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Galloping Flashbacks: The Representation of National Space in Turkish Action/Adventure Films of the 1960s–1970s

Abstract

This study explores the representations of national space and its borders in twenty-four action/adventure films with historical settings. It concentrates on film series featuring comic-book heroes: Tarkan, Karaoğlan, Malkoçoğlu, Battal Gazi, and Kara Murat, all produced between 1965 and 1978. Although they have not been taken seriously as films, their prominent place in Turkish national memory, makes them effective tools for understanding varieties of Turkish nationalism in the Cold War period. This article demonstrates that political and ideological changes in the Turkey of the 1960s and 1970s were reflected, at times subtly, in the action/adventure films of the period. In particular, during the second half of the 1960s, Turkish action/adventure films transitioned to more radical and violent cinematic representations in the 1970s. Increased aggression in the depiction of Turkish action/adventure heroes was accompanied by a shrinking and more limited depiction of national space, reflecting the country's more defensive *zeitgeist*.

Keywords: Turkey, Turkish cinema, Cold War, action/adventure heroes, national space

1. Introduction

'God created the Turk as ruler. 'Rule over the other nations,' He said. 'Bring justice to them, love the righteous and weak.' He gave them horses, women, and weapons. 'The world is your homeland, war is your festival, martyrdom is your highest rank,' He said. 'Asia was yours, Europe is yours too,' he said. And God made the Turk superior.'[1] Thus declares the voiceover in the final scene of *Malkoçoğlu Avrupa'yı Titreten Türk* (Malkoçoğlu: The Turk Who Made Europe Tremble), a popular action/adventure film produced in 1966. This particular scene presents Turkish nationalism's core argument regarding national space: National space transcends the geographical boundaries of the Turkish nation-state. In this context, it is the Turkish nation's God-given right and mission to rule over the world as benevolent conquerors. This film was not an isolated example of producing and reproducing the arguments about national space. Rather, it belongs to a vast corpus of comparable action/adventure films set in different historical periods, made during the 1960s and 1970s.

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1   '*Tanrı Türk'ü ilbay yarattı. 'Öteki ulusları yönetin, onlara adalet götürün, haklıyı ve zayıfı sevin, haksızı ve kuvvetliyi ezin,' buyurdu. At verdi, avrat verdi, silah verdi. 'Dünya senin yurdun, cenk bayramın, şehitlik son rütben,' dedi. 'Asya senindi, Avrupa da senin,' dedi. Ve Tanrı Türk'ü üstün kıldı.*' (01:34:44–01:35:46)

This article explores the representations of national space and its borders in twenty-four action/adventure films with historical settings. It concentrates on film series featuring the comic-book heroes Tarkan, Karaoğlan, Malkoçoğlu, Battal Gazi, and Kara Murat. These films were produced between 1965 and 1978, a period that witnessed the pinnacle of Turkish cinema's flourishing production and consumption. Several among them were blockbusters of their time, thanks to a large audience. Although an exact number remains elusive due to the absence of reliable box office records or ticket sales data, their enduring presence on television channels even today is meaningful. People still watch them and are familiar with the image of any of these heroes fighting against non-Turks on his horse. Therefore, the films' prominent place in Turkish national memory renders them valuable tools for understanding diverse manifestations of Turkish nationalism during the Cold War era.

The films, as cultural products, were not independent of the Cold War political and historical context in which they were made. It was a period in which Turkey witnessed the rise of nationalism, political Islam, and isolation in the international arena due to its policies concerning Cyprus. Consequently, in its examination of the representation of national space, this article sounds out the relationship between the context and the films. Although this relationship is not one of direct correspondence, the coexistence of these films within the same timeframe and political/historical backdrop holds significant meaning. With this motivation in mind, the article is divided into five parts. The first part introduces the theoretical framework on the construction and ascribed meanings of national space. In addition to providing a brief literature review, this section also explains the unique role of cinema as an art form that creates and recreates space. The second part offers an overview of the political and historical context into which these films were born. After a third part examining common elements found in the films, the changing representation of space is explored in the fourth and fifth sections. The pivotal demarcation between these final two parts is the 1971 Military Memorandum, which, as this article argues, marked a shrinking in the representation of national borders in films.

2. Constructing the Homeland

No nation exists in a void; it is always attached to a piece of land, a space it calls its 'home.'[2] This could be the land on which the nation currently lives, a land that has been lost in the past,[3] or a promised land of the future.[4] It could be where the nation

2   Smith 1999, 149.
3   Şevket Süreyya Aydemir is one of the late Ottoman/early Republican intellectuals longing for his 'lost home' in *Suyu Arayan Adam* (Aydemir 2015 [1959], 43). Yahya Kemal is another significant intellectual whose poems are permeated with a nostalgia for Ottoman glory after the loss of the Balkans (Beyatlı 2003). For an exploration of nationalist nostalgic constructions of both the Balkans and Anatolia in the late Ottoman period and a discussion how how this war might have influenced intellectuals, see: Kıbrıs 2015.
4   Smith 1999, 69.

was born, where it lived out its greatest and most glorious days, or where the nation is said to have the potential to experience such days. Charles S. Maier writes that nationalists consider the land as 'the sacred center of resources, livelihood, output, energy' for the nation.[5] When the land becomes the 'homeland,' 'hills and rivers and woods cease to be merely familiar; they become ideological as sites of shrines, battles, and birthplaces,' as a founder of the field of sociology of language Joshua A. Fishman puts it.[6] Anthony D. Smith conceptualizes an *ethnoscape* as a landscape believed to encompass the terrain on which heroic ancestors had led the nation to realize a providential national mission and which also contains and preserves the bodies of these ancestors. They are 'the places where holy men and heroes walked and taught, fought and judged, prayed and died, are felt to be holy themselves; … testifying to the glorious and sacred past of the ethnic community.'[7] The nation, as a monolithic body, 'owns' the land, which is the land of their forefathers and where their bones were buried.[8] The landscape becomes a link between fellow members of the nation across generations,[9] formed while excluding 'others' who do not share that common ancestry.[10] Therefore, it is argued, that 'despite the ravages of time and the vicissitudes of social change,' there is a continuity between different generations, which makes 'us' the descendants of the heroes and sages of the past, connected through a shared homeland. This land is believed to be the home of heroes and an arena or stage for their enactment of epic actions and achievements.[11] Thus, political negotiation over this land is impossible,[12] and it is that nation alone with legitimate and historic rights to this land.[13] Within this framework, national space transcends its mere geographical significance and assumes the role of a foundational element in national identity. It serves as a cornerstone through which the heroes, the people of a nation, and even outsiders are defined and where identities are negotiated.

