

Censoring the Nation: Censorship of Turkish Cinema

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes Turkish film censorship between 1936 and the early 1970s. The period includes the Second World War, Turkey's transition to multiparty system, industrialization, rural to urban migration, and two military interventions: one in 1960, the second one in 1971. The 1950s and 1970s, at the same time, coincided with the Golden Age of Turkish cinema leading to an enormous production and consumption. During the period under examination, Turkish cinema was a significant area to understand the formation of Turkish nationhood in relation to market demands and state interventions in the form of censorship. Relying on censorship reports prepared by the Central Film Control Committee, this paper reveals that censorship was a powerful tool of the state to design the boundaries of Turkishness through a homogeneous and standard imagining of the Turkish national identity as opposed to heterogeneity which made different national imaginings possible. The paper also argues that these reports were never independent, in fact were the products of the dominant ideological codes of the Turkish political culture. In this regard, although the Committee was a domestic institution, it never worked independent from foreign policy. Thus, the paper also analyzes how the implications of the Commission's criteria changed over time under the influence of gradually increasing aggressiveness and militarism in the country as a response to foreign policy concerns.

Introduction:

This paper analyzes Turkish film censorship between 1936 and the early 1970s. The period includes the Second World War, Turkey's transition to multiparty system, industrialization, rural to urban migration, and two military interventions: one in 1960, the second one in 1971. The 1950s and 1970s, at the same time, coincided with the Golden Age of Turkish cinema leading to an enormous production and consumption. During the period under examination, Turkish cinema was a significant area to understand the formation of Turkish nationhood in relation to market demands and state interventions in the form of censorship. Relying on censorship reports prepared by the Central Film Control Committee, this paper reveals that censorship was a powerful tool of the state to design the boundaries of Turkishness through a homogeneous and standard imagining of the Turkish national identity as opposed to heterogeneity which made different national imaginings possible. The paper also argues that these reports were never independent, in fact were the products of the dominant ideological codes of the Turkish political culture. In this regard, although the Committee was a domestic institution, it never worked independent from foreign policy. Thus, the paper also analyzes how the implications of the Commission's criteria changed over time under the influence of gradually increasing aggressiveness and militarism in the country as a response to foreign policy concerns.

In my analysis, I have divided the decisions according to historical periods based on general trends that influenced dominant ideological codes in Turkish politics. The first period is between 1936-1950, which remarks the single party period in which political centralization was the case. The second period is 1950s that is defined by transition to the multiparty period with the rise of the DP. This is also a period of liberalization and Americanization. This period ends with the May 27, 1960 military coup that was supported by an alliance of big industrialists, intelligentsia and university students. The 1960-1965 then becomes the fourth period which includes films with social realist tendencies in accordance with ‘controlled’ political liberalization that would ‘save’ the society from opting for a DP-like party again. The post-1965 period is the period that continued the DP tradition with the rise of rightist movements in addition to opposing voices in the form of student and workers movements. The period ended with the severe suppression of the leftists in favor of the rightist groups.

The Central Film Commission:

In 1932 with increasing centralization of the government, state-controlled film commissions were established to control not only the display of films but also their production and distribution. Previously, it was the city governors who were authorized to censor films. The new commissions, one in İstanbul and the other in Ankara, were supervising both domestic films and the imported ones. The one in Ankara was the Central Commission and is comprised of one public official from the ministry of the Interior (head), one from the police, one from the General Staff of the Army, one from the Ministry of Tourism, and one from the Ministry of Education.

The Commission was looking for the following criteria for the production and exhibition of films: a film should avoid:

1. political propaganda related to a state;
2. degrading an ethnic community or race;
3. hurting the sentiments of fellow states and nations;
4. propagating religion;
5. propagating political, economic, and social ideologies that contradicted the national regime;
6. contradicting public decency, morality, and national sentiments;
7. reducing the dignity and honor of the military and propagating against the military;
8. being harmful to the order and security of the country;
9. provoking crime;

10. including scenes that may be used to propagate against Turkey.¹

Based on these criteria, the commissions might accept or reject a film. In some cases, the commission might accept a Turkish film but ban its distribution abroad, believing that it had problems with quality or could give a bad image of Turkey and could even request some revisions in how the film should end or what characters should say. For example, the film *Türk Mucizesi (Turkish Miracle)*² was said to be devoid of narrative. In this context, the consumers of the films were interpreted as passive and vulnerable, so they could be influenced by what they saw in films. In contrast, the Commission members seemed to perceive themselves as the guardians or the fathers of the nation.

The 1936-1950 Decisions:

An analysis of the Central Commission's available decisions³ from 1936-1950 shows that with all these interventions, the political elite was, in fact, drawing the boundaries of ideal Turkishness and showing proper manners to the 'nation' as its guardians. In this context, first, the Commission partially or completely rejected films denigrating other nations or hurting their emotions. For example, in 1936, a domestic film, *Türk Mucizesi (Turkish Miracle)*, was rejected by the Commission on the basis that the Greeks had been denigrated with that scene in which the Turks threw the Greek flag. The Commission commented that this action was not something that the Turkish nation would do, so the scene harmed the nobility of the Turkish nation as well.⁴ In another case from 1937, the Commission rejected an American film, *Zehirli Sevda (Poisonous Love)*, since it represented the Germans as preferring love over fatherland.⁵ The Commission found this insulting for the Germans, and it was probably afraid of the fact that the Turkish citizens watching these kinds of films could turn into these German characters. This was not something desirable in a period of economic crisis and increasing aggressiveness in

¹ Nezih Erdoğan article, Dilek Kaya-Mutlu article

² (1936-2 filmde nazım bir fikir yoktur; rejime hücum edilecek yerde şahıslara hücum edilmiştir. Güya şahısla eyi olursa rejim de iyi olacaktır, canakkale muharebesine ait kısımlar telkinidir)

³ These decisions are held in hardcopy format by the Ministry of Culture, Directorate General of Copyrights and Cinema in Ankara. They are not accessible to the general public. Researchers who want to browse this material should apply to the Directorate in writing. I thank very much to Prof. Nezih Erdoğan in helping me to get copies of these decisions.

