

## CHAPTER 4

# Melodrama, Realism and Internal Migration

## Cinematic Representation of Internal Migration in Turkey (1964–1990)

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As a traumatic social experience, internal migration<sup>1</sup> in the twentieth century shaped the social structure of Turkey to such an extent that its ramifications are still influential on the political, economic, judicial, and social issues in the country. Turkish filmmakers were relatively slow to respond to such a major subject matter, and hence, the first films exclusively on migration are seen in the mid-1960s. Filmmakers' interest in migrants grew as they started to perceive migrants with limited opportunities and little prospects as a growing social problem in the urban environment. This study aims to understand how internal migration and migrants have been perceived, contemplated, and presented by prominent filmmakers of Turkish cinema history between the 1960s and the 1990s, utilizing thirteen feature films focusing on migration and migrants as their chief subject matter. The last case for analysis is from 1990 because migration ceased to be a popular subject matter for filmmakers in the 1990s when the film industry almost came to a standstill in production and entered a state of transition towards 'the new Turkish cinema',<sup>2</sup> as a result of which internal migration became a side issue rather than the main subject matter.

However, before delving into the subject matter, a brief look at internal migration as a social movement in Turkey is necessary to grasp the main characteristics of the movement and the overall profile of people involved in it to draw the framework of the social trauma on which the films were constructed. Internal migration in Turkey started in the 1950s from rural areas to cities, and from small cities<sup>3</sup> to larger urban areas, and continued until the 2000s in an increasing trend. Rapid urbanization in Turkey has not been accompanied with industrialization to accommodate millions of migrants in the work force each year. Indeed, just before the eruption of waves of migrants, despite economic growth in

agriculture, industry dropped approximately two per cent to become 13.5 per cent between 1946 and 1953 (Varlı 2010: 12–16). Migration was mainly triggered by mechanization in agriculture in the 1950s leading to unemployment among agricultural workers, and by economic depression towards the end of the decade with a massive currency devaluation in 1957. In that period, the rural population (towns and villages), which amounted to around 78 per cent in 1945, started to drop to around 65 per cent as of 1960 with an ever-decreasing trend to 34 per cent in 1990 (TUIK 2010: 10). The earliest official figures on migration as of 1965 reveal that the social displacement has been in an overwhelmingly one directional fashion from the east to the west of the country, mainly to the major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, and then other industrialized cities in the west. The number of migrants between 1965 and 2000 amounts to a total of 21.1 million (Kocaman 2008: 17–18). Although the educational profile of migrants was slightly above the overall average of the country, even as of 1985,<sup>4</sup> 12.45 per cent of the migrants were illiterate, and 46.83 per cent had graduated from primary school. The number of migrants with a high school or equivalent degree and tertiary education amounted to 25.81 per cent (ibid.: 41). So, almost three-quarters of the migrants either could not read and write, or they only had the basic skills to read and write simple texts. Hence, they were not eligible for skilled labour that required formal training, which turned out to be a major drawback for the people in the race for employment in their destination, and a source for dramatic stories. As a result, big cities in the west where wealth accumulated became the target of rural people to start an adventure with unforeseen consequences.

While exploring the filmic representation of this dramatic movement, the study mainly utilizes a formalist approach, and does not claim to provide sociological, political, and/or economic insights, although it benefits from studies and data on the subject matter where relevant. Among the cases, while some films with repetitive narrative elements or limited scope and significance are covered briefly, films with more significance in terms of film history, narrative qualities, and film form are studied in more detail to be able to reach a concise survey of films on internal migration in Turkey. For practical reasons, the analysis of the films is limited to certain elements of form and content from a formalist approach that mainly focuses on, but is not limited to, themes and character formation in terms of narrative elements; and on cinematography, mise-en-scene and editing in terms of film form where necessary. The analysis of the selected films reveals that the films can be divided into two categories as didactic and descriptive films in

their approach to internal migration in Turkey; however, rather than providing an extensive coverage of the social phenomenon, they present a limited and repetitive scope which, in the majority of the cases, utilizes a melodramatic structure in terms of narrative elements, and a hybrid film language combining realistic style and classical narration in terms of film form.

### **Internal Migration in Turkish Cinema: Archetypes**

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Although the appearance of migrants in Turkish feature films dates to 1952 with a slapstick comedy<sup>5</sup> called *İki Kafadar Deliler Pansiyonunda* (Two Buddies in a Boarding House Full of Lunatics, 1952), by Atıf Yılmaz, it was not until the 1960s that internal migration became the main subject matter in films as a social problem. The 1960s witnessed heated debates about the future of Turkish cinema under a more democratic constitution of 1961<sup>6</sup> with a more contemporary approach to civil rights and political representation, enabling more room for freedom of expression and political action that also influenced artistic productions although the strict regulations and censorship for cinema remained the same. Turkish filmmakers became more involved in social problems including poverty, class conflict, inequality, migration and so on. Halit Refiğ, a director, writer, and producer, was among the proponents of the idea of 'national cinema' to focus on social problems in a realistic approach, as in Italian neorealism and American realism, using native sources without any collaboration with foreign sources in order not to compromise between local subject matters and production demands (Refiğ 2013: 26, 34, 41). By the same token, in 1964, Refiğ made *Gurbet Kuşları* (Birds of Exile), the first 'social realist' film focusing exclusively on internal migration as a 'social problem'.

