

# The Cinema in Turkey During 1940s

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**Abstract**—The cinema in Turkey during the 1940s was shaped under the Second World War conditions. The amateur film makers from different socioeconomic roots experienced movie production in those years. Having similar socioeconomic characteristics and autobiographies, each of them has a different understanding of cinema. Nevertheless, they joined in making movies which address native culture and audience. They narrated indigenous stories with native music, amateur players and simple settings. Although the martial law, censorship and economical deficiencies, they started to produce films in the Second World War. The cinematographers of the 1940s usually called as *the transition period cinematographers* in Turkey, producing in the passage between *the period of the theatre players* and *the period of the national cinema*. But, 1940- 1950 period of Turkish cinema should be defined not as a transition but a period of forming the professional consciousness in cinema.

**Keywords**—Cinema in Turkey, censorship, propaganda, spectacle, audience.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS article is about the structure of the cinema in Turkey in the 1940s that is during and after the Second World War. In this paper, the structure of the cinema sector in Turkey, the perception of filmmaking of the government and society, the popular domestic and foreign films, the sociocultural characteristics of the audience has been investigated. By this method, the historical connection between 1940s and 2000s' native cinema in Turkey has been analyzed. In the domestic cinema sector there are many *unconscious historical factors* which have been formed before 1950s. Although still affecting our cinema today, they are forgotten, overlooked or underestimated. These processes in the collective unconscious manipulate the visual culture of societies and manipulates people with or without their conscious knowledge.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey has undergone a rapid social transformation. Being inherited a limited infrastructure and a low capital, the sovereign government of the Republican People's Party has a protectionist, elitist and totalitarian economic policy during 1930s and 1940s [17], [13], [14].<sup>1</sup> The government supported newly growing domestic production by the legal and economic regulations. In the 1940s the most important source of income for the people was the agriculture

but during the Second World War, the agricultural production has diminished. Due to this decline in production, many goods such as food, medicine, fuel etc. could not be found and the prices of seldom goods were increased. The big increases in prices and the high inflation rates caused decreases in the living standards of the people. The rising of prices caused profiteering (*ihhtikar*) being widespread in Turkey during the war years.

İstanbul as a cosmopolitan city, has been preserved its national importance after establishment of the Republic too. It had a cultural profile of European cities and its literacy rate was high due to many economic, social and cultural activities [6], [8]. For the cinema industry, the centre was again İstanbul in the 1940s. However, in the Anatolia the socioeconomic conditions were much more difficult. Anatolian population deprived of many economic, social and cultural facilities. The economic conditions were poor, the education level was low, the enterprises of the state were rare. In order to the practices of cinema being developed, these regions need many basic necessities such as having regular, average income level, regular working hours, widespread electricity networks, technological equipments, movie theatres and film distributors. As it can be argued easily, these factors were not present in the Anatolia during 1940s.

## II. THE POPULAR MOVIES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN TURKEY

The Second World War was the biggest total war in the 20th century. Although it has huge destructive effects over societies, cultures and nature including the cinema sector itself, it's glamorized the moviemaking as an influential branch of art and business. The radio and press that were the most effective communication media at the beginning of the 20th century, stayed behind the cinema during the war because as an audio-visual medium, the cinema has a bigger domain (Fig. 1). In the Second World War, cinema has been also replaced other entertainment genres in Turkey such as the traditional theatre, Western theatre, concert, operetta [42].

Under the pressure of the war conditions, people estranged themselves from their daily troubles via going to the movie theatres. They bring many people from different religions, languages, genders, economic levels and social statuses together for a duration of one movie. During 1940s, the transition period filmmakers succeeded in communicating with the average people by movies and created an audience base needed for developing a domestic cinema in Turkey [38].

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Fig. 1. One of the popular radio advertisements from a newspaper in the 1940s. The radios were very effective communication vehicles during war years. (Cumhuriyet Gazzette, 22 Ekim 1939)