⁴ (1936-2, Türk Mucizesi 23.11.1936, Yunan bayrağı atma ve tahkir etme safhası Türklüğün necabeti le kabili telif değildir.)

⁵ German (1937-8 ama 9.6.1939 kararlaştırılmış, Zehirli Sevda, iki Almanın aşkı vatana tercih ettiklerini isbata çalışmaktadır. Filin, Alman milletini tehdit eder mahiyeti olduğu kanaatindeyim) 1939-4 18.2.1939 Keşif Alay ..film esasta Hindistan'da İngiliz millet lehine bir propaganda mahiyetini haiz olmasına rağmen nehirde cereyan eden atliam sahnesiyle mevkii müstahkemini tekrar zaptında görülen kısım ve İngiliz bayrakları çıkarıldıktan sonra burda tekrar görülmek suretiyle..) They approved the film Keşif Alayı (The Reconnaissance Regiment) on the condition that the British flag appears in scenes with atrocities was removed. Although it was an Indian pro-British propaganda film, the Commission did not probably want the consumers associate the flag with the deaths.

international politics. The rejection also shows what was considered appropriate for Turkish citizens. In fact, the representation of wars and military occupied the minds of commission members very much. The Commission censored anti-war films showing painful influences of wars such as atrocities or mentally ill soldiers. For example, some scenes of *Thunder Afloat*, showing one soldier strangling another one was eliminated.⁶ On the other hand, the Commission decided to consult with ministries about *Mrs. Miniver* in 1943. This was an anti-Nazi film making the propaganda of the US' entry to the war. The Commission thought that the film was denigrating "friendly nations," but it was informative since it could teach people what to do during air attacks.⁷ In another case, the commission asked for the removal of scenes in which Bismarck spoke about the German strength in *Ölüme Karşı Savaş (Fight Against Death)*.⁸ *The Lion had Wings* was accepted only if the scenes with Hitler's speeches were eliminated.⁹

Through the end of the war when German defeat became certain, the Commission did not like films denigrating even the German leader because this American film *The Victory of Tarzan* film had some scenes in which a monkey was imitating the deceased leader of the German nation."¹⁰ The Russian film, *the Last Days of a Dictator*, was also rejected on the ground that it denigrated Hitler. This was unacceptable for the Commission, which found insulting a person even if he was the most-hated enemy inappropriate. Anti-communism was the other theme in censorship decisions. In 1945, the Commission intervened a Russian film

⁶ (1941, Thunder Afloat, 31.3.1941, Filmin sonlarına doğru Amerikalı bahriyelinin denizaltı gemisi kumandanını kurtarmasını müteakib başını koltuğu altına alara boğazını sıktığını gösteren kısmın kesildikten sonra memleketimizde gösterilmesinde bir mahzur bulunmadığına müttefian karar verildi),ama ogrenisin insanlar hava bombardimanını

⁷ (1943-10, karar no 29, 18. 2.teşrin, 1943,mis miniver aslında dost devlet ve milletin hislerini rencide edici sahneleri var ama "diğer taraftan mezkur film heyeti umumiyesi itibarile hava bombardmanlarına ve bunlardan korunmağa müteallik iki veçheli bir mahiyet arzetmekte ve aynı zamanda her bakımdan dikkati çekecek şekilde sahneleri ihitva etmekte olduğundan yurdumuzda gösterilmesinde halkı tenvir ve kitleyi ruhan ve maddeten bu gib ivukuu her zaman ve her suretle mümkün hadiselerle karşı hazırlamak maksadını komisyonumuz göz önünde bulundurarak fayda mülhaza eylediğine ve ancak bu tarzı hareekt komisyonumuzca şimdide kadar benimsemiş olan halkı heyeana verecek mevzuları havi filmlerin gösterilmemesi şeklindeki prensip kararından ayrılmayı ifade etmekte olacağından bu hususun yüksek makamdan istizanına ve telakki olunacak emir ve direktife göre gelecekte hareket hattının tesbit ve taynine ittifakla karar verildi.)

⁸ Germany (1940-4, Ölüme karşı Savaş 12.10.1940 Filmin Rayştag'da prens Bismark'ın Almanyanın kuvvet ve gururunu tebarüz ettiren kısmı politik propaganda mahiyetini haiz bulundurduğundan, çıkarıldıktan sonra memleketimizde gösterilemsinde bir mahzur bulunmadığına müttefikan karar verildi),

⁹ especially Hitler not praise him (1940-6), The Lion had Wings 16.11.1940Filimde Hitlerin söz söylerken anmış...ve bir yerinde alman zabitanın maiyyetinde emirler vermesine ait sahneni de kesilmesi şartiyle memleketimizde gösterilmeinde bir mahzur bulunmadığına müttefikan karar verildi. 1945-22)) but

¹⁰ (1944-19, karar no 74Tarzanın Zaferi adlı amerikan filmi, 8.11.1944, Çİta adlı maymunberlindeki alman generalle rasyo vasıtasıyla konuşmaya başlamasında itibaren filmin sonuna kadar olan kısmın ki (bu ısında Alman devlet resisinin maymuna benzetilmesi gibi bir sahne ve konuşma mevcuttur) tamamen kesilmesi. Filmde görülen Naziler vahşi bri hayvandır ibaresnin kezalik çıkarılması; 1945-22 24 Temmuz1945 136 sayılı karar, Diktatörün son günleri aslı Rus filminin -film alman fuhleri hitleri tezyif maksadını gütmekte ..en ufak bir sanat değeri bile taşımamaktaur.hayata gözleini yummuş bulunan herkes hakkında, bu kimsse veev can düşmanımız bile olsa susmak veya hiç değilse tezyife ve tahkire yeltenmemek brir Türk civanertlik geleneği olduğunagöre filmin bu açık ve tezyif amacı milli dugularımıza aykırı düşmektedir).

