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Various Representations of Jews in Turkish Cinema

Abstract

This article was delivered in Turkish at the 2015 International Conference on Religion and Film in Istanbul, Turkey. The author has provided the English translation of the paper.

Author Notes

Melih Çoban graduated from the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Marmara University, in 2000. He earned his master's degree from the same department in 2003 with his thesis titled, "Different Conceptions of Jewish and Palestinian Nationhood: The Question of Palestine Viewed Through Ethnic, Religious and Political Identities in Conflict." He earned his Ph.D. from the interdisciplinary program of Politics and Social Sciences, Marmara University, with his thesis titled "Jewish Intellectuals in Turkey." He served as research assistant at the Department of Sociology, Marmara University between 2002 and 2010 and has been serving as lecturer at the same department since 2010. His main academic areas of interest are political sociology, political science, sociology of sports, ethnicity and politics, cinema and society and ancient civilizations.

Introduction

Non-muslim minorities in Turkey have contributed to the development of Turkish cinema in terms of their active involvement in acting and production. Especially during the black-and-white film period, the relatively high number of actors, actresses and production team members of Armenian and Greek origin is very significant. Non-muslims, although in a quantitative decline when compared to earlier periods, have maintained their involvement in Turkish cinema in the following decades as well.

But, despite their historical and frequent presence in the Turkish cinema sector, representations of non-Muslims as movie characters has always been very rare. When we have a look at Turkish cinema from its earliest days, non-Muslim characters seem to be given place at a very low level both in terms of the quantity of characters and the durations of appearance compared to Muslim characters. A second significant point to be noted in this respect is that Jews remained as the least appearing non-Muslim group as characters in Turkish movies when compared to Armenians and Greeks. Jews, as both a religious and ethnic community, have been represented in a limited number of movies with minor roles and these roles have been undertaken by characters heavily relying on the stereotype of the Jew which has been widely recognized by the Turkish society for long decades.

Beginning with the 1990s, related to the downfall of Yeşilçam¹ and the rise of visual media in the form of an increasing number of private television channels in Turkey, television series have become an important means of cultural entertainment for the Turkish society. In some television series of this era, non-Muslim characters have been given place, but with one exception that Jews, unlike their inferior status in the movie sector, have been represented more when compared to other non-Muslim groups. In addition, Jewish characters have appeared in

¹ The name given to the Turkish cinema sector in its classical age. “Turkish Hollywood” in other words.

some movies produced in this era as well. But, unlike in the previous decades, the typologies of Jewish characters in the cinematic productions of this period have been more various in number with the reproduction of the traditional Jewish movie characters and the introduction of new ones.

In this article, representations of Jews in Turkish movies and television series will be studied under various character typologies with reference to certain political, social, cultural and economic phenomena which have become dominant in different periods in Turkey. In this respect, 26 Turkish movies and 4 television series have been analysed. In addition, a full literature review related to the subject has been completed.

There are various studies about the presence of non-Muslims in Turkey. Among these, “Yeşilçam’da Öteki Olmak: Başlangıcından 1980’lere Türkiye Sinemasında Gayrimüslim Temsilleri” (Being the Other in Yeşilçam: Representations of the non-Muslims in Turkish Cinema from its Beginning to the 1980s, 2013) by Dilara Balcı is of great significance. Other significant studies about the subject are “Eleni, Niko, Maria ve Yorgo: Türk Sinemasında Rumlar” (Eleni, Niko, Maria and Yorgo: Greeks in Turkish Cinema, 2012) by Gül Yaşartürk; “Azınlık Filmleri: Tarihin Yeniden İnşası ve Kolektif Bellek” (Minority Movies: Reconstructing History and Collective Memory, 2010) by Serhan Mersin; “1990 Sonrası Türkiye Sinemasında Etnik Kimliklerin Temsili” (Representations of Ethnic and Religious Identities in Turkish Cinema after 1990, 2012) by Eren Yüksel and “Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging” (2008) by Gönül Dönmez-Colin.

The Presence of non-Muslims in Turkish Cinema

Since the earliest days of Turkish cinema, especially in the period until the 1980s, it can be observed that non-Muslims had a significant presence in the Turkish movie sector. This

presence revealed itself more in commercial terms like theater ownership, movie production and distribution and technical staff rather than acting. Before the Republican era, it was the non-Muslims who were the pioneers of cinema in the Ottoman land. The first cinematic performance in the Ottoman land had been initiated by two Greeks, namely the Psihuli brothers in 1897 (Scognamillo, 1991: 14). Pathe Theater, the first cinema theater in Turkey, had been established in Istanbul by Sigmund Weinberg, a Polish-Jewish immigrant in 1908 (Evren, 1995: 44). This pioneer status of non-Muslims have continued in the earliest years of the Republican era as well, and many cinema theaters have been established in Istanbul by Greek, Armenian and Jewish entrepreneurs. Among these entrepreneurs, Jews like Sigmund Weinberg, Jean Lehman, Arditi and Saltiel can be counted (Balcı, 2013: 65-67).

The presence of non-Muslims in Turkish cinema has not remained limited with the commercial level. In terms of direction and acting, non-Muslims have become significant as well. In the earliest years of Turkish cinema when it was ethically forbidden for Muslim women to act, Armenian actresses like Eliza Binemeciyan and Bayzar Fasulyeciyan have undertaken the female roles in many Turkish movies. Following the earlier periods, celebrity actors of Armenian origin like Nubar Terziyan, Kenan Pars (Kirkor Cezveciyan) and Sami Hazinses (Samuel Uluç) have played roles in many movies. Again, in terms of direction, non-Muslim directors like Arşavir Alyanak, Aram Gülyüz, Artun Yeres and Nişan Hançer have become significant names in Turkish cinema (Dönmez-Colin, 2008: 109).

It is very interesting to see that Jews, while taking part in the commercial side of cinema along with Armenians and Greeks, have presented an inferior presence on the artistic side when compared to the number of actors, actresses and directors of Armenian and Greek origins. Actually, there are many names from among the Turkish Jewish community who have become well known artists in the branches of painting, music, theater, photography and caricature (Besalel, 1999: 131-156). In terms of movie acting, except Rozet Hubeş and Yosi Mizrahi who

acted in many movies and Nedim Saban and Berrin Politi who acted in the television series *İkinci Bahar* (1998-2001) and *Kara Melek* (1997-2000), there have been no actors or actresses of Jewish origin in Turkey. In the field of movie direction, there are no Jewish directors as well. Therefore, there is a visible inferiority of the Jews in the artistic side of cinema when compared to Armenians and Greeks. This inferiority also revealed itself in terms of the representation of the Jews as characters in Turkish movies as well.