*Birds of Exile* is significant both as the first film to problematize migration and as the first didactic film in terms of the narrative elements and their presentation. The film is basically about the unpleasant experiences of a large middle-class family of six with enough capital to invest in Istanbul to run an automobile workshop after they migrate from a smaller city in the southern region of the country, Kahramanmaraş. Quite a stylistic choice, the story is narrated in an episodic manner by multiple intradiegetic narrators, the members of the family except the mother who metaphorically has not moved to a new environment as she is always indoors and does not have a voice at all. Each member relates his/her

own perspective about how the family is 'defeated' in their ironic quest to 'conquer' the city. Eventually, with the exception of the youngest son who studies medicine at university, and the daughter who commits suicide, the family decides to return to their home city after many mistakes, deceptions and disappointments. Reportedly, one criticism about the film is that the director advocates anti-migration and anti-Western theories, and hence he 'looks for private reasons' in presenting the failure rather than larger concepts such as class relationships (Dönmez-Colin 2008: 59). The director's worldview aside, the film indeed poses class relationships in a very subtle way by accommodating a range of characters from different classes: an upper-class family with insights into and concerns about the country's current crisis articulated in a rather artificial manner; the traditional migrant family as a middle-class unit; and a migrant self-made man as the representative of the rising lower class with aspirations to rise in society, implying the possibilities of quick and easy social mobility. The idealist young son and the self-made man stand in stark contrast to each other. As a migrant, the young son becomes a student of medicine at university, falls in love with an open-minded urban student from the so-called 'decent' upper-class family, and achieves the mental transformation and adaptation in the urban space. The student functions as the mouthpiece vocalizing the premise of the narrative in a Brechtian tirade claiming that the problem with migrants is that they demand everything while offering nothing in return, and those who cannot contribute to the urban environment are not eligible to reside there. On the other hand, the penniless 'self-made man' called 'parasite' starts to build his fortune by utilizing every opportunity while the middle-class family falls apart. Eventually, he becomes the owner of a district full of squatter settlements and discloses his plans to become a rich contractor by selling squatters' houses, called *gecekondular*,<sup>7</sup> to his fellow countrymen.

The presence of the self-made man reveals how the urban space is perceived as a land of endless opportunities for easy social mobility in an unstable environment by those who have nothing to lose and a lot to gain. Indeed, squatting on public land and building illegal constructions not only to fulfil the basic needs but also to raise a fortune through real-estate transactions have been among the biggest problems in Turkey to date. Outnumbering the urban population, migrants gradually acquired a significant political presence as voters, enough to determine the fate of the elections as of the 1970s, and zoning amnesties granting property rights to migrants were issued by populist politicians especially during the 1980s for political gain before the elections (Tercan 2018: 26). From the narrative's

perspective, the presence of the ‘parasite’ foreshadows the core problems of the future about migration as a warning for the audience. The juxtaposition of the urban upper-class family as the ideal, the middle-class migrant family as the negative example, but the well-educated migrant son as the positive example, and the lower-class ‘parasite’ as the threat holds the main premise of the narrative: the inevitable social chaos unfolding on one’s doorstep due to migration and migrants. Hence, the arguments of the narrative are presented through character formation and largely melodramatic events to elaborate the problems caused by conflicts between the traditional/rural and the modern/urban in terms of patriarchy, cultural conflict, alienation, adaptation, sexual frustration, femininity, morality and so on.

The second film, *Bitmeyen Yol* (The Endless Road, 1965), by Duygu Sağıroğlu, deals with migration from a different angle by focusing on the migrants at the bottom of the social ladder, the uneducated, poor, unskilled and cheap labour from the countryside. At first, the story is about a group of men migrating to Istanbul to have a decent life by entering the workforce at the expense of brutal exploitation of labour. The film epitomizes the gap between ideological struggles and the actual case in an ironic way: barely literate villagers come across leftist slogans for a fair world on the walls, targeting them, yet the message cannot be delivered for obvious reasons. Following this line of argument, the narrative makes use of themes such as employment, exploitation, class struggle, unions, cultural conflicts, alienation, and ideology. However, in the second half, the story quickly evolves into a melodramatic love triangle between one of the migrant men and two married but lonely women with children all from the same village. A chain of melodramatic events leads to desperation and a dramatic end for the migrant man and his beloved when, in a state of delirium, he kills one of the bosses who refuses to employ him. Achieving documentary quality, the film successfully depicts the miserable living conditions of poor migrants consumed by routine. Also, observations about unemployment, education system, traditional marriage, gender issues, sexual frustration, and the established system that does not take migration into consideration are implied. The focal point assumes the position of a relatively silent observer of social problems so that the audience can pass judgment. The narrative tries to create emotional bonds and sympathy to deliver the implied messages rather than setting out a discussion, unlike the previous film, and remains on more humanitarian ground excluding overt discussions.

These two films form the narrative basis of the later films on migration in terms of how they handle the subject matter with a didactic and descriptive stance

respectively. However, from a formalist perspective, neither of these films is realistic, for instance, in terms of Bazin's description of the representation of reality by avoiding aesthetic touches such as the 'classical cut', by using filmic tools such as depth of field to enable the audience to make connections between the setting, the action in progress and the actors to reach 'unity of image in space and time', and by long takes to deliver 'the continuum of reality' (Bazin 1967: 34–37). On the contrary, the films employ a range of formal devices of classical narration to stir emotions and guide the viewers' perception of the characters and events rather than building a relatively neutral distance to encourage viewers' own interpretations of the narrative.