and wanted the film distributors to eliminate the song, “To the Red Country where the Sun Rises.” In addition to the song, they asked for the removal of hammer and sickle symbols, and especially the wedding scene in which “tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, drivers” stated as the guests.¹¹ Public officers’ portrayal was another issue. After examining the screenplay of *Yaprak Dökümü* (*Falling Leaves*), the commission asked the scriptwriter to remove the sentence: “who knows when this somebody be in a good mood to approve that public officer will be promoted.” According to the Commission, this could give the impression that in Turkey, public officers are promoted arbitrarily.¹²

The Commission intervened with the kind of words used in dialogues, especially of dubbed films. In addition to Western films, the Commission encountered many Egyptian films at that point. No matter what the original language was, it restricted the use of words such as merci,¹³ mister,¹⁴ efendim,¹⁵ hanım, bey,¹⁶ and beyefendi¹⁷ in the dubbed versions. Besides, some words were replaced with their ‘pure’ Turkish counterparts: ‘vazife’ with ‘görev’¹⁸ and ‘nahiye’ with ‘bucak.’¹⁹ In a dubbed Egyptian film, even the title, *Elyetim* was changed probably due to its Arabic connotation.²⁰ Besides, scenes, including nudity and sex, were found problematic as well. The Commission objected close shots of dancing women, scenes with long kissing and naked legs. Long belly-dancing scenes were intervened as well, and that harmed mostly Turkish and Egyptian films.²¹

Thus, the decisions of the censorship committee were clear representations of the interplay between the official discourse and international relations. Besides, not only the western and Egyptian supplies but also the demands of the censorship committee shaped what should be represented to the audience. As for domestic production, censorship was a significant force that influenced the content of films.

¹¹ karar no 1945 1944-21 kanyak garbunak-deniz tehlikesi, 31.5.1944; “”-Başta ve ortada güneş doğarken söylenen güneşin doğduğu kıvıllı yere (ülkeye) şarkısında bu tabirlerin çıkarılması 2-ayın bulunduđı kısmın buğday başakları içine kadar girmiş bulunan ve kamerin bir orak intibasını veren sahnesin kesilmesi 3-Denizmelikesi ile İvanın evlenmesine müteallik kısmında mevcut düğüne davetliler meyânında terziler, kunduracılar, demirciler, arabacılar vs. sözlerinin çıkarılması

¹² yaprak dökümü senaryosu incelendi “bilmem kmin keyfi yerine gelecek” cümlesindekn memurların terfiinin amirlerinin keyfine tabi olduđu neticesi çıkarılacağından ...senaryodan ıkarılmak ve film haline geldikten sora tekrar görölmek şartı ile filme alınmasına oy birliđi ile kara verildi.¹²

¹³ 1944-13 Londra Blackout mourer-Londra gece baskını karar n: 67, 4.10.1944)

¹⁴ (1944-10 Saat el tehfiz idam saati, karar no 63, 18.9.1944

¹⁵ (1945-31, Düşman Yumruđu altında paris, 14.02.1945, kara rno 99)

¹⁶ (1945-21, karar no 134, Yayla Kartalı -yerli, şarkılar incelemişler., 3.7.1945)

¹⁷ (1944-10 Saat el tehfiz idam daati, karar no 63, 18.9.1944

¹⁸ 1946-13 al muttahima o kadın mısır filmi 13.3.1946, karar no 191)

¹⁹ (1946-17 karar no 282, lekeli kadın senaryosu incelendi, 28.11.1946

²⁰ (1948-01, mısır filmi, öksüz kız, karar no 562, 13.5.1948,

²¹ 1948-15, 1.12.1948 kalbim senin fitaşın getirdiđi yabancı, çıplak olarak yapılan raks sahnesi, arar no 652)

The 1950s:

The Commission was cautious about not to offend Turkey's allies. For instance, the scenarios of *Çalık Binbaşı İstiklal Savaşı'nda* (*Major Çalık in the War of Independence*)²² and *Çingene Kızı Peruze* (*Peruze, the Gypsy Girl*) were not approved because they might be disturbing 'friendly nations.' About the latter, the scenarist is asked to add a scene in which the gypsy king who killed two persons is punished by Greek authorities. By doing this, the Committee probably aimed to show that there is rule of law in Greece.²³ Besides, in *Yavuz Sultan Selim ve Yeniçeri Hasan* (*Selim the Resolute and the Janissary Hasan*), the scene in which Shah İsmail falls of the ground when fighting with Hasan and then rescued by two Iranian ladies, is also eliminated.²⁴ This scene might accidentally lead to the idea that Turkish government is belittling Iran. The committee also decided that the filmmakers should revise the film named *Vatan Hainleri* (*Enemies of State*) due to its association with the Russian Embassy with intelligence activities. The report states that the film may not be in line with diplomatic rules, and it could actually agitate the Soviet Union, a state that Turkey was not currently in war.²⁵ These decisions could explain why the portrayals of external enemies are not always extremely negative.

Furthermore, scenes with religious references were asked to be deleted. The Committee wanted the removal of scenes including call to prayer sounds,²⁶ where characters say 'Allahuekber,'²⁷ with performances of Muslim prayers²⁸ and imams with turban.²⁹ These decisions reveal that the DP stood aloof from the thorough representation of religion, although the populist policies made it seem much more tolerant towards the expression of religious identities. This fits into the Republican understanding of secularism. Besides, the Committee was always in favor of not displaying ethnic and religious differences. Several scenarios about the Battle of Karbala between Sunnis and the Shias were rejected because of their potential of inciting religious strife within the country.³⁰ In the film named *On Bir Nisan* (*April 11th*), the

²² 1954-1: Çalık Binbaşı İstiklal Savaşı'nda, Decision No: 98, 26.04.1954:

²³ 1954-002: Çingene Kızı Peruze, Decision No:148, 28.6.1954

²⁴ 1952-35, 9.12.1952, Decision no:201

²⁵ 1956: 14, 14.3.1956, decision no: 26

²⁶ For example: 1950-27: çete.. filmed gecen ezanın giriş çıkarılıyor, allahın emri peygamberin kavli çıkıyor; 1952-33: efelerim efesin yoruk Osman efe , 3.10.1952, karar no: 150, ezan sesi çıkartılıyor; 1955-05,Alevden omlek, minarede ezan okuma sahneis tamamen kaldırılınsın21.6.1955, karar no 52

²⁷ For example: 1953-39: İstanbulda ramazan, 16 ekim 1953, karar no200. Tekbir sesleri çıkartılıyor.