Until the 1980s, representation of non-Muslims as characters in movies has been very few when compared to the representations of Muslims. In this period, short durations of appearances under minor roles in a limited number of movies have taken place. This situation can be explained under two phenomena related to the non-Muslims in Turkey. First of all, dating from the 1950s when Turkish cinema was on the rise as a cultural sector, non-Muslims had already lost their demographic significance in Turkey. Due to a series of historical events such as the Deportation of Armenians in 1915, the Population Exchange of Greeks and Turks in 1924, “Citizen Speak Turkish” Campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, The Thracian Pogroms of 1934, Welfare Tax of 1942, Establishment of the Israeli State in 1948 and massive migration of Turkish Jews, and the September 6-7 Incidents in 1955, the total population of the Greeks, Armenians and Jews have declined to very low numbers. Thus, the social reflection of non-Muslims in movies had been at a very low level when compared to the representations of the Muslim Turks who constituted the majority of the population in Turkey.

Secondly, during the development age of Turkish cinema after the 1950s, dominant currents in Turkish cinema like national cinema, social realist cinema and revolutionary cinema have mostly given birth to cinematic products related to social phenomena in Turkey like national culture and identity, social problems, new social classes and migration from rural to urban areas (Yorulmaz, 2015: 73-89) and within this trend, producers and directors have not much felt the necessity to give place to non-Muslims who were then a rapidly diminishing part

of the social mosaic. This situation is also, to a certain extent, related to the fact that all these three cinema currents mentioned above have mostly used the rural areas and population as the main phenomena integrated into the movie plots. During the Republican era, non-Muslims had already lost their presence in the rural areas of Turkey and had been concentrated in Istanbul, the biggest metropolitan city in Turkey. Therefore, non-Muslim elements would only be referred to in certain movies which used Istanbul as the setting.

Representations of the Jews in Turkish Cinema between 1950 and 1980

In the period between 1950 and 1980, representations of non-Muslim characters in Turkish cinema have assumed three major functions. First of all, such representations have been used in order to stress the multi-ethnic demographic structure of Ottoman society. This function of ethno-demographic representation is very explicit in movies such as *İngiliz Kemal Lawrence'a Karşı* (English Kemal vs. Lawrence of Arabia, 1952), *Haremde Dört Kadın* (Four Women in the Harem, 1965), *Ay Yıldız Fedailerini* (Guardians of the Crescent and Star, 1966), *Kozanoğlu* (Kozanoglu, 1967), *Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe* (Mehmet Efe of Cakirca, 1969), *Kahramanlar* (Heroes, 1974) and *Sayılı Kabadayılar* (Leading Bullies, 1974).

Secondly, non-Muslim characters have been given place in non-historical movies with scenarios taking place in Istanbul, in order to reflect the multi-ethnic social structure of this big metropolitan city where the non-muslim communities have been concentrated in post-Ottoman Turkey. “Non-Muslim figures, who are of very little significance in the movie plots, have the sole function of stressing the cosmopolitan structure of Istanbul” (Balci, 2013: 105). And thirdly, these representations of Non-Muslim characters have assumed the function of reproducing certain stereotypes of Non-Muslims. These stereotypes carry certain characteristics separately for the Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities which are generally assumed to be

forming an authentic and inseparable part of their collective identities. These characteristics are composed of various properties such as professions, moral values, physical appearance, dressing codes and the Turkish accents they possess.

Among these stereotypical characters of Non-Muslims, Jews have comparatively been represented less than the Greeks and Armenians. In addition, while Greek and Armenian characters have presented a variety in terms of differing gender, age, profession and personality, Jewish characters have mostly been presented in a single form. These Jewish characters have generally been old aged, mean, greedy and cowardly males. The names given to the characters have generally been traditional Turkish-Jewish names like Salamon, Moiz and Mordehay. In addition, these characters have undertaken the function of adding comicality to the movies with their funny appearances, accents and body languages. Actually, these characters can neither be called good or bad; they are just stereotypical images of Jews.

This stereotypical nature which has been attributed to the Jewish characters in the movies actually has a long standing background which finds its roots in authentic folkloric and artistic performances of Turkish culture including traditional theatrical plays like *ortaoyunu*, *meddah*, *Karagöz*, and in universal art branches like theater, literature and caricature.

In the *Meddah* performances which are based on funny imitations, the Jewish character has always been very significant. The Jew who has been stereotyped in these performances is a mean, greedy, self-seeking cowardly male (Nutku, 1997: 132). In *Ortaoyunu*, Jews have been represented in a similar way:

The general name given to the Jew is Cud. In the plays, the Jew is called 'Jew' or 'çifit'. Basic characteristics of Cud are his cowardliness, his heavily corrupted Turkish accent, his religiosity and his getaways after being beaten. Materialism, one of the most significant characteristics of the stereotype of the Jew, is also seen in this character....

Indifference and commercial mind, two other important characteristics of the stereotype of the Jew, are also very explicit in the Cud. In the plays, Cud has differing professions like the jeweller, moneylender or junk dealer.... Mostly he has a book (probably the Torah signifying his religiosity) or a notebook (probably to keep his commercial records) in his hand.... The Jewish character in *Karagöz* plays a male merchant or moneylender with a corrupt accent who lives in the Jewish neighborhood of Balat in Ottoman Istanbul and who frequently gets beaten by others (Bali, 2006: 157-158).

During the single-party regime in Turkey between 1923 and 1945, leading humor magazines like *Karikatür*, *Akbaba*, *Şaka*, *Mizah* have frequently given place to caricatures about Jews which contributed to the development of the stereotype of the Jew. In these caricatures, Jews of Istanbul have generally been pictured as rich, fine dressed, money-minded, cocky people with a corrupt accent (Bali, 2009: 21-28). In the written jokes about Jews in these magazines, common characteristics of them have been stressed as follows: corrupt accent, cowardliness, materialistic mind, artfulness and meanness (Bali, 2006: 149-155). The most frequently used Jewish name in these caricatures and jokes has been Salamon. This is very significant in that Salamon has in time become the name that portrayed the stereotype of the Jew and has been the most frequently used name for Jewish characters in the movies between 1950 and 1980 in Turkish cinema.

