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Identity and Success in Turkish Cinema

Türk Sinemasında Kimlik ve Başarı

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Abstract: In 1989 the number of cinema movie viewers in Turkey started to be measured. The figures show a significant increase in attendance and earnings on the last twenty years. Based on these data it is possible to state that since the 2000s the Turkish film industry has become a mass phenomenon and a very profitable business. According to the research conducted such success can be explained by several reasons. First, the impressive growth of the film-making sector has made it independent from the television industry. Secondly, the proliferation of high-budget production companies. Thirdly, the boost driven by legal and governmental incentives. Fourthly, the massification of mass media and marketing networks, especially spurred by the huge spreading of internet and the new social ones. Finally, the improvement of the average income of Turkey's population. Regarding the movies massively attended, most of them are Turkish comedies which are attractive to domestic audiences not only as entertainment but also because they involve identity references. In this sense, the Turkish spectator feels himself depicted in the screen in an active manner (the behaviors and reactions by the characters are a representation of Turkish idiosyncrasy) as well as in a passive one (the character represents the type of Turk the spectator feels he is not). Besides comedies, domestic dramas or action movies appealing to nationalistic elements are also well received by the Turkish public. The underlying discussion refers to an undefined contest for what Turkishness means within a society that has experienced many economic, political and social changes in recent decades, which have created an identity crisis.

Structured Abstract: In the last years, cinema attendance in Turkey has significantly increased. Before the 1990s, although the film industry was already prolific, especially during the Yeşilçam era in which 300 movies could be produced per year, the number of spectators was not massive. At the same time that a liberal process of economic opening was being held in Turkey and political censorship was softened, cinema attendance started to be measured. Based on these numbers, it is possible to state that during the 2000s the film industry became a mass phenomenon in Turkey. According to the Turkey Box Office information, in the last 20 years within the 100 most viewed films in Turkey, 86 of them are Turkish and within them the comedy genre has been predominant. In fact, 17 titles in the 25 most attended films are comedies, six of which are into the Top Ten. It is also noticeable that comedies belonging to a series are repeatedly listed. The most interesting case is *Recep İvedik*, a six movies saga starring Şahan Gökbarak, all of them on the list, including the highest (Part 5, 2018. Attendance: 7.437.050) and the 2nd (Part 4, 2014. Attendance: 7.369.098) positions. Similar cases can be found in the *Düğün Dernek* series (Part 1, 2013: 3rd position; Part 2, 2015: 6th position) starring Ahmet Kural whose film *Ailecek şaşkınsız* reached in addition the 14th position; *Eyvah Eyvah* (Part 2, 2011: 17th pos.; Part 3, 2014: 27th pos.) with Ata Demirel in the leading role; *Vizontele* (Part 1, 2001: 29th pos.; Part 2, 2004: 32nd pos.) in which the main character is performed by Yılmaz Erdoğan, and the sequence *G.O.R.A.* (2004: 15th pos.),

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A.R.O.G. (2008: 21st pos.) and *Arif V 216* (2018: 10th pos.) starring Cem Yılmaz who also positioned his Stand-Up comedy movie *CM101MMXI Fundamentals* (2013) in the 18th place. The main hypothesis of this article is to suggest that the Turkish audience's comedy preferences can be explained by a desire to themselves represented on screen, even in an environment in which the meaning of Turkishness is being contested and remains undefined. Regarding the movies that are not comedies, four of them depict operations (real or fantastic) displayed by the Turkish military. *Ayla* (2017: 7th position) is based upon a true story whose background is the participation of Turkey in Korea War. The rest of films show imaginary confrontations by Turkish Army against corrupt members of CIA (*Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak*, 2006: 13rd pos.), against ISIS (*Dağ 2*, 2016: 23rd pos.) and against a pretended terrorist organization whose head (a religious leader) fled to the USA (*New York'ta Beş Minare*, 2010: 25th pos.) in what seems to be an unnoticed harbinger of the subsequent persecution of the Gülenist movement. The remaining movies in the Top 25 list deal with the 1980 military coup through the narrative of an unfair trial (7. *Koğuştaki Mucize*, 2019: 8th pos.), and a family conflict (*Babam ve Oğlum*, 2005: 19th pos.). Also, with a vision of Turkey's Southeastern region in years following the 1960 coup through the eyes of the incipient attempts of schooling and the wedding traditions in a local family (*Mucize*, 2015: 20th pos.). One more (*Fetih 1453*, 2012: 4th pos.) narrates the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans from the Turkish point of view. Finally, *Müslüm* (2018: 5th pos.) is a biopic of Müslüm Gürses, a legendary Turkish Arabesque singer.

