I am a Turk even if I had discovered that my grandfathers came from the Kurdish or Arab areas (of Anatolia); because I learned through my sociological studies that nationality is based solely on upbringing” (quoted in Kırıçı 1998, 230-31). It should be noted that “every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms” (1991, 13) and it is the ethnic core that “often shapes the character and boundaries of the nation” (39), as Smith states. ‘Turk’ was the ethnic core that shaped the character and boundaries of the civic-territorial model of Turkish nationalism. The role of centralised education is also emphasised by Gellner (2006), on the grounds that it provides a generic cultural base to counter diversified, traditional (and sometimes illiterate) local cultures.

Aiming to create and spread a common culture, the Young Turks embarked on a common educational system in 1909 in which Ottoman Turkish and History courses were made compulsory. The Law for the Unification of Instruction, introduced in the early days of the republic (3 March 1924), was a revolutionary act used to further a sense of nationhood. Since then all the schools have been governed by the Ministry of Education under a national education policy. Following that, the Arabic letters were replaced by the Latin alphabet in 1928. This reform had a three-dimensional function: it assisted nationhood; it served to break the ties with the Ottoman past and Islamic traditions; and it contributed to the orientation towards the Western world. The establishment of village institutes (köy enstitüleri), introduced in 1940, was another step in educational reform. These institutes trained the youngsters of villages to be elementary school teachers and provided practical education in agriculture and technology so as to help them to educate others in the village and future generations as well. They were abolished, however, after the opposition Democratic Party came into power (in 1954).

The founding ideology of the republic construed the term ‘Turk’ as being a melting-pot for all the ethnicities in the country; this might be considered to be rational for an emerging modern and centralist nation-state. Objections quickly arise, however, which assert that the Kemalist nationalism was not just a territorial but also an ethnic
concept, for the Kurds and other Muslim groups (that were not covered in the Treaty of Lausanne) were ignored from the beginning and were thought to be assimilated in time. These criticisms deserve respect since the practices of the nation-state have not been painless, as we will see throughout this chapter.

The profound nationalist atmosphere of the 1930s justifies the criticisms to some extent. It was in these years that an emphasis on the Turkish race in history and language first became apparent. Established in 1931, the *Turkish Historical Thesis* (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) was introduced and was developed over the following years through the *Turkish Historical Society* (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*). According to this new thesis, the Turks living in Central Asia were forced by geographical conditions to migrate in different directions to China, Europe and the Near East, where they created civilisations. Thus, it is claimed, many nations are descended from the Turks. *Sun-Language Theory* (*Güneş-Dil Teorisi*), on the other hand, asserted that all the languages of the world were born out of a single, primeval one to which Turkish was the closest and Turkish hence aided the emergence of new languages. The *Turkish Linguistic Society* (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) was established in 1932 and functioned to purify the language, particularly through the removal of Arabic and Persian words. These movements aimed to provide a source of national identity of which the individuals of the very young republic could be proud. By setting ties with its pre-Islamic past, the republic distanced herself from Islamic and Middle Eastern culture and traditions, a move which helped to pave the way for Westernising policies.

**Nationalism and Film**

An emphasis on a shared and unified culture, that is a ‘national culture’, inevitably leads to repression of minorities, as Elsaesser states: “A nation, especially when used in a context that suggests cultural identity, must repress differences of class, gender, race, religion, and history in order to assert its coherence, and is thus another name for internal colonization” (2005, 36). In a similar vein Hayward notes that the problem of pressure in terms of culture not only occurs between the coloniser and the colonised, but also within a nation state: “the role of national culture is (still) to suppress political conflict and disguise it as imagination – *imagem/nation* - a function that is so clearly manifest in the
very problematic issue and conceptualisation of national cinema” (2000, 96). Because, Hayward adds, “national culture is a product of nationalist discourses and is based in the principle of representation and (of course) repression” (98). Higson, on the other hand, points out that films ‘will often serve to represent the nation to itself as a nation’ and invite ‘a diverse and often antagonistic group of peoples…to recognize themselves as a singular body with a common culture’ (1997,7). That is what Turkish cinema served to do for many years by positing the national identity as a fixed concept. The censorship mechanism was a significant factor which reinforced that. As discussed in Chapter 1, the obscure and unconscious mechanisms that worked towards the normalisation of cultural homogeneity and against cultural diversity and change are labelled ‘deep nation’ by Robins and Aksoy. They asserted 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 (censorship) commission saw themselves as the guardians of Turkish national identity. The authors also pointed out the existence of cinematic works in the post-1990 period that ‘act out’ the logic of the deep nation. Some of these works, those that question the national identity and/or problematise ethnic identities, are within the scope of this chapter.

Smith states that in comedy and documentary films (and I would argue this applies to melodramas as well) “‘the people’ has often signified the ‘common folk’, rather than the ‘ethnic folk’; but in history, mythology and war films, this motif is combined with the distinctive ethnic culture of ‘the people’ – be they Jews, Greeks, Romans, Scots, French or Russians” (2000, 56). This is the type of film, ‘fetishising the national rather than merely describing it’ (Higson 2000, 64), which was produced by Turkish filmmakers in abundance. Films which display the ‘heroism’ of the Turkish troops sent to Korea, to Cyprus and to the War of Independence, and the adventures of historical heroes in the Byzantine palaces, are numerous in the heyday of Turkish cinema before the 1980s. Nationalist discourse has been promoted in a number of films that have been attuned to the popular taste in recent years as well. However, a national cinema should grant a place to the excluded identities too, that is to say if one aspect of a country’s national cinema consist of films that fetishise the national, then some other films should represent the minorities and the problematic facets of nationalism.
According to Higson (1997), the films are the fields of tension at the same time and many films exist that challenge the nationalist discourses. That kind of representation composes a significant part of the Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films.

The narrative and cinematic representation of the nation and nationalism in these films can be classified in two groups. One is the *implicit representation* in which we see banal nationalism displayed somewhere in the background. The second group is composed of explicit thematisations through *contrastive representations* of nationalism.

**Implicit Representation: Banal Forms of Nationalism**

Michael Billig’s notion of *banal nationalism* is a useful concept in discussing what I call the *implicit representations* of national identity and nationalism. Regarding the established nations, particularly ‘the Western’ which have confidence in their own continuity, Billig observes: “In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building (1995, 8).

As national identity is not only something which is thought to be natural to possess but also something natural to remember, Billig argues, it is remembered in the routines of daily life through the flags (and many other reminders as well) which flag nationhood in a subtle manner. That process of remembering is not experienced as a remembering as with the great days of the nations but occurs while one is doing many other routine activities, including *forgetting*. Therefore nationhood is evoked in an unconscious, unaware way and the nation-state is reproduced by banal nationalism day after day. Those flags are hung outside a public building or for instance decorate a filling station (Billig 1995). The number of banal reminders is so great that they are camouflaged and escape a national inhabitant’s notice and only a foreign or an alerted investigative eye can easily perceive their abundance.
Flags being located in the everydayness of Turkey fit very well into Billig’s definition of banal nationalism. They stand unnoticed not only at the official posts but in private spaces such as cafés, taxis, minibuses, boats, bicycles, sports halls, shops, and the windows of apartments. Prints of Turkish flags and images derived from the star and crescent are also observable in everyday life in many different forms. Nevertheless, the Turkish flag as a metonymic image only justifies banal nationalism in the case of Turkey, that is to say it does not display a peculiarity. We naturally see those unnoticed flags in the backgrounds of films, both Eurimages-backed ones and others. What is peculiar to Turkey is the image, especially the portrait, of Atatürk as a banalised reminder of nationhood and the nation-state.