With regard to Italian neorealism, the on-location shooting and the natural light in certain scenes (Shiel 2006: 1–2, 12), especially in the scenes in squatter settlements in *The Endless Road*, create an almost documentary quality. However, because classical narration alternates with neorealism, a hybrid approach is seen in these films which undermines the realism effect and highlights 'fictionality'. Therefore, the film that most deserves to be called 'realistic' in form and content is *Umut* (Hope 1970), by Yılmaz Güney. The film has been regarded as the best example of Italian neorealism in Turkish cinema, the archetype of 'new Turkish cinema' that reaches to Nuri Bilge Ceylan (Daldal 2013: 185), or even the pinnacle of realism in Turkish cinema (Özön 1985: 386). Indeed, except for the fact that the actors who are playing 'illiterate rural characters' are dubbed with 'a decent urban accent', thereby undermining the realism effect, the film matches Bazin's understanding of realism, and follows neorealist conventions by means of on-location shootings, using ordinary people as actors, long takes and long shots. Also, long scenes and sequences without dialogue, and the absence of traditional appealing leading actors prevent identification with the characters, making the viewer distant observers. The film presents a slice of the life of a migrant cab driver whose old cab is pulled by his lean horses in Adana, a relatively wealthy agricultural province. Relying on the 'divine' instinct of a self-proclaimed hodja, the man loses his sanity in a desperate attempt to locate buried treasure to solve his problems caused by poverty. Despite the revisions demanded by the censorship board, the film was eventually censored for creating a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor, and a misleading impression about and suspicion towards security forces (Ataman 2013: appendix 92). The film successfully touches on class struggle, illiteracy, unfair treatment of public institutions, religious superstition, wavering morality, absolute commitment to rigid traditional

worldview, and poverty which is largely ignored by most of society and the political authorities.

These three films can be seen as the archetypal examples for later films on migration in form and content by providing a basis for migration films until the 1990s in Turkey and enabling a rough categorization of films as ‘didactic’ or ‘descriptive’ based on their approach to the subject matter. The ‘didactic approach’ problematizes migration as a social issue from a distance in a rather intellectual manner in order to diagnose the problems and offer explicit opinions, suggestions, criticism or solutions in a rather condescending and commanding manner by explicitly highlighting the victims and culprits. The didactic films are *Birds of Exile*, the trilogy (*The Bride*, *The Wedding*, *The Blood Money*), *The City with Golden Land and Rock*, and *Bilo the Banker*. Secondly, ‘descriptive films’ observe the problems and people, and inform the audience about migration and migrants in a rather sympathetic manner, presenting migrants as the victims of powers beyond their control, as seen in *The Endless Road*, *Hope*, *The Horse*, *A Handful of Heaven*, *The Broke Landlord*, *Mr Muhsin*, and *A Little Cloud*. Compared to the didactic films, rather than imposing judgments or conclusions directly, these films present the events and characters in a ‘relatively neutral’ way so that the viewers arrive at their own conclusion. As for the film form, with the exception of *Hope*, which reproduces neorealism, most of the films in both groups utilize a hybrid approach to various degrees through which mise-en-scene produces the realism effect, but cinematography and editing interrupt the filmic experience of the audience to guide them as much as possible.

## Didactic Films

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The bulk of the didactic films accumulates in the 1970s, and disappears in the 1980s, which is most probably related to the *zeitgeist* of the era. Despite the military memorandum forcing the government to resign for a stricter order in 1971, the relative freedom in the 1960s carried over to the 1970s in the form of social and political demands in a politically intense urban environment with violent conflicts between the polarized left and right wings, and the struggle for civil rights through unionist movements.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, political themes are seen more often in the films of the period. Some of the major themes are cultural conflict between urban and rural culture, sexual repression and frustration, femininity, patriarchy, adaptation,

integration, unemployment, ideology, capitalism, class conflict, exploitation, lack of education, impotent social institutions, corruption, and the human condition. Despite the presence of overt ideology, melodrama continues to have weight in these films, undercutting the realism effect. Nevertheless, the distinguishing quality of these films is that they always impose a certain point of view in the depiction of problems, solutions, lack of solutions, and lessons to be learned.

After *Birds of Exile*, a trilogy by Lütfi Akad, an acclaimed, versatile and prolific director, is dedicated to the problem of migration with a critical look. The trilogy consists of *Gelin* (The Bride, 1973), *Düğün* (The Wedding, 1974), and *Diyet* (The Blood Money,<sup>9</sup> 1974) and presents stories of different migrants from different parts of the country migrating to Istanbul, depicting the transition from ‘mechanical solidarity’ to ‘organic solidarity’ in a fairly didactic fashion. In the first two films, the household preserves all the rural values, beliefs and traditional rules. The whole family is a single unit working like a machine to employ capitalist means of profit on a small scale, yet, at the expense of humanity, by allegorically sacrificing one of ‘them’. In all three films, the narratives are structured to reflect the point of view of the main female character as the mouthpiece of the filmmaker. A study on the trilogy claims that the films pose binary oppositions such as traditional–modern or Islam–the West, and whereas the male characters represent the traditional and Islam, the main female characters represent the opposition befitting the aspirations of the Kemalist discourse on modern Turkish female citizens (Çöloğlu 2009: 148, 152). However, the main female characters in each film take traditional religious teachings as the guidance to the right path, and they create moments of epiphany. Specific Islamic parables are used as evidence to add more credibility to the moral lessons, to underline the digression from the moral code by the males as savage capitalists, and to establish a rapport between the main characters and the target audience by using ‘their’ language rather than the language of the urban elite. Hence, the main female characters are in constant conflict with their environment, underscoring that the main negotiation is indeed between traditional religious teachings and modernism, implying that they are compatible with each other, and contrary to the popular assumption, that migrants do not need to become ‘western’ to become ‘modern’ urban citizens. Indeed, the director himself, while mentioning the first film in his memoirs, regards the current migration movement as a movement that does not fit the romantic descriptions of unfortunate sorrowful accounts of migrants. His narratives do not present pitiful people, but daring and fearless people who do not care to change and adapt to the new



environment (Akad 2004: 544). While writing about the second film, he further elaborates that when migrants fail to succeed as unskilled, unemployed and penniless people, they would metaphorically tend towards cannibalism (ibid.: 549–50). Hence, the common denominator for the trilogy is sacrifice or price manifested by the characters either by sacrificing one of their own or themselves, providing moral lessons for the viewer.