In certain instances, there exists a discrepancy between the territorial boundaries of the modern nation-state and the envisioned space that nationalists aspire to possess. Nation-builders do not always refer to clearly defined borders. Instead, the pre-nation-state understanding complements the modern interpretation.[14] Regarding the modern conception, Benedict Anderson highlights the contemporary notion of territoriality, stating that 'state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory.'[15] According to this perspec-

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5   Maier 2000, 818.
6   Fishman 1968, 41, cited in: Lowenthal 1994, 17.
7   Smith 1999, 153.
8   Kristof 1994, 221–2.
9   Schöpflin 1997, 35.
10   Smith 1997, 49.
11   Maier 2016, 1–8.
12   Schöpflin 1997, 28–9.
13   Maier 2016, 1–8.
14   Agnew 1994.
15   Anderson 1991, 19.

tive, national space is limited by borders[16] defined through the sovereign power of the state.[17] However, from the pre-modern standpoint, 'states are defined by centers, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.'[18] Territory, therefore, was by no means precise, and boundaries lacked accuracy.[19] Consequently, the horizons of nationalist minds are not confined by the actual border but expanded by the notion of the 'frontier,' an ideationally boundless realm, as Richard Slotkin notes in his work about the perception of the American frontier.[20] The frontier is characterized by complexity, fluidity, diffuseness, and distance from centralized political authority. It can be pushed outward or inward, eastward, or westward. As Nicos Poulantsaz emphasizes, 'to mark out frontiers involves the possibility of redrawing them: there is no way of advancing in this spatial matrix except … through demarcation of an interior that is always capable of being extended *ad infinitum*.'[21] Therefore, despite the establishment of national boundaries, the territory of a state can be redefined repeatedly.[22]

Like any other state in the modern world, today's Turkish nation-state exists within a national space with well-defined borders, in contrast to the pre-modern states, which had expandable territories. Behlül Özkan delves into the transformation from a pre-modern imperial understanding of borders to a modern understanding, tracing the influence of the political-historical context since the early twentieth century on the transformation of the concept of homeland (*vatan*) during the same period. Özkan argues that foreign policy issues played a significant role in determining external and internal threats and in shaping the perception of what national space included and excluded during the Cold War era.[23] Additionally, Sezgi Durgun specifically examines geography textbooks from the period between 1928 and 1950, suggesting that the representation of the homeland depends on a specific political and historical context and serves the official ideology in envisioning the homeland.[24] Drawing upon these works, it can be asserted that both the borders of the national space and their representation are not fixed. Instead, national space and its representations are shaped and constructed through political processes.

The current study explores the representation of national landscapes and their borders in an unofficial realm: cinema. Films, as popular cultural products, reconstruct memories and imagery from the past, thereby creating a visual and auditory repertoire that contributes to the formation of national identities.[25] Anderson posits that

16   Del Biaggio 2017, 38–9; McCrone 1998, 55; Schöpflin 1997, 29.
17   Szary 2017, 16.
18   Anderson 1991, 19.
19   Sack 1986, 75–6.
20   Slotkin 1998.
21   Poulantsaz 2000, 105.
22   Stouraiti and Kazamiaz 2010, 14–5.
23   Özkan 2012.
24   Durgun 2011.
25   Bayrakdar 2006, 275.

the invention of the printing press and subsequent mass publishing facilitated the widespread dissemination of the idea of the nation.[26] This idea could be extended to include other mediums in which the nation is imagined, such as films, a point supported by Tim Edensor.[27] Through this lens, action/adventure films, with their narrative emphasis on physical action, combat, and battles,[28] play a unique and dynamic role in the quest for representing national space. Those films, which were set in the past, portraying the struggle of Turks versus non-nationals, are rich sources for exploring the depiction of national space.

3. A Tarnished Backdrop to Turkey's Golden Age of Cinema

According to the new history approach to film studies,[29] there is a relationship between a given era's political-historical context and its cultural products. Hilmi Maktav, a prominent scholar in film research, asserts that films serve as reflections of collective memories that are translated onto the cinematic screen after being filtered through the multifaceted prism of a country's economic, social, and political transformations.[30] Likewise, Howard S. Becker posits that films, as representations, speak to the prevailing conditions of society and our world.[31] Within the context of this article, the films under scrutiny are not evaluated solely based on their historical accuracy; instead, they are regarded as essential tools for exploring the ideological climate in Cold War era Turkey.

The films analyzed in this article were produced in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by widespread societal conflicts that swept through Turkey and accompanied various political transformations. The first *coup d'état* in the history of the Turkish Republic was carried out on May 27, 1960, followed by the implementation of a new constitution in 1961. These developments sought to dampen the political rise of the conservative rural bourgeoisie, chiefly represented by the Democrat Party (DP). The 1965 nationwide elections witnessed the rise of the Justice Party (AP), as the successor to the DP, in opposition to the coalition formed by the military and bureaucratic elites who orchestrated the 1960 coup. Political tensions found an echo in the streets through the mobilization of emergent social movements, with university students constituting one of the most dynamic groups, alongside the burgeoning business sector and trade unions. The escalating tension was disrupted by a memorandum issued by the Turkish military on March 12, 1971, which forced the resignation of

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26   A substantial contribution on this point is Gavin D. Brockett's *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk* (Brockett 2011). Following in the footsteps of Anderson, Brockett analyses local newspapers published between 1945 and 1954 and argues that national print culture played a significant role in reinforcing the idea of the Turkish nation during this period.
27   Barker 1999, 5–6, cited in: Edensor 2002, 9.
28   Tasker 2005.
29   Chapman, Glancy and Harper 2007.
30   Maktav 2013.
31   Becker 2007.

the government. The repercussions of the oppressive measures implemented by the memorandum regime predominantly targeted leftist youth, resulting in severe ideological suppression. The result of this oppression was the domination of Islamist and nationalist elements in everyday political discourse, something reflected in the formation of the so-called 'National Front' governments by the rightist political parties. Islamic influence rose in political culture, with Ottoman and Islamic values touted as bulwarks against communism and the spread of leftist ideology.[32] Furthermore, the international political atmosphere also offered fertile ground for the ascendancy of these elements in political discourse. Turkey had been isolated by its Western allies in its foreign policy, with the United States, for example, imposing an embargo in response to Turkey's proactive policies in Cyprus. The oil crisis and an economic downturn further exacerbated this state of tension and isolation. Consequently, the 1970s witnessed a period of tension characterized by waves of protests and political violence. From the 1960s to the 1970s, the prevailing *zeitgeist* was molded by societal transformations, international isolation, an atmosphere of aggression, pervasive fear, militarism, and increasing nationalism. This period ended in 1980, with the country's second *coup d'état* and a new constitution in 1982.