²⁸ For example: 1952-34: bos besik, karar no:157. 21.10.1952oba beyi osmanın cocugunue isim koyarken kulagina ezan okunuyor. Ezanın baslangıcı olaak sadece, surur namazı kılınan sahneler çıkarılacak; , , 1957-14, islamda putperestlik olmadığina gore gelin teli baglama ve ezan okuma sahnesi çıkıyot aglayan gelin

²⁹ 1957-01 Kanlı Pınar imamın sarıklı gozuktugu sahnelerin çıkarılması

³⁰ 1952-30: Kerbela Vak'ası, senarist ziya sakir, memletimizde su an mezhep catismaları olduğundan uygun degil senaryo reddediliyor, 26.2.1952; Karar no 25; ,

word ‘Armenian’ was replaced by ‘enemy,’ and the names of characters were all changed into foreign names. The report explains the reason for this decision by stating that they did not the film to cause societal friction.³¹ The Committee is careful even about songs in films. According to a report, in *Kelepçe (Handcuff)*, the word ‘Kurd’ is omitted in the lyrics of the folk song *Kürdün Gelini (The Bride of the Kurd)*.³² These films present a relatively homogeneous society despite the fact that the committee was, of course, aware of differences. Another case is the film *Vatan İçin (For Homeland)*, in which the portrayal of a Turkish policeman as being against the War of Independence is found problematic.³³ This could be an attempt to block possible anti-militarist perceptions.

In parallel to the rising interest in Ottoman history, during the period, various films about the Ottoman Empire were shot. This, however, does not mean the presence of a complete internalization of Ottoman history by the government. In fact, the official discourse of the 1950s did not still diverge that much from the Turkish History Thesis of the early Republican era. This means that there was still a distance from the Ottoman past despite the increasing availability of both academic and non-academic sources about it. What drew the Censorship Committee’s attention was the films about the Ottoman bandits (*efe*) of the 19th century. These films were intervened and either the scenarist or the director was asked to eliminate certain scenes that criticize the Ottoman Empire. For instance, some sentences in the scenario of *Çakırcalı* were asked to be erased. These sentences were: “Why don’t you expect the Ottoman’s help again? Why don’t your paid servants, Circassians and Albanians come and save you?”, “God damn you, the Ottoman,” “Don’t you know that I am the enemy of Circassians and Albanians?,” “Ottomans, the bitch.”³⁴ With the same mentality, the sentence “Do not trust Ottomans” is eliminated in *Dokuz Dağın Efesi Çakıcı Geliyor (Çakıcı, The Efe of Nine Mountains, is Coming)*.³⁵ This approach in favor of eliminating negative sentences about the Ottomans does not simply mean that the government wants to present a good image of Ottomans because it is now in full peace with its past. In fact, this could be a tactic to present the government’s version of the Ottomans, which is the bringer of peace and civilization, as it

1957-12 kerbela şehidi imam huseyin,,s enaryoyu diyanete tetkik ettirdikten sonra, 31.07.1957, karar no:116; 1958-009 Kerbela.. memleketimizde yasayan sunni ve siiler arasında dusmanlik dogmasına sebep olabilir, cekilmesin, 29.12.1958, karar no:247.

³¹1954-03: bilumum ermeni kelimesinin kaldırılıp dğşman kelimesinin getirilmesi, isimlerin ona göre düzeltilmesi, ve halkı kin ve nefrete sevk etmemek., karar no 177, 16.8.1954, OnBir Nisan

³² 1958, 22: 2.10.1958, decision no: 67, Kelepçe

³³ 1951-21: polisin kuvayi milliyecilere cephe alışı, 30.11.1951, Decision No: 139, Vatan İçin;

³⁴ Çakırcalı, Decision no 29, 91122-232, 27.04.1950 “Haydi yine Osmanlı’dan medet umsana; paralı uşakların, Çerkezler, Arnavutlar neden gelip seni kurtarmıyor.,” “Hayd kara dinini, senin gibi Osmanlıya,” “Çerkezlere, Arnavutlara düşman olduğumu bilmiyor musun,” “kahpe Osmanlılar.” 1950: 28

³⁵ “Osmanlı’ya güven olmaz” Decision No: 95, 26.11.1958, 1958-08

will be explained in the following section. Therefore, what the government did could be interpreted as a Turkifying version of the Ottoman past instead of completely ignoring it. This is domesticating and so controlling the empire. Here, one other point to note is that the Committee probably did not want to offend communities who had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire previously, no matter if they founded their own state or not, such as Circassians and Albanians. This approach, again, fits into the myth of the national mission, which puts forth that Turks have a national mission, and that mission is to bring civilization and peace to the world.

The 1960-1964 decisions:

Although not entirely about ‘social realist’ films or films referring to the past, a survey of available reports shows that the portrayal of state officers and army members was quite significant for the military/bureaucratic elite. Regardless of the genres of films, the Censorship Commission criticized representations of the police, teachers, doctors, journalists, and air force pilots. Considering the Jacobinist urban alliance supporting the coup, this kind of intervention was not unusual. The military/bureaucratic elite was believing in transforming the society above, and besides, the Committee might have wanted to change the anti-intellectual discourse dominated the DP era. In this context, the Committee requests the makers of *Bir Gecelik Gelin* (*One Night Bride*) to delete the scenes with two journalists blackmailing someone and asking for a bribe. For the Committee, these scenes are humiliating journalists.³⁶ Another film, *Yuva* (*Nest*), is not approved due to its narration of a female teacher who has to quit her job after some people lynched her because they thought that she was immoral. The Committee’s solution is to add another scene showing the intervention of the state in favor of the teacher.³⁷ Similarly, the following sentence is deleted in the film *Genç Kızlar* (*Young Girls*): “aging artists are made into teachers.”³⁸ Obviously, being an artist is not always appreciated by the conservative public, so the Committee protects teachers. In another film, a scene in which a doctor behaves in such a way that is not serious enough for a medical professional is asked to be deleted.³⁹ Similarly, for *Çapraz Delikanlı* (*The Womanizer*), the Committee wants filmmakers to remove a scene in which the fake police receive a bribe and run away.⁴⁰ Even if the police were fake, the scenes were not acceptable because they depicted the police in a negative way. In the same vein, the