In *The Bride*,<sup>10</sup> the main conflict around sacrifice is narrated through an allegory with reference to the story of Abraham and Samuel (İbrahim and İsmail in Turkish register) about the origins of the festival of the sacrifice in Islam as told by the head of the family to the son of the bride. Rather than providing money for the treatment of the bride's terminally ill son, the male members sacrifice him to the family business. This sacrifice is an awakening for the woman, and she leaves the house and the communal order to become a factory worker, which is the equivalent of prostitution for the traditional family whereas it is a step towards individualization and modernization for the narrative. In *The Wedding*, the religious rhetoric continues with the story of Joseph (Yusuf in Turkish register), again as an example of sacrifice and betrayal. First, the youngest member of the family is sacrificed when he is manipulated to take the blame for stabbing another street vendor to protect one of the adults. Then, for business purposes, two young sisters are literally sold to men against their will to exploit the tradition of bride money by the males, who take the money to utilize as capital: hence, metaphorical cannibalism. Once again, the main female character, the older sister, plays the part of the saviour, and rescues her sisters during the wedding ceremony despite being stabbed by the groom. In addition to savage capitalism internalized by the migrant entrepreneurs, the narrative also criticizes the hypocritical, contradictory and dichotomic worldview they pursue.

The last film of the trilogy, *The Blood Money*, extends the themes to migration, class struggle, unions, and class consciousness. The story develops around a work accident which results from the deliberate negligence of the management to fix a faulty machine in a factory, which is metaphorically associated with faulty modernization, urbanization, and labour. The new migrant worker in charge of the machine and the main female character, a working-class single mom, fall in love. However, they disagree about the local trade union and the unionist activities struggling to acquire the right for collective bargaining. Rather than referring to leftist terminology or literature, she justifies her decision to join the union with reference to the prophet's religious teachings that advise solidarity, unity and

collective action. Eventually, the anti-unionist husband has the same accident, and his arm is torn off. The wife throws the arm at the boss as the price for the emancipation of a modern slave. The film ends with her tirade blaming all parties involved without specifically pointing fingers at a particular group and gives a Brechtian look at the camera to include the audience as well as creating an explicit sense of didacticism. The film tries to reach the migrant working-class people to raise awareness, underline their social position, and convince them to participate in class struggle. Hence, the trilogy clearly states the right and wrong, the morally acceptable and unacceptable, and even explicitly delivers the message by means of tirades by the main female characters to reconcile the traditional and the modern for the migrants, to persuade them to change their perspective in the urban space without giving up the core values that have guided them for decades. To that end, Islamic teachings are strategically used to reveal, by one of the migrants, that the deeds of culpable migrants are against the Islamic creed.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the initial optimism around raising awareness among the migrants and offering solutions to ameliorate the complications of rapid urbanization is replaced with growing pessimism and sarcastic criticism rather than guidance. One example is a satirical and didactic film called *Taşı Toprağı Altın Şehir* (The City with Golden Land and Rock, 1979), by Orhan Aksoy. The film depicts the disintegration of a migrant family after migrating to the city to make money to buy a tractor and return to their village. However, amid economic depression and social frustration in a turbulent period just before another military coup d'état, they immediately meet the chaotic dark side of the city with its nepotism, corruption, insecurity, exploitation, inflation,<sup>11</sup> juvenile delinquency, and organized crime in a series of melodramatic events. 'The family as the smallest unit' disintegrates, and 'individual' action gains priority over group action because of the growing personal interests and ambitions of the migrants as they explore the opportunities in the city. Eventually, the head of the family leaves the city alone, uttering a tirade of frustration after losing everything and all other family members for various reasons including death, adultery, and imprisonment: an extremely pessimistic picture about the filmic world of migrants when compared with the initial cases.

In a similar fashion, the bitter criticism and pessimism continues in a popular dramatic comedy film called *Banker Bilo* (*Bilo the Banker*, 1980), by the master of comedy in Turkey, Ertem Eğilmez, which foreshadows the new Turkey<sup>12</sup> from the migrants' perspective. The film depicts the upcoming banking crisis in an unstable

social, political and economic environment through the story of a naïve rural migrant who falls prey to a confidence man in the guise of a human trafficker. After a series of hardships and tricks, the naïve migrant learns by bitter experience to become ruthless, and has his revenge on the confidence man by replacing him in his company using similar tricks. The didactic tirade uttered by the main character at the end is a concise description of the new *zeitgeist*. The virtuous human being in him is killed by ‘them’, and what they now see is the reincarnation of an immoral man. The grim implication in the previous films becomes a motif that migrants are now convinced that survival skills should include normalization of immorality, corruption, and individualism at all costs, and that success is mainly measured by money and the power it brings.

As migration grows to be a more chaotic problem, discussions, solutions, and optimistic observations cease to exist in the narratives, and are replaced by grim portrayals of migrants. A vicious cycle is formed: as the system ignores the massive social mobility, migrants become significant contributors to the problems as, in the eye of the filmmakers, they make obvious mistakes, act selfishly, become opportunists, disrupt the social order, even sacrifice or deceive their own family members, and usually face an unpleasant ending. Therefore, for the viewer, the emotional bond is established with only some of the migrants who are victimized by the established system, or even by their own people. *The City with Golden Land and Rock* marks a turning point due to the sharpness of criticism and pessimism. Towards the 1980s, the filmmakers seem to lose hope for a positive change and are disappointed in the migrants as well as the institutions and the rest of society. According to these didactic films, hope is conditional, and largely related to other members of society. Failing to acknowledge the need for mutualism causes the adaptive and assertive individuals, groups and communities disregarding ethics and even laws to have the upper hand and be more likely to climb up the social ladder than the law-abiding people, which in return poisons society.