At the intellectual level, this period also witnessed the transformation of the Turkish History Thesis, the official nationalist paradigm developed by the early Republican elite, into the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. The Turkish History Thesis traces the Turkish nation's origins to Central Asia, which it considers to be the original land of the Turkish nation. According to the thesis, Turks migrated from their original land in 12,000 BCE due to severe changes in climatic conditions. In their westward journey, they disseminated their culture, thereby establishing the earliest great civilizations in human history. Some of them arrived in Anatolia, which had until then been vacant land. Therefore, they were Anatolia's original and autochthonous inhabitants. These arguments serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they aim to eradicate any potential competing claims to the land by constructing a narrative based upon a purely Turkish history of Anatolia. Secondly, they exclude the Islamic heritage in favor of Westernization. Turks' conversion to Islam is generally explained in pragmatic terms, such as adapting to the geographical proximity to the Islamic world and aligning with the state's economic needs. The conquests by Turks, therefore, were not endeavors to propagate Islam but somewhat altruistic pursuits aimed at disseminating civilization. Moreover, the Turkish History Thesis negates the Ottoman heritage by reducing the Ottoman Empire to merely one of the many states established by the Turks. This serves to imagine Turks as a nation with an inherent capacity for state-building that spans history. Within this framework, conquests such as that of İstanbul are highlighted to emphasize the superiority of the Turkish nation. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire is regarded as the symbol of regression, wherein the infiltration of non-nationals into the state and their attainment of positions of power are presented as factors contributing to its decline.[33]

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32   Poulton 1997, 154–63, 179–80.
33   *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi* 1932; Copeaux 2000.

The Turkish History Thesis was mostly uncontested in Turkish historiography until the development of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, with its strong emphasis on Islam, in the 1970s. The new synthesis was never the opposite of the previous thesis but worked in complement to it. The basics of the new synthesis were put forth in 1972 by İbrahim Kafesoğlu, who served as the founding chairman of *Aydınlar Ocağı* (The Intellectuals' Hearth), a small organization formed by a group of conservative journalists, academics, and intellectuals. Fundamentally, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis sought to reconcile Turkish national identity with Islamic elements. According to Kafesoğlu, the conversion of Turks to Islam was a relatively smooth process, as Islamic principles resonated harmoniously with Turkish culture. He further argued that through their conversion, Turks had safeguarded Islam from an imminent decline in power and influence.[34] Ahmet Kabaklı, another intellectual associated with the group, even positioned Turks as the saviors and vanguards of the Islamic world.[35] This perspective reinforced the notion of Turkish national superiority in the eyes of the Intellectuals' Hearth. As a natural consequence, the Ottoman past was glorified. Within this context, the contributions of Osman Turan, a historian, and member of the Hearth, were particularly noteworthy. Drawing on Medieval epics and chronicles, Turan's works emphasized the inherent superiority of the Turkish race, as one chosen by God. Therefore, the more they extended their own borders, the more prosperous and just the world would become.[36] This idea aligned with the concept of *nizam-ı alem* (world order), which formed the core political ideology legitimizing Ottoman political rule, promoting the supremacy of the conqueror and the state in the face of potential chaos and corruption.[37] From this point, the envisioned order proposed by Turan could be referred to as *Pax Turcica*. This realm of 'Turkish peace' pushed the mental borders of Turkish domination by assigning the Turks a significant role of potential world conquerors. At first glance, this idea may appear irredentist; however, when considered within the international political context of the 1960s and 1970s, characterized by Turkey's gradual isolation and the Cyprus issue, it can be interpreted as a reference to the cultural and spiritual connections with 'Outside Turks' – Turks residing beyond the borders of the Turkish nation-state, who were believed to be in dire need of the Turkish nation's intervention to liberate them from the clutches of communist oppressors.

The intellectual transformations witnessed during the 1960s and 1970s coincided with a remarkable era in Turkish cinema, characterized by a prolific output and widespread audience consumption. The period saw the production of approximately 4,500 films, with annual ticket sales surpassing the population of Turkey more than fivefold.[38] Most of these films were quickly produced and of suspect quality, with poor special effects and technical recording, reused costumes and settings, and occasional inconsistencies in the plot. Many of these productions were action/adventure

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34   Kafesoğlu 1966, 5–6, 269–70.
35   Taşkın 2007, 223, 243.
36   Turan 1955; Turan 2014 [1969].
37   Hagen 2005.
38   Arslan 2011, 103–8.

films set in historical contexts, prominently featuring conquests and wars as their central themes and propagating nationalist messages through their narratives, which relied heavily on stereotypical characters such as powerful nationalist heroes and evil non-nationals.[39] It is important to note that this does not imply a direct one-to-one correspondence between the immediate political climate and the films themselves. In truth, no film can be deemed an objective or accurate representation of reality; instead, each film is a product or reflection of the political-historical context in which it was produced. Films can either support or criticize the existing regime, regardless of their specific content. This interconnection should not be disregarded.

Given the immense production and consumption of films in Turkey, the driving force behind the development of Turkish cinema as a mass industry was the audience itself. To distribute their films in İstanbul, producers would contact the owners of first-run cinema halls, which were partially controlled by major film-importing companies. For other cinema halls, producers collaborated with distributors who gathered information from cinemas in six regions: İstanbul, Adana, Ankara, Samsun, İzmir, and Zonguldak. This facilitated the understanding of audience preferences and guided the decision-making process for future film productions. Once the producers made their choices, cinema hall owners or regional operators would provide bonds for the production of the films. Producers allocated some of these bonds to compensate the actors and film crew for their work. On the other hand, distributors ensured that the most in-demand films were produced and subsequently rented in cinemas for several weeks or months.[40] In this system, consumer demand was pivotal in sustaining the industry. As a result, many directors produced films within the supply and demand framework, making adjustments based on audience reactions. This commercial approach, however, limited opportunities for new cinematic experiments and the development of auteurs. It should also be noted that due to the commercial mindset, films did not necessarily reflect the ideologies of the filmmakers themselves. Some films were created for their marketability. As a result, most films were produced repetitively, following established commercial formulas.