With the movies, the newsreels were exhibited too in the film theatres regularly. 1940s, cinema was an instrument for forming a kind of ‘national unity and social conjunction’ within the country and a tool of ‘gathering international information and making advertisement’ outside the country. The cinema can combine ‘real’ and ‘fictitious’ and represent them together. Therefore, during the Second World War cinema was used as a propaganda tool as an information vehicle and many governments began to invest in the cinema sector. The governmental manipulations of the cinema sector during the war has been speeded up the expansion of politics and diplomacy domains into the cinema. This development can be best exemplified with the newsreels which exhibited with feature films. The newsreels became very vital because they were popular, actual, cost-efficient, persuasive, informative and exhibited anywhere in the world for a mass audience. The governmental institutions regulated newsreels and used them efficiently for legitimizing and expanding their own politics during the war years.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1940s one of the most important factors which determines the preferences of the cinemagoers for movies and movie theatres were living places (habitat<sup>3</sup>) of the audience. The living places is not only an area of residence but the environment in which people lives, works, spends their spare time, communicates etc. [4]. Here, it is important to understand the meaning and connotations of the living places. The French sociologist Bourdieu identifies socially this area as

*habitus* and based on a wide-ranging social research he defines *habitus* as such:

“... The division into classes performed by sociology leads to the common root of the classifiable practices which agents produce and of the classificatory judgements they make of other agents’ practices and their own. The *habitus* is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the *habitus*, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles, is constituted.”[16]

Both the living areas and cultural preferences of the audience connected to their economic conditions and social classes. The economic level of the audience shapes their cultural tastes. The preferences of audience strengthen the social differences related to the economic levels. As Pierre Bourdieu argues in his impressive book “*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*”:

“... The *habitus* is not only a *structuring structure*<sup>4</sup> which organizes practices and the perception of practices but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions, i.e. by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference.”[16]

Briefly, the cultural tastes or the preferences of the subjects are signs of their social origin and the educational level. Therefore it can be argued that, what the people of different social classes *have been watching* depended upon their socioeconomic basis and this situation shapes their cultural status:

“...The most fundamental oppositions in the structure (high/ low, rich/ poor etc.) tend to establish themselves as the fundamental structuring principles of practices and the perception of practices.”[16]

On the basis of this point of view, in 1940s İstanbul could be divided into three zones in different regions represented in İstanbul City Statistics according to the socioeconomic conditions of people (Fig. 2).

1. The old city center on the historic peninsula called *Surici* (in European side),
2. The Westerner- trade center called *Galata-Pera* (in European side),
3. The public residential area called *Üsküdar-Kadıköy* (in Asian side).

<sup>2</sup>This can be easily observed if the daily newspapers of Turkey in the 1940s such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Akşam*, *Tan*, *Haber Postası* etc. are investigated.

<sup>3</sup>Here, the *habitat* means is used as the place where a population lives.

<sup>4</sup>The emphasis is mine.



Fig. 2 Pera (Beyoğlu), Galata, Suriçi (Historic Peninsula), Şişli, Üsküdar and Kadıköy in an İstanbul map through the two sides of Bosphorus

Suriçi (Historic Peninsula) consists of Fatih, Sultanahmet, Eyüp, Beyazıt, Eminönü regions. It was the living area of old Ottoman aristocracy and bureaucracy [9], [29]. After Ottoman Empire has been declined, The Ottoman aristocracy which lost their function and economic power left Suriçi zone and Suriçi opened into middle class settlements. During these years, in Suriçi the middle and low-middle class lived within the rules of district, religious community and the patriarchal family. Being the most crowded place in 1940s, Suriçi was also the slum area of İstanbul [19], [10], [11].

Pera consists of Galata- Beyoğlu- Harbiye- Şişli regions [35]. In this region the economic level of the people was high in relation to two other areas. In Pera, the economic status of the dwellers was more important than their religious and/or ethnic origins. Although the population of Pera district was lower than that of Suriçi, the cinemagoers in Pera were much more than that of Suriçi [47]. Üsküdar- Kadıköy district could be seen as a ‘small Suriçi’ within its own boundaries. This region is a small, self-sufficient area in comparison to the ones in the European side.

During the Second World War, the cinema in Turkey was distant from local and foreign political activities as much as possible. The one-party state of the period was very strict and careful about the possible “propagandist activities” in the cinema. In these years, Turkish cinema could not go outside of particular subjects and controlled under the law and regulations<sup>5</sup> applied by the police force as well as the governmental agencies [33], [48], [51]. Infact, if we watch the available films of 1940s, we can see that there is no propagandist example whether criticizing or supporting the Second World War. In spite of this fact, during the 1940s the moviemakers were blocked because movies were seen as political artefacts rather than cultural ones. The pre-censorship which takes precautions on films before they are produced, annihilated the freedom of creativity. Therefore, during the Second World War, the cinema sector in Turkey was not

<sup>5</sup>The regulations About The Control of The Films and The Film Scenarios started to applied at 19 July 1939 [20].

powerful enough as artistically, politically or technologically. Despite of these circumstances, it was controlled by the state in preparation, production and exhibition stages. The film censorship that has been applied in the 1940s destructed at the intellectual basis of movies [33].