## **Descriptive Films**

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Sharing the themes seen in the didactic films, the descriptive films underscore human suffering more than the social implications of migration. Although the social, economic, and political elements are not excluded or ignored in the narratives, migration is mainly handled in terms of its effects on the individual. The

descriptive films target the audience to establish a bond by relating the bitter experiences of migrants usually leading to a sense of defeat in a rather existential fashion by situating migrants as victims of powers larger than themselves. The main characters lose their sanity, die or go through a period of denial as seen in *The Endless Road*, *Hope*, *The Horse*, *Mr Muhsin*, and *A Little Cloud*; and only in *A Handful of Heaven* and *The Broke Landlord* do they face a bittersweet ending with a little bit of hope for the future, although they are still defeated and at the bottom having lost all they have struggled for. Perhaps it is not coincidental that most of the descriptive films accumulate in the 1980s, under the heavy shadow of the military coup in 1980, a period of major negative changes in all departments of life in parallel with increasing authoritarianism.

After *The Endless Road* and *Hope*, the theme of the doomed individual reappears in *At* (*The Horse*, 1981), by Ali Özgentürk. The film presents the bitter story of a migrant father in Istanbul who tries to provide for his son so that he can have a proper education, but he cannot cope with the demands of the era and falls prey to economic circumstances. Being part of the informal economy, the father faces defeat, and starts to suffer from hallucinations. He sees himself in a coffin, implying that his son will be saved upon his self-sacrificial death, and will receive an education as an orphan under the state's supervision. In the end, the prophecy fulfils itself, and he is accidentally killed in a fight with another fellow migrant after stealing the man's cart. Hence, the film involves sharp criticism from a humanitarian perspective in relation to all parties and factors involved, including the political authority, bureaucracy, widespread corruption, migrants and the loss of humanity. From this perspective, migrants are still outside the society on their own; they are either the predators or the prey, and the meek and mild-mannered ones are doomed to destruction by the very society and institutions that are supposed to provide aid. While reminiscent of *Hope* in the scenes portraying the harsh reality, when the psychological deterioration of the character becomes the focus, a more stylized film form, close to theatrical drama, is seen, resulting in a hybrid style breaking away from the realism effect. Similar to *The Endless Road*, the narrative depicts the story of uneducated, unnoticed, 'failed' people in society. However, a counter example to *The Horse*, about the challenges of survival of migrants with a similar profile, is *Bir Avuç Cennet* (*A Handful of Heaven*, 1985), by Muammer Özer. The film focuses on a nuclear family of four that arrives in Istanbul, and desperately takes shelter in an abandoned bus.<sup>13</sup> The family transforms the bus into a pleasant home with a garden and plants around it.

However, the family experiences a series of problems with the officials due to complaints from the city people situated across the deserted bus. Eventually, the bus is removed by the officials by force, and the perseverant family becomes homeless. However, they decide to stay and struggle for existence in the city and set up a tent at the same spot as their new home rather than give up. Although the story reflects only the migrants' perspective, for the first time, it clearly mentions the migrant-urban dweller tension, and how uncomfortable some urban dwellers feel about migrants squatting near their modern buildings. The film ends on a positive note; however, the future of the family remains open-ended for the audience.

So far, the films on migration have had very little to say about the conditions in the migrants' hometowns and the reasons why people leave their homes. One of the films that maintains the equilibrium between the city and the country is *Züğürt Ağa* (The Broke Landlord, 1985), by Nesli Çölgeçen, a narrative that traces the social transformation from the perspective of a landlord of a rural region in *Şanlıurfa*, who is indeed idealized as a conscientious generous but shallow-minded person. A comparative study aptly reveals the similarities between Don Quixote and the obsolete feudal landlord in terms of character formation as an 'anti-hero hero' who is unaware of the end of an era and the beginning of a new one until it is too late (Yumul 2018). As a remnant of regional feudalism, the landlord falls victim to the social changes related to urbanization after he moves to the city. The first half presents the adverse conditions in a village, which belongs to the landlord, together with its inhabitants, hinting at the faulty mechanisms in the countryside and mentioning the role of impoverished land, drought, inefficient agricultural methods, mutual distrust, religious moral decay, and local political deals. The second part is devoted to the urban experience, leading to a fall from power when the landlord gradually loses all his money and people around him, including his wife and children, due to his inability to realize and adapt to the new culture. In the end, the landlord is forced to accept the new status quo, the end of an era, and sells his remaining asset, the riding boots – a metaphor for feudal power – to become a street vendor, which is, nevertheless, a rather bittersweet ending. On the other hand, the former subjects of the landlord adapt to the new conditions more successfully and explore the opportunities of the urban space as self-made men on equal terms with the landlord. Again, the narration is too idealized, but is functional in underlining, through caricaturized characters, the individualism which is on the rise.