In this regard, it is hard to look for a direct correspondence between the political views of specific directors and the messages conveyed in the films. In fact, conservative nationalist directors like Natuk Baytan and Mehmet Aslan, as well as leftist direc-

39   During the 1960s and 1970s, various intellectual camps were formed in Turkish cinema, including social realists, proponents of national cinema, the Sinematek group, and advocates of Islamic national cinema. These diverse camps collectively contributed to the development of an intellectual milieu, within which my corpus was conceived. However, it is important to note that none of the films included in my corpus are associated with these specific camps. Nevertheless, they collectively constitute a cohesive body characterized by a shared nationalist spirit that seeks to comprehend and represent the Turkish nation while fostering a sense of connection among its populace. Although this aspect is beyond the scope or objective of the present article, it remains an underlying element that permeates the cinematic works under consideration.

40   Tunç 2012.

tors such as Atıf Yılmaz and Tunç Başaran, all produced nationalist action/adventure films with historical settings and the overall tone of these films was remarkably similar. Keeping this in mind, the present article focuses on the relationship between the broader context and its cinematic products rather than delving into the individual preferences of directors, actors, and production companies and their preferences. The influence of agency, in addition to the interpretation of films by the audience, is left for future research. Furthermore, it is worth noting that many of the films within the corpus are based on comic books produced in the same period.

Thus, through a close reading combined with film analysis, this article attempts to grasp the deeper meanings embedded in the films.[41] As Brummett and Mikos argue,[42] films should not be regarded as mere audio-visual commodities but rather as meaningful texts. However, a thorough understanding of a text becomes possible only when 'the conditions of (meanings') knowledgeability' are explored.[43] This means the context in which the films are produced, circulated, and consumed needs to be investigated to gain a sense of the text's more profound meaning.[44]

4. Introducing the Corpus: A Brief Panorama of the Turkish Hero's Journey

The present study explores the representation of national space within a corpus of twenty-four action/adventure films with historical settings. These films can be classified into two distinct groups: those with an episode produced in the second half of the 1960s and those whose first episode was released in the early 1970s. The earliest film series examined is Karaoğlan, comprising five films produced between 1965 and 1972. This is followed by the four-film Malkoçoğlu series released between 1966 and 1971. The third group of five films features Tarkan and was released between 1969 and 1973. A series of four Battal Gazi films came out between 1971 and 1974. Finally, the most recent series centers around Kara Murat, featuring in seven films produced between 1972 and 1978.

Despite their distinct narratives, several common characteristics can be observed among the protagonists and plots of these film series. Whether it is Tarkan, Karaoğlan, Malkoçoğlu, Battal Gazi, or Kara Murat, each protagonist confronts non-Turkish adversaries. The heroes of the 1960s, except for Malkoçoğlu, engage in battles set in pre-Islamic and/or non-Islamic contexts. Therefore, Islam is never strongly emphasized. Regarding the few references, an inconsistency is present in terms of belief systems. For instance, in the *Tarkan* series, the ruler is referred to as 'God's sword,' signifying divine appointment. In *Altaydan Gelen Yiğit* (The Hero from Altay, 1965), Balaban, Karaoğlan's elder companion, says, 'May Gök-Tanrı forgive the sins' of a dying man from the Mongolian enemy named Camoka.[45] In contrast, Karaoğlan states, 'May the Gods take

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41 Brummett 2010, 9.
42 Mikos 2014, 411.
43 Giddens 1986, 545.
44 Mikos 2014, 410–1.
45 '*Gök Tanrısı suçlarını bağışlasın*' (38:12).

your life.'[46] Furthermore, *Baybora'nın Oğlu* (Baybora's Son, 1966) depicts Karaoğlan combating Catholics who attack Byzantium. Karaoğlan perceives Catholic men of religion as murderers acting in the name of religion. The Catholic priest, in turn, labels Karaoğlan as an 'unbeliever' (*dinsiz*) several times.[47] Although it remains unclear which religious beliefs Karaoğlan adheres to, particularly in the last example, it is evident that the enemy is Christian. On the other hand, in the films of the 1970s period, religion assumes a pivotal role as the most crucial component of national identity. As a result, the hero fights not only to save his lands and family but also to conquer new places in the name of Islam.

All heroes' fights occur in historical settings, such as the Uighur lands, İstanbul, or Central Anatolia. Irrespective of the specific location or adversaries involved, the hero's struggle is consistently depicted as legitimate and righteous. Upon receiving an order from a sultan or a leader, the hero immediately embarks on his mission, galloping towards his destination on horseback. Indeed, all films in the corpus include extended horse-riding scenes as exterior shots. As the hero approaches the enemy territory – something the audience is meant to understand from the rocky and mountainous landscape – he pauses at a *han*, a hostel for travelers. This is a place of excessive food and drink and sometimes features dancing or encounters with women representing the non-Turkish other. In the *han*, the hero experiences his initial encounter with the enemy and emerges victorious. After that, he enters the enemy castle surrounded by giant walls. These fortresses conceal secret chambers and passageways alongside chapels adorned with vivid flags and crosses. Simultaneously, the enemy attacks the hero's *oba* (nomadic encampment) or village, resulting in the tragic demise or capture of the hero's family and friends. This event signifies the fusion of the hero's personal quest with the greater cause. In fact, nationalists perceive the nation as a unified family and an indivisible entity. The attack on the hero's family is considered an attack on the nation and its homeland. Finally, the Turkish and/or Turkish-Muslim triumphs over the enemy, eliminating non-Turkish others who claim Turkish lands.

5. From Central Asia to Byzantium: 1965–1971

Among the five Turkish heroes explored in the current study, Tarkan lives farthest back in time, the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The films that depict Tarkan regard Central Asia as his original homeland, in conformity with the Turkish History Thesis. According to the narrative of *Gümüş Eyer* (The Silver Saddle, 1970), Tarkan was born near the Caspian Sea. Tarkan's religion is never made into an issue, but his Turkishness is often emphasized and praised. According to the narratives, Tarkan's parents were killed when his *oba* was attacked by some non-Turkish enemies. Then, a woman of the same *oba* sacrifices her own child and hides Tarkan in a cave. There, he is raised by a wolf family. When he becomes an adult, he is always accompanied by a wolf as his family.

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46 '*Tanrılar canını alsın*' (49:21).
47 '*Baybora'nın dinsiz gölgesi*' (55:23), '*dinsiz köpekler*' (59:02).