The recent developments in Turkish Cinema also reflect social changes. In this sense, whereas before the 1990s movies were designed exclusively as a source of entertainment, in the last three decades they have become a product within the market aimed at profitability which has coincided with an audience having better purchasing power, a society with identities in dispute and a massive consolidation of the mass media. Therefore, while the limits between authenticity and commercialization seem to have been solved in favor of the marketing approach which has transformed the movies into a mass consumption commodity, the film industry in Turkey is also a disputing territory in which the narratives trying to be imposed confront other resisting perspectives. In this way, different approaches to Turkey's reality are being shaped and other sources of identity are taking place in popular fiction. In the case of specific comedies such as *Recep İvedik*, the most successful saga in Turkish film industry, its high acceptance can be explained by the Turkish average citizen feeling identified with or represented by him. However, it is also the result of the boom in social networks and the growing commercialization of the film market that has made the Turkish film industry a commodity and a mass consumption product.

Keywords: Turkish cinema, identity contest, representation, Turkish blockbuster movies, marketing

Öz: Türkiye’de 1989 yılında film izleyici sayısı ölçülmeye başlanmıştır. Rakamsal veriler son yirmi yılda izleyici sayısında ve maddi anlamda kayda değer bir yükseliş olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu verilere dayanarak şunu söyleme mümkündür ki 2000’li yılların başından itibaren Türk film endüstrisi daha ilgi çekici bir hale gelmiş ve karlı bir iş sahasına dönüşmüştür. Yürütülen araştırmalara göre bu başarı aşağıda belirtilen sebepler ile açıklanabilir. İlk olarak film sektöründeki etkileyici büyüme onun televizyon endüstrisinden bağımsız olmasını sağlamıştır. İkinci olarak yüksek bütçeli yapım şirketlerinin yaygınlaşmasıdır. Üçüncüsü, devlet tarafından verilen yasal ve destekleyici teşviklerdir. Dördüncüsü medyanın kitlesel gücü, pazarlama ağı özellikle internetin ve yeni sosyal ağların uzantılarıyla geniş bir alana yayılmasıdır. Son olarak Türkiye nüfusunun ortalama gelirinin artmasıdır. Yüksek katılımla filmlere ilişkin, birçok Türk komedi filminin yerli seyirci için sadece ilgi çekici bir eğlence kaynağı olmamakla birlikte kişilerin kendi kişisel kimliklerini de bu filmlerde görmeleridir. Bu bağlamda, Türk izleyicisi kendisinin perdede aktif bir biçimde tasvir edildiğini hissetmektedir (Karakterin davranışı, tepkisi Türk mizacını ve özelliklerini temsil etmektedir). Bunun yanı sıra edilgen durumda ise karakter temsil ettiği Türk tipini karşı tarafa yansıtmamaktadır. Komedi filmlerinin yanında aile içi dram veya aksiyon filmlerindeki milliyetçi özellikler Türk halkı tarafından beğeniyle karşılanmaktadır. Altı çizilen bahis, Türklüğün anlamının son yıllarda toplum içinde birçok ekonomik, politik ve sosyal anlamda yaşanan değişimler sonucunda kimlik krizine sebep olmasını ve tanımlanamayan rekabeti kastetmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk sineması, kimlik yarışması, tasvir, Türk gişe rekorları, pazarlama

Introduction

Artistlik yapma! is the expression recurrently used by Recep İvedik, a famous character created by the Turkish actor Şahan Gökçek, whose films have become a mass phenomenon in Turkey in the last decade. In its literal sense, this phrase asks someone not to play a role, but it is addressed to “smart-asses” or people who “put on airs” and behave as a nuisance. That expression and language in general used by the character are now commonplace within the Turkish audience, very familiar with his manners and gestures, which are easily recognizable among most people. Such identification is not surprising taking into consideration that *Recep İvedik* is a film saga (six movies have been produced until now) that has had huge attendances. For instance, in the case of the fifth part, released in 2017, it was viewed in theaters by almost 7.5 million people, which represented more than 9 percent of Turkey’s national population that year (80,8 million inhabitants) (TUIK, 2018). Additionally, due to current broadcasting channels such as the internet, video players (DVD/Blu Ray), streaming platforms and television, views have probably been much larger, not counting the receptivity that these movies have had within the Turkish diaspora, especially in Germany.