Thus, while the first Jewish character in Turkish cinema had appeared for a duration of one minute in the movie *Beş Hasta Var* (There are Five Patients, 1956) as a male debt-collector with no name, the next Jewish character in the movie *Üç Arkadaş* (Three Friends, 1958) had a name: Salamon. Salamon Efendi² is a greedy and mean man in his fifties who earns his life by loansharking. He is a direct replica of the Salomon character pictured in humor magazines like

² Efendi is a title mostly used during the Ottoman Era to denote adult males.

Akbaba regarding his personal characteristics. Salomon, with a goatee beard and big eye glasses, wearing a black suit and a black felt hat, always falls victim to humiliating jokes in the Turkish cafe where he sits all day and uses it as a free office where his customers who are in need of urgent loans can find him. In these frequently appearing joke scenes, the three main antagonists of the movie, who are also among the regular customers of the cafe, tell the young waiter that Salomon will pay their bill and when Salomon, as a mean person, becomes terrified by this, all the customers in the cafe burst into laughter. In a scene in the movie, he lends twenty Turkish liras to a young man who is in urgent need of cash in return for his watch and tells him that he can take his watch back for one hundred liras later. This scene emphasizes that Salomon is a cunning person who lacks morality to the extent that he can even take advantage of desperate people. In the 1971 reshoot of the movie by the same director under the same name *Üç Arkadaş*, the Salomon character has been presented exactly the same as he had been in the first movie.

Salomon also speaks Turkish with a very corrupt accent which has been represented in all the literary and folkloric sources forming the background of the stereotype of the Jew in Turkish cinema. Salomon, pronouncing the G's as Y like many elderly Jews who lived in those years and with other accent-related properties, has been presented to the Turkish audience as the male representative of the Sephardim³ who constitute the majority of the Turkish Jews.

Another interesting issue in both *Üç Arkadaş* movies is the fact that, while Artin, an old male photographer of Armenian origin who is one the main protagonists, is a poor, righteous and father-like figure living and sharing life with two young Turkish men, Salomon the Jew is a kind of evil character.

While Armenians have been represented in good or evil characters in other movies in the following decades, the Salomon character has maintained its pure form as the stereotype of

³ Sephardim is the name given to Jews of Iberian origin who were expelled from the region during the Spanish reconquista at the end of the 15th century. The majority of Turkish Jews belong to this group.

the Turkish Jew. For instance, Mordehay the moneylender is another adaptation of the Salomon character under a different name in the movie *Katip* (The Scribe, 1968), preserving all the personal characteristics of Salomon such as physical look, accent and greedy personality.

However in the movie *İlk Göz Ağrısı* (First Love, 1963), the Salomon character has been reproduced and presented as an exceptional personality. This time, Salomon, unlike the traditionally caricatured Jew, is a character without a beard or eyeglasses who adds comedy to the scenes where he appears. When he meets Turgut, one of the main characters in the movie, he introduces himself as Salamon Şamata.⁴ Unlike the first Salomon who appeared in *Üç Arkadaş*, he is not occupied with a profession such as money lending, but instead he is a salary paid officer working in an insurance company. He appears in two scenes in the movie, and in both scenes he serves as a figure of comedy with his accent and funny body language and mimics. This character of the Funny Jew has reappeared in the movie titled *Sürtük* (The Slut, 1965) and its reshoot in 1970, as the Jewish dancing instructor. The no-name dancing instructor appears in a very short scene where he falls to the ground while trying to perform a dance figure and adds comedy to the movie. An interesting thing to be noteworthy here is the fact that in both *Sürtük* movies and in *İlk Göz Ağrısı*, the Jewish character has been performed by a Jewish actor named Moris.

A third type of Jewish character seen in Turkish movies between 1950 and 1980 is the evil Jew who is capable of performing all types of immoral and criminal actions for his own material interests. Moiz the Thief who appeared in the movie *Karakolda Ayna Var* (Mirror in the Police Office, 1966) is the first example of this character type. Although no thievery by Moiz has been shown in the movie, this nickname refers to him as a person who steals other people's goods. Moiz leads Necati, the main protagonist of the movie, into a deadly trap set by his foes and gets paid by them in return for this service. This presents a new type of Jew unlike

⁴ Şamata means noise in Turkish. It is obvious that Salomon's real surname is not şamata here, but he probably aims to establish a warm relationship with other characters by introducing him with a funny surname.

the previous versions of the Jewish movie character, who will do anything for money. Similarly, Moshe the Moneylender of the movie *Kozanoglu* (Kozanoglu, 1967) takes active part in a conspiracy by other shopkeepers against Hasan the Armsmaster, a very righteous person who prevents other shopkeepers in the bazaar from performing illegal commercial activities. However, his partners in crime are all Muslims. Thus, it is not possible to speak of a representation of corrupt professional ethics placed only on Jews in the movie.

A fourth type of Jewish character seen in movies of this period is the old avaricious Jew. The best examples of this caricatured and funny character can be seen in two movies directed by Remzi Jöntürk, namely *Sayılı Kabadayılar* (Leading Bullies, 1974) and *Kahramanlar* (Heroes, 1974). In the first movie, Leon Efendi, a very old Jewish man, appears in a scene where Zarife the Belly Dancer takes all the money from his pocket and throws it to the children in the Street. Leon, unable to protect himself, tries to recollect as much money as he can from the street while murmuring words such as “Oh my lovely coins, let’s save whatever we can from these evil children.” In the second movie titled *Kahramanlar*, Salih, a young man as one of the main protagonists, places a stolen watch in the hands of Salomon, a very old Jewish man. When Salomon becomes aware of the watch’s presence in his hands, he examines the watch and becomes happy like a child, saying that “where did it come from? It even functions fine!” The old greedy Jewish character who places material interests in top priority has been represented in a funny way and has been performed by the Turkish actor Kamer Sadık in both movies.