Tarkan is a loner and asocial but a great hero. Resonating with the portrayal of heroes in similar films of the genre, he lacks unattainable and fantastical physical attributes. In fact, he is quite an ordinary person whose power comes from inside – his Turkishness. In *Altın Madalyon* (The Golden Medallion, 1972), for example, he is defined as being worthy of an army. Moreover, Tarkan is brave, strong, and resilient. He is the loyal warrior of Attila, whom he refers to as 'the Great Hunnic Emperor' and whom he believes has the legitimate right to conquer the world because he is the 'Scourge of God' for Europeans.[48] Here, the fact that Attila gets his legitimacy from God confers legitimacy on the fight of his warrior Tarkan, too. To conquer the world and avenge his family, Tarkan battles across a vast landscape from China, Iran, and Anatolia to northern and southern Europe. Thus, his enemies are various but are all non-Turkish and non-Muslim: the Chinese, Vandals, Vikings, Alans, Romans, and some fantastic enemies such as Gosha, the witch. Moreover, all of them are trying to wipe out all the Turks in the world.

During Tarkan's quest to confront his adversaries, he embarks on a dynamic journey passing through steppes, lowlands, forests, caves, rivers, and seashores like the other heroes. These scenes include very extended shots of horse riding. However, despite their immense length, these sequences do not provide explicit geographical markers. In the case of *Altın Madalyon*, the narrative voiceover mentions, in vague terms, that Attila is fighting in Western Europe. As a result, the audience is presented with a vast national landscape. Within this context, according to Smith's conceptualization, Central Asia is the *ethnoscape* that safeguards ancestral heritage. On the other hand, the remaining parts of the world are territories that Turks possess a divine right to conquer.

Another hero portrayed in the films of this earlier period is Karaoğlan, who works in the service of Genghis in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Central Asia. He is a Uighur Turk and sets off on the road from Khorasan in *Altay'dan Gelen Yiğit* and *Camoka'nın İntikamı* (Camoka's Revenge, 1966). His adversaries encompass some unknown Chinese tribes alongside the treacherous Mongolian named Camoka. In *Baybora'nın Oğlu* and *Bizanslı Zorba* (The Byzantine Tyrant, 1966), Karaoğlan comes to Byzantium engaging in a struggle against Manuel I, the reigning Byzantine Emperor. His final stop, however, is again Central Asia. In the film *Karaoğlan Geliyor: Cengiz Han'ın Hazineleri* (Karaoğlan Is Coming: Genghis Khan's Treasures, 1972), he embarks on a quest to discover the hidden riches of a deceased Central Asian emperor. Similar to Tarkan, Karaoğlan is also an orphan. His father's enemies killed his mother, who had refused to wed their leader, with his father subsequently suffering death at their hands. When Karaoğlan grows up, he decides to avenge his father's death. Later, he finds out that his father is, in fact, still alive, prompting him to continue his battle toward Byzantium in *Bizanslı Zorba*. Like Tarkan, Karaoğlan embodies strength, resilience, and bravery as he bravely confronts his adversaries across that vast space that extends from Central Asia to Byzantium.

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48   '*Büyük Türk Hun İmparatorluğu'nun başbuğu, Avrupalıların Tarının kırbacı ismiyle andıkları Attila*' (2:28).

Both Tarkan and Karaoğlu primarily fight within Central Asia, aligning with the Turkish History Thesis, which emphasized the Turks' heroic emergence from that region. Meanwhile, the third hero of the period, Malkoçoğlu, can be regarded as a transitional hero bridging the Turkish History Thesis heroes with those of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Malkoçoğlu is an Ottoman hero, a raider under the auspices of Mehmet II (the Conqueror). Notably, Malkoçoğlu asserts his identity as 'the owner of the entire world' (30:27) in *Avrupa'yı Titreten Türk* (The Turk Who Made Europe Tremble, 1966).[49] His Turkishness is always at the forefront, and although he is a hero of the Ottoman Empire, his Muslimness does not occupy a significant place in his identity. Instead, Malkoçoğlu serves as an instrument through which the Ottoman Empire is Turkified. Malkoçoğlu journeys back and forth between the center of the empire, where he receives the ruler's orders, and its frontiers, where he dutifully executes his assigned missions. Similar to the heroes from Central Asia, Malkoçoğlu fights in battles set in open landscapes. At times, he gallops across vast stretches of forests, valleys, and rivers accompanied by his horse and a few select companions. This portrayal of limitlessness serves to emphasize that Turks once commanded a vast dominion and that their power had been limitless. In essence, this argument legitimizes the Turkish domination of the world, as encapsulated in the introductory quotation. This brief yet impactful scene depicts Turks as benevolent conquerors, justifying their superiority and their entitlement to establish a *Pax Turcica*. This claim aims to legitimize and glorify the conquest and control of extensive territories spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa, depicting it as a triumph of peace and prosperity in world history against corrupt forces of evil empires.

Throughout the Tarkan, Karaoğlan, and Malkoçoğlu films, the heroes pass through forests, hills, rivers, seasides, and sometimes steppes repeatedly. By employing such cinematic depictions, the filmmakers effectively convey the notion that the heroes have covered long distances, indicating how vast the Turkish territories are. However, owing to the absence of specific place names and relatively vague geographical references, such as 'Western Europe,' the viewers cannot ascertain the precise borders of the homeland for which the heroes fight. Nevertheless, what unequivocally permeates the audience's perception is the depiction of the Turkish lands as expansive and fertile. Consequently, the national landscape is portrayed as vast, devoid of clear and distinct borders, and open to potential expansion. Consequently, in accordance with the perspectives of Slotkin and Poulantsaz, the borders of the Turkish national space function as frontiers. These possess the potential for perpetual expansion and advancement. Characterized by their fluidity and remote nature, they evade easy control by the central authority, thus rendering the role of raiders of utmost importance.

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49   '*Bütün dünyaya sahibim*' (30:27).

6. Anatolia: The 1970s

The Battal Ghazi film series presents the adventures of a raider *ghazi* in Anatolia as a role model to justify Turkish-Islamic domination of Anatolia before the Ottoman Empire. Battal assumes the position of *serdar*, or commander-in-chief, within the Malatya principality during the twelfth or thirteenth century, receiving orders from its leader, Ömer Beg. Significantly, not only Battal himself but also his father, Hüseyin Ghazi, his son Seyyid Battal Ghazi, and the son of Seyyid Battal Ghazi all fulfil the role of commander-in-chief of Malatya principality across the series. This continuity within the familial lineage is further reinforced by the casting decision to employ the same actor, Cüneyt Arkın, in portraying these diverse characters throughout the four films. This selection of casting, stemming either from the producers' economic considerations or the audience's preferences, automatically fosters the audience's perception of distinct characters as a unified and formidable national figure. Additionally, this narrative strategy speaks to the uninterrupted continuity of Turkish-Muslim rule in Anatolia across generations. Thus, Anatolia emerges as the *ethnoscape* of significance in Smith's conceptualization. The focus on ethnic continuity reinforces the notion that Turkish people are inherently warriors, serving as loyal servants of the state, as exemplified by Battal's portrayal within Ömer Beg's court.