The success of Recep İvedik is only a sample of a trend reached by a series of Turkish films since the 2000s that have not only performed well in the box office but also have meant significant revenues. In many cases, the films are comedies, but the action and historical ones can also be found. What are the reasons for these good figures? What is special in these movies that make them so appealing for Turkish audience? Answers to questions like these will be attempted throughout this article under a main hypothesis: the films that Turks like most are those which they can identify with. It means that somehow the audience feels itself depicted in what is staged on the screen. But it also refers to a broader sense of identity, related to what should be understood as Turkishness, that is, what characterizes the Turks.

However, to understand this successful wave, it is not enough to affirm an identity component, because there are films that also exploit the representation of the Turkishness on the screen without having achieved similar performances in the box office. In addition, it is necessary to consider the realization, release, projection and distribution of films in terms of profitability, in which the films are products that need to be marketed. Therefore, success in attendance is accompanied by tangible economic profits not only in the box office collection but also in all the commercialization activities that surround the entire production and viewing process. This is also due to changes in the economy which for the film industry brought with them modifications in the production chain and made Turkish cinema a massive and profitable business since the 1990s. Outcomes can be seen in the number of productions and the growing figures since the 2000s. With new technologies and the spread of social networks and media, marketing has also played an important role in the success of films.

Social and economic changes in Turkey have had a political background, with the AKP coming to power in 2002, which has involved a debate on Turkish identity. It has also brought with it an agenda to deepen the country's integration in the global market as well as a shift in foreign policy, now oriented towards the former territories of the Ottoman Empire and rapprochements with emerging powers and the Third World. Internally, these adjustments have led to a concentration of power directly proportional to the increase in authoritarianism. Some of the blockbuster movies seem to address issues related to this new political agenda, especially action films or those that clearly allude to nationalist elements. Yet several of the comedies, through “identification” or “depoliticization” may be contributing to the purposes of government or making them imperceptible to the public. As follows, all these issues will be elucidated.

Background

In 2014 Turkish Cinema celebrated its 100th anniversary which demonstrates a long tradition

in film making. Within this history it was the Yeşilçam era (since the end of the 1950 to the mid-1970) the most prolific in film production, with an average of 150-175 movies per year, reaching its peak in 1972 when more than 300 films were produced. After a decadence period, during the 1990s Turkish cinema began a revival in harmony with the economic changes initiated in the prior decade in Turkey and the unprecedented development that private television channels experienced in the country. While in 1989 (the same year that the movie attendance started to be measured) not even a single private channel existed, four years later there were already eleven. As of 2008, they had surpassed twenty (Behlil, 2010: 3). According to this author, the film companies, some of which are from the Yeşilçam period, had influence in the configuration of new television broadcasting. However, such impact suddenly dropped in 1994 because of an economic crisis in Turkey. As a result, a contrary trend initiated afterwards when television influenced the new blockbuster local movies. The first of these massively viewed films was *Eşkıya* (The Bandit), released in 1996 which reached 2.5 million spectators. As Behlil states, “the television sector provided a haven for members of the cinematic workforce during the period when filmmaking was at its nadir” (Behlil, 2010: 4). The support that television provided to renascent film industry went until 2005 when the number of production companies and directors working exclusively in theatrical releases became predominant though actors in general performed in both media.

The interdependence between television and film industries is also highlighted by Suner who shows how in the 2000s Turkish popular cinema became a massive profitable sector. The interrelation is based not only on the success that both Turkish TV drama series and films increasingly had (the soap operas abroad, movies within the country) but also on the production origins and the audience. “Film and television industries have remained strongly interconnected during this period, in the sense that they share the same creative crew, financial sources, technical infrastructure, and viewers” (Suner, 2011: 126). In fact, some movies in those years were adaptations of television shows or characters, just like in the case of Recep İvedik. In 2005, the Turkish comedian Şahan Gökbağkar created a program called *Dikkat Şahan Çıkabilir* which was composed of sketches mainly aimed at criticizing other TV productions, newsletters or celebrities. In a short period, the program became very popular and Gökbağkar was seduced by a larger media holding, the owner of four private channels, to broadcast his show on one of them. Although the program was not as successful (in part due to a change in the format) one of the characters depicted in it, Recep İvedik, remained memorable and at the beginning of 2008 was released as a film for the first time reaching 4.3 million viewers.