Almost the mirror image of *The Broke Landlord*, and the last case from the 1980s, is *Muhsin Bey* (Mr Muhsin, 1987), by Yavuz Turgul, which focuses on the cultural conflict and transformation mainly from the urban perspective. Mr Muhsin is a gentlemanly, sensitive, naïve, old-school but broke music producer and organizer. He is approached by a talented young migrant who follows the *arabesk* music hype to Istanbul to become one of those rich and famous *arabesk* singers. The narrative sets these characters as opposite poles to each other, to discuss the convergence of diverse cultures in the midst of the cultural transformation in the city. The migrant lacks finesse, manners, perseverance, and artistic background, and thus represents the rising *arabesk* culture. The old man adores Turkish classical music and abhors *arabesk* songs, and accepts the young talent for his debut album on the condition that *arabesk* music is off the table, and that the latter will only sing folk music. In the end, the producer swindles people's money to afford the cost of the debut album, turns himself in, serves his sentence in prison, and finds the young talent only to witness that he has become an *arabesk* singer in a third-rate place, and has become lovers with the old man's beloved. He finds peace in regressing to the 'good old days' in his dreams while the cultural transformation symbolized by the *arabesk* culture is in full throttle. The narrative is constructed around the term *arabesk* which is mainly used to describe a hybrid music genre popular among the rural migrants in Turkey from the 1960s onwards. However, both the musical production and the cultural manifestations and associations of *arabesk* soon stirred discontent in the urban society to various degrees and became a pejorative term to define a specific group of people listening to such songs, which depicted intense pain, suffering, love, divine mercy and justice with a musical structure mixing Arabic melodies and local musical heritage. Indeed, *arabesk* music quickly became a cultural element, an expression of ambiguity stemming from displacement, a lack of sense of belonging and identity. In the 1980s, *arabesk* culture became more acknowledged by the political leaders as the migrants, who were also voters, outnumbered the urban dwellers (Özbek 2000). Hence, the narrative presents the perspective of an urban character who opposes everything that *arabesk* stands for, especially the vulgarity dominating society in all departments to replace 'the good old days' for the urban dwellers. Indeed, the narrative ends on a pessimistic note with failure, defeat and disappointment for all parties involved regardless of their background, ambitions, motivation, and gender, and the audience is given enough space to interpret the implications themselves, unlike with the didactic films.

Finally, a retrospective film, *Bir Küçük Bulut* (A Little Cloud, 1990), by Faruk Turgut, marks the end of an era with the dramatic story of a family migrating to Istanbul. The intradiegetic narrator is an adult relating what he experienced as a little boy during a turbulent period after migrating to the city. Like *The Horse*, the story of a father and a son is the focus, and again, the father struggles to provide his son with a brighter future and educational opportunities. However, he ends up imprisoned for groundless ideological reasons, and is eventually killed by one of his relatives in a brawl. The film is another example of the existential perspective on the insignificance of human lives in a ruthless system due to rapid urbanization. The overall social, political, economic problems produce such an unstable environment that false arrest or death of an individual is a mundane event due to the faulty system the foundations of which have been weakened over the period of transition driven by migration. The appearance of the adult narrator at the end, as a noticeably well-off and decent urban individual who managed to survive the hardships, signals the completion of the first phase of the traumatic internal migration movement after all the sorrow and drama summarized in the previous narratives, and the beginning of a new phase, the integration and negotiation process of migrants in the cities to create a new hybrid urban culture.

The descriptive films focus more on the individuals and the nuclear family, and are without an overt didactic approach. The presentation of diverse problems and the criticism of the malfunctioning system and deteriorating society are used as the context for the stories, but the context itself is not developed further to explicitly create the discussion of a social problem. The approach changes to a more impartial but emotive stance that aims to present open-ended cases for the audience to interpret. With the exception of *Hope*, and partly *The Horse*, which rely on neorealism, the use of classical narration enables the audience to establish emotional bonds with individual characters more easily than is the case with realistic approaches, at the expense of undercutting the realism effect. Hence, melodramatic modality is seen with a series of unfortunate events dragging the characters towards unhappy or pessimistic endings, or ambiguous endings that are partially consoling for the audience although the characters are indeed in a worse position than they were in previously. Eventually, the descriptive films tend to focus on negative and pessimistic stories about migration and migrants.

## Repetition, Limitation and the Lack

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The study of these examples reveals a trend in the ways in which films on migration approach their subject matter. After the archetypal films, which seem to be experimenting with narrative scope and film language in handling social problems in cinema, the examples allow a rough categorization as didactic and descriptive films in a surprisingly chronological manner, which is related to the *zeitgeist*, the conditions that are subject to change due to major political, economic, and social factors in time and space. The films share basic narrative and stylistic elements stemming from the powerful archetypal films on migration but with different perspectives and diverse styles. In both types of films, a narrative pattern can be observed: first, the conflict is set between the old traditional rural order and the new modern urban order, and then between the desires of the migrants and their inability to fulfil them because of a range of internal and/or external factors including the inadequate established system that is unable to produce solutions for problems about urbanization.

In parallel with the social changes, the filmic approach of the narratives changes as well: the victims and the oppressed of the 1960s transform into victimizers and oppressors in the 1980s, turning the initial picture upside down. Most of the films focus on the lives of stereotypical migrant profiles with stories usually composed of unfortunate events, death, sorrow, suffering and so on, to produce an excessive emotional response (for a discussion of similar themes and stylistic approaches in the Indian context, see Raj and Sreekumar in this volume). This melodramatic excess is translated into imagined spaces and agents, which undermines realism and leads to decontextualization, especially in the descriptive films. The films usually employ a hybrid film form composed of classical narration in terms of cinematography and editing, and neorealism in terms of *mise-en-scene*, particularly in setting, costume, and visual details. Except in *Hope* and *The Horse*, the style functions mainly to guide the audience throughout the film to signal for certain emotional reactions to be produced.

*Birds of Exile* and the subsequent didactic films imagine migration as an intellectual question that refers mainly to the disrupted order caused by migration which victimizes the migrants in return. These films propagate the idea that migration can easily become a source of disappointment, deprivation, regret and frustration for all parties involved, and that migrants should go through a period of adaptation and change and should not expect too much while offering too little.



The initial didactic films try to identify the problem in order to offer insights and solutions using the characters as the filmmaker's mouthpiece in a somewhat constructive but one-sided and condescending manner. The later films opt for harsh criticism and even satire to underline the severity of the problems, and some of the migrants' share in them. Hence, the idealism intended to raise awareness and provide insight in *Birds of Exile* and the trilogy is gradually replaced with pessimism and dark humour in *The City with Golden Land and Rock*, and *Bilo the Banker*. In these two films, the characters become wiser, but to no avail as they lose too much, including people they care about, their hopes and dreams.