Battal's home environment is depicted as a traditional Turkish village with simple wooden houses, beautiful gardens, and green fields. In *Battal Gazi'nin İntikamı* (Battal Ghazi's Revenge, 1972), the audience also sees green and plain festival grounds. The festivals are crowded, vivid, and joyful events accompanied by folk music played on folk instruments such as drums and *zurna*. The local people enjoy wrestling contests or rest in traditional nomadic tents. In line with their surroundings, these people are all dressed in traditional Turkish folk clothes: the men in *şalvar*, the women in headscarves, and the colorful loose dresses made up of unique fabrics with easily identifiable Turkish motifs. The scenes are all very brightly colored and well-known to those who are already familiar with Turkish culture. The message here is that this beautiful land belongs to these innocent people.

Kara Murat, another notable protagonist of the 1970s, assumes the role of Janissary commander. Enduring the tragic loss of his family during early childhood, he willingly enlists in the Janissary hearths to acquire the necessary training to avenge their death. He becomes the Janissary commander through his exceptional skills, integrity, and bravery. In parallel with the Battal Ghazi series, the Kara Murat series features films that depict not transverse green fields in solitude but also occupying the imperial court alongside the other esteemed bureaucrats of the empire. These particular scenes effectively convey the hero's integration within the intricate tapestry of the state apparatus. These scenes portray the hero as a part of the state structure, not a free raider anymore.

The Kara Murat series stands out among the action/adventure films of the 1970s as it offers a remarkably detailed portrayal of the national space. Particularly interesting is the opening sequence of *Fatih'in Fedaisi* (The Guard of the Conqueror, 1972), where the audience is presented with a map with clearly defined borders. The map

visually represents the Ottoman Empire, centered on Anatolia and the Balkans, and surrounded by the remaining part of the Balkans and Anatolia, in addition to a small amount of the Middle East, Crimea, and Cyprus, all painted in different colors. This depiction is intriguing, for it departs from the boundless territories often attributed to Central Asian films from the preceding 1965–1971 period. This is interesting because according to this map – contrary to how many Central Asian warriors were portrayed in the films of the earlier period – the Ottoman Empire (and by extension the Turkish nation) here ruled over a limited area instead of limitless and vast territories. The map also includes an animated arrow showing the conquests of Mehmet II. The first arrow goes from the Balkans to İstanbul and then shows İstanbul in flames. Once conquered, İstanbul's color turns into the pale yellow of the Ottoman Empire. Then, another arrow proceeds from İstanbul to the Italian Duchy of Athens, followed by other arrows to the Kingdom of Serbia, the Despotate of the Morea, the Empire of Trebizond, Wallachia, Bosnia, the Beylik of Karaman, and the Crimean Khanate. Each time the arrow arrives in one of these places, the color becomes yellow to indicate its conquest by the Ottoman Empire. Some other scenes in which the Ottoman army marches are inserted between two conquests. The arrows and the army move quickly, conveying that the Ottoman army never stopped and continuously conquered new places.

In contrast to the other films, which give little indication of where the hero is underway, the arrows of *Fatih'in Fedaisi* show the areas through which Murat rides on his horse. His starting point is never far from where the sultan is. Sometimes, he starts from the center: Depending on the period, this is either Manisa, where Prince Mehmet resides, Edirne, the capital before the conquest of İstanbul, or İstanbul itself. Irrespective of Murat's initial location, the center, as the court of Mehmet the Conqueror, is depicted as a palace with Turkish/Ottoman blue and white tiles on the walls and interior gardens. For instance, in Ölüm Emri (Death Command, 1974), Murat embarks on his journey from Manisa, the central town of Saruhan *sanjak*, which, as a historic training ground for princes, served as the location of Mehmet's court. From there, he goes on to Byzantium, then back to Manisa, before finally going to Edirne. This tour is at the same time as the tour of Mehmet as he becomes the sultan and leaves Manisa for Edirne at the end of the same film.

In *Fatih'in Fermanı* (The Edict of the Conqueror, 1973), Murat visits his mother living in Pınarköy, an actual village in Rumelia. With its wooden or mudbrick houses, this village is represented as quiet and colorless, signs of simplicity and humility. Similarly, Murat's mother is portrayed as a modest woman with a typical traditional outfit, including a traditional headscarf and loose dress. The village is entirely peaceful. Children, all dressed in traditional baggy trousers and turbans, are shown playing games. Some ladies, again with traditional loose robes and headscarves, do their laundry near a river while talking about someone's wedding. The village and its inhabitants are familiar to any Turkish viewer, since they were used in other films of the same series. For example, in *Kara Murat Kara Şövalyeye Karşı* (Kara Kurat versus the Black Knight, 1975), Murat's father, Ömer Beg, visits his wife and twin sons in a village after completing a mission. The village's representation is like that of Pınarköy, only with the

addition of livestock animals. His wife and sons are in their traditional dress, and in one scene, Ömer Beg is shown playing games with his sons next to a beautiful green river. The Turks of Chios in *Denizler Hakimi* (Master of the Seas, 1977) also live in a village that is almost the same. However, these familiar and typical surroundings are constantly disrupted by the arrival of enemies. When Murat visits his town second time in *Fatih'in Fermanı*, he finds his mother killed by the Byzantines in front of her home. The village might be considered a microcosm of the Turkish nation: What happens to Murat's town and mother might happen to any of the nation's members.