The year 2005 seems to be a watershed in contemporary Turkish cinema. On one hand, the increasing independence of film production companies regarding television contributed to their transformation into more specialized enterprises. The biggest companies focused on high-profile productions with larger budgets, top celebrities starring the main characters and better distribution and promotion channels. On the other hand, the support by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism became widespread providing significant financial resources for local productions. It was possible thanks to the approval of laws for the evaluation, classification, regulation and support of feature films during the second half of 2004 which consists of assistance in development, production and post-production. Despite the disposal of private investments, the provision with public funds has become increasingly necessary, especially for small companies. Even so, well-funded productions also receive financial support by the government. In any case, these changes were visible since 2005 when Turkish cinema became a huge phenomenon. As can be seen below, the top 25 of most viewed Turkish movies, all of them productions that surpassed 3 million of attendants, were released in the last sixteen years:

No.	Film	Production company	Premiere date	Attendance
1	Recep İvedik 5	CGV Mars D.	Feb. 16, 2017	7.437.050
2	Recep İvedik 4	Tiglon	Feb. 21, 2014	7.369.098
3	Düğün Dernek	UIP Türkiye	Dec. 6, 2013	6.980.070
4	Fetih 1453	Tiglon	Feb. 16, 2012	6.572.618
5	Müslüm	CGV Mars D.	Oct. 26, 2018	6.480.563
6	Düğün Dernek 2: Sünnet	CGV Mars D.	Dec. 4, 2015	6.073.364
7	Ayla	CGV Mars D.	Oct. 27, 2017	5.589.872
8	7. Koğuştaki Mucize	CJ Entertainment Turkey	Oct. 11, 2019	5.349.014
9	Aile Arasında	CGV Mars D.	Dec. 1, 2017	5.289.051
10	Arif v 216	CGV Mars D.	Jan. 5, 2018	4.968.462
11	Recep İvedik 2	Özen Film	Feb. 13, 2009	4.333.144
12	Recep İvedik	Özen Film	Feb. 22, 2008	4.301.693
13	Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak	KenDa	Feb. 3, 2006	4.256.567
14	Ailecek Şaşkıncı	CGV Mars D.	Mar. 2, 2018	4.034.858
15	G.O.R.A.	Warner Bros. Türkiye	Nov. 12, 2004	4.001.711
16	Recep İvedik 6	CJ Entertainment Turkey	Nov. 8, 2019	3.986.620
17	Eyyvah Eyvah 2	UIP Türkiye	Jan. 7, 2011	3.947.988
18	CM101MMXI Fundamentals	Tiglon	Jan. 3, 2013	3.842.535
19	Babam ve Oğlum	Özen Film	Nov. 18, 2005	3.839.883
20	Mucize	Pinema	Jan. 1, 2015	3.737.605
21	A.R.O.G.	UIP Türkiye	Dec. 5, 2008	3.707.086
22	Etilerin Savaşı	UIP Türkiye	Jan. 31, 2020	3.630.822
23	Dağ 2	CGV Mars D.	Nov. 4, 2016	3.600.000
24	Organize İşler Sazan Sarmalı	CJ Entertainment Turkey	Feb. 1, 2019	3.537.429
25	New York'ta Beş Minare	Pinema	Nov. 5, 2010	3.474.495

Source: Turkey Box Office (<https://boxofficeturkiye.com/tum-zamanlar/seyirci-rekorlari/tum-filmler>).

There are some interesting facts to point out. First, all the films are Turkish. Indeed, if the list of the 100 most viewed movies of all time in Turkey is checked, only 14 of them are foreign. *The Fast and the Furious 7*, released in 2015, is the best performing *yabancı* film in the box office reaching 2.9 million in attendance and the 30th position within the list. Secondly, most of the blockbuster movies are comedies. In the Top 25, 16 are humorous films including the three most viewed. Thirdly, films that are not comedies involve nationalistic subjects and are mainly action movies, historical movies or a mixture of them. Finally, parts of the same saga or movies starring the same actor are recurrent within the list, as in the case of *Eyyvah Eyvah*, starring Ata Demirel; *A.R.O.G.* y *G.O.R.A.* with Cem Yılmaz as the leading actor, who also performs in *Arif V 216* and the stand-up comedy *CM101MMXI Fundamentals*; *Düğün Dernek*, whose leading role is played by Ahmet Kural; and *Recep İvedik*, performed by Şahan Gökbar.