A fifth type of Jewish character in this period is the Jewish tradesman. These are middle-aged male characters who are experts in professions such as jewellery and antique trade. While some of these tradesman characters have been presented without the negative properties of the traditional stereotype of the Jew such as in the movie *Balıkçı Osman* (Osman the Fisherman, 1973), others have been represented in personalities who can breach the boundaries of

professional ethics for any kind of commercial interest and gain. In this respect, the Jewish Jeweller in the movie *Bizim Kız* (Our Girl, 1977) is a good example of this type of movie character. The movie plot develops around Zeynep, a young beautiful orphan girl who has been raised collectively by the good people of a poor neighborhood. The leading locals of the neighborhood cheat two jewellers of Armenian and Jewish origin in order to finance Zeynep's wedding ceremony. In this case, the actual cheaters are Muslim Turks, but the Jewish jeweller breaches the professional ethics by billing the jewels at a much higher price. When the two jewellers learn that they have been cheated, they go to the wedding place to claim compensation for their financial loss. The father of the groom compensates their loss and, happy to have regained their loss, they give up on handing the cheaters over to the police. This scene is actually very controversial in that it is not clear whether the two jewellers have represented the character of a gentle and forgiving person or the character of a person who does not complain as long as his material loss has been compensated although there is a criminal situation.

A sixth type of Jewish character presented in this period is a unique one which appeared in only one movie. While the Turkish movies between 1950 and 1980 present a male-dominance in terms of Jewish characters, for the first time in Turkish cinema, a Jewish female character appeared in the movie *Umut Dünyası* (A World of Hope, 1973). Esther, a shopkeeper, is a unique character not only because she is a female, but also she displays a violent and cruel personality which has never been witnessed among the former Jewish characters in Turkish movies. When Zeynep, a honest and kind-hearted young girl working at Esther's shop, loses the money her boss gave her to be paid to another shopkeeper, Esther goes crazy and insults Zeynep with very harsh and slang language. She blames Zeynep for stealing the money and threatens to hand her over to the police. The appearance of Esther is very significant in that such an aggressive attitude had never been displayed by Jewish characters in Turkish movies before. Besides, instead of the traditional cowardly male Jew, there appears a vicious and

aggressive female Jew. Esther seems to be a dangerous person, just like another character with the same name who will be appearing in the Turkish television series *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves, 2003) many years later.

Just as Esther constitutes an exceptional case to the male-dominance in the realm of Jewish characters in Turkish movies on the basis of gender, other exceptional cases are also visible in terms of socio-economic class. Such exceptions can be seen in two movies in the period between 1950-1980 whereby Jews have been presented as members of the high-bourgeoisie instead of the traditional middle-class Jew image. In the movie *Karanlıkta Uyananlar* (Those Waking up in Darkness, 1964), while there are unnamed Jewish, Armenian and Greek businessmen presented as the representatives of the capitalist system, there is also a poor Armenian factory worker as a non-Muslim character. Just like Artin the photographer in *Üç Arkadaş* (Three Friends, 1958), there may always be a poor and honest Armenian, but a poor Jew, just as we see in the case of Moiz the Thief of *Karakolda Ayna Var* (Mirror in the Police Office, 1966), can only survive through fraud. Such a misrepresentation probably has its roots in the fact that after the massive migration waves of Turkish Jews to Israel dating from the 1940s, only middle-class and upper-class Jews who did not seek any material gain in beginning a new life in a new country had remained behind in Turkey. Therefore, the remaining Jews of Turkey, as of their socio-economic status, have always been stereotyped as “being rich.” Therefore, a general understanding such as “there is no poor Jew” has become dominant among the Turkish society, and, referring to Moiz the Thief, it can be said that, even if there is an exception of the poor Jew, he can’t earn his life on honest and righteous grounds.

The second movie *Güneşli Bataklık* (Sunny Swamp, 1977) is exceptional considering not only the socioeconomic status of its Jewish character, but also his fate. This time, a Jewish businessman is forced to bankruptcy by his Muslim rival. In this respect, *Güneşli Bataklık* is an exceptional movie which breaks down the traditional image of the materialist Jew who always

pursues and maximizes his material benefits through his business relations with the *goyim* (non-Jews).

Summing up, it can be said that representations of the Jew in Turkish cinema in the period between 1950 and 1980 had been developed through traditionalised characters which were based on the stereotype of the Turkish Jew finding its roots in certain cultural and political sources. Both negative and positive features of this stereotype, while being presented through movie characters with certain functions, have been reproduced in the collective memory of the Turkish society. But, in the period after 1980, Turkish cinema will be developing new and alternative Jewish characters who will constitute deeply exceptional cases against the traditional and internalized image of the Jew.

Jewish Characters in post-1980 Turkish Cinema

The eighties, following the military coup in September 12, 1980, has marked the beginning of a new period in Turkish cinema whereby new movie genres and themes which did not fit the classical Yeşilçam products of earlier decades had been introduced for the first time. This period can be called as a new one from two aspects. First of all, “changing social mentality in Turkey under a process of depolitization has influenced cinema as well, and dating from the second half of the 80s, movies about pre-eighties terror in Turkey and post-coup years of state oppression have been produced one after another, and a political era in Turkey for the first time has been reflected on the movie screen in such an intensity” (Maktav, 2000: 79). Secondly, there has been a significant rise within the context of the representations of different ethnic identities in cinema: “The eighties has been an era of rapid technological advancements, widespread neo-liberal policies and collapsing socialist regimes. This era has also enabled the popularization of ethnic, religious and national identities and the rise of identity politics in

Turkey” (Cereci, 2013: 7). This new trend based on the representation of cultural identities has first been revealed in certain movies with themes and characters based on the Kurdish identity (Ulusay, 2014: 16-17). Although not as high as the number of movies dealing with Kurdish identity, movies with representations of the non-Muslims in Turkey have also been produced in this new period.