The images related to the founder of the Turkish nation-state appear in several different public and private spaces in Eurimages-backed films. For instance we see his portrait: on the walls of cafés and restaurants in films like Robert’s Movie (Canan Gerede-1991), The Boatman (Biket İlhan-1999), On the Way (Erden Kıral-2005) and Three Monkeys (Nuri Bilge Ceylan-2008); in the office of a high-school principal in My Only Sunshine (Reha Erdem-2009) and Honey (Semih Kaplanoğlu-2010); on the wall of the doctor’s office in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (Nuri Bilge Ceylan-2011); and on the wall of Doğan’s atelier in The Master (Bahadır Karataş-2009). We see the bust of Atatürk in the school garden in Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (Nuri Bilge Ceylan-2011) and the memorial tomb (anıtkabir) of him fills the background in a scene where three protagonists go on a walk in Our Grand Despair (Seyfi Teoman-2011). In two films the portrait of Atatürk is hanged in the offices of people who could be thought to be irrelevant. Mr. Ali of Takva: A Man’s Fear of God (Özer Kızıltan-2006), who is a conservative merchant and shows respect to the sheikh of the religious brotherhood to which he belongs, keeps an Atatürk portrait on his wall. However, the religious brotherhoods were all abolished in 1924 as a step of revolutionary spirit, and this move was led by Atatürk. There is also a money case under his portrait, thus the scene draws attention to the pragmatic nature of trade: the tradesmen in general appear and act in accordance with their commercial interests. Thus they pay some cursory lip-service to the founder of the secular-modern nation-state as a common reference point. In a similar manner, we see Atatürk’s portrait in the office of the boss of a night club that looks like a
In short, the main banal reminders of nationalism and national identity for Turkey are the back-grounded flag, the various images of star and crescent, and the images related to Atatürk. The last of these banal reminders is the one that is peculiar to Turkey and implicitly represented, i.e. back-grounded in at least 11 Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films to my observation. I will now proceed to the second group of representations (contrasting ones) of Turkish national identity and nationalism of which there are ample critical examples.

**Contrastive Representations of Nationalism**

Mette Hjort (2000) has examined the strategies deployed by Danish filmmakers in their attempts to foreground more explicitly the theme of the nation. Hjort identifies two general approaches, adopting the terms ‘monocultural’ and ‘intercultural’ in her analysis. In the monocultural approach, the audio-visual field is hyper-saturated with national elements and interlocutors, whereas in the intercultural approach we see the mobilisation of different cultures and the use of contrastive cultural elements to foreground specifically national questions and direct the audience’s attention to the problem of national identity. The intercultural approach is the most common incarnation of the theme of the nation and might be deployed to re-connect with national roots, re-imagine national identities or call into question the rationality and legitimacy of social differentiation along national lines, through contrastive thematisation. The intercultural approach is thus potentially more critical. One of the examples Hjort gives is *Riget* (*The Kingdom*-1994) by Lars von Trier and Morten Arnfred. The title of the film has a dual meaning in Danish: the national hospital and the kingdom, empire or state. Both meanings clearly direct our attention to questions of nationhood and national identity. The Swedish doctor working in the hospital occasionally goes to the roof and, facing in the direction of Sweden, reviles the Danes. In one such instance, he mentions a series of icons or brands of his own country. Two national identities are thus ironically contrasted and “as a result, the very pursuit of personal identity in and through the national appears
questionable, even laughable” (116). The use of irony and making the audience laugh, although not essential to the narrative, increases its effect on the viewer.

In addition to Hjort’s notion of intercultural thematisation, I would draw attention to the idea of ‘contrastive representations of the nation and nationalism’. I use this term advisedly to describe the processes whereby well-known signs, symbols, acts or rituals of the national identity and nationalism are shown to the spectator, together with their antithetical interrogative elements. More specifically, the term helps to identify the methods used by filmmakers to juxtapose contrastive elements or make them occur in the same context in order to raise questions with regard to national identity and/or nationalism. Although one might claim that contrastive representation could be utilised for celebrating nationalism and degrading the ‘other’ or the non-national, the transmitted message becomes clear through the agency of the feeling that is invoked in the spectator. In other words, there is critical potential in the discourses and representations created by these methods. The collision of contrastive elements occasionally marks the whole of a film; at other times, it is confined to specific sequences and in many cases, the collision takes place within a single shot. I will now discuss scenes from two selected Eurimages-backed films (Waiting for the Clouds and Mud) that may serve as illustrative examples of these representational strategies, I will then focus on a film (Big Man, Little Love) that problematises Turkish nationalism through contrastive representation. Many other Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films make use of contrasting themes related to the nation, even if the nation and/or nationalism is not the larger problem or subject matter addressed by the narrative. These themes vary widely but can be grouped under the sub-headings of Praising of Turkish Ethnicity, Turk and the ‘Other’ in Opposition, Patriotism, Flag, and Atatürk; details of these representations can be found in Appendix-I.

Waiting for the Clouds (2005) by Yeşim Ustaoğlu, is a film which focuses on identity, specifically in relation to a woman of Greek ethnicity, wherein the nation is contrastively represented throughout the narration. Indeed, the collision of contrastive elements pervades the entire film. For example, there is a scene in which school pupils sing an anthem taught by their teacher:
One, two, three…

If surrounded by the enemy, if abandoned on their own,

Do the Turks give up? Do the Turks give up?

Turks never give up! Turks never give up!

Until the end of time

Turks never give up! Turks never give up!

The pupils start to laugh toward the end of the anthem as Mehmet, the hero of the film, has wet his pants. The teacher punishes Mehmet by making him stand against the blackboard while the others continue singing.

In another scene from the same film, all the pupils of the school are gathered in the front garden to recite the daily oath, as is the practice in Turkish schools. One pupil says the words and the others repeat:

I am a Turk. I am honest. I am diligent.

My law: Protect the younger, respect our elders, love my country, my nation, more than myself.

My goal: Success and progress.

My existence is the good of Turkey.

What an honour to say ‘I am a Turk’.

Mehmet flees the stage to see a friend who is waiting behind the wall while the oath is repeated by his schoolmates.

In the final example from Waiting for the Clouds, we see the celebration of ‘Turkish Products Week’ in the classroom:

Teacher: What week is this?

Pupils: (Altogether) Turkish Products Week!

Teacher: What have we learned?
Pupils: Turkish products are the best products.

Then the teacher asks what they have brought from home for the celebratory lunch. All the pupils have brought anchovy fish, which is clearly a local product of the Black Sea (in keeping with the setting of the film) and therefore, not ‘national’ in the sense intended by the celebration.

As we have seen, while foregrounding nationalist songs, recitations and festivities, thereby drawing the spectator’s attention to the theme of the nation, the director contrasts those elements of nationalism with small, ironic acts. Mehmet wets his pants during an anthem proclaiming that Turks never give up; he flees the scene at the moment of the daily oath propagating the ‘positive’ aspects of Turkishness. Finally, there is the juxtaposition of local and national products when it is the latter that are meant to be celebrated. Together, these scenes question and satirise nationalism.

The contrastive representation does not need to be ironic, as is evident from the opening scene of Mud (2003) by Derviş Zaim. We see a Turkish troop deployed in Northern Cyprus and the major makes a speech to the soldiers as they stand under the bright sun. He states that Cypriot Turks had long been threatened by the Greeks, enduring massacres, rapes, forced migration and great losses. Thanks to the arrival of the Turkish army on the island in 1974, he continues, the Greeks and the Turks have been living in peace in their own separate regions for thirty years. However, according to recent news, the Greeks in the southern part of the island are again building up weapons and the Turkish army must be ready to resume the fight. The soldiers repeat three times: “We must be ready!” At that moment, Ali, one of the soldiers, falls to the ground and faints. This makes a compelling opening to a film which goes on to critically examine the Cyprus dispute through the Turkish habitants of the island.