Identification and other variables

As it was proposed, the main approach to the success of these films is related to identity, understood as the feeling that Turks have of being represented on the screen as well as the configuration of what to be Turkish currently means. In this sense, blockbuster movies have been

released in a context in which Turkishness is being (re)defined. The changes that Turkish society has experienced in the last decades, in economic, social and political realms, have deeply affected the sense of identity within it. Following Suner again, “Popular cinema, like other domains of popular culture, is a field where striking manifestations of the tensions around Turkishness can be found” (Suner, 2011: 125). Such an element is present in all the movies indicated above. It can also be found in the characters depicted in comedies as well as in the plots performed by the dramas, based upon real stories or not. Regarding the latter, Suner affirms that it is linked with the self-image of magnificence that Turkish society has developed in the last years of transformation. “On the one side, there is an aspiration to magnificence. What might be called a ‘latent post-imperial consciousness’ has always been a subtle, yet significant constituent of Turkish identity, in the sense that Turkish citizens tend to see themselves as successors of the Ottomans” (Ibid: 131). This is what explains, from her point of view, the specific success of *Kurtal Vadisi: Irak* (The Valley of Wolves: Iraq) released in 2006 but can be applied to films with similar nationalistic themes such as *Ayla*, whose background is Turkey’s participation in the Korean War, *Dağ 2* (The Mountain 2), which is based on the warfare against the PKK in Southeastern Turkey, or especially *Fetih 1453* which details the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks.

Regarding the comedies, Suner suggests that the self-image in Turkish society has another face: monstrosity, expressed in the peculiarity of the Turks to respond to given situations and the rise of a new dominant identity that challenges the precedent prevalent one. These idiosyncratic features are more visible in characters performed by Cem Yılmaz in *A.R.O.G.* and *G.O.R.A.* and Şahan Gökbağar in *Recep İvedik*. On one hand, she considers Yılmaz “as the comedian who has succeeded in capturing the essence of Turkishness most accurately” (Ibid: 142) and his films provoke pride in the audience as the result of placing a Turk in the center of science fiction scenarios in which he interacts with strange characters and environments but is able to move forward because of his being Turkish. On the other hand, *Recep İvedik* is the depiction of a ‘new’ and authentic Turkishness, a portrayal that Yaren and Karademir assume as a “careful play with national and lower class identity” (Yaren et al, 2020: 616). Such arising Turkishness is opposed to the “White Turks” which refer “to the consolidated urban classes who have identified with a particular image of the ‘West’ and ideologies of Westernization ... and adopted arrogant attitudes towards those unable to pass as Western” (Ibid: 143). It is in this context that the expression “*Artistlik yapma!*” can be understood, as a complaint against that type of Turks.

This re-emerging identity is becoming predominant as a result of the transformation that Turkey has experienced under the AKP rule whose “success story in Turkish politics is often perceived as a victory of authentic Anatolian people against the military-bureaucratic elites” (Ibid: 147). Even so, such hegemony is being deployed by a rising conservative part of the society, with a Sunni-Muslim base and inland origin as the only acceptable identity within the struggle for the definition of Turkishness. As Hintz proposes, “identity contestation, (can be) defined as ongoing processes of debate and pushback groups holding differing understandings of what constitutes the appropriate national identity for their state” (Hintz, 2018: 18). Since Erdoğan has led the AKP success and is the visible representative of recent cultural changes in Turkey, it is impossible to waive a reference to him in the review of contemporary Turkish cinema. After all, he is identified by his followers as “one of them” and defined himself as a “man of the people” in the sense that he represents the “authentic” Turkish Muslim in opposition to the “White” Turks represented in the Western-oriented Kemalism and the secular political and economic elites. It is not a coincidence that Recep İvedik has the same name as the president. Furthermore, the film slogan refers to him as a “Hero of the people”. In both cases, Recep “despite his excessive features, is actually a character with whom ordinary Turkish people can easily empathize and identify. In this respect, they serve to make their viewers feel good about their Turkishness” (Suner, 2011: 148).