**İstanbul Belediye Sınırı İçinde Mevcut Tiyatrolar, Sinemalar ve Diğer Eğlence Yerleri Faaliyeti**  
*Activité Des Théâtres Des Cinés et Autres Places d'Amusement*  
2 — Sinemalar — Cinés  
1929 — 1933

Sevirci sayarı — Nombre des spectateurs

Müesseselerin isimleri Nom des établissements	Sevirci — Amis	Kışın Hiver	Yazın Été	Yılın Année	Sevirci sayarı Nombre des spectateurs	Yılın Année								
Alemdar S.	629	1175	3103	4106	2882	2200	1800	2200	1800	3300	6100	6000	6706	49275
Alkazar	630	6850	4125	7450	4800	5675	3225	1800	3600	3300	5000	5000	5000	8300
Artistik (Sümer)	631	21500	13600	9700	13200	7200	2300	4900	6500	8800	14300	15300	25100	91300
Asrı	632	31100	27300	28100	31100	31100	21000	21000	21000	8220	28100	27300	31100	21000
Balat	633	1800	1400	430	700	600	400	500	600	900	900	900	900	3300
Beyktaş parkı	634	3000	1410	3510	610	1600	1000	2600	3600	3200	4000	4100	3300	33500
Eklər	635	19700	13375	16975	16055	6400	3800	2900	5300	11000	7800	12200	11100	125455
Elhamra	636	12300	26575	13300	12665	6910	2900	2300	—	16000	5225	12660	20534	148279
Erenköy	637	32740	11750	23000	12480	3800	3300	1700	—	2000	14500	12675	11525	126796

Fig. 3 The document about the activities of actual theatres, cinemas and other entertainment places within the border of İstanbul Municipality 1929- 1933 from İstanbul City Statistics. This statistics shows the number of the monthly audience (x axis) according to the different cinemas in different regions between 1929- 1933 (y axis). These statistics have been prepared two languages during the first half of the 20th century

The effects that are created by the movies are bound up with the existing visual cultures of society. Therefore, the understanding of the cinema and its culture in Europe is very different from the one in the Eastern societies including Turkey [31], [44]. Being lived the industrial revolution and getting through the production line system as a “lifestyle” during the second half of the 19th century, the culture of representation in Western societies can be defined in relation to movement, speed, modernization etc. Whereas Eastern societies didn’t live a similar kind of mechanization, an automatic production system and consumerism which are the basis of capitalism.<sup>6</sup> In Eastern societies which are usually underdeveloped economically, the understanding of movement as well as the reflection of the world in the traditional understanding of depiction is distinct from the capitalist, modern societies. Because of these reasons the

<sup>6</sup>The relation between the mode of production, the average life style and the visual culture of the society is a quite interesting subject. By the investigation of the interactive relations between the economy, life style and culture, the historical development of world cinemas can be understood more effectively and explanatory.

concepts of representation and performance have been acquired different structures from Western counterparts. When we came to Turkey, the cinema was completely different from widespread old spectacular activities in Eastern societies such as the folk theatre (*Karagöz* or *shadow play*), folk drama (*ortaoyunu*), improvisation theatres (*tuluat tiyatrolari*), storytelling (*meddahlık*) [7], [8]. These spectacular activities are standing on a verbal basis. Usually, they were performed in unsettled settings with nonprofessional people. On the other hand, the cinema usually needs a written material i.e. scenario, a technological equipment and a technologically equipped settlement i.e. cinemas. Although, the cinema is a new “art” for Turkey, the audience and the infrastructure of the spectacular activities were the same. Therefore, under the war conditions of Turkey, the cinema has not been found a proper ground for improving.