Big Man, Little Love

Before discussing Big Man Little Love, which is one of the most prominent films that thematise the nation contrastively, I shall consider Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, the only way to construct and sustain a meaning with the ‘other’ is to establish a dialogue in between. He defines dialogic
relations as follows: “Dialogic relations are relations (semantic) among any utterances in speech communication. Any two utterances, if juxtaposed on a semantic plane (not as things and not as linguistic examples), end up in a dialogic relationship” (1986, 117). Dialogic relation is the acceptance of difference and the constructed meaning does not totally belong to only one side. In such a relation both sides own a ‘surplus of seeing’, i.e. I cannot see all of what you see and you cannot see all of what I see. The meaning is modified and perceived by the ‘other’ according to his/her own experience, knowledge or seeing in that process. Without dialogue, there is no existence, there is no life.

Heteroglossia is, as Michael Holquist articulates, “a way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal markers” (1990, 69). However, an extreme monologism does not accept the existence of an equal consciousness except itself. In that sense “official languages, even those that are not totalitarian, are masks for ideologies of many different kinds, but they all privilege oneness; the more powerful the ideology, the more totalitarian (monologic) will be the claims of its language” (Holquist 52-53). Nevertheless dialogism and heteroglossia are in the nature of life and necessity, as Bakhtin states: “The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth” (quoted in Gardiner 1992, 31). Cultural practices, in this respect, have proved to work against monologism in different times and places of the world.

Mr. Rıfat, a retired judge in Big Man Little Love (2001) by Handan İpekçi, represents the monological voice of the nation-state which gives no room for languages other than the official Turkish. One day, the couple responsible for bringing up Hejar, are killed in a raid by the police; the five year old Kurdish girl had lost her parents before. As the sole survivor of the raid, Hejar is taken in by Mr. Rıfat, who is her neighbour. He tells Hejar not to speak Kurdish and that only Turkish should be spoken in this country. However, Kurdish is her mother tongue and she does not know how to speak any other language since she is an infant in the pre-school period. Mr. Rıfat also objects to English being adopted as the language of teaching in colleges, and tells Hejar that “a nation should lay claim to her native language”. The national element – the
official language of Turkish – is contrasted here with Kurdish, an unrecognised element. The irony lies in the conflict between Mr. Rifat’s demands that the child relinquish her own language, even as he lectures her about a nation’s claim to its own language.

His acquaintance with Hejar forces him to face the other realities of the country: he realises that his servant Sakine is also Kurdish (her real name is Kurdish - Rojbin - but she has concealed this) and can communicate to Hejar; he witnesses the tough life conditions in the suburbs of Istanbul; and travels sitting close to a woman in a veil in the same minibus.

Finally, in order to communicate with Hejar, Mr. Rifat learns from his servant how to say “Don’t Cry” in Kurdish, and many other words soon follow. Hejar begins to learn Turkish and a relationship between the two that might be described as dialogical is established. In this sense, the film focuses on the encounter of the monological voice of the nation-state ideology with one of the neglected ethnicities of the country and the recognition of heteroglossia – in this case the Kurdish language. The film narrates a transformation from a monological denial to a dialogical relation. It was banned for ‘displaying the police in a negative manner’ but later this ban was acquitted by a court ruling.

As we have seen, Turkish filmmakers have questioned national identity more clearly in the post-1990 period. Among the works which have thematised nationalism,
Eurimages-backed films have made it thorough by either displaying the banal reminders of nationalism in the background or by foregrounding the national elements together with their interrogative contrastive elements. I shall now discuss the representation of diverse identities in these films.

Diverse Ethnic Identities

A valid piece of research published by Peter Alford Andrews (1989) posits the existence of at least 47 different ethnic groups in Turkey. While the Muslim population displays a mixed character due to the intermarriages over the centuries of assimilation, the non-Muslim groups are much more ethnically distinct. The Treaty of Lausanne significantly contributed to the distinctiveness of non-Muslims via its protective articles designed for them.

In the previous section I focused on the implicit representation of banal nationalism and contrastive representations of Turkish national identity in Eurimages-backed films. The following section covers the diverse ethnic identities, i.e. the Kurds, Greeks and Armenians, and their cinematic representation. Each sub-section first provides an historical background for each ethnicity, before addressing issues of representation in the relevant films.

Kurdish Identity

“It would scarcely be an overstatement to say that the realism of the political demands of an ethnic group within a polity is largely determined first by size, both absolute and relative to other groups, and second by its geographical distribution” (Mutlu 1996, 517). Given their prevalence in Turkey and relatively loud vocalised demands, the Kurdish identity deserves to be treated separately, despite the Kurds not being defined as a minority group in the Treaty of Lausanne. There is no reliable statistical data about the sizes of the ethnicities since the 1965 census. Indeed, this was the last time the question, not of ethnicity, but mother tongue, was asked to the citizens. Figures regarding the size of the Kurdish population, released in recent years vary, suggest they account for between 12% and 26% of the country’s population (Menon 1995; Mutlu 1996; Kirişçi
1998; Houston 2001; Romano 2006). However, as Servet Mutlu states, “more often than not, these estimates reflect pro-Kurdish or pro-Turkish sympathies and attitudes rather than scientific facts and erudition” (1996, 517). Regardless of the specific figure, the Kurds are the second largest ethnicity and the Kurdish question is the core point of the debates around ethnic identities in Turkey.

Kurdish districts were included in the Ottoman territory in the 16th century. Martin M. van Bruinessen (1989) points out that we encounter the first written expressions of a Kurdish ethnic awareness around 1,600 AD and that a clearer awareness existed from the 17th century onwards, due to the political stability brought about by Ottoman supremacy, which tended to consolidate previous ethnic boundaries. By the end of the 19th century, one of the two separatist threats to the empire, the Kurds, started to function as a weapon against the other, the Armenians, via the *Hamidiye Regiments* which composed of various Kurdish tribes. Established by Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1891, these regiments persisted until the 1920s and fought for the Ottoman army in WWI. The role of Hamidiye Regiments in the atrocities against the Armenians is a known fact, yet, it is also noted that these regiments served to foster the emergence of a Kurdish national consciousness.

Probably envisaging a decentralised Islamic order in the post-war period, the Kurds supported the War of Independence on a large scale, especially following the quashing of any likelihood of an independent Kurdish state, which had been projected in the Treaty of Sevres. In his 1927 speech, Atatürk narrated the case in the days of the war: “From one end to the other of Anadolu [Anatolia] the population is united. All decisions are taken jointly by all the commanders and our comrades. Nearly all the Valis and Mutasarrıfs [governors of provinces] are on our side. The national organization in Anadolu comprises every district and community. The propaganda aiming at the erection of an independent Kurdistan under English protectorate has been successfully countered and the followers of this movement have been dispersed. The Kurds have joined the Turks” (1963, 15).

Nevertheless, the Kurdish people began to be considered as part of the Turkish identity by the 1930s. A great deal of research followed from the establishment of the
Turkish Historical Society, and the Turkish Linguistic Society, which attempted to promote the ‘Turkishness’ of the Kurds. According to Poulton, Atatürk’s approach to the issue was, at first, to concede the differing ethnic identity of Kurds, however this approach changed following the uprisings: “Initially, he appealed (Kemal Atatürk) to them (Kurds) as fellow Muslims but as a separate people (ethnie). However, faced with continuing Kurdish insurrections, he began to emphasising the unity of the ‘nation’. Henceforth, all manifestations of Kurdish nationalism were proscribed” (1997, 96).