When Murat's parents are killed in *Kara Murat Kara Şövalyeye Karşı*, both are buried in the middle of the wilderness under a tree. This burial scene poignantly captures Murat's prayers. We see Murat praying; the adult Murat prays for the mother, and the little Murat prays for the father. From this moment on, the land assumes the role of not only a living space but also a sacred abode for the deceased ancestors. The Battal Ghazi series features a similar scene. Sometimes, Battal goes to the frontiers to ride and hone his swordsmanship. These training grounds are portrayed as vast fields bereft of human settlement. However, the audience is aware of their proximity to enemy territories, for in *Battal Gazi Destanı* (The Legend of Battal Ghazi, 1971), Battal's father, Hüseyin Ghazi, is murdered as he leaves the training area to circumvent the tomb of Süleyman Ghazi, which lies in the hands of the enemies. He is buried in a similar place as Kara Murat's parents, far away from the settlement area. These distant burials might be read as a sign of the vastness of the space belonging to Muslims. In the Battal Ghazi series, Hüseyin Ghazi sheds his blood for this land. Then, the younger Battal prays near his father's grave and swears that he will grow up to take revenge on his behalf. The grave is next to a very young and thin tree, and Battal says his father's blood will make this tree grow. This representation emphasizes the sacredness of national space and constructs a bond between the Turkish Muslims and Anatolia, the homeland for which they sacrificed their lives, as Smith would agree. At the same time, it is a clear rejection of the others' territorial claims since the land is also the home of the nation's ancestors.

Following these tragic attacks on homeland/home and nation/family, Kara Murat is given his mission and sets out on the road. For him, 'one heart, one hero is enough,' as he says in *Fatih'in Fedaisi*.[50] Murat rides his horse very fast, mostly alone. On his way, he passes through the wilderness, green fields, muddy rivers, and past the sea in long shots. Yet, as Murat approaches the lands of his adversaries, he always comes upon a dessert. This could be an indication of the harshness of his mission. In *Kara Murat Şeyh Gaffara Karşı* (Kara Murat versus Sheikh Gaffar, 1976), Kara Murat finds himself in an open market and attacks the enemy by putting cabbages onto the two sharp ends of a pike. The market is depicted as a crowded and chaotic place, similar to Western representations of Arab marketplaces. This conforms to stereotypical cinematic representations of the East.

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50   '*Bir yürek, bir yiğit yeter*' (19:43).

Water assumes a unique role in the landscapes of these action/adventure films. In Ölüm Emri, Kara Murat gallops off on a dangerous raid to rescue Prince Mehmet II from being killed by a Byzantine Princess, Olympia, a co-conspirator with Mehmet II's rival, Prince Orhan. Amidst the unfolding turmoil, in one scene, Murat and his raider friend, Sinan Beg, cross a muddy river on their horses while struggling against the enemy soldiers, who pour oil onto the water and burn it. Additionally, there are instances where Murat passes across the sea. Notably, it is worth highlighting that while the Ottoman Empire was surrounded by the sea, the sea is never incorporated into the part of the narrative that takes place in Ottoman lands. Instead, the sea is shown in relation to the enemy lands. That is to say, the sea is included in the narrative only when the national warrior is about to arrive at the lands controlled by the enemy. It might even be a place where he encounters the enemy. In *Fatih'in Fermanı*, Murat and his raider friend, Mihal, sail for Lesbos with a small boat, emphasizing the proximity of Lesbos to Anatolia. Observing Lesbos and its fortress from a distance, these scenes are made in such a way as to ensure that the characters are framed with land in the background. Consequently, the Turkish warriors, embodying the nation's spirit, are never portrayed as sailing upon the open sea but rather tied to the land. The sea, therefore, is primarily associated with the realm of the other. Although the costs of filming on the open sea may have posed considerable challenges, the symbolic meanings associated with the sea are significant.

In *Devler Savaşıyor* (The Giants are Battling, 1978), Murat voyages to Morea to gather intelligence on a corrupt governor conspiring against Mehmet II in collaboration with another pasha. He passes across the sea alone by ship, so the sea takes him to the land of the other. In *Denizler Hakimi*, some corsairs, under the protection of the Prince of Chios, launch an assault on the Ottoman naval fleet commanded by Admiral Yunus Pasha. Murat embarks on a sea journey to rescue Yunus Pasha, who is held captive in enemy territory. Simultaneously, the corsairs attack a Turkish village in Chios, cruelly burying several Turkish villagers, including an older woman, up to their necks in the sand. This poignant scene serves to depict both the savagery of the enemy and the complex relationship between the Turkish nation and the sea. Drawing from these cinematic sequences, one can contend that Turkish national identity is predominantly linked to the land, while the sea symbolizes notions of peripheral existence, a lack of control, and ownership by the other.

Murat's journeys predominantly lead him westward, with the exception of a single expedition eastward towards Mushar castle in the Kharput region, governed by Sheikh Gaffar (depicted in *Kara Murat Şeyh Gaffara Karşı*). In *Denizler Hakimi*, Murat is in Chios, while *Devler Savaşıyor* takes place in Morea. In *Fatih'in Fermanı*, he is in Lesbos. In addition to those islands, Wallachia is also a significant destination for Murat. However, in *Fatih'in Fermanı*, the narrative takes a divergent path. Here, the Byzantine attacks Pınarköy, Murat's hometown located in Çatalca of Rumelia, along with neighboring villages like Atalan, Subaşı, Oklalı, and İhsaniye. Hence, except for the islands and Wallachia, all the mentioned locations are within the borders of contemporary Turkey. In fact, the audience was probably familiar with these islands as well, an interest that was compounded by the rise of the Cyprus issue in the 1970s.

Audiences could have compared the islands of the film, and their Turkish inhabitants, with Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriots. The films also served to justify the Turkish community's historical presence in these islands, currently owned by Greece. Moreover, the emphasis on the villages of Çatalca in today's Thrace in *Fatih'in Fedaisi*, the series' first film, served as a reminder to audiences of the profound loss suffered by the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, invoking a sense of historical trauma.

The land of the enemy is represented in two ways in the Battal Ghazi series: the external realm surrounding the Byzantine Castle and the internal spaces within it. The outer world of the castle is depicted as a land of rocks and mountains, in stark contrast to the picturesque green fields of the Turkish-Muslim villages. In *Battal Gazi Destanı*, Battal and the Byzantine warrior Hammer fight night and day on an arid and barren land adjacent to sharp-edged rocks. The plot develops within the castle's interior spaces, which are noticeably distinct from the beautiful outdoor landscapes of 'our' land. The castle is presented as a structure composed of cold, dark stones and marble, adorned with extravagant decorations that contrast sharply with the humble wooden dwellings of the Turkish-Muslims. The representation of the people inhabiting this space complements the overall depiction. The Byzantine soldiers are portrayed wearing layered garments, complete with protective shields and helmets, in contrast to the hero, who fights only with his bare chest. The emperor or prince typically adorns himself with jewelry and colorful robes, normally considered something women wear; their women wear revealing clothes. This representation presents the enemy as ostentatious, falsely conveying an impression of power. However, the reality is quite different: The others residing in this constructed space exist in a confined, limited, and artificial environment that does not harmonize with the land they occupy. Muslims, however, live in harmony with nature, surrounded by green fields, forests, and rivers. Animals, too, have a friendly relationship with Battal, including his horse Aşkar. Here, Muslims are portrayed as 'natural' as the land itself and the Turkish dominance over the territory by aligning Muslims with nature. Therefore, removing the 'artificial' Byzantines, is presented as the only 'natural' outcome. Remarkably, the villages on the islands are depicted no differently than those in Anatolia, with houses and notable landmarks such as mosques, which are all the same.