³⁶ Decision No: 25; 13.3.1963; Dosya no: 91122/2025

³⁷ Decision no:37; 11.4.1963; Dosya no: 91122/1334

³⁸ Decision No: 6, 21.1.1964; Dosya no:91122/2402 “eskiyen artistleri öğretmen yaparlar”

³⁹ Film: Neşemizi Bulalım; Decision No: 117; 17.10.1963;; Dosya no: 91122/2448

⁴⁰ Film: Çapraz Delikanlı; Decision No: 161; 20.12.1963; Dosya no: 01122/2647

Committee members stated that if a murder or other criminal things happen, there must be a scene with the police coming to the crime scene and taking the problem in hand.⁴¹ This particular point, as in the cases of *Karanlıkta Uyananlar (Those Awakening in the Dark)* and *Suçlular Aramızda (The Criminals are Among Us)*, might be related to the military/bureaucratic elite's effort to impose that there is the rule of law in the country and nothing is arbitrary. This point also enhances the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the people. Furthermore, any references that could be attributed to negative meanings about the military are deleted. A remarkable example is *Şafak Bekçileri (Watchmen of the Dawn)* about air force pilots. The Committee wants the director to delete the scene in which the parents of one of the pilots say, "we could not even eat in peace for the last two years that you have gone to military school." Even the final scene of the film is changed at the request of the Committee. In the first copy, the leading character dies and becomes a martyr in his assignment of making a reconnaissance flight to discover unusual activities at the borderlands. In the copy distributed to cinema halls, however, he has an accident and comes back alive.⁴² What the Committee wanted to do with all these was to protect the image of an educated class while at the same time imposing the idea that the army had been a promising career and pilots were heroes.

Social realists had the Jacobinist mentality of transforming the society from above and creating ideal Turkish national out of 'common man' that would not support the values Menderes represented. Therefore, first, the honor of public officers was restored with various censorship decisions intervening in their cinematic representations. Most significantly, films which were about the impacts of social and economic developments and criticizing the DP policies. According to these films, educated young males, no matter what their social backgrounds are, should lead the society, and in fact, education is the only path of upward social mobility. The tricky part, however, is that this Jacobin vision required students not to act independently of the military/bureaucratic elites. Therefore, what students as the inheritors should do was not to lead the country by omitting the wishes of the previous generation, but to 'follow' the military/bureaucratic elite in leading the society which needed to get enlightened.

It should also be noted that the early Republican official discourse and the Censorship Commission's decisions defined the ideal Turkish citizen as the member of a homogeneous nation by complying with the myth of national and ethnic homogeneity. However, both the Commission and filmmakers of the 1960-1965 period seem to be aware of heterogeneity in terms of class and ethnicity but choose the strategy of reducing it to the level of hometown.

⁴¹ Film: Can Pazarı, Decision No: 68; 7.8.1963; Dosya no: 91122/2515

⁴² Decision no: 81; 3.9.1963; Dosya no: 91122/2596 (?)

This means birthplaces of characters were taken as the defining elements of their heterogeneity with the omission of ethnic or class differences. This was the strategy chosen by the military-bureaucratic elite to form a re-attachment with the lower classes of rural origin. Consequently, films either took place somewhere in the periphery or included characters originated from different parts of Anatolia.

Nevertheless, many films of the social realists were censored including *Bitmeyen Yol* (*The Unending Road*, dir. Duygu Sağıroğlu, 1965) and *Hudutların Kanunu* (*The Law of Borders*, dir. Lütü Akad, 1966). Besides, some other social realist films such as *Suçlular Aramızda* (*Criminals are Among Us*, dir. Metin Erksan, 1964), *Karanlıkta Uyananlar* (*Those Awakening in the Dark*, dir. Ertem Göreç, 1964) and *Haremde Dört Kadın* (*Four Women in Harem*, dir. Halit Refiğ, 1965) had already been commercial failures unsuccessful in attracting masses' attention.⁴³ Here, it could be argued that these filmmakers' minds, as the reflections of the military/bureaucratic elites' mentality, did not match with the tastes of the masses and the government's expectations. Therefore, being afraid of censorship and indeed facing it, the filmmakers had to adapt to the new parameters of the political atmosphere. In addition, to make money, they had to produce films that would be absolutely watched by the audience.⁴⁴ The end result was the emergence of conceptual and theoretical discussions about what and how the Turkish cinema should depict for grasping the hearts and minds of the common men and avoiding censorship at the same time. These pre-1965 attempts still included a top to bottom approach at discovering the 'common men' who determined the fate of the country in the elections.

Post-1965: The Myth of Homogeneity Succeeded with Censorship:

The primary goal of the censorship committee during the period of social turmoil was to protect societal order. Here, regardless of which genre of films they talk about, the censorship decrees are helpful to have an encompassing understanding of the reproduction of political myths. Since the myth of the hero in the minds of the political elites also adopted the feature of loyalty, disloyal and rebellious characters in films were always expected to be punished by the filmmakers. Consequently, the frequency of decrees asking the filmmakers to insert scenes in which the police came and captured the outlaws increased. For example, for two fantasy/adventure films; *Kilink İstanbul'da* (*Killing in Istanbul*) and *Kilink Uçan Adama Karşı* (*Killing against the Flying Man*), the Commission wanted Kilink, an anti-hero, and criminal, to

⁴³ Refiğ, p. 126.