With the first rebellion in 1788, a great number of Kurdish rebellions have taken place throughout history, though accounts of specific figures vary. While some historians see them as possessing a nationalist character, others prefer to ascribe a religious essence to them. Taking the historians’ reflections into consideration, the cases of Şeyh Said (1925), Dersim (1937-38) and the PKK (since 1984) rebellions are eminent. However, the Kurdish question was not wholly manifested in the form of armed rebellions. The first Kurdish cultural organisation, Taali ve Terakii Kurdistan (Recovery and Progress of Kurdistan), was established in 1908 and the first Kurdish political association, Kiviya Kurd (Kurdish Hope), was established in 1910 and legalised in 1912 (Smith 1991, 132). The first legal Kurdish organisation in the republican period was established in 1969 under the name Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (The Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East) and the first legal political party to recognise and announce the Kurdish ethnicity became Türkiye İşçi Partisi (The Workers’ Party of Turkey) in 1970, which provoked its own closure by the Constitutional Court on the grounds of encouraging activities against the indivisibility of the country. Many Kurdish organisations emerged during the 1970s, almost all of which subscribed to Marxist discourse, contrary to the nationalist and/or Islamic character popular during the initial years of the republic. Of those, PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/Kurdistan Workers’ Party) was the most radical and engaged in armed struggle against feudality and colonialism (they defined the Turkish state as a colonial one) in the Kurdish populated region, in favour of an independent Kurdish state; around forty thousand people have been killed hitherto. In the last twenty years, however, it has been frequently argued that the discourse of PKK has deviated from Marxism-Leninism towards nationalist and/or

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70 Mutlu (1996) points out that 13 guerilla-style uprisings occurred during the republican period. Menon (1995) suggests 27 revolts between 1920 and 1940 occurred. Rouleau (1996), referring to one of the former prime ministers, Süleyman Demirel, states that there have been 29 rebellions in the 20th century.
Islamic tendencies, and rejecting an independent state but struggling for regional autonomy. The PKK was labelled a terrorist organisation by the state from the beginning, due to their violent acts against the military and police forces as well as civilians. The European Union and many western states listed the PKK as a terrorist organisation in recent years. On the other hand, the Kurdish question has been formally vocalised through certain legal political parties established – many closed by court decision - in the post-1990 period.

Virtually all of the Kurdish organisations aspired towards self-determination, but made gaining cultural rights (language, literature, folklore) and recognition of their ethnic identity a key priority. The state, on the other hand, had for many years considered the issue a terrorist problem and acted to suppress it. A part of the Kurdish population in the relevant regions was deported to the more western lying cities following the uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s. The Democratic Party government during the 1950s established pragmatic relations with the feudal leaders to keep the regions under control. Although the constitution of 1961 contributed to a relatively democratic atmosphere, the bans on using spoken or written Kurdish language and names remained in place. The strength of the suppression increased especially following the military coup in 1980, which emphasised the unity and indivisibility of the nation and the country. The 1990s brought about official recognition of Kurdish identity by the state. However this period also saw evacuations of villages, closure of political parties and publications which focused on the Kurdish question, assassinations and/or the disappearance of prominent political figures in South Eastern Anatolia, and the militarisation of the region. The 2000s witnessed steps being taken towards widening the cultural rights of the Kurds, and this included the freedom to teach Kurdish in private lessons, and furthermore the state-owned TV corporation (TRT) starting to broadcast in Kurdish and other minority languages such as Arabic and Bosnian. Nevertheless, the problem still retains its importance and is a central factor in debates regarding ethnic identities in Turkey.

Kurds and Films

Until the 1990s due to the mechanism of censorship filmmakers could neither focus on the Kurdish question, nor overtly represent Kurdish identity, except for a few examples
where the issue was handled in a rather indirect manner. For instance *The Law of the Border* (*Hudutların Kanunu*-1966) by Lütfi Akad narrated the risky trade of the smugglers (because of the mined terrain throughout the south eastern border). *The Herd* (*Sürü*-1979) by Yılmaz Güney and Zeki Ökten depicting the long journey of a Kurdish family who travel to the capital by train to sell their sheep, is critical of the patriarchal order in those communities. *A Season in Hakkari* (*Hakkari’dede Bir Mevsim*-1983) by Erden Kıral portrayed the tough conditions of life in South Eastern Anatolia through the story of a teacher who is assigned to one of the villages in the region. A few more examples could be added to these. However, within these films, we do not hear the Kurds speaking Kurdish, nor a direct dramatisation of the identity issue. In many other cases, the Kurds are represented - without mentioning their *Kurdishness* – as immigrants to big cities, in rural narratives that are critical about their customs and feudality, or as funny-types who speak Turkish with a markedly different accent.

The post-1990 period witnessed a more clear representation. Kurdish legends *Mem and Zin* (*Mem û Zin*) by Ümit Elçi and *Siyabend and Xecê* (*Siyabend û Xece*) by Şahin Gök were filmed without Eurimages support in 1991 and in 1993 respectively. Probably the first film to overtly focus on the Kurdish question and within which we first heard characters speaking Kurdish, is *Let There Be Light* (*İşıklar Sönmesin*-1996) by Reis Çelik (a non-Eurimages film), as the director pointed out (personal interview with Reis Çelik, Istanbul, 1 Apr. 2009). Casting the Turkish army and PKK as the opposing sides of a war and calling the latter ‘guerillas’ (as the Kurdish left calls them), the director noted great difficulty in shooting the film, due to the ban put in place by the army authorities, and that after completion he was threatened and tried in court for ‘praising an act which is deemed as an offence by the state’; he was acquitted (*Çelik* 2009). Other non-Eurimages films that focus on the Kurdish question include, *The Photograph* (*Fotoğraf*-2001) and *Storm* (*Bahoz/Fırtına*-2008) by Kazım Öz, *Trial* (*Doz/Dava*-2001) by Gani Rüzgar Şavata, *I Saw the Sun* (*Güneşi Gördüm*-2009) by Mahsun Kırmızıgül and *On the Way to School* (*İki Dil Bir Bavul*-2009) by Orhan Eskiköy and Özgür Doğan.

As for the Eurimages-backed films, it is possible to group these works into two categories based on their representation of the Kurds. The first group of films are those
that point out various problems faced by Kurds or that partially attempt to portray the Kurdish question as a problem. For example *Goodbye Tomorrow* (Reis Çelik-1998) narrates the capture, trial and execution of three prominent leaders (Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan) of the generation of ‘68, and is based on real events. The prosecutor’s indictment claims that everybody living in Anatolia is Turkish, and the defendant’s reply is that different ethnic groups live in Turkey, a fact which is not accepted by the prosecution. Deniz Gezmiş, just before his execution, shouts “Long Live the fraternity of the Turkish and Kurdish peoples”. In *Journey to the Sun* (Yeşim Ustaoğlu-2000) we see a crowd on the street celebrating the victory of the Turkish national football team, and waving flags. There is a driver who does not join in with their excitement and does not blow his horn. Some people in the crowd ask him “Are you a fucking Kurd?” because he is thought to be ethnically non-Turkish for not joining them. A few men from the crowd kick and stamp the car, breaking its glass. In *Innowhereland* (Tayfun Pirselimoğlu-2002), the mother of Şükran tells her a story of a youngster who was killed and thrown into the river Genç after being incarcerated, just like the case of Berzan’s father in *Journey to the Sun*. Rıdvan of *Toss Up* (Üğur Yücel-2004) talks about Elif, who was his girlfriend when they were in high school. She had once told Rıdvan: “We are Kurdish… The villages are being evacuated. There are terrorists.” Years later, when Rıdvan is in the army, he realises after a clash in rural South Eastern Anatolia, that one of the PKK militants he shot is Elif, lying on the ground. Thereupon he loses his composure, starts running unthinkingly, steps on a mine, and loses one of his legs.