Fig. 4 The famous Turkish and Armenian theatre players of the 1900s became cinema players of 1920s to 1940s: Selahattin, Burhanettin, Madame Hereçya, Münif Fehim, Ahmet Fehim, Kemal Daveri, Madame Binemeciyan, Bedia Muhavvit, Eliza Binemeciyan, Adriyen, Arşaluis, Ahmet Fehim, Şadi Karagözoğlu, İ. Galip. [32]

Based on Islamic origins, the negative outlook towards visual and plastic arts leaning on ‘impersonation and depiction’, the repression over painting and sculpture as well as the immaturity of scripted theatre prevented the transference of the accumulation of visual culture in Turkey. Moreover, the exclusion of women from theatrical activities made existing shows incomplete, insufficient and unrealistic both on stage and the screen. Because of these situations, generally visual and performative arts in Turkey as a Muslim-majority country have been usually practiced by Non-Muslim ethnic groups such as Armenians, Istanbul Greeks, Jewish people, White Russians and migrants. (Fig. 4)

### III. THE CINEMA AS A BUSINESS SECTOR

After the Second World War, the film importation and cinema management became a profitable business. In the Turkish cinema, the first film production firms were the representatives or clients of the foreign production firms. The first domestic production firm, Kemal Film was opened in 1922. Although it had a short business life consisted of six

movies, it is the first national, private production company which constructed a film studio and invest money into domestic film production. It worked with Muslim actresses in the cinema for the first time as well as made movies based on true life stories for the first time. The second film production firm was İpek Film worked in film production, dubbing, film importation and cinema management between 1928-1952. Moreover, both Kemal Film and İpek Film performed official duties by shooting documentary movies for government, recording the parliament speeches [21], [26], [44].

After Kemal Film and İpek Film, a new production company and film studio i.e. Ha-Ka Film was constructed by Halil Kamil in 1939. Ha-Ka Film’s first film was *Taş Parçası* (*The Rock*), shot by a young director, Faruk Kenç. Unlike from movies of Muhsin Ertuğrul<sup>7</sup> [34], [44], [46] *Taş Parçası* was about the traditional life of a middle class Muslim family (Fig. 5). Because of this reason, it drew attention from the common audience. With its subject and characteristics *Taş Parçası* exemplified a new breath in the cinema. This new period in Turkish cinema has been called as *the transition period* meaning a transition from Muhsin Ertuğrul’s period to a new generation of filmmakers’.



Fig. 5 The advertisement of *Taş Parçası* is a unique collage designed by the oriental elements from the movie. (Cumhuriyet Gazzette, 29 December 1939)

<sup>7</sup>Muhsin Ertuğrul (1892- 1979) accepted as the founder of Western theatre in Turkey. He was worked as the player, director, actor, producer both in the theatre and cinema. His style in the cinema of Turkey can be defined as “the classical, theatrical, unrealistic and became alienated to the public”. He is the only director who made films between 1922- 1939 in Turkey. Therefore, this period usually called in the history of cinema as “Muhsin Ertuğrul’s period”. *İstanbul’da Bir Facia-ı Aşk* (1922), *Aysel Bataklı Damın Kızı* (1934), *Ateşten Gömlek* (1923) are some examples from his films.

If we analyse this period more elaborately, we see that the appearance of *Taş Parçası* is not accidental. Faruk Kenç is one of the few candidate moviemakers who educated in European countries in 1930s. The profile of these young filmmakers such as Şadan Kamil, Baha Gelenbevi, Turgut Demirağ shared similar characteristics. First, they did not have enough experience and capital in the cinema sector. Secondly, they could not use the available technological equipment under the control of “old” sector. Thirdly, they created shortcut solutions to the problems of limited facilities in order to be able to make movies. Fourthly, they usually worked with amateur players. The film makers of 1940s were the first generation of the Republic. Belonging to bourgeois families living in Istanbul, they were well educated and cultured. They gained their social formation during the formation of the Republic. This means that they witnessed the First World War, the Turkish War of Independence, the Second World War and lived through the realization of Republican reforms. They educated abroad and gained some experience in the cinema. This generation lived the effects of the big historical transformation and detachment from Ottoman period.

Because of not having the technology of talking movies, the filmmakers of 1940s in Turkey shoot movies “silently”. With the dubbing method that is adding sound on movies after filming, they were able to produce movies under war conditions of Turkey. The dubbing method created in 1940s, has been living in Turkish cinema for years even today. The dubbing affects domestic movies negatively both in form and content. Shooting movies silently decreased the quality of cinema because the film loses some part of its reality. The external sound that was added later reduced the authenticity of the scenes. On the other hand, the probability of making mistakes in dialogues decreases in shooting silent movies. It doesn't presuppose professionally educated players and it eases composing film music.