⁴⁴ Refiğ, p. 127.

appreciate the jobs of security forces in catching himself.⁴⁵ In the same vein, the Commission did not allow the display of another film *Firtına Adam (Storm Man)*, because the film had no scenes showing the police catching the criminals.⁴⁶ Here the commission might have wanted to convey the message that criminals are always get punished, and they take their lessons. This message might have worked well in this period of increasing social movements. In this regard, although it is hard to follow nationalist mythmaking here directly, it should be stated that these decrees could be contributing to the loyal hero myth, which was based upon conforming with the rules of the state and elderly.

As it always did, the Commission also gave importance to the images of the police, gendarmerie, and state officers in general. In order to give the message that the Turkish state hence its representatives are always powerful, anything that would show the state officers weak or disorderly were eliminated. For example, the scenes where Turkish military officers drink with some Turkish girls,⁴⁷ go into a hotel room with a girl,⁴⁸ putting on untidy clothes, having bad haircuts⁴⁹ were all erased. The film *Kanunsuz Dağlar (Lawless Mountains)* was allowed to be shown only if the teacher does not say that she will give birth to an illegitimate child of a bandit.⁵⁰ The scenes involving the cruelty of the military or the police were erased, too. For example, the police beating, torturing, and executing⁵¹ some criminals by firing squad some criminals by firing squad some criminals by firing squad⁵² were all asked to be deleted by the commission. The scenes criticizing the police or gendarmerie⁵³ or belittling them⁵⁴ or showing them fell off the ground while following a criminal⁵⁵ were found harmful to the honor and dignity of the military and the police. Here, negative depictions of state officers could also destroy the image of strong state. Therefore, with these decisions, the commission contributed to the reproduction of the myth of strong state.

The Commission always imagined the Turkish nation as a homogeneous entity, confirming the myth of the homogeneous nation. In this period between 1965 and 1971, the already existing desire to emphasize homogeneity united with deep anxiety of maintaining social integrity. In this regard, the commission was cautious about the depiction of social

⁴⁵ Decree No: 158, File NO: 91122/3931, 27.9.1967 1967/0887

⁴⁶ Decree No: 971/49, File No: 91122/4977, 25.2.1971, 1971 1282

⁴⁷ Bize türk Derler, Decree No: 18; File No: 91122/2741; 1966-613, 17.2.1966

⁴⁸ 1966-663 Uc Korkusuz Arkadas, Decree no: 68; File No: 91122/3421; date: 10.5.1966

⁴⁹ 1966-693; Damgalı Adam, Decree No: 99; File No: 91122/3472; date: 8.7.1966

⁵⁰ Kanunsuz Daglar, 10.11.1966, Decree No: 206; File No: 91122/3543; 1966-0785

⁵¹ 1968, 946; Kartal Efe, Decree No: 82, File No: 9122/2925, Date: 26.4.1968

⁵² 1970-1146; Yuz yılların Mehmetçiği, Decree N: 57; File No: 91122/4662; 10.3.1970

⁵³ Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe, 11.04.1969; Decree no: 72, File no: 91122/4394. 1969-1038

⁵⁴ Guney Olum Saciyor, 10.2.1970; Decree No: 37; File No: 91122/4710; 1970-1137

⁵⁵ Kızgın Topraklar, 1971-1306; Decree no: 971/93; File No: 91122/4877; 15.4.1971.

classes. In order not to motivate class-based strife, some scenes depicting social class differences and in which characters rebel against the existing order were found harmful to the homogeneity and integrity and therefore eliminated. For example, the scene with a crying coal mine worker after his leg had been broken was erased.⁵⁶ In addition, the film *Fakir Çocuklar (Poor Children)* was accepted on the ground that the sentence “Some people pay 25,000 liras for a wedding dress while some others need 25 piasters” should be removed because it had the potential of causing a struggle between social classes.⁵⁷ The scenes showing poor peasants walking in mud⁵⁸ in “the worst and the most miserable places of the city” are all rejected.⁵⁹ An interesting example is *Keloğlan (The Bald Guy)*, from which the commission asked the elimination of scenes in which the folk hero Keloğlan says that the Sultan did not know what onion and traditional tarhana soup were.⁶⁰ Here, it is hard to declare anything about how the commission perceived the Ottoman past. What should be emphasized is that the Commission did not want to provoke the people against each other by showing differences.

For the sake of homogeneity, Kurdish names in films were all asked to be changed into Turkish names as the commission did before. The difference this time was the frequency of the decrees. In fact, given the increase in the number of films, that frequency could be normal, and so, there might be more of continuity rather than a change in the commission’s approach. For example, for Kerimo, the commission suggests Kerim, which sounded more like Turkish.⁶¹ The examples include other names such as Keje, Apo, Oski, Selo⁶², and Hamido⁶³, which were all asked to be changed. Songs in Kurdish were eliminated, too.⁶⁴ There are some decrees about the representation of non-Muslims of Turkey. The film *Allahaismarladık Istanbul (Goodbye Istanbul)*, which was about the War of Independence, was approved by the commission on the condition that either a voiceover or a text should be added to the opening scene stating that this film is a story of the past and today Turks with Greek roots live the honor of being Turks.⁶⁵ This decree, on the one hand, emphasizes homogeneity and, on the other hand, reveals the commission’s caution of eliminating any potential ethnic strife between the Greeks and the Turks. This message is quite understandable given the fact that the Cyprus issue was about to

⁵⁶ Canım Benim, Decree No: 69, File No: 91122/2764, 4.6.1965, 1965-430

⁵⁷ Fakir Çocuklar, 1.11.1966; Decree no: 199; File No: 91122/3691; 1966-0780

⁵⁸ 1968-987; Renk Duvarları, Decree no: 198, File No: 91128/1/5-19; 23.10.1968

⁵⁹ 1966-596, Bitmeyen Yol, Decree no: 1; File no: 91122/3156; 11.1.1966

⁶⁰ 1971-1357. Keloğlan, Decree no: 971/165, File No: 91122/5154; Date: 14.7.1971

⁶¹ 1966-760 Anası Yigit Dogurmus, 29.9.1966, Decree no: 166, File NO: 91122/34362; 211 91122/3462-degistirince kabul oluyor film.