The second group of Eurimages-backed films are those in which we hear either Kurdish names referred to or the Kurdish language spoken. The characters of Kurdish origin bear Kurdish names in a few films: *The Bandit* (1996) by Yavuz Turgul (*Baran, Berfo and Keje*); *Journey to the Sun* (2000) by Yeşim Ustaoğlu (*Berzan*); and *Big Man Little Love* (2001) by Handan Ipekçi (*Hejar and Rojbin*). Those characters speak in their mother tongue to the people who are of the same ethnic identity, except in *The Bandit*: Baran speaks Turkish to the mad woman who stayed in the ruined village and to his old friend who was forced to inform on him to the gendarmerie. Besides this, we hear a peasant (and later another man in the hospital) vocalising the Kurdish word “Nenas” in *House of Angels* (Ömer Kavur-2000) which means “Unknown”. We also hear a Kurdish ballad in the soundtrack to *On the Way* (Erden Kiral-2005), during a scene in which the
filmmaker Yılmaz Güney is moved by the police to another prison in a car. The people in bridal procession, which they (Güney and the policemen who accompany him) encounter at a service area on their journey, also sing a Kurdish folk song and dance the halay, upon which the policemen take Güney away from that place. In a contrasting case, Hejar, the little girl in Big Man Little Love, cannot communicate to the salesperson, when Mr. Rıfat takes her to purchase new clothes. Mr. Rıfat cannot explain that she is Kurdish and does not know any other language:

**Salesperson**: (to Hejar) What is your name?

**Mr. Rıfat**: She doesn’t speak Turkish.

**Salesperson**: Why? Isn’t she Turkish?

**Mr. Rıfat**: She is Turkish but lives in Germany.

Among the Eurimages-backed films, Journey to the Sun (2000) by Yeşim Ustaoğlu is the film that most fairly portrayed the problematic aspects of the predominant Turkish nationalism, and the difficulties of bearing a Kurdish identity.

**Journey to the Sun**

Focusing on the changing life of Mehmet, this film is about his transformation in terms of learning what it is to be a Kurd. Mehmet is a worker in the municipality of Istanbul, having migrated from Tire, a town in Western Anatolia, a few months prior to the time depicted in the film. He is arrested by the police at a checkpoint because of a gun the man previously sitting next to him had left when leaving the minibus. The music tape with Kurdish language that was given to him by Berzan (a new friend, and a peddler), combined with his darker skin, reinforces the suspicions of the police that Mehmet is a Kurdish activist. Even his girlfriend, Arzu, can hardly believe he is not Kurdish. This is evident in the dialogue following his being released by the police:

**Mehmet**: Nobody believes I am from Tire.

**Arzu**: Are you from Tire?

**Mehmet**: Why does everyone ask me that?
**Arzu:**  I don’t know. It’s like you’re too dark to be from Tire.

**Mehmet:** Is that a crime, to have dark skin?

**Arzu:** Why did they [police] throw you out?

**Mehmet:** Seems I’m too dark for them too.

**Arzu:** Let’s change your looks. We’ll bleach your hair blonde. Maybe you can grow a ponytail.

**Mehmet:** (smiling) You want me to wear an earring too?

Life becomes more difficult for him now, what with having a record with the police. He moves to different addresses, but every time his door is marked with a red ‘X’ sign. In the second part of the film Mehmet takes the coffin of Berzan (who had been incarcerated by the police after joining a demonstration supporting the hunger strikers in prison, and was subsequently found dead) to his village in South Eastern Anatolia in order to fulfil his friend’s last request. As an irony of fate, Berzan had told him before that his father was also incarcerated and found dead, which he said was commonplace in that region. Mehmet witnesses the evacuated villages and military measures taken in the Kurdish populated towns during his long journey. We see the doors of the houses in Berzan’s town, Zorduç, are marked with an ‘X’ sign, as in the case of Mehmet.

Mehmet stops to speak to the hitchhiking newspaper seller children during his journey in that region. One of those kids finds his blond hair strange and asks why it is so:

**Kid:** Why is your hair blond?

**Mehmet:** Why is yours black?

**Kid:** God made me this way.

**Mehmet:** He made me this way, too.

**Kid:** Strange thing to do!

This dialogue draws attention to the relativity of identity. While Mehmet was too dark for some people in Istanbul, his new blonde look is strange for the Kurdish kids.
this time. Everybody judges him according to his/her own references and whatever he
does he cannot escape from being ‘strange’. Black hair and skin is strange in the West,
whereas it is the blonde man who is the stranger in the East.

In the final scene in a dialogue with a soldier on a train, Mehmet expresses that
he is not from his hometown Tire but, in fact, from Zorduç, Berzan’s hometown, and
says he has a friend from Tire. As the director Ustaoğlu pointed out, Mehmet perceives
the Kurdish reality throughout the film: “While he does not know what it means to be
from Tire, Mehmet understands Zorduç and Berzan, and he becomes one with Berzan.
The film is about Mehmet growing up, and he now can say ‘I know very well what it
means to be Berzan; I have a friend from Tire, called Mehmet, I know him as well’”
(2010).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Faruk Günaltay, the representative of
Turkey in Eurimages at that time was criticised by some of the media for the co-
production support decision for Journey to the Sun and the distributors were not eager to
circulate the film.

In conclusion, given their size, vocalised political demands and long history of
insurrections, Kurdish identity and representation deserves separate treatment, even
though they are not officially recognised as a minority group. Turkish cinema has for many years represented Kurds without mentioning their identity or in films showing the problems faced by them in an indirect manner, but the last two decades have witnessed a more clear and questioning representation. Both Eurimages-backed films and other Turkish cinema have either directly pointed out Kurdish question or given place to Kurdish language and names in a variety of works.

(Non-Muslim) Minorities

In this section I shall discuss the representation of Greek and Armenian identities, two communities that were declared ‘minorities’ by the Treaty of Lausanne. The Jews of Turkey, another group declared a minority, will be discussed in Chapter 5, which addresses religious identities.

The concept of a ‘minority’ meant almost nothing in the Ottoman era because of the aforementioned millet system. The term became a valid one courtesy of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which served to protect the civil rights of non-Muslim citizens. The treaty guaranteed minorities equal rights with their Muslim compatriots, including the right to run their own educational, religious and social institutions. However thousands of Greeks and Armenians had left the country when the War of Independence ended and their number had shrunk to diminutive levels compared to pre-war period, as Erik J. Zürcher states: ‘The larger Christian communities were practically gone (the Armenian community had shrunk to about 65,000 and the Greek community was down from around 2 million to 120,000); and Anatolia, which had been 80 per cent Muslim before the wars, was now approximately 98 per cent Muslim. Linguistically, only two large groups were left: the Turks and the Kurds, with half a dozen smaller groups (Greek, Armenian and Syriac-speaking Christians, Spanish-speaking Jews, and Circassian, Laz and Arabic-speaking Muslims)” (1993, 172).