The dubbing is also a method for translation of foreign films into Turkish (Fig. 6). The translation of import movies into Turkish made adaptation of audience to films easier. During translation, the original foreign names of people and spaces had been converted into convenient native equivalents. The unfamiliar elements in movies replaced with similar indigenous ones. This procedure is called as “localization” (*yerleştirme*). Therefore, the dubbing of foreign films are not only translation but an adaptation and vernacularization too. Because of these reasons, the dubbing sector became as important as the film production sector during the 1940s. The growing up of dubbing increased the audience. Although in the beginning dubbing was adopted for domestic film production as a solution to economic problems, after it became a necessity in terms of using amateur players in the cinema of Turkey. The dubbing made the training of players for the intonation, diction and memorization unnecessary. On the other hand, it created a work area for the theatre players who have these knowledge. Consequently, dubbing as ‘an economic method’ helped the production of domestic films whereas as ‘a technical phenomenon’ it undermined the visual and aural qualifications of them [41].



Fig. 6 One of the famous dubbing artists in 1940s i.e. Ferdi Tayfur was making dubs of a Lorel- Hardy movie. (*Perde ve Sahne*, 1941)

These developments in filmmaking procedures facilitated the establishment of new production companies. During these years, the number of production companies, domestic film production and cinematographers have risen. The production companies of this period were short-lived, low-budget firms, 80 % of which produced only one movie [12], [37], [38], [44], [47]. These production firms did not strengthen economically until the tax decrease law in 1948. After 1948, the production of domestic movies increased; this enlarged the audience and strengthened movie theatres. Moreover, the preferences and investments of production firms shaped and conditioned the audience. It should be noted that in the 1940s the limited capital was not the only problem for filmmakers. The national economic conditions under the war economy made difficult to find raw material and technical equipment. The difficulty of finding raw film affected the artistic development too. While shooting movies, domestic filmmakers used the available raw film and other material with the minimum amount and maximum care. Therefore, the possibility of repetition in order to correct the shots were usually very low. In the 1940's, the producers were the leaders of film production. They organized production, distribution and exhibition processes according to their own benefits. Although this structure seems to create a powerful arena for producers, in fact this structure diminish their economic strength. Thus, production firms requested government support so that they reinforce their economic situation. As we see in the next section, the demands of the decrease in the custom rates, the reduction of municipal taxes imposed on tickets or the rise of ticket prices for domestic films were partially responded by the government in the advancing years.

#### IV. THE TAXES RELATED TO THE CINEMA INDUSTRY

In Turkey, the direct taxes which affected the cinema sector between 1923-1939 were the profit tax and the custom tax. The profit tax is taken from net income and custom tax (custom duty) is a financial obligation taken from the goods passing beyond the custom borders. The custom tax is important for domestic filmmakers because it is related to the raw material importation. While taking low customs from foreign film importers for exposed films, to request high customs from domestic film producers for raw film, laboratory materials and cinematic apparatuses disfavoured the domestic film production in Turkey [25], [39].

With the beginning of the Second World War, the government legislated new tax rules. The Wealth Tax [3], [24], [27] being in force between 1942-1944, was presented as being taken from the big capital and income owners for once. Nonetheless, the organization and application of the tax had intensive negative effects on the whole society but especially on minorities and non-Muslim people. It created many social reactions [3], [27]<sup>8</sup>. Among the taxpayers there were people from cinema sector i.e. producers, owners and managers of movie theatres and film importers. These people were the investors in cinema sector. In addition to its political, social and cultural effects, the Wealth Tax pulled a big amount of capital off the cinema market and weakened the economic capability of the cinema sector. In Turkey, this intervention in the economy of the cinema sector debilitated film production. In those years, the domestic film production was interrupted until the end of the Second World War.

Another sectoral tax, was collected from the cinema tickets. Before 1948 tax regulations about the cinema sector were temporary and unplanned, so they reverted in a short time. The local revenues such as the Entertainment Tax (*lubiyyat vergisi*) and the Hospice Share (*Darülaceze hissesi*) were regulated many times. The Entertainment Tax was taken from the places with the ticket entrances that are “the film exhibitions, sport competitions, horse races, concerts, circus, funfairs, gardens with music; the places entered without tickets that are bars, pavilions, casinos, night clubs, taverns, cabarets, dancing halls, billiard saloons, table football saloons and tote bets” [39]. The Hospice Share was taken over ticket revenue of the entertainment places and transferred into the public assistance institutions.