⁶² Seyyit Han-Topragin Gelini, Decree no: 108; 5.6.1968; file no: 91122/4167

⁶³ Eskiyaoglu, 6.5.1971; Decree no: 971/109; File No: 91122/4539

⁶⁴ Kralların Kaderi, 91122/4920; 6.10.1970; Decree no: 219.

⁶⁵ Decree no: 66, File no: 9122/3448, Date: 9.5.1966; 1966-661

be revitalized during those days. This should be why the Commission stated that although these were really ‘Rum *çapulcular*’ (Greek looters) attacking Turks in Cyprus, the words “Rum *çapulcular*” should be eliminated.⁶⁶ This demand of the committee was also realized in films about local heroes that do not use the word Rum for the enemy but try to make it identifiable with Greek music and Greek language.

As always, the commission was keen on the depiction of religion. Religious scenes manifesting everyday reproduction of religion, including azan,⁶⁷ prayer⁶⁸ such as a scene in which soldiers pray, the scene in which the character swears on Qur’an,⁶⁹ women wearing black burka,⁷⁰ some wrapping string on the window of the holy tomb’s place⁷¹ and some others praying in a holy tomb⁷² were taken out because they were thought to be exploiting religious feelings of the people. In this vein, Güney’s film *Umut (Hope)* was rejected on the ground that it promoted superstitious beliefs.⁷³ However, despite these decrees, there were some films which portrayed the lives of prophets, and these films were not censored on that basis, such as *Hazreti İbrahim (Prophet Abraham)*,⁷⁴ *Yahya Peygamber (Prophet John)*,⁷⁵ and *Hazreti Yahya (John the Baptist)*.⁷⁶ The commission probably interpreted these films as a part of the history and culture of the country, therefore confirmed their display. This could also be related with the Commission’s acceptance of Sunni Islam as one of the founding blocks of the nation because the documentary *Peygamberler Diyarı Hac ve Kabe (The Land of Prophets Haj and Kabaa)* was also quite popular during the time, and the Commission even approved an additional explanation about pilgrimage before the film starts.⁷⁷

On the other hand, the commission’s attitude towards films about the Alevi was much more prudent; therefore, they made a detailed analysis of these films. Despite only two examples from the late 1950s, this time, there were many decrees about the depiction of Alevi religious rituals or characters. The first consideration of the Commission was the clashes

⁶⁶ Fedailer, Decree No: 90; File o: 91122/3727; 16.6.1967; 1967-863

⁶⁷ Yigit kanı, Decree no: 119, File no: 91122/3542, 2.8.1966; 1967-873; 1967-876, Gecelerin Kralı; Decree No: 140; File O: 91122/3948; 7.9.1967

⁶⁸ Bombacı Emine, Decree no: 139, File no: 91122/3558, 2.9.1966; 1967-860, Yolsuz Mehmet, Decree No:19, File no: 91122/3855; 17.5.1967

⁶⁹ 1966-618; Namusum İçin, Decree no: 23; File NO: 91122/821, Date: 25.2.1966

⁷⁰ Olum Tarlası, Decree No. 34, File no: 91122/3616, 16.3.1967 Panayırda carsafli kadınları gösteren sahneler elimine ediliyor. Fakir çocuklar 1966-0780 ; 1968-951, Pire Nuri, Decree No: 94, File No: 91122/4156; 17.5.1968

⁷¹ 1967-884; Erenlerin Düğünü; Decree No: 153; File No: 91122/3921; 21.9.1967

⁷² Sen Benimsin; Decree No: 157, File No: 91122/3968, 26.9.1967

⁷³ Umut, Decree no:211; File No: 91122/4905; 24.9.1970; 1970-1223a, b, c

⁷⁴ 1965-0543; Decree No: 182; File No: 91122/3278; 30.11.1965

⁷⁵ 1965-0557; Decree No: 196; File No: 91122/3301; 16.12.1965

⁷⁶ 1965-0559; Decree No: 198; File No: 91122/3312; 17.12.1965

⁷⁷ 1965.564; Decree No: 204; File No: 91122/3243; 22.12.1965.

between Sunnis and Alevis. Both in the 1950s and 1965-1971, the scenes depicting them were all censored for not arousing religious strife. Then, the commission members prepared quite detailed reports about the films. The main criterion of the Commission in their minds in making their decisions was the Sunni version of Islam. They criticized many rituals depicted in the films saying that these did not confirm the Muslim tradition. For example, the Commission thought that the film *Anadolu'yu Türkleştirenler (The Ones Who Turkified Anatolia)* included many religious mistakes, such as considering Haji Bektash Veli, who had been an Alevi mystic, as the only man of religion that Turkified Anatolia and showing him as sharing the same ancestry with Prophet Muhammad.⁷⁸ Moreover, after watching *Allah'ın Arslanı (God's Lion)*, the commission mentioned that it is unacceptable to depict the birthplace of Ali as Kabaa. The commission also found mistakes in the depiction of some wars, the way it is prayed, the pronunciation of the Islamic salutation,⁷⁹ and the time of the morning azan.⁸⁰ In addition, sentences like: “We will take the revenge of the blood spilled over in Kerbela,” “We will kill the murderers of Hasan and Hüseyin” because they could cause strife and chaos.⁸¹ The film *Anadolu Evliyaları (Saints of Anatolia)* was approved on the condition that the parts related to Ali are erased.⁸² These decrees added being a pursuer of Sunni Islam to the features of the national warrior.