In spite of the protective articles of the Treaty of Lausanne, and the egalitarian principles of successive constitutions, in practice it would appear that non-Muslim minorities have faced discrimination. The case of capital levy (varlık vergisi) is a prominent example. Although Turkey did not engage in WWII, military expenditure had
to be increased and approximately one million soldiers were kept in the army as a precaution. Industrial and agricultural output decreased following the withdrawal of manpower from production and compounded by warfare an economic recession ensued. To cover the deficit, the government decided to collect a one-time tax from the citizens in November 1942, called capital levy. However that tax was aimed at non-Muslims under the premise that these tradesmen had gained advantage from the war because of credit speculation and black-marketing. Foreigners and Dönmes (Jews converted to Islam) paid twice the Muslim rate, while non-Muslims paid up to ten times as much as Muslims (Poulton 1997, 117). The ones who could not pay that tax were deported to work camps. The rising internal and external reactions forced the government to abandon the levy approximately one year after its issue. The capital levy was intended to serve the Turkification of the economy by debilitating the financial power of non-Muslim minorities. Mrs. Salkım’s Diamonds (Salkım Hanım’ın Taneleri-1999) by Tomris Giritlioğlu is a non-Eurimages film that focused on this issue.

The loss of non-Muslim minorities significantly undermined the diverse culture of Anatolia, as Andrew Mango stated in 1976: “The disappearance of minority communities has broken the texture and the articulation of society which, after fifty years, has not yet fully healed and reformed itself” (13), an observation which still holds true today.

Greek Identity

The Greeks of today’s Greece (Hellenes) became the first ethnicity to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire and formed a sovereign nation-state in 1832. Greeks in Istanbul, like the other non-Muslim groups, maintained some autonomy under the millet system for approximately five centuries. The Turks and Greeks, the two main ethnicities of Istanbul after the city passed into Ottoman hands in 1453, lived together without much integration between the two communities. However, their support for the Greek army that invaded Anatolia after WWI caused the Greeks of Istanbul, Izmir and the rest of Turkey to be perceived by the Turks as disloyal: “During the period of Turkish defeat

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71 Referring to Benbassa and Rodrigue, ŞuleToktaş (2006, 207) gives the figures as: “The tax rate calculated on the basis of annual revenue earned was 5 percent for Muslims, 156 percent for Greeks, 179 percent for Jews and 232 percent for Armenians”.

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and despair, the Patriarchate and Istanbul’s Greek community had supported the Athens government in the cause of the *Megali Idea*. In 1919, even when the Sultan’s government was still in office, Greek Orthodox churches issued a declaration calling for ‘union with Greece’. The Patriarch petitioned the Allied powers to support the Greek cause. Money and volunteers were sent to aid the Greek army fighting Turkish forces in central Anatolia” (Alexandris 1983, 57).

Consequently, following the War of Independence, many Greeks had to leave Istanbul. There were roughly 250,000 Greeks in Istanbul according to Patriarchal estimates, approximately 150,000 of those went to Greece between 1922 and 1924 (Alexandris 1983, 104). In addition, following the war, there was an agreement between the two countries to exchange minorities living in each country: “In order to eliminate future irredentist Greek claims on Turkish territory, the Kemalist government resolved not to allow the deported Greeks to return. Greek proposals for a voluntary exchange of minority populations were rejected by the Turks. Ultimately, the agreement reached by both sides of Lausanne provided for the compulsory exchange of the Greeks of Anatolia and the Turks of Greece, with two exceptions…” (Bahcheli 1990, 11). The Greek inhabitants of Istanbul and the Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace were excluded. The total number of Greeks who left Turkey for Greece amounted to 900,000 and the number of Turks who left Greece for Turkey to 400,000 (Zürcher 1993, 171).

Before that, following the Balkan War of 1912-13, approximately 30,000 Greeks were deported from their homes in Thrace and Anatolia in order to accommodate some of the 300,000 immigrated Muslim refugees from the war zone, 122,655 of whom were from territories that were lost to Greece (Bahcheli 1990, 8).

Greece and Turkey enjoyed neighbourly relations in the initial decades of the republic until the dispute over Cyprus caused a tense atmosphere in the 1950s. Whilst representative delegations were negotiating in London over the status of the island, a news broadcast on Turkish radio and then an afternoon newspaper announced on 6th

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72 *Megali Idea* is a type of Greek nationalism which aims to unite all the ethnic Greeks in one ‘Great Greece’ by expanding the borders of the country to the regions where they live, in this case at the expense of the Ottoman state or of Turkey.

73 The figures included the people who left Turkey before the Treaty of Lausanne. Justin McCarthy (1983), on the other hand, estimates the lowest possible number for Greek refugees as 850,000.

74 Justin McCarthy (1983, 130) refers to Stephen Ladas who noted the deportation of 85,000 Greeks from eastern Thrace to interior Anatolia in 1914 and 150,000 Greeks from western Anatolia to Greece. However, McCarthy states that Ladas does not offer any source for that information and thus his figures are questionable.
September 1955 that the house in Salonika, Greece, where Atatürk was born, had been bombed. The reaction in Istanbul resulted in a riot in which more than five thousand properties owned by Greeks and other non-Muslim citizens were destroyed and despoiled, including houses, shops, churches, schools, factories, hotels and bars. 59% of those belonged to Greeks, 17% to Armenians, 12% to Jews, others to Dönmes and citizens who migrated from Belarus (Güven 2005). Hundreds of reports of rape were also filed. The government promised to compensate the damages and cast the blame on ‘anti-rich communists’. However the compensation did not cover the losses made, and the arrested intellectuals were acquitted by court. The governors of the ruling Democratic Party however, including the prime minister, were later found guilty after the military coup of 1960 for provoking the people against non-Muslim citizens. It is also claimed that a Turkish university student in Salonika was the perpetrator of the bombing, however the accuracy of these claims has yet to be verified. Thousands of Greeks had to leave Istanbul for Greece after the incidents of 6-7 September 1955. Pains of Autumn (Güz Sancısı-2009) by Tomris Giritlioğlu is a non-Eurimages film that focused on those incidents.

Among many other conflicts, the Cyprus conflict is probably the most disputed between Greece and Turkey. Remaining under Ottoman rule from 1571 until 1878 and under British afterwards, Cyprus was declared as an independent republic in 1960. Comprised of two ethnicities, 80 per cent Greeks and 20 per cent Turks, the island did not experience internal violence until the mid-1950s. However the EOKA organisation, which aimed at enosis, unifying the island with Greece, “started its campaign of violence on April 1, 1955” (Bahcheli 1990, 33) and killings started in 1956. The violence escalated, reaching a peak in 1963, following attempts to change the basic articles of the constitution in favour of the Cypriot Greeks. “The scale of the fighting in December 1963 in Cyprus surpassed all previous experiences of internal violence. During the most intense period of fighting, between December 21 and 25, hundreds of people were killed, wounded, or taken as hostages” (60). The military coup of 1967 in Greece encouraged the enosis aim once more but Turkey, being one of the three guarantor states (along with Greece and Britain), intervened in the affairs on the island due to the violent incidents of 1974, and it deployed troops in the northern part, and simultaneously caused the fall of the military regime in Greece. From this period on the two ethnicities have lived in
separation. While the Greek side in the south still uses the name ‘Cyprus’ and claims to represent the whole population of the island, the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ was declared an independent state in 1983 but was not recognised as such by any country other than Turkey.

The wars against Greece and the Turkification process of Anatolia caused a decrease in the Greek population, from 1,254,333 according to Ottoman census of 1911-12 (McCarthy 1983, 110) to just a few thousand, in the space of a hundred years. In essence, the mutual deportation of minorities contributed to the constitution of more homogenous nations both in Greece and Turkey. Since then two further events, the 6-7 September 1955 incidents and the Cyprus conflicts of 1963 and 1974 have caused the Greek minority of Turkey to shrink further.