There were important steps in the cinema sector about tax regulations. As Ozturk argues, in 1930, as a parliamenter of the Republican People’s Party and as a cinema manager, Süreyya İlmen demanded a reduction from the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) for the taxes over cinema tickets [39]. This reduction could create a reduction in ticket prices too. During these years, the total tax taken from tickets was 47% of the total ticket price. İlmen argued that these

ticket prices of theatres and movie theatres caused the spectators have decreased and this tax pressured the movie theatres. Therefore, he recommended a discount of tax ratio from 47% to 10%. This recommendation did not become successful in that time. On the other hand, it was antecedent to the tax reduction application of The Domestic Film Producers’ Association in 1947.

TABLE I  
 THE DOMESTIC FILM PRODUCTION COMPANIES AND FILM PRODUCTION IN  
 TURKEY (1945- 1955)

Years	Domestic Film Production Companies	Domestic Film Production
1945	2	2
1946	5	6
1947	8	12
1948	11	18
1949	9	19
1950	11	22
1951	23	36
1952	32	61
1953	31	41
1954	36	51
1955	44	62

The most important economic demand of film makers during 1930s and 1940s was the application for a tax discount in 1947. The request of Domestic Film Producers’ Association was satisfied by Local Revenue Rule in 1948. The Local Revenue Rule diminished the ratio of entertainment tax. This support of government became the springboard of the cinema in Turkey. After the municipal tax of domestic film exhibitions reduced, projecting domestic films became cheaper than foreign movies. Therefore, the movie theatres began to prefer domestic films and this situation increased the film production. As it can be seen in the Table I below there is a dramatic increase in domestic film production companies after 1948 especially after the 1950s. It can be said that the economic basis of the cinema in Turkey has been constructed after 1948.

#### V. IMPORTED FILMS DURING AND AFTER THE WAR YEARS

There were few producers, directors, film companies and film production in Turkey between 1939-1945. While the biggest war of the 20th century has been going on, Turkish cinema seemed immobile. However, during the war, there was a big amount of film importation to Turkey. The number of imported movies between 1939-1945 is over 5000.<sup>9</sup> 80% of

<sup>8</sup>According to the references, 87% of the Wealth Taxpayers was non-Muslims. The Wealth Tax was applied as if it is “a punishment” for the wealthy non-Muslim people. It’s used to collect the money in the hands of minorities for the usage of the government. The official agents pushed forward their applications to foreclosure, enforcement and even to exile. The Wealth Tax caused many non-Muslim people to migrate from the country.

<sup>9</sup>There is not an official data over the cinema sector in the 1940s. Therefore I have analyzed the film advertisements of the newspaper and the information given in them in order to collect a data about the cinema sector of the 1940s. I collect data from the daily newspapers of the 1940s such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Akşam*, *Tasvir-i Efkar*, *Tan*, *Son Havadis Gazettes*. On the other hand, this

these movies were made in US while the others were made in France, Germany, Austria, England and Egypt. The most important resources for the domestic filmmakers in learning moviemaking were these foreign movies they watched. The imported movies influenced the artistic taste of domestic spectators too and gave shape to the technological, stylistic and aesthetic views of the filmmakers. In the cinemas during 1940s, American and Egyptian films were watched more and they have a structural influence on the domestic cinema.

In those historical periods –as well as today- most of the American movies shown in Turkey were adventure, crime, war and western films (Fig. 7). The genre of drama and melodrama movies were second in the frequency of the exhibition. Portraying realistic characters, settings, life situations and stories, dramatic movies were mostly addressed female spectators. The melodrama movies were chosen because of their emotional impact. On the other hand, these movies narrated the emotional lives, reactions, problems of people from different social classes.

The musical films were in third rank in popularity. The genre of musical films was popular both in American, European and Middle Eastern cinemas during the war years. The invention of the sound film was still a new phenomenon during the 1940s–although it's not common in Turkey- , this is why there was a big interest in the films containing music, song and dance. The actors and actresses of these musical films were singers of operas, operettas, revues, concerts; tenors and sopranos; crowded ballet and dance groups.



Fig. 7 The ad of the movie *Tarzan ve Oğlu (Tarzan Finds a Son!)* directed by Richard Thorpe. (Cumhuriyet Gazette, 3 December 1939)

In Turkey, the Egyptian musicals were as popular as the American counterparts. The origins of Egyptian cinema were traditional Arabic music, music instruments and dance. Egypt has been opened up to Western technological developments, trade investments and cultural improvements from the beginning of the 19th century so, the cinema sector has been advanced rapidly [49], [50]. The Egyptian cinema, was the film production center of the Middle East by bringing the most

successful singers and dancers of Arabic countries together. After 1940s, the Egyptian cinema has raised its box-office revenue using similar styles and themes of Hollywood cinema, and became a rival to the American film companies in Egypt. The Egyptian movies constituted a new film genre with its representation of multicultural Arabic culture. These movies had usually a melodic, rhythmic, entertaining structure, melodramatic themes. These movies were decorated with elements of song and dance.