On the other hand, *The Endless Road* and the subsequent descriptive films assume a 'relatively neutral' stance to focus on migrants as individuals with tough psychological experiences in an unstable society experiencing ongoing moral decay. These films are seen frequently after the 1980s during one of the most oppressive periods of the country, in a post-coup d'état environment. Without explicit didacticism, migrants are presented as victims of the conditions they encounter and of society in general, enabling viewers' identification with the characters more than is the case with the didactic films. The characters end up in a worse position than they were in initially, and even if they are somewhat content in the end, the ambiguity of the endings prevent the implication of a truly happy ending.

However, with the exception of Güney and to some extent Akad, filmmakers cover a tiny portion of a massive social phenomenon by categorically reproducing a similar discourse that does not include the major local and national political, economic, ideological, and social events of the eras they belong to, nor their socio-psychological implications, probably relying on the viewers' background knowledge and ability to fill in the blanks. Apart from citing financial reasons, the films do not even explore the reasons why people desert their homes, bear the otherwise unbearable conditions in urban areas, and refuse to return even when they are without food, shelter and money. Similarly, the reasons why 'the east' is considered uninhabitable by millions of people remain almost nebulous as the films do not provide a concise political, economic, or social background for the audience, except in *The Broke Landlord* to some extent. In a similar fashion, with the exception of *Mr Muhsin*, the urban side of the subject matter is not elaborated at all, as if urban people did not exist side by side with migrants. When they are visible, for instance, they are sketched as stereotypical characters in *The City with Golden Land and Rock*, and as ghostly functional beings in *A Little Cloud* merely to trigger

dramatic conflicts. Therefore, the result is usually a repetitive narrative design, and the narratives fail to explore the diverse cases of migration as a social problem. With the exception of the trilogy by Akad, the experiences of the migrants follow a similar path: migrants are either simply poor to varying degrees, as in *The Endless Road*, *Hope*, *Bilo the Banker*,<sup>14</sup> *The Horse*, *A Handful of Heaven*, *Mr Muhsin*, and *A Little Cloud*, or they end up becoming poor after a steady fall, as in *Birds of Exile*, *The City with Golden Land and Rock*, and *The Broke Landlord*. The lack of innovation in narrative construction and style signifies the limited response of the filmmakers to the social trauma. The reasons for this might vary, from commercial pressure from the producers and lack of freedom in the Turkish film industry of the era, to censorship boards and political oppression, or any other reason and their combination thereof.

Although there are many factors at play, censorship and financial restrictions need to be touched upon briefly to elaborate on the relationship between the environment and stylistic and narrative limitations, and the major reasons for the arrested development of the film industry, which eventually encompassed films on migration as well. To begin with, from the Ottoman era until 1986,<sup>15</sup> all regulations concerning the film industry had been aimed at institutionalized censorship executed by the members of a variety of formal institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the General Directorate of Police, the General Staff, the Directorate of Press and Tourism, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture (Çiftçi 2001: 22–25). Due to the nature of the censorship boards, films were essentially subject to political control from a certain ideological perspective putting them under pressure about diverse topics including political discourse and representation of social events that the political authority might not approve. For instance, two of the films analysed in this study, *The Endless Road* (1965) and *Hope* (1970), are among the very first examples of their kind, and they were immediately targeted by the censorship board, and the screening of both films was banned in Turkey and abroad on the debatable grounds that the films were insulting certain social values, misrepresenting different strata of society, and so on. To avoid such restrictions, which were based on highly ambiguous concepts open to interpretation, producers and directors tried to take advantage of loose and sloppy practice of the boards by submitting ‘decent’ copies of scripts and trimmed versions of their films which were not the same as the final copies of the scripts and films (Ataman 2013: 115, 121, 122, 135). However, no matter how creative producers, directors, and writers were in their attempts to escape the authorities,

the mere presence of censorship boards – with the authority to reject a film project partly or entirely before and/or after the production stages – has created a crippling effect on freedom of expression. Şeref Gür, a producer whose films shared a similar fate, underlines the fact that the worst part of censorship boards is self-censorship, which gradually leads creative people to internalize the hovering threat to the extent that they become their own police (*Remix, Remake, Rip-off*, 2014). Hence, filmmakers would revise their works as if they were a member of the censorship board in order to stay away from trouble, financial loss, or imprisonment; this might also account for ‘the lack’, the unexplored stories from all sides in films on migration.

Another factor is the structural issues of the film industry in Turkey, which is characterized by, figuratively speaking, never ending austerity measures due to chronic high inflation and currency crises. All camera equipment, film stock, post-production devices were imported; and therefore, economic fluctuations and foreign currency rates, and, especially during the 1970s, embargoes for political and financial reasons all had to be considered in film budgets. On top of that, the industry in the 1950s was built to prioritize profit over the wellbeing and healthy growth of the industry in the long term. The industry was fuelled and controlled by distributors, regional operators, and cinema owners who had a say in the number of films made per season, the genre, cast, and content of the films to be produced, and they became the main financial sources for filmmaking due to lack of bank loans and subsidies. Eventually, the golden years of Turkish cinema, which flourished in the 1960s (with an increase in the number of productions per year from 80 films to around 300 films), came to a halt in the late 1970s (Erkiliç 2003: 93–96; Kalemci and Özen 2011: 85–90). One of the biggest producers of the period diagnosed the financial problems of the industry as a lack of capital and wrong economic policies by the governments. He claimed that the production companies overextended themselves by making more films than they were capable of, by raising only around 25 per cent of the money required at the start and collecting the rest from the aforementioned sources. As a result, a large sum of box-office earnings flowed to people outside the industry, which led to a shrinking industry in the long run. However, he also confessed how he refrained from purchasing modern equipment for post-production due to heavy customs tariffs, which was not sensible from a business perspective as the return on investment would have taken a long time; and therefore, the company continued to use obsolete equipment for over thirty years (Dorsay, Coş, and Ayça 1973: 25, 32). The