In this respect, the first movie with a Jewish character in this period is *Öç* (Vengeance, 1984). In the movie, Melayin the Jew is the main antagonist who tries to set three leftist young comrades against each other. It is a movie whereby the promotion of Islamic identity as the uniting cement of the divided Turkish society in the post-coup period had been presented with the introduction of the Jew, the domestic enemy who divided the Muslim society. As the Turkish cinema expert Hilmi Maktav states:

Öç tells the story of three leftist college students who, on the day of their escape from the country, enter into a settling with their ex-leftist friend who is now an Islamist. In the movie, the leftist movement is condemned for the outbreak of terror before the coup, but leftist militants are not treated with hatred. Instead, it is emphasized that in spite of the cruelties they had committed, they were still humans with humane feelings in their hearts. Then, what was the basic motive that led these young people to the leftist organisations and terrorist activities? The answer to this question has been given in the beginning of the movie with the Jewish character who helped the leftist militants on their getaway and set them against each other by turning in their Islamist friend. The way of salvation pointed in the movie is Islamic ideology (Maktav, 2000: 80).

The second movie with Jewish characters in this period is *Usta Beni Öldürsene* (Sawdust Tales, 1996). The movie cannot be regarded as a Yeşilçam movie considering its marginal theme and the fact that it has been produced under the partnership of Turkish, German and Hungarian producers. Fikret Hakan, a famous Turkish cinema authority and actor, has stated that “celebrating the centenary of cinema, Yeşilçam is going down, or *Usta Beni Öldürsene...*” (Hakan, 2012: 497). Although it is not clear whether Hakan criticizes multi-national partnerships which can be interpreted as the decline of national cinema or the highly marginal and surrealistic theme of the movie in his statement, it is obvious that the movie has been one very different from traditional Yeşilçam products. The movie plot develops around the staff of a circus located in an imaginary country ruled by a fascist regime in wartime conditions. Among the circus staff who are awaiting the return of their manager who left for talks with official authorities to enable the circus to continue its tour, there are four Jewish characters, namely Abib, Ishak, Aaron and Naum. But, nothing significant related to their Jewish identities is revealed in the movie except their names. The movie was based on the story written by the famous Turkish-Jewish author Bilge Karasu and the existence of Jews as main characters was probably a choice to emphasize the lives of ordinary people under a fascist rule by use of Jewish figures which will resemble an atmosphere similar to Nazi era Germany.

The movie *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* (Mrs. Salkım's Diamonds, 1999), has marked the beginning of a new era of debate within the context of non-Muslim minorities and cinema. Based on the novel with the same name by Yılmaz Karakoyunlu, the movie plot develops around the lives of certain Muslim and non-Muslim characters whose lives deeply change due to the Welfare Tax of 1942 in Turkey. The Welfare Tax was a state policy enacted in 1942 in order to punish those who had taken advantage of the wartime conditions in Turkey and had earned unjustifiable enrichment. The Tax policy was unjust in the fact that the lists of tax-payers had been divided into categories such as Muslim, non-Muslim, *dönme* (convert) and foreigner,

which actually constituted a breach of the principles of Turkish citizenship stated in the Turkish Constitution. It was the non-Muslim category who constituted the majority of the total taxpayers and those who were unable to pay their amount of tax were sent to a workcamp situated in the Eastern Anatolian province of Aşkale.

Thus, the movie was based on historical facts but, the controversy about the movie was simply based on the fact that the Jewish characters in the original novel were replaced by Armenian ones in the movie. Ivo Molinas, a columnist in *Şalom*, the official newspaper of the Turkish Jewish community, has questioned the reason why, although it was the Turkish Jews who had been damaged by the Tax policy the most when compared to other ethnic groups, it was the Armenians who were represented as the major characters in the movie:

The aim of these words is not to criticize the movie *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, but the movie, with its false characters and its inability to reflect the political facts about the Welfare Tax no better than an elementary level history book, has fallen far behind the novel. By the way, while the choice by the Armenian scriptwriter in replacing the Jewish characters of the novel by Armenian ones is not of our concern here as it is his own initiative, observing the results of this choice has been very interesting. I thereby leave the duty to interpret the absence of the Jews in the movie, although it was the Jews who were damaged by the Tax the most, to everyone except the scriptwriter. (Molinas, 1999).

With regard to the reactions to Molinas' article, Etyen Mahçupyan, the scriptwriter of the movie, has claimed that the leadership of the Jewish community had denied access to synagogues and Jewish cemeteries where certain scenes would be shot and this was the reason why the Jewish characters in the novel such as Nora had been turned into Armenian ones. A

significant comment about the issue has been stated as: “The sensitivity of the leftist liberals about the Armenians and popular denial of antisemitism in Turkey, when combined with the anxiety of the Turkish Jewish community to become model citizens, has become embodied on the popular platform within the movie *Salkım Hanım’ın Taneleri*.” (Kocabaşoğlu, 2010).

As stated in this quotation, the replacement of the original Jewish characters with Armenian ones is related to both the attitude of the leftist liberals who are very influential in the intellectual arena in Turkey as well as in the cinema sector, and policies of the community leadership of Turkish Jews. Turkish-Jewish researcher Rıfat Bali explains this twofold attitude with these words:

A series of phenomena such as sharing the same political discourses with the conservative, nationalist and Kemalist groups who form the majority of the Turkish society, not establishing close relations with the intellectuals and NGOs who oppose the status quo, preserving the official history discourses about non-Muslims, not placing themselves as victims in the public sphere, and finally being identified with the cruel image of the Israeli State and Zionist policies will lead to the isolation and ignorance of the Turkish Jews by the liberals and leftists. (Bali, 2009: 575).

The term “official history” used here by Bali is very significant in explaining the issue in more clear terms. Dating from the beginning of the 90s, certain unfortunate historical events concerning the non-Muslims have been brought back to the political and cultural agenda whereby these events could be debated in an atmosphere of freedom of speech free from the chains of official history discourses which had been dominant for long decades. Events such as the Armenian deportation of 1915, September 6-7 incidents of 1955, and the Welfare Tax of 1942 were no longer taboos but open to debate and the revival of identity-related subjects in

the cultural and political agenda has drawn the attention of many intellectuals and academics in Turkey. Therefore, a process of re-writing the histories of the non-Muslim communities concerning their relationships with the Muslim society and the Turkish state has been initiated. During this process, the attitude of the Turkish Jewish community, under the orientation of the community leadership, has remained positive in preserving many elements of the official history discourses such as Turks as the protector of non-Muslim minorities. The Quincentennial Foundation established by Turkish and Jewish elites in 1992 has been very influential in this process. The basic aim of the Foundation was to organize a series of social and cultural activities to celebrate the arrival of Sephardic Jews in Turkish land. The main motto of a series of activities organized by the Foundation was that “Turks had saved the Sephardic Jews from the Spanish reconquista and had granted them refuge and security under the protection of the Ottoman Sultanate.” Following this motto, a series of books related to the history of Turkish Jews have been published in this period which have pursued an elective historical method, referring only to positive outcomes of the mutual co-existence of Muslims and Jews in the Turkish land. Events of negative nature such as the Welfare Tax and the 1934 Pogroms in Thrace have not been mentioned in these studies and this situation, while serving as satisfactory for the community leadership, has drawn the reaction of a small number of intellectuals like Rıfat Bali.