The socioeconomic similarities between Egypt, the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey made Egyptian movies popular in Turkey too. Egyptian films made in 1930's were shown İstanbul movie theatres through 1940s and gathered a big amount of audience. Till that time, the audience of Turkey did not watch another Muslim- majority cinema and they remembered their recent history viewing these exotic movies which included 'sheeted actresses, fezzed actors and Arabic melodies'.<sup>10</sup> The conventional Turkish audience feeling closer to Arabic culture tended to watch Egyptian movies. The movie theatres showing Egyptian movies were like 'the concert halls, casinos, night clubs' for them.

In the 1943, the one-party government concerned that the Egyptian movies were increased the curiosity toward Arabic culture and language. Therefore, it's forbidden to exhibit those movies in some cities of Southern and Southeastern Anatolia which are near to the border of Syria, Iraq and Lebanon [48]. This partial censorship maintained until 1957. The popularization of Egyptian movies in Southern and Southeastern Anatolia originated from geographical and cultural proximities of these two regions. It's known that if a supply of a product in market decreases while the demand remains unchanged, usually the replicas are produced. Therefore, the prohibition of popular Egyptian movies paved the way for producing domestic movies like Egyptian ones. This censorship accelerated the production of the vernacularized versions of the Egyptian movies. Through this period, the Egyptian movies affected both the music and the cinema of Turkey.

In the 1940's, the modernization paths of the Republic were new. The Kemalist bourgeois class defined Western rooted cultural products as innovative and modern, whereas the Eastern origin cultural products as traditional and reactionary. The bourgeois class which identifies the difference between 'high' and 'low' art with their cultural choices, usually preferred the Western rooted cultural products [1], [36], [41]. This mechanism was also operative for cinema sector. In the 1940s for Republican bourgeois class, foreign movies were more popular than domestic films. The audience in Pera region containing non-Muslim, Levantine and foreign people included in this group too. The native movie makers tried to find ways of *uniting traditional subjects with a modern spectacle apparatus*. i.e. cinema in order to change this conditioning. The film makers of transition period considered

number is an approximate result because there were some missings in the newspaper collections between 1939- 1945.

<sup>10</sup>On the other hand, it's an interesting fact that although cinema in Egypt is taken as a Muslim country's cinema, the cinema in Egypt mainly composed of non-Muslim indigeneous or foreign artists and cinematographers.

that the present domestic films were unpopular because they did not 'represent' us. Moreover, they argue that domestic films could also become popular alongside the European and American movies if they 'became indigenous'. Thus, these filmmakers started to produce films with this understanding. In order to reach a synthesis in the cinema field, they turned towards the usual, common, familiar and routine subjects. Their movies satisfied the audience and became a reference point for many cinematographers following them.



Fig. 8 *Endülü Geceleri* (*Nights in Andalusia*) was a German musical film made bilingually in German and Spanish and it was shown in Istanbul in two languages in two different cinemas at the same time. (Cumhuriyet Gazzette, 18 October 1938)

The liking of transition period films by the audience changed the aspect towards cinema sector. The opinions of film makers about supply and demand equilibrium of the market shaped the contemporary film industry. For example in 1940s the popular movies were musical melodramas. Therefore, the import of musical movies as well as the production of them was increased in the 1940s. The English, Arabic even Spanish musicals were exhibited simultaneously in the movie theatres (Fig. 8).

During this period, the domestic films were mainly exhibited in Taksim cinema in İstanbul. By this way, Taksim cinema which has been showing Egyptian and domestic movies in Pera turned into an alternative spectacular space (Fig. 9). It transformed the profile of Pera in 1940s because in those years, Pera was the place of American and European films [43]. The exhibition of different kinds of movies in Taksim cinema changed the panorama of the cinema market and indicated that non-American or non-European movies could achieve huge box-office success as well. In this period two different kinds of cinema management policies were formed. One of them was showing saloon films, and the other was showing melodrama films. During the Second World War, the 'elite-bourgeois' class theatres showing salon films weakened against the 'populist' approach of the movie theatres projecting melodrama films. This development also shows a change in mentality as well as the production.