Greeks and Films

Greek identity was represented in Turkish cinema, albeit occasionally; this often took the form of secondary roles in films, in which Greek characters would speak Turkish in distinct accents (as was found in representations of Kurds). It should be also noted that many citizens of Greek origin have contributed to the formation of Turkish national cinema from the beginning as producers, cinematographers and technical crew. However, the problems faced by the Greek minority were not displayed in the films; censorship was the definite factor behind this fact. The troubled Greek-Turkish international relations described above did become themes of (non-Eurimages) commercial films which were bent to nationalist agendas in past and recent Turkish cinema. In terms of Eurimages funding, this has proved to be a good forum in which to support the representation of both citizens of Greek origin and the problematic relations between Greece and Turkey.

Waiting for the Clouds (Yeşim Ustaoğlu-2005) as a Eurimages-backed film focuses on a woman who has to conceal her Greek identity and lives in the Black Sea area with a Turkish name for almost sixty years. The film begins with archival footage of deportations in and from Anatolia. Eleni, who is known in her community by her Turkish name Ayşe, is one of the hundreds of thousands of Greeks deported in 1916 from the Black Sea region to southern towns of Anatolia. The government took the decision to
deport the Greeks following the invasion of the northern city of Trabzon, at the Black Sea coast by the Russian army during WWI. The government’s decision was a precautionary check on the potential of the Greek minority collaborating with the Russians. The deportation took place when Eleni was ten years old and she had to march a great distance to the south, with her family and the other exiles. During this journey her mother and sister died as a result of cold conditions and starvation. She and her six year old brother Niko survived and were adopted by a Turkish family. Ayşê/Eleni never spoke Greek, and nobody has known of her real identity since Selma, the daughter of the Turkish family who saved her, passed away. The film moves to 1975 and Ayşê/Eleni decides to go to Salonika, Greece, to see her lost brother years later (after the demise of Selma). There she meets a deported Greek woman from Havza, a town in the inner Black Sea region of Turkey: they speak Turkish in between. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Waiting for the Clouds questions and satirises nationalism through foregrounding nationalist songs, recitations and festivities and thus draws attention to the question of identity.

Three Eurimages-backed films touch upon the Cyprus conflict, one on 1963, the other two on 1974 incidents. Firstly My Darling Istanbul (Seçkin Yasar-2007) points out how Greeks were deported because of the Cyprus conflict. In one scene in the film, the character Ali explains:

Istanbul was rescued from Greeks three times: in 1453, in 1922 and in 1964… 40,000 Greeks were deported from Istanbul in 1964 with 20kg of effects and 22 dollars at most. Then their assets were seized… Chauvinistic politics were executed step by step. I vaguely remember in my childhood the ‘Shopping among Turks’ and ‘Citizen, Speak Turkish’ ['Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş'] campaigns. There has not been a serious study on this issue yet.

Mustafa adds: “We were using Cyprus as an excuse to be rescued from the Greeks. That is it. The media added fuel to the flames at that time…” The father of Irini in the film was a Greek who had to leave Istanbul for Greece in 1964. A neighbour, one of the remaining Greeks, says: “They had us pay for all that took place in Cyprus”.

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Mud (Derviș Zaim-2003), a film shot in the northern territory of the island, intends for the spectator to recall the War of 1974 through a plethora of symbols beside mere dialogue. Ali, who is a soldier in the Turkish army by this point, had survived by chance a fusillade fired by Greek Cypriot militants. Temel on the other hand, a friend of Ali’s sister, cannot overcome the trauma he suffered when he shot two unarmed Greek Cypriots in 1974. In the film Toss Up (Uğur Yücel-2004) Cevher’s father explains how the tensions between the two nations destroyed his marriage with his Greek wife, Tasula. Two Turkish fishermen beat a Greek colleague of theirs during the War of Cyprus. When he condemns the fight, one of the fishermen responds “you produced a child from a Greek woman”. When he returns home, he asks Tasula if her father was a Greek agent, and then drives her and their son from the house. Twenty-five years later, Tasula and their son visit him after the great earthquake in 1999.

Love under Siege (Ersin Pertan-1997), a film about the handover of Istanbul from Byzantium to the Ottomans, informs us the Ottoman army that besieged Istanbul was composed of fifty-thousand troops from different ethnicities, including Greeks. The finale of the film draws attention to the cultural continuity in societies even if the political systems or rulers change, noting on the screen: “Knowing Byzantium is the key to understanding the Ottomans and thus today’s Turkey”. In five other films, Greek minorities still present in Turkey are represented. These are: the Greek family of Please Don’t Go (Tunç Başaran-1998), in the Antakya region; Hristo, of Boatman (Biket İlhan-1999), who is the owner of a shop in Çeşme; Madame, of Goodbye (Zeki Ökten-2000), whose four friends visit her at the end of their daily walk in Bozcaada; Tasula, of Encounter (Ömer Kavur-2003), who works in a pension-restaurant in Bozcaada and whose relatives have left Turkey many years ago and now visit her; and Niko of My Darling Istanbul (Seçkin Yasar-2007), who is the owner of the restaurant where Irini, Ali and their two friends have dinner.

Consequently, being one of the two biggest ethnicities of Istanbul during the Ottoman era, the Greek population in Turkey dramatically diminished during the period of the War of Independence. The international problems between Greece and Turkey have always adversely influenced the Greek minority in Turkey, a situation which has contributed to the decline of Greeks in the Turkish population. A relatively high number
of Eurimages-backed films provide representation of the Greek minority as well as the troubled dimensions of Greek-Turkish relations.

**Armenian Identity**

Unlike other ethnicities, Armenian minorities were spread into various regions of Anatolia, though they are more condensed in the eastern part. However they did not make up the majority of any province. Controversy surrounds the true number of Armenian’s living in Anatolia before WWI, because of the relocation/genocide debates. McCarthy (1983, 110-11) estimates it at approximately 1.5 million and 8.5% of the total population. Armenians were called ‘the faithful people’ (millet-i sadıka) because of the services supplied to the Ottoman government as they replaced the ‘untrusted’ Greeks (who gained independence before), starting in the second quarter of the 19th century (Koloğlu 1999). Nevertheless, nationalist movements which broke the empire into pieces had an influence on that ‘faithful people’ as well and some Armenian fractions claimed independence. The empire, which by this point had lost the majority of its territories in Europe, did not tolerate this new claim in Eastern Anatolia, which was close to the Russian border. Hence the affiliation was breached by the end of the 19th century and a few violent incidents by and against Armenians had already occurred before 1915.

Today, approximately a hundred years later, the incidents of 1915 are still fiercely debated and controversy rages in terms of the official versions of the historical theses of the Turkish and Armenian parties being discrepant. Zürcher elaborates:

At the outbreak of the war, Armenian nationalists saw in a Russian victory their chance to achieve the establishment of an Armenian state in eastern Anatolia. Russian propaganda encouraged these aspirations. A few thousand Armenians joined the Russian army; there were Armenian desertions from the Ottoman army and guerrilla activity behind the Ottoman lines. Confronted with this situation, the Ottoman cabinet, on the initiative of the Interior Minister, Talât Pasha, decided to relocate the entire Armenian population of the war zone to Zor in the heart of Syrian desert. This relocation (tehcir) was carried through in
1915-16 and it resulted in the death of enormous numbers of Armenians. So much is undisputed historical fact. (1993, 120)

As Zürcher (1993, 120-21) explains, there are three points of controversy surrounding this issue. One is the necessity of the operation. While defenders of the relocation-decision point out the treasonable activities of the Armenians and the difficulty to define who was loyal to the empire and who was not, objections arise on the grounds that it was not only the Armenians of the war zone that were deported, but also those from many different locations of Anatolia as well. The second controversy concerns the number of deaths. While the defenders of the official Turkish thesis claim the figure to be around 200,000, the Armenian thesis claims the number of deaths to total up to ten times that amount. Thirdly, the most critical point of the debates focuses on whether the incidents of 1915-16 constituted a genocide, or not, and whether the government was involved in this officially, or whether the deaths were planned and instigated by a minority clique in the ruling party (CUP) in order to ‘solve’ the Eastern problem.