The cultural implications that characters performed by Cem Yılmaz and Şahan Gökbağar

reflect on Turkish society are also analyzed by Geçgin (2018) who finds a relationship between the cultural structure of social classes and the heroic myths of the films. In the case of Yılmaz's performances in *A.R.O.G.*, *G.O.R.A.* and *Arif V 216*, there are many cultural codes and references which Turks not only identify with but that also make the characters' actions foreseeable because they are Turks. In this sense, Yılmaz's characters fulfill the expectations by the Turkish audience that wishes to see their "civilization" depicted on the screen. In his turn, Recep İvedik tends to be distasteful because of his exaggerated manners, the language he uses and the dirty jokes he makes, many times related to corporal activities or even sexist and homophobic references. Therefore, such a character is identified with a low-class stratum. However, the character carries out "cultural codes with reference to heroic myths from the conservative world" (Geçgin, 2018: 186) that are shared by many of the viewers.

At the end, Recep İvedik is very amusing for the Turkish audience. Trying to determine the reasons for that receptivity, Töret finds elements of comicalness in the character's language and movements as well in his behaviors and manners that are beyond the socially accepted. In this sense, Recep İvedik says all that cannot be said in public and that could not be expressed in a different way. "Since the point of view of the social norms in connection with the pressure and control the one's feelings are brought out during amusement, the guffaws are totalized" (Töret, 2016: 73). The enjoyability this films saga produces can be explained in what Töret calls the "Theory of inadaptation" when the character's reactions and behaviors are generated by exposure to environments to which he does not belong. Here again his contrast to the world of the "White Turks" is emphasized. But it is also possible to set out a "Theory of superiority" in virtue of which the viewers see themselves as "superior" to that the character represents, as if he portrayed all that they are not. In other words, Recep İvedik is the "other" type of Turk that they can make fun of. This argument is followed closely by Gide (2018), who explores the motives of movie success in the amusement effect that it causes in the audience. "The behaviors that the own viewers cannot do, the movements that the character of Recep İvedik does (make) viewers have fun" (Gide, 2018: 198).

There is another element involved in the success of Turkish films in the box office related to their promotion. As stated, movies are also consumption goods that need to be sold. Therefore, besides the appealing of their representation of Turkishness, movies such as Recep İvedik are also a result of a "consumerism culture combination coming from the change and transformation of the society and the conflicts related to the historical, social, political, economical and cultural conditions" (Töret, 2016: 79). The promotion through television is an important element, but new technologies and the scope of the internet and social network have played a prominent role. Behlil shows how after the TV program performed by Şahan Gökçek was cancelled, the sketches involving the Recep İvedik character were available online, becoming the first YouTube phenomenon in Turkey. It was the precursor of the feature film that reached more than 4 million attendants without substantial traditional promotion efforts. In their turn, Kuruca and Mevlüt Akyol affirm that while "the increase of domestic productions and box office receipts rise, the curiosity toward the role of social media is increasing" (Kuruca et al, 2015: 101). Taking the film *Düğün Dernek* as an object of study, they examine its promotion on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In the first case, the shared content was especially high during the month prior to the release and the premier time itself, in December 2013. A similar trend was visible on Twitter. Regarding YouTube, the trailer reached more than 8 million views before the release of the film which demonstrates the success of the teaser campaign. As the authors state "with the developing and innovating technology 'social media' has become an important and influential medium for the marketing of films. Hollywood cinema has long been used as an effective means of 'social media' networks has started to be used in developing movie industry of Turkey" (Ibid: 108).

In a similar research that analyzes the Twitter accounts belonging to the most viewed Turkish films between 2006 and 2015, Yolcu highlights the importance of social networks in the marketing of film productions nowadays. The 6 to 8 weeks period that in average a film is presented in cinemas must be preceded by an aggressive teaser campaign in order to grant the highest money collection during the screening time. Immediacy and simplicity of social networks are key elements in the success of such operations. “In this way a message can reach millions of people in a very short period. Comments shared in the social media, because of their views potential become important” (Yolcu, 2016: 484). The use of official film Twitter accounts initiated in 2010 with *Eyvah Eyvah*. Since 2015, each movie has not only an account on that social network but also on others such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Google. However, Twitter is the most effective means due to the ease of retweeting. Therefore, she concludes that “the Turkish Cinema social media become more massive while they can be commented in a more professional way” (Ibid: 500).