ramifications of the worsening financial conditions were felt in the production stage in the form of tight budgets, limited shooting days, archaic equipment, and limited film stock. For instance, Akad, whose last feature length film was *The Blood Money*, recollected the constant downturn in working conditions in terms of the length of film he was allowed to use in his career. As was customary in the past, the amount of film consumed during the production stage was measured by metres; at the beginning of his career as a director he was able to use around 10,000 metres of negative film, but this amount steadily decreased to around 6,000 metres as the industry standard, and then to 4,000 metres in dire circumstances (2004: 38). Considering that a 35 mm film reel is approximately 305 metres long, amounting to 11 minutes for sound film, the directors could shoot roughly 215 minutes of footage at best when they use 6,000 metres of film. This means that they could hardly have the opportunity for retakes and extra shots for details and experimentation. Further taking into account the busy schedule amounting to twenty to thirty shooting days, usually without a proper shooting schedule and shooting script (Özön 2013: 236–37), it would not be an overstatement to deduce that quality is compromised for faster filmmaking relying on formulas which undermine creativity and novelty in film style, which might at least partly explain the presence of recurrent and similar stylistic patterns to combine classical narration with neorealism in the majority of the films.

Hence, from a formalist perspective, the films analysed in this study display certain narrative and stylistic patterns in the ways in which they handle the subject matter of internal migration, enabling a categorization as didactic and descriptive films with substantial differences in how they perceive and present their subject matter. However, overall, these films project only a small part of a larger picture, and the film industry fails to provide a diverse and thorough portrayal of the ongoing problems related to internal migration in the given period in Turkey. Placing these films in a historical context reveals that the limited repertoire in form and content can be related to the economic and political conditions in the form of financial restraints and censorship. Further and more detailed studies on what these films have ignored, and the influence of cultural, political, and economic factors that explicitly or implicitly steer filmmakers in terms of film form and content, might prove to be essential to gain new insights about the theme of migration in Turkish cinema in particular, and filmmaking in general.

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## Notes

1. The term ‘migration’ in this study broadly refers to the basic definition of social migration as ‘any instance of geographical movement of individuals and groups relative to one another, or any instance of the geographical movement of a group, which has consequences for group structure’ (Startup 1971: 177).
2. The early 1990s are usually considered to be the beginning of a new era in Turkish cinema called ‘the new cinema’, which refers to the detachment in filmmaking from the old tradition to restructure the industry almost from scratch after the fall of the old production companies, compromised film quality, and a significant fall in the number of spectators (Atam 2009: 206). Eventually, a new generation of directors, together with some of the younger members of the older generation, started making films with better cinematographic quality, state-of-the-art equipment, soundtrack, special effects, and editing to be able to attract the audience who avoided Turkish films in a market under the dominance of foreign films, especially Hollywood films, which raised the expectations of the audience. This new generation had bigger budgets and benefitted from the ongoing financial expansion in the 1990s in media industries (Suner 2010: 12–14). On top of that, after Turkey became a member state of *Eurimages* in 1990, and thanks to the state subsidies to support cinema, the directors had better prospects of securing financial resources themselves in the absence of production companies of the previous era (Teksoy 2005: 938–39; Atam 2009: 206). Eventually, the new generation of directors started to make commercially successful films that stimulated the spectators’ interest in domestic films and regained the lost prestige.
3. Until 1982, settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants were classified as urban areas (Öztürk et al. 2018: 514; UKKS 2014).
4. The rates are expected to be lower between the 1950s and the 1970s.
5. In this study, slapstick comedies are excluded, but dramatic comedies are included.
6. In 1960, a military coup d’état, which probably paved the way for future military interventions, took place producing a surprisingly democratic constitution the following year.
7. *Gecekondu* literally means ‘landed at night’, referring to the quick and illegal construction of houses usually on public land. The number of *gecekondu* settlements in 1955 was 50,000 accommodating 250,000 people, and that figure rose to 1.75 million units accommodating 8.75 million people as of 1990 (Keleş 2018: 540). It is estimated that squatters’ houses accommodated approximately at least 50 per cent of the population in three major cities in Turkey in the 1990s (Taş and Lightfoot 2007: 267).
8. As of 1975, trade unions represented approximately 3.3 million members, a dramatically high number when compared to 295,000 members as of 1963 (Buyukuslu 1994: 59).

9. Not a proper translation, but a popular one. The title refers to a torn arm thrown at the management by the main character as the 'price' or 'compensation'. Therefore, 'the price' would make more sense.
10. The main character is called 'the bride' to underscore her position in a traditional patriarchal family: she is an outsider in the eye of her husband's family, and she is excluded from decision making processes.
11. According to the official reports, the inflation rate in 1978 was 52.6, and it increased to 63.9 in 1979 (TCMB 1980: 92).
12. Here, 'the new Turkey' refers to the paradigm shift triggered by a new liberalization attempt driven by Turgut Özal in the 1980s. He was the deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs in the military government after the military coup d'état in September 1980, and then the prime minister after winning the first free elections in 1983 while the existing political parties and their leaders were banned (Başçı 2017: 74).
13. The imprint on the deserted bus reads 'Prisons and Detention Houses', implying that now the bus houses new urban prisoners, the migrants.
14. As an exception, the main character starts as a poor man and then ends as a rich man, again appropriate to the melodramatic modality.
15. There have been many versions of the regulations, beginning in 1909 and 1915 in the Ottoman era, and then in 1932, 1934, 1977, and 1983 with amendments with no improvement. In 1986, one of the most significant changes was the removal of the police from the board, implying a more civilized board. However, members from the Ministry of the Interior and the General Staff remained intact (Çiftçi 2001: 22–27). So, these changes did not solve any problems about political censorship at all but made them more implicit.

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