There are two main reasons lying behind this choice of the Jewish community leadership in pursuing an elective method of history. First of all, the Quincentennial Foundation had a mission of overriding the negative image of Turks and Turkey stemming from the so-called Armenian genocide of 1915 on the international arena by promoting the discourse of Turks as saviors and protectors of Jews. Secondly, against the rising trend in re-writing the histories of non-Muslim communities in Turkey which condemned the Turkish state and the Muslim majority as treating the non-Muslims badly, the Jewish community leadership has reproduced

their survival strategies of being less visible in the public sphere and keeping a low-profile by not mentioning the negative sides of the history of their existence in the Turkish land. Therefore, the replacement of Jewish characters with Armenian ones in a movie about the Welfare Tax may sound more reasonable in the light of these facts. Thus, in the movie *Güz Sancısı* (Pains of Autumn, 2008), the second movie about non-Muslims in Turkey by Turkish director Tomris Giritlioğlu who also directed *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, which was also based on the another novel by Yılmaz Karakoyunlu, the original Jewish character Esther was replaced by a Greek character named Elena. The movie plot develops around certain characters under the tension of the September 6-7 incidents of 1955, whereby a series of pogroms against the non-Muslims, mostly Greeks among them, took place in various districts of Istanbul. Just as in the case of *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, the replacement of the Jewish character has been based on two probable reasons. First of all, the September 6-7 incidents are one of the negative events which the Turkish Jews want to leave behind and not remember in their collective memory. And secondly, as it was the Greeks who were mostly targeted and damaged during the incidents, incorporating a Greek character might have been more reasonable for the scriptwriter and the producers.

Although some Jewish intellectuals like İvo Molinas have condemned *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* for not mentioning the Jews in the movie, one scene with a Jewish character is very hard-hitting. The movie presents a single Jewish character named Moiz, an old shopkeeper who is loved and respected by other shopkeepers at the bazaar. Dialogue by Moiz and other shopkeepers about the concentration camps in Nazi Germany is noteworthy for stressing the upcoming Welfare Tax in comparison:

Moiz: My aunt's daughter has been sent to the concentration camp. No one knows where she is.

Shopkeeper 1: Not only in Germany, but in all countries invaded by Hitler it is the same situation.

Shopkeeper 2: Thank God Turkey has remained outside the war.

Moiz: No one may know what will happen tomorrow. Can you, my dear?

Shopkeeper 2: You are too pessimistic Moiz Baba⁵! It is all obvious here. What on earth could happen to us?

Moiz: No one knows, son. No one knows...

Another significant point to be noted about *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* is the fact that it was the first Turkish movie that has referred to the phenomenon of *dönme* in Turkish cinema. The *dönme* are a closed community in Turkey who are descendants of ex-Jews who were converted to Islam during the Ottoman era. In the movie, when Mr. Halit, one of the main protagonists, goes to the Tax Bureau in order to object to the high amount of tax accrued to him, the tax officer states that his grandfather was a Jew and therefore he was accrued the tax amount under the category of the *dönme*. Mr. Halit, unable to do anything but only saying in tears that he is a Turk, is sent to the working camp in Aşkale as he is unable to pay this huge tax. Following the movie, the *dönme* phenomenon had been popularised through books by authors like Soner Yalçın and Ilgaz Zorlu in the 2000s. After *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, the *dönme* theme had once been used in a television series named *Sağır Oda* (Deaf Room) which aired on television between 2006 and 2007. In the series, the members of the imaginary Kırımlı family, a leading family of the high bourgeoisie in Turkey, were actually *dönmes*, but this fact was kept secret from the audience until the series finale.

⁵ Baba means "father" in Turkish and can be used as a title for respected and beloved elderly men.

The Era of Television Series and Series-Based Movies in Turkey and New Representations of the Jews

Until 1990, television broadcasting was under state monopoly in Turkey. Following the establishment of *Star 1*, the first private television channel, many more channels one after another entered the realm of visual media. As the number of channels increased, a new form of cinematic entertainment has become an important part of the lives of Turkish people: television series. Of course, television series had aired on state-owned channels before 1990, but the new competitive environment of the visual media paved the way for a serious rise in the TV series sector. In addition to that, the downfall of Yeşilçam has led the Turkish audience to Hollywood movies shown at theaters, but more than that, to television series which they could watch comfortably at their homes for free.

Among these television series, two of them are very significant for this study considering the Jewish characters they presented. Although it may be open to question whether television series should be regarded as a part of cinema or not, there are two situations which enable the inclusion of these series within this study without any question. First of all, several movies have been produced based on these series. And secondly, in both series, leading Turkish movie actors and actresses have played roles. Finally, considering the fact that these series have introduced new types of Jewish characters to the Turkish audience, they will be analysed as a part of this study.

The first Turkish series to be referred to in this context is *Deliyürek* (Mad Heart) which aired on television between 1998 and 2002. The main protagonist is Yusuf Miroğlu, a brave young man who fights against injustice and cruelty with his friends. In the Miroğlu character, the traditional movie character of the brave honest Turkish man protecting the poor and the oppressed has been revived but this time in an urban version of the classical Turkish hero.