The success of these Turkish blockbuster movies has produced effects in the advertisement field not only related to the films’ promotion but also the sponsoring they obtain. Pekman and Tüzün find that “between the advertisement and film channels, a synergy of which both sides feed from is created in a form of campaign” (Pekman et al, 2012: 22). In many cases, such symbiosis is developed through a product placement strategy which is the “incorporation of a product, brand or business for commercial purposes into a film or television program” (Akyol et al, 2015: 263). The placement can be explicit or implicit, as well as visual, verbal or mixed. Despite the importance that brand exposure can have in high-profile films, product placement is also common in independent movies since it is a significant financial source. For instance, Ayça Akyol and Kuruca find that films directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, probably the most famous Turkish independent director, dedicate more screen time to product placements than blockbuster comedies do. The product placement in Turkish productions is regulated by a law approved in 2011 and includes all types of brands, being notable food/drinks and vehicles trademarks (Orkan et al, 2018: 76).

The sense of identity provoked by the comedies is also exploited by the mass viewed drama movies. As seen, in the Top 25 of the most attended Turkish films the non-humoristic pieces are action or historical movies featuring nationalism. These depictions become appealing for the same reason that comedies are: because Turks identify with them. In both cases, Turkish films support (willingly or unconsciously) a political agenda while promoting unity around common national purposes, as can be inferred in action movies as *Dağ 2*, *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* or *New York’ta Bes Minare* (Five minarets in New York). As mentioned, the first addresses fight against the PKK whose intensity has increased since 2015 when peace talks between the government and the Kurdish guerilla were broken for the last time. Regarding the second movie, its background is the Iraq War in 2003 and the (fictional) betrayal by American forces to the Turkish military. The latter film shows the persecution in the U.S. of a Turkish religious clergyman accused of a political conspiracy, in a clear allusion to Fetullah Gülen. In their turn, comedies would realize a de-politicization task through a normalization of current conditions or the lessening of criticism against the government while entertainment is provided. In that regard, Fiske suggests that there are theories on Popular culture that describe it as evasive pleasures. “Merely safety valves that finally serve to maintain the current structure of power by providing licensed, contained, controlled means of expressing resentment” (Fiske, 2011: 7). Maybe at the end, Turkish movies are just an escape valve.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s but especially in the last sixteen years Turkish cinema has become a mass phenomenon. The huge attendance of movies has coincided with structural changes in economy and politics which have been reflected in the culture within Turkish society. The preference for local productions is related to the high sense of nationalism deployed by the Turks but it is also linked to the identification screened by recent blockbuster movies. Although comedies are likely preferred,

some dramas have also performed well in the box office. Nevertheless, the success is not all about identity. Modernized marketing strategies have played their part. It has gone together with the spread of new technologies and the insertion of Turkish economy into the dynamics of the global market. The transformations experienced because of the AKP rule are also visible in the cinema. The nationalism depicted on screens (via explicit staging or celebration of idiosyncrasy) works in parallel with political purposes. Finally, as a result, a new hegemonic identity emerges and consolidates within the struggle for Turkishness. As Suner states, “once a largely invisible, normative, and naturalized form of identity in Turkey, Turkishness today has come under critical scrutiny. It has begun to be contested, challenged, and problematized in ways in which it had never been before” (Suner, 2011: 125).

The prevalence of a new form of identity can be seen in the debates around some television programs or in the success of nationalist films, some of them reclaiming the grandeur of the Ottoman past, as in *Fetih 1453*. It matches perfectly with the objectives drawn up by the AKP government in domestic affairs as well as in foreign policy. “The cognitive worldview of this proposal considers Turkey’s role as legitimate inheritor of Ottoman legacies and, in turn, the former home of the caliphate; this positions Turkey as a regional power to be feared and admired” (Hintz, 2018: 56). Meanwhile, the Turkish cinema industry keeps growing. The sixth part in the Recep İvedik sequel was released on November 2019 and it was expected to break the record that its fifth part achieved in 2017. However, it did not perform as projected, being surpassed by *7. Koğuştaki Mucize* that was released a few weeks earlier and later became a worldwide phenomenon due to its streaming on Netflix. In total the film reached almost four million spectators. In both cases, the film’s success reflects the aspect of a new Turkey.

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