Regardless of the reasons or intentions, the result was a tragedy beyond any dispute. Besides the deaths, hundreds of thousands of Armenian citizens had to leave the country during or following WWI. By 1965, the Armenian population of Turkey had decreased to as low as 56,286 (Armenian speaking) or 69,526 (Gregorian Christians) (Andrews 1989, 127).

Many citizens of Armenian origin have contributed to the development of Turkish national cinema from the very beginning, as have the members of Greek minority. They occasionally took part in secondary roles in films. Problems faced by them were not displayed in the films, due to the aforementioned censorship system. As for the Eurimages-backed films, the Armenian question has not been focused upon directly, and has been implicitly addressed in only one work, Summer Love (2001) by Barış Pirhasan. The little boy shows a photo, speaks about Arpin who is now an old woman, and her family who had to migrate to Canada. Probably referring to the incidents of 1915, the boy speaks about the Armenians running away years ago and how Arpin was rescued by a Turkish family: “Look. That’s Arpin. Hugging her cousin. She stayed a year in Canada,
then came back again. When Arpin was small, all the Armenians were running away. Fatma Ana’s Mum opened the door, grabbed Arpin and pulled her inside”. Besides that implication, the representations of Armenian ethnicity as a component of the people of Turkey are much more numerous in the films that are within our scope. Cevat, of The Blue Exile (Erden Kıral-1993), runs into a theatrical company on the train while being moved to his new town of exile. All the actresses of that company are non-Muslim and one of them is called Vartuhi (an Armenian name). In Istanbul beneath My Wings (Mustafa Altıoklar-1996), Agop, clearly an Armenian name, serves alcoholic drinks in his restaurant in spite of the ban of the sultan. Anna, from the film Steam: The Turkish Bath (Ferzan Özpetek-1997), speaks of an Armenian dish in the restaurant where they celebrate the marriage news of Füsun. Representations occur in three other films: the owner (Hacik) of the shop to whom Teodora, and Antuan, sell the Sultan’s belongings in Please Don’t Go (Tunç Başaran-1998); the headwaiter (Melikyan) of Pera Palas Hotel, in The Time of the Heart (Ali Özentürk-2004); the boss (Helvacıyan) of the travelling theatre company in Borrowed Bride (Atıf Yılmaz-2005), are Armenian citizens of Turkey.

In conclusion, Armenian identity is not focused on in any of the Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films; however they have been represented in secondary roles in a relatively high number of films.

Other Ethnic Identities

In addition to the ethnicities already discussed, other ethnicities are represented or mentioned in a number of films. We see Master Butros, who is an Arab, going to fight in WWI as a soldier of the Ottoman army, in The Road Home (Semir Aslanyürek-2006). Similarly the nickname of the bully in Cholera Street (Mustafa Altıoklar-1997) is ‘Arab [Arab] Sado’ and the nickname of one of the drivers in Once Upon A Time in Anatolia (Nuri Bilge Ceylan-2011) is ‘Arab’, probably because of their ethnic origin. Takva: A Man’s Fear of God (Özer Kızıltan-2006) displays prejudice against Arab identity. Muharrem, the protagonist, recalls a scene from his childhood in which his grandmother says “[he] who drinks coffee, becomes Arab”. Muharrem reflects that this may be the reason he does not drink coffee.
Representations of other ethnic identities are as follows: it is mentioned that the soldiers of Georgian, Serbian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Russian, French, Latin and even Greek origin form part of the Ottoman army, shown in an army of 50,000 troops that besiege Istanbul in 1453, in *Love under Siege* (Ersin Pertan-1997); we see the Italian minorities of Istanbul, such as Madame Anita and Mr. Oscar in *Steam: The Turkish Bath* (Ferzan Özpetek-1997); Safiye, one of the girls in the imperial harem is actually Italian in *Harem Suaré* (Ferzan Özpetek-1999); Evliya Çelebi takes the sketches and notes to Antonio Pasha (Italian), Gomez Agha (Spanish), Mr. Artin (Armenian) and Mr. Itzak (Jewish) for translation, because they are in an unknown language and probably have something to do with flying, in *Istanbul beneath My Wings* (Mustafa Altıoklar-1996); the existence of various ethnic groups that live in the Ardahan region, in Eastern Anatolia, is displayed, for example in the characters Koço (Kurdish), Şaho (Azeri), Malakan Kaiser (German) and Troubadour (Armenian), in *Tales of Intransigence* (Reis Çelik-2004); Esma’s peer mentions the Gypsies in a negative manner in that they are ‘full of tricks’ in *Summer Love* (Başış Pirhasan-2001); the inhabitants of *Cholera Street* (Mustafa Altıoklar-1997) are from many diverse ethnicities, including Gypsies and Greeks. However this film criticises the state and police forces’ attitude towards minority groups.

Three men in the crowd talk after a criminal incident:

A: Shall we complain to the police?

B: The police would love to see us fight and kill each other.

A: Then what can we do?

B: Get together. Unite against injustice for the first time. Unite!

C: What do you mean unite? Stop that communist jargon!

B: You are useless!

**Conclusion**

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was composed of diverse ethnicities and held a peculiar governing system accordingly, the Republic of Turkey was established as a centralist modern nation-state that adopted a unified culture. It was
more a civic-territorial nationalism than an ethnic one, as defined by Smith; intended as a melting-pot identity, and without distinctions of religion and race such that everybody was called ‘Turk’. However, the practices could not escape oppression or negligence in terms of minority ethnic identities. Furthermore, the demography of the Anatolian population dramatically changed after long-term warfare due to the decrease in the number of non-Muslim minorities. While the Treaty of Lausanne provided equal rights for minority communities, it also contributed to their isolation in the protective articles.

For many years Turkish films have tended to posit national identity as a fixed concept, thereby serving to reinforce a unified, national culture; the censorship mechanism from the 1930s to the late 1980s was a significant factor behind this kind of imagination and representation. During the past twenty years, the problem of national identity has started to be interrogated in film and represented with greater complexity. The filmmakers have made direct use of the cinematic medium as a field of tension within which national discourses might be challenged.

A significant number of Turkish-initiative films supported by Eurimages have focused on, questioned or represented both predominant nationalism and the diverse ethnic identities in Turkey. While banal forms of nationalism, to refer to Billig, have been implicitly represented in the background of films, an explicitly contrastive representation has been adopted where filmmakers have intended to problematise national identity and nationalism. The images related to Atatürk have appeared in at least 15 films either as banal reminders of nationhood (at least 11 films) or as contrastive representation of Turkish national identity (5 films).75Big Man Little Love (Handan İpekçi-2001) has questioned Turkish national identity through language, a film which can be read with reference to Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. The diverse ethnic identities of Turkey such as Kurds, Greeks, Armenians and a variety of others have been represented in a relatively large number of films, and in some cases they have been problematised, for example in Journey to the Sun (Yeşim Ustaoğlu-2000) and Waiting for the Clouds (Yeşim Ustaoğlu-2005).

75 For the details of contrastive representation of Turkish national identity, see Appendix-I.
The figures showing representation of nationalism and diverse ethnic identities in film are presented on the graph.

Fig. 18. The number of Eurimages-backed Turkish-initiative films in which national elements and diverse identities have been represented or problematised (minimum numbers out of 59 films).