Miroğlu and his friends, while fighting against the deep state and its collaborators among the mafia, find themselves confronted with a big game played by the CIA and MOSSAD agents in Turkey. In the series-based movie titled *Deliyürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* (Mad Heart: The Boomerang Hell, 2001), Miroğlu succeeds in eliminating the CIA agents and their local collaborators in the South-eastern region of Turkey. In the last episodes of the TV series, a special squad of MOSSAD enters the scene, kills Miroğlu and destroys his whole family and friends. These MOSSAD agents, while being presented as antagonists who can commit any kind of cruelty in order to reach their aims, also formed the first examples of a new type of Jewish character in Turkish cinema; the Israeli Jew. The Israeli Jew character is very different from the Jewish characters who had until then been presented in Turkish cinema. First of all, the Israeli Jew is not a local, but a foreign element who is not a part of Turkish society but an alien character. Secondly, unlike the previous local versions of the Jewish characters who presented characteristics such as greed, funny appearance, accent, and cowardliness, these Jews are coldblooded, self-confident, frightening characters who are capable of doing anything in the name of the state of Israel and her global interests.

Actually, the introduction of the Israeli Jew into Turkish cinema at the beginning of the new millenium was not a coincidence. The global strategies of Israel as a new phenomenon has been increasingly popular as a subject with the Turkish public in this new era. The Israeli Jew is actually a cinematic outcome of the discourses and conspiracy theories about Jewish plans to establish global hegemony which became very widespread among certain right and left wing sections of Turkish society. This rising trend finally reached its peak in 2010 with the Gaza flotilla raid which led to a massive protest against Israel and her policies in the Middle East in Turkish society. In addition, the tension between Turkish and Israeli governments related to the question of Palestine has also been influential in promoting anti-zionist and anti-Israeli

sentiments among Muslim Turks as well. Therefore, the birth of the Israeli Jew in the 2000s marked the beginning of a new era concerning the representation of Jews in Turkish cinema.

Following *Deliyürek*, in the television series *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves) which aired between 2003 and 2007 and reached a wide popularity, various Jewish characters have been presented. Mostly following the pattern presented in *Deliyürek*, the series plot developed around the relations between the deep state and mafia, and even real-life persons were incorporated into the plot with their names changed. The first Jewish character in the series to be mentioned is İplikçi Nedim (Nedim the threadmaker). Nedim (also called as Niso by other Jewish characters in the series) is a famous businessman in his fifties who owns textile factories, but he actually owes his financial wealth to loansharking whereby he uses the financial earnings of the mafia leaders in his business. Nedim, with his greed for money, his meanness, cowardliness and funny accent is a revived version of the local Jew who had been frequently presented in Turkish movies between 1950 and 1980. His existence adds elements of comedy to the scenes where he appears. Actually Nedim is a fictionalised character based upon the real life Turkish-Jewish businessman Nesim Malki who was murdered in 1995. Nedim, although being a coward, is self-confident in that he is an irreplaceable partner for the mafia leaders and because he has established close relations with Israel. He is an extremely mean man who frequently says “paracıklarım” (my coins) with his funny Sephardic accent and these repetitions keep the traditional image of the greedy Jew alive in the eyes of the audience. His religiosity is not much referred to except in one scene where he is shown wearing a *kippa* on his head while counting banknotes in his hand. But, it is obvious that he feels a strong belonging to and is proud of his Jewish identity. This can be concluded from two scenes in the series. In the first scene he refers to Jews as “us” and in the other scene, he threatens the Chechen warriors who ask him for money by saying, “have you recognized the six point star? There are one thousand of us here in this building!”

A second Jewish character in the series is Samuel Vanunu, actually performed by the Armenian actor Nisan Şirinyan. Samuel is a businessman and a member of the Council of Wolves, who organizes the relationship between this Turkish mafia council and Israel. He serves as a *consilieri* to the council members about global affairs. But, unlike Nedim and other traditional representations of the Turkish Jew, he does not present personal characteristics like corrupt accent, greed, meanness and cowardliness. Instead, although seeming to be an inferior and insignificant member of the council, in the last episodes of the series it will be revealed that he is a very dangerous character who will act recklessly to gain power when the right time comes. In this sense, Samuel seems to be a new version of the local Jew hybridized with the Israeli Jew.

A third Jewish character in the series is Esther Hirsch. Following the first Esther in the movie *Umut Dünyası* (A World of Hope, 1973), a second female Jewish character with the same name has come to the scene. Unlike the first Esther who spoke with a Sephardic accent, Esther Hirsch is an Ashkenazi⁶ as understood from her surname. She is the wife of Tombalacı Mehmet, a member of the Council of Wolves. Although not being much visible in the series, it is obvious that Esther is much more powerful and more dangerous than her husband considering her close relations with Israel. With her cold-blooded and sharp looks and accentless but dull way of speaking, she is much different from the first Esther who displayed her feelings with her mimics and speech. While the former Sephardic Esther displays the stereotypical Mediterranean characteristics of exposing feelings, the latter is meant to resemble the Western Europeans with her cold-blooded personality. The latter Esther, an Ashkenazi, is a less known element when compared to the former Sephardic Esther, as it is the Sephardim who constitute the majority of the Turkish Jews and the cultural image of Turkish Jewry. Therefore, Esther Hirsch constitutes a new type of Jewish character not much known to the Turkish audience.

⁶ A term to denote Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. They constitute approximately 10% of the total Jewish population in Turkey.

Actually, Hirsch is not the first Ashkenazi character in Turkish cinema. In the movie *Dokuz* (Nine, 2002), the character nicknamed *Kirpi* (Hedgehog) is a young female vagabond who has no lines in the movie but appears in certain flashback scenes. Her identity is not revealed in detail and the only clues about her Ashkenazic identity are the Star of David she wears on her neck and the Yiddish songs she sings. Just like *Kirpi* whose origins are not fully known, Esther Hirsch also remains alien when compared to the traditional character of the local Jew. In this respect, Esther Hirsch can be respected as a hybrid character caught in the middle of being local and foreign.

Other Jewish characters in the series are Samuel's wife and her mother. Although they have minor roles and short appearances, their existence in the series plot is noteworthy due to an important point within the context of non-Muslims and their representations in Turkish cinema. As Dilara Balçı, an academic expert in Turkish cinema, has stated, in the period between 1950 and 1980, non-Muslim characters in Turkish movies appeared mostly in places like their workplaces and in other locations within the public sphere. The organic and non-organic elements of their private lives, such as their household and their residences were not given place except in a few exceptions (Balçı, 2013: 164). The incorporation of Samuel's wife and her mother into the series enabled the representation of the private sphere of a Turkish Jew for the first time in Turkish cinema. Although given place in short scenes, dialogues between these three family members in the house environment have introduced the Jewish family to the Turkish audience.