Aside from the cold, hard materials of the enemy castle in the Kara Murat series, other distinctive features also set it apart. First, the palace seems to fit so poorly into the surrounding nature because it is urban, unlike the rural lands owned by Turks. The palace of the enemy exhibits unnatural architectural traits, including an arena where slaves engage in deadly combat, prisons in which people are tortured, and mysterious passages and tunnels full of water serving as battle sites. Decoration sets the enemy's dwelling apart as well. The Christian enemies often utilize colorful banners adorned with dragons, perhaps chosen not for ideological reasons but rather as a deliberate effort by the filmmakers to associate the enemy with the most unfamiliar and peculiar creature in the eyes of the audience. Furthermore, the castle serves as a setting where Murat occasionally gains access to the bedroom of a Christian princess or queen. For instance, in *Fatih'in Fedaisi*, Murat is invited by Wallachian queen Lucia to share her sleeping quarters. These bedrooms typically exhibit vibrant colors and feminine

decorations. Murat's entry into these places symbolizes the Turks' infiltration into the innermost corners of enemy territory.

Lastly, there are churches in the enemy castle, where people pray or sometimes make plans to defeat the Turks. In *Kara Murat Kara Şövalyeye Karşı*, the church also becomes a site where Mark, Murat's twin brother who has seemingly forgotten his true identity, receives a blessing from a priest. The most memorable scenes showing churches are the ones using Hagia Sophia as a part of the narrative. As previously mentioned, in *Fatih'in Fermanı*, Murat, Mehmet II, and some other officials are shown praying in Hagia Sophia. In that scene, Hagia Sophia serves as a symbol of conquest. Interestingly, Hagia Sophia is also used not as itself but also as a fighting arena in Morea in Kara Murat *Devler Savaşıyor,* depicting the post-1453 period, and where Murat defeats Commander Davut. The significance of this encounter lies in the fact that Davut happens to be the brother of Greek Kani Pasha, a *devshirme* in the court of Mehmet II. Seeking to become the governor of Morea, Davut either imprisons or kills the governors appointed by the Ottoman center. Thus, the scene in Hagia Sophia depicts a clash between a loyal Turk and a disloyal one. This scene gains more significance considering Davut's Greek origin, highlighting that converted Greeks can still rebel against the Ottoman authority and cause turmoil. This representation aligns with an essentialist conception of nationhood, which asserts an unchanging essence as the true marker of Turkishness. Within this framework, the Greeks residing in Anatolia are perceived as betrayers, and Byzantium is metaphorically defeated once again in Hagia Sophia as Davut loses the fight.

7. Conclusion: A Return Home?

The 1960s were a period in which Turkey sought to find a distinct and authentic identity in the face of rapid Westernization and the challenges of modernization. The re-evaluation of the Ottoman past served as a means to anchor Turkish society in its historical roots and regain a sense of cultural pride and continuity. Within this context, national space was represented with fluid and vague boundaries. On the other hand, diverging from the earlier era, the cinematic representations of the 1970s exhibit a distinct shift in the focal point of national space, now centred predominantly around Anatolia, alongside various islands in the Aegean. Therefore, the Turkish heroes, who had previously galloped through Central Asia while asserting dominion over the world, now turned into heroes who ardently defend Anatolia. The later films also saw a notable integration of Islam into the national identity of their heroes. This whole transformation runs parallel to the political-historical context, characterized by the ascendancy of political Islam alongside fervent nationalism and isolation in the international arena. Consequently, the hero assumes the role of not only a Turkish one safeguarding the Turkish homeland but also a Muslim defender, protecting Islam against adversaries simply designated as Christians. The most blood-drenched sequences can be found within the clashes between the heroes and the Christians. Furthermore, the grandiose aspirations of world domination espoused in the earlier film series have been replaced with a focus on the

defense of Anatolia as the national homeland. The conceptual boundaries of the idealized homeland have shrunk.

However, the process of nation-building is not a one-time undertaking. It is a continuous phenomenon. With the end of the Cold War and later the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), wars in the Middle East, and Turkey's interventionist foreign policies in the Eastern Mediterranean and among its neighbors, various nationalist imaginations have stretched the borders of the nation-state once again. This interplay between geopolitical dynamics and domestic politics has generated a fertile ground for the redefinition of nationalist narratives, something also reflected in the cultural realm. Within this context, over the past few decades, Turkish television series set in the Ottoman era have experienced a remarkable surge, paralleling the golden age of cinema witnessed in the 1950s–1970s. Prominent examples such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (Magnificent Century) and *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (Resurrection Ertuğrul) have not only achieved substantial commercial success but have also gained international acclaim, being exported to numerous countries across the globe. These television series have emerged within a political-historical context characterized by Neo-Ottomanism, signifying a departure from a Western-oriented foreign policy and a renewed emphasis on re-establishing connections with territories once part of the Ottoman Empire. Within this framework, Turkey assumes an active role on the global stage, seeking to reframe the Ottoman past through a distinctly Turkish lens.[51] This discourse enabled the Turkification of the Ottoman past and gave Turks a greater role in world history. Within this broader context, the rise of the Ottoman historical television series can be seen as a reflection of the evolving political landscape.[52] Their popularity can be understood within the context of Turkey's aspirations for regional influence and soft-power projection as the nation seeks to enhance its diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties with countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans. The series, with their captivating narratives, continue to not only entertain but also evoke a collective consciousness and spark a sense of nostalgia among the audiences.

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51   Çevik 2019; Carney 2018.
52   Today, a central concern shaping the landscape of Turkish politics revolves around the profound impact of refugee flows from Libya, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. With four million registered refugees, predominantly of Syrian origin, Turkey has emerged as the largest refugee-hosting country. Considering the prominence of these issues, an investigation of the influence of refugees on Turkey's culture and cultural products represents a prospective avenue for future research.

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