The Commission also dealt with historical action/adventure films that played a significant role in the reproduction of the myth of military nation with their focus on aggressive heroes fighting against non-Muslim enemies. In the available decrees, these films were either not censored or only censored for not confirming the moral standards. In this regard, no problems were found in *Karaoğlan Altay'dan Gelen Yiğit (Karaoğlan The Hero Coming from Altai)*,⁸³ *Fatih'in Fedaisi (Fatih's Guard)*⁸⁴, and *Camokanın İntikamı (Revenge of Camoka)*.⁸⁵ On the other hand, the commission wanted the removal of some scenes involving nudity from the films *Baybora'nın Oğlu Karaoğlan (Baybora's Son Karaoğlan)*,⁸⁶ *Camokanın Dönüşü*

⁷⁸ 1967-885; Decree no: 156; File no: 91122/3939; date: 26.9.1967; 1967-0889, decree No: 167, File No: 91122/393936.10.1967

⁷⁹ 1969-1083 Decree no: 192; File no: 91122/4303, 16.9.1969; 19669-1104 Decree No: 256, File No: 91122/4303, 24.11.1969; 1970-11391-1139b, Decree No: 43, File no: 91122/4303, 12.2.1970

⁸⁰ 1967-885; Decree no: 156; File no: 91122/3939; date: 26.9.1967

⁸¹ Ebu Müslimi Horasani, 1970-1124; Decree No: 16, File No: 91122/4574, 13.1.1970; 1970-1136, Decree No: 36, File no: 91122/4574, 10.2.1970.

⁸² Decree no:154; File no: 91122/4324; 24.7.1969

⁸³ 1965-487; Decree No: 126, File No: 91122/3185; 17.9.1965

⁸⁴ 1966-666; Decree No: 72; File No: 91122/3482; 13.5.1966

⁸⁵ 1966-746; Decree No: 152; File No: 91122/3623; 20.9.1966

⁸⁶ 1966-688; Decree No: 94; File No: 91122/3445, 1.7.1966

(*Return of Camoka*),⁸⁷ *Karaoğlan'ın Kardeşi İntikam Fedaisi* (*Karaoğlan's Brother The Guard for Revenge*),⁸⁸ *Tarkan Camokaya Karşı* (*Tarkan against Camoka*),⁸⁹ *Karaoğlan Şeyhin Kızı* (*Karaoğlan Daughter of the Sheikh*),⁹⁰ *Atillanın 4 Atlısı* (*Four Riders of Atilla*)⁹¹ and *Malkoçoğlu Ölüm Fedaileri* (*Malkoçoğlu the Guards of Death*).⁹² Besides, *Gültekin Asya Kartalı* (*Gültekin the Eagle of Asia*)⁹³ and *Malkoçoğlu Ölüm Fedaileri* (*Malkoçoğlu the Guards of Death*)⁹⁴ were intervened due to the use of swear words and obscene gestures. It seems that the Commission did not have a particular problem with the militarist and aggressive discourses of any of these films, probably because they do not depict contemporary times.

However, the Commission's approach to the film *Kara Battal* (*Black Battal*) was interesting. Regarding this film, which is currently unavailable in any archive, the Commission wanted the removal of various scenes, which included some sentences by Byzantium statesmen and soldiers. The sentences about Turks are listed in the report as the following: "(Turks are) Primitive men, are left in the dark," "they are primitive, barbarians, do not know what it means to be civilized," "They feel pleasure from beating women and cutting them. They should be given the harshest punishment in order to make them human beings," "They know nothing about culture, nor about civilization. They live as nomads. They sleep in tents; they are primitive. They make money by plundering where they go; they are plunderers," "They are so unaware of humanity, brotherhood and goodness...they are not developed physically as well."⁹⁵ Through these lines, the filmmakers present an outline of various arguments that were claimed to be made by the Western world about Turks. *Kara Battal* and all the other heroes of historical action/adventure films aim to take revenge on what was stated in these sentences. Once they defeat the enemy, they reconstruct a past in which Turks had always been superior.

Thus, the ideal Turkish citizen should be not only Turkish nationalist, young, brave, loyal, and militarist, but also a pursuer of the Sunni tradition of Islam. In this context, the decrees 'Sunnified' the Alevis by ignoring them besides 'Turkified' Kurds and the Greeks of Turkey. This understanding also fits well into the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, which was developed in the 1970s, particularly by Ibrahim Kafesoğlu in *Hearts of Intellectuals* and later

⁸⁷ 1968-995; Decree No: 217; File No: 91122/4333; 1911.1968

⁸⁸ 1969-1035; Decree No: 68; File No: 91122/4341; 4.4.1969.

⁸⁹ 1969-1084; Decree No: 195; File o: 91122/4587; 17.9.1969

⁹⁰ 1969-1105; Decree No: 267; File No: 91122/4561; 3.12.1969

⁹¹ 1970-1168; Decree No: 101; File No: 91122/4734; 16.4.1970

⁹² 1971-1427; Decree No: 971/310; File No: 91122/5110; 23.12.1971

⁹³ 1969-1036; Decree No: 70; File No: 91122/4329; 8.4.1969

⁹⁴ 1971-1427; Decree No: 971/310; File No: 91122/5110; 23.12.1971

⁹⁵ Decree No: 26; File No: 4266; 30.1.1969; 1969-1014

adopted as state policy by the military regime and its successors following the 1980 military coup.

The decisions after 1971?

Although I was not able to reach censorship decrees after 1971, I can safely claim that unlike the films up to now censored by the censorship committee, Milli Sinema examples were not probably interfered with although they depicted Islam as a part of everyday life. This could be a sign of transformation in the mentality of the committee towards Islamization.

The only case of Milli Sinema which is available among the censorship decrees I was able to reach was *Birleşen Yollar* (*Merging Roads*, dir. Yücel Çakmaklı, 1970), which was known as the first example of Milli Sinema.⁹⁶ Although it is set in modern times and contains everything that the committee censored before, such as azan, headscarf, praying, imam, Quran, mosque, and the tomb of a religious saint, the committee approved it with a majority vote.

Concluding Remarks and An Analysis of Continuities and Discontinuities:

The 1930s-40s: diplomacy

The 1950s: religion, Ottoman Empire, Kurds

1960-1965: the portrayal of state officers

post-1965: punishment, religion, Sunni Islam, Kurds, Alawis, Armenians

- NATIONAL / ETHNIC / RELIGIOUS / CLASS-BASED HOMOGENEITY
- religion as a part of everyday life
- violence against others was legitimized

LOYALTY

⁹⁶ This film was an adaptation of a novel with islamic undertones by Şule Yüksel Şenler entitled *Huzur Sokağı* and produced by Elif Film, the first openly Islamic domestic film company