Following *Kurtlar Vadisi*, a sequel to the series named *Kurtlar Vadisi: Pusu* (Valley of the Wolves: Ambush) has aired on television since 2007 until now. In the sequel, there have been representations of the Israeli Jew rather than the local one, and this policy was also applied to the movies based on the series. In the sequel, we see Shamir as one of the main antagonists. Shamir is the head of MOSSAD's operations in Turkey and he presents the characteristics of

the Israeli Jew which had been seen before in *Deliyürek*: self-confidence, cruelty and the will to commit anything necessary to pursue the interests of the state of Israel. But, Shamir seems to be a localized version of the Israeli Jew, considering his funny accent and body language which add to his personality a devilish comicality. Along with Shamir, another Jewish character in the sequel is Benjamin Hazar, who, unlike Shamir, is a Turkish Jew. Hazar, as a leading figure of the Turkish-Jewish community, is a character who criticizes the Zionist policies of Israel and feels a strong belonging to his Turkish identity. In this respect, he emerges in the series as a “model citizen of the state” as Rifat Bali refers to him. When Hazar acts against the interests of Israel, a MOSSAD squad tries to kidnap his grandson, but Polat Alemdar, the main heroic character of the series, saves him. The mutual clash of MOSSAD agents and Hazar in the series can be explained as a policy applied by the producers of the series. It can be said that the producers most likely aimed to escape any possible condemnations of being anti-semitic by placing two different Jewish characters against each other. Hazar, as the local Jew who has been fully integrated into Turkish national identity and citizenship, has been targeted by MOSSAD agents, outsider enemies who can even hurt a Jew for their own interests. Therefore, by use of introducing Hazar, the anti-Zionist attitude of the sequel has been stressed by the producers.

Jewish characters have been given place not only in *Kurtlar Vadisi* and its sequel, but also in two movies which were based on them. Both movies can be considered as reactionary productions whereas the first movie *Kurtlar Vadisi Irak* (Valley of the Wolves: Iraq, 2006), was produced after the mistreatment of Turkish soldiers situated in Northern Iraq by the US Marines in 2003. The massive and long-term reaction by the Turkish society towards this unfortunate event are embodied in the movie which served as an imaginary and cultural revenge in the scene—satisfactory enough for the Turkish audience—where a special squad led by Polat Alemdar, the main protagonist of the *Kurtlar Vadisi* series, arrived in Northern Iraq to avenge the mistreated Turkish soldiers. In the movie, the only Jewish character is an Israeli medical

doctor who cooperated with the US authorities in Northern Iraq for illegal smuggling of body parts and organs taken from local Iraqies into Israel to be sold to those Israeli citizens in need of organ transplanting. The doctor, in all his dialogues in the movie, emphasizes that lives of others are not important when compared to the health and welfare of the citizens of Israel. Therefore, he has been presented not only as the classical Israeli Jew pursuing the interests of Israel, but also as a doctor who lacks the medical ethics of his profession.

The second movie based on the television series is titled *Kurtlar Vadisi Filistin* (Valley of the Wolves: Palestine, 2011) and again, like the former movie, it serves as a reactionary movie which has been produced after the Gaza Flotilla Raid in 2010 in which nine Turkish activists were killed by Israeli soldiers who boarded the ships which carried stocks of humanitarian aid to the people living in the Gaza Strip. The movie which was produced upon this unfortunate event, is full of characters of the Israeli Jew type, like the Israeli soldiers and secret service agents who can even kill the Palestinians just for fun, and armed Jewish settlers who have invaded the Palestinian territories. In addition to these, another type of Jewish character has been given place for the first time in the history of Turkish cinema; the diaspora Jew. Simone Levi, an American Jew, who serves as a guide to tourists from the USA during their trip in Jerusalem, meets Polat Alemdar by accident and joins their adventure. It is a hard-hitting scene in the movie in that, when Simone listens to the cruel mistreatment of Palestinians by the Israeli soldiers from the Palestinian family who hosted them in their house, she says “a true Jew would never do these.” This scene resembles the character Benjamin Hazar in *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu* who had the function of stressing the anti-zionist characteristic of the series and of escaping any possible accusations of anti-semitism. Similarly, by introducing a diaspora Jew who disapproves of the cruel actions of the Israelis, the producers of the movie probably aimed to draw the thin red line between anti-semitism and anti-zionism.

Conclusion

Concerning the representation of non-muslims in movies, Turkish cinema can be studied under two different periods, namely pre-1980 and post-1980 with respect to the rate of appearance and character typologies. While in the first period Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities in Turkey were presented under characters based on their former representations in traditional and authentic sources like *ortaoyunu*, *meddah*, *Karagöz* and theatrical plays, this situation began to change in the period after the 80s. The increasing number of movies giving place to non-Muslim characters in this period, while reproducing the traditional typologies, also brought forth new types of non-Muslim characters which had been developed in accordance with the changing political and social conditions.

In the period before 1980, Jewish characters in Turkish movies were fewer than Armenian and Greek ones. This situation began to change after the 80s with Jews being represented more frequently in movies and television series when compared to the previous decades. In this period, Jews have been represented at a secondary level in movies related to the histories of non-Muslims in Turkey when compared to Greeks and Armenians, but instead, they have been given more place in television series and movies based on current political developments. In this new era, the Jewish characters which were heavily based on the traditional stereotype of the Turkish Jew began to leave their places to new characters such as the Israeli Jew or hybrid versions of these two. This situation is an outcome of the socio-political survival strategies of Turkish Jews and the changing trend in Turkish politics concerning the relations with Israel.

Given the power of cinema with its informing and orienting functions, either traditional characters based on the stereotype of the Turkish Jew and their reproduced versions, or the Israeli Jew character, while having served as important sources for introducing the Jews to the

Turkish society, also have contributed to the reproduction of the stereotype of the Jew. Knowing the fact that there are millions of people in Turkey who have never met a Jew or an Israeli in their lives, it is obvious that such stereotypes would be misleading. Also, considering the thin red line between anti-semitism and anti-zionism and the power of cinema in reproducing the collective memory of societies, it would probably be more proper to introduce Jewish characters in Turkish movies and television series which would emphasize their humanitarian characteristics rather than stereotypical ones.

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