Fig. 9 A film (*Karanlık Yollar*, *The Dark Ways*, Faruk Kenç, 1948) advertisement says "in Taksim cinema a great Turkish film which everybody should see... a youth dram, a family tragedy..."

On the other hand, the movie theatres of the Old Peninsula (*Suriçi*) demanded and showed Egyptian movies at most. The audience in *Suriçi* at 1940s was the last generation who viewed *ortaoyunu*, *tuluatshows*, *cabarets*, *cantos*, *public storytellers* in *Direklerarası*<sup>11</sup> and *Şehzadebaşı* (Fig. 10). With the transformation of *Suriçi* entertainment venues into the movie theatres at the beginning of the 20th century, the people has been watching traditional spectacles began to follow movies. Here, the visual habits were significant in the choices of the native spectator. The visual culture is an important component depending on the symbols and the meaning learned by viewing. The basis of visual culture for Turkish cinema was the traditional performance arts growing on this land i.e. juggling, acrobatics, buffoonery, dances, puppetry, public storytelling, *Karagöz*, pantomime, minority theatre, folk drama and improvisation theatres [2], [5] [30], [45]. The traditional performances are figured on improvisation rather than specific texts and updated according to time and place. This made them daily and casual. On the other hand, the improvisation is the political dimension of performances and a defence method against the political hegemony. In Turkey, the theatrical and cinematic activities popularized in the 20th century were the modern followers of this tradition and the cinematographers of the 1940s were the first noticers of this reality.

<sup>11</sup>The district in which many entertainment places are collected in old İstanbul. Special thanks to Z. Özlem Havuzlu about the spatial explanations about *Direklerarası*.





Fig. 10 *Direklerarası* where the entertainment places settled at Istanbul in the beginning of 1900s. (Drawing Salih Erimez, *Tarihten Çizgiler* Mecmuası, [42])

As we understand with the debates so far, after Tanzimat reforms, the most important controversy in artistic and cultural fields was about how the national progress should take place. One solution to this controversy is to imitate Western countries for progression [13], [14], [15], [17], [18]. The other solution is to be guided by Western civilization in the historical orientation of Turkish culture. In the 1940s, the average audience was interested in cantos, operettas rather than the grand operas; they went to tuuat theatres more than Western theatres; they usually listened allaturca and folk music (*Türkü*) instead of the classical Western music. Becoming engaged in operettas rather than grand operas, tuuat theatres rather than Western theatres, allaturca music rather than classical music, the audience necessitated new searches in music, theatre and cinema. The intellectuals and artists criticized the method of imitating products of Western culture, when they realized the fact that the community pays attention to living cultural works carrying traces from their lives. In fact, this is the criticism of the transition period cinematographers about the former understanding about cinema. Unlike from past, the artists of the 1940s advocated *indigenous and natural* works of art instead of *Westernized and imitating modern* ones. Even if it is nasty, an original work of art is always better than a copy work.

In the 1940s, the most important achievement of domestic cinematographers was to be able to make movies realizing these principles [22], [23], [24]. Movie theatres were the schools of moviemaking for them. Not having an institution, a tradition, or an infrastructure of film making, the movie theatres were vital for young cinephiles during economically troubled years of the Second World war. They worked with many amateur people from small stages, concert halls and non-theatrical jobs. They worked in unsophisticated settings and costumes. Therefore, during the first half of the 20th century, one of the obstacles for domestic cinema can be defined as the balance problem in an underdeveloped new sector. The film makers of the 1940s saw cinema as an art of communicating masses. They have a kind of “faith” toward

the cinema, so they tried to solve the obstacles of the cinema market. They care for the desires of the audience and take the art of filmmaking professionally. So, they paid attention to both the content and the aesthetics. At the end, even though they have limited technology and limited “political” freedom, they managed to compose a beginning toward a cinematic language [28].

Because of all factors mentioned above, the moviemakers of the 1940s can be seen as an avantgarde generation, interested in cinema as a newly growing art and began to work for this art without having commercial concerns. The economical base of domestic cinema in Turkey has risen on these conditions. Therefore, the romanticist and poetic Turkish cinema of 1940s should be identified not as a *transition* period but as *the period of cinematographic consciousness*. These first steps started a new path for the next generations of the cinematographers after the 1950s. They maintained their effects until the end of the 20th century over the cinema in Turkey.

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