

DRAKULA COMES TO İSTANBUL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURKISH FANTASTIC CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to recount a brief history of Turkish fantastic cinema. Although fantastic themes have been a part of world cinemas almost since the beginning of cinema itself, the first examples of Turkish fantastic cinema appear much later in the 1950s. Most of the Turkish fantastic movies made between the 1950s and the 1980s are Hollywood and European film adaptations or domestic characters dealing with Western concepts such as space travel. Nevertheless, these characters and themes undergo significant "nationalization" processes, where iconic characters of the world cinemas are re-created to fit into a very particular and different cultural context, becoming a part of the Turkish cinema and the Turkish culture. After exploring the earliest examples of Turkish fantastic cinema, a brief explanation of the historical fantasy period, the masked heroes period, and the transition between the space age and galaxy age period is provided in chronological order, along with a detailed recount of the most exemplary films of each period in an attempt try and reach an understanding of how these seemingly foreign concepts and characters became an undeniable part of Turkish film culture and history. The article is concluded with projections about the future of Turkish fantastic cinema.

Keywords: Fantastic cinema, Turkish cinema, Adaptation, Yeşilçam.

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DRAKULA İSTANBUL'A GELİYOR: FANTASTİK TÜRK SİNEMASININ KISA BİR TARİHİ

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Fantastik Türk Sineması'nın kısa bir tarihini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Fantastik temalar, başlangıcından itibaren dünya sinemalarının bir parçası olagelmış olsalar da, Türk sineması ilk gerçek fantastik sinema örneklerini ancak 1950'lerde vermiştir. 1950'ler ve 1980'ler arasında çekilen Fantastik Türk Sineması örneklerinin çoğu, ya Hollywood ve Avrupa filmi adaptasyonları, ya da uzay yolculuğu gibi son derece Batılı kavramlarla haşır neşir olan yerel karakterler içeren filmlerdir. Oysa bu adaptasyonlar, dünya sinemalarından ödünç alınan ikonik karakterlerin, oldukça kendine özgü ve farklı bir kültürel bağlama yerleştirilmek üzere yeniden yorumlandığı ciddi bir "millileştirme" sürecinden geçerek, Türk sinemasının ve Türk kültürünün bir parçası haline gelirler - burada küresel olan yerel olanla bir araya gelerek, aynı anda hem çok tanıdık, hem de tümüyle yepyeni bir şey yaratır. Çalışmada, önce Fantastik Türk Sineması'nın ilk örnekleri ziyaret edilmekte, ardından tarihsel akış da gözetilerek fantastik tarihi filmler dönemi, maskeli kahramanlar dönemi, ve uzay çağı ve galaksi çağı geçişi dönemiyle ilgili kısa açıklamalar, her dönemin en belirgin örneklerine dair detaylı bir anlatım eşliğinde yapılmakta, böylelikle görünürde bunca yabancı kavramlar ve karakterlerin nasıl olup da Türk film kültürü ve sinema tarihinin bir parçası olabildiklerine dair bir anlayışa ulaşılması hedeflenmektedir. Çalışma, Fantastik Türk Sineması'nın geçmişine dair çıkarımlar ve geleceğine dair öngörülerle sona ermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fantastik sinema, Türk sineması, Uyarılama, Yeşilçam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fantasy and fantastic elements have been the source of people's imaginations since the beginning of human history. From the paintings on cave walls to the hieroglyphs depicting Gods in the Egyptian pyramids, Cervantes' Don Quixote fighting windmills, the vampires, and other supernatural creatures of Gothic literature, the human imagination has always been occupied and nourished with fantastic images. And these fantastic images and explanations take their roots from the innate human need to bring an explanation to the unknown forces of nature. As such, fantastic cinema is yet another manifestation of the human imagination's fascination with these glorious images, and there lies our most primitive connection to our oldest forefathers, dancing around the fire, telling stories.

The emergence of fantastic cinema in the world dates nearly as back as the beginning of cinema itself. It has been more than a hundred years since "the magician of cinema" Georges Méliès landed a spacecraft right in the eye of the moon for the first time on the silver screen in *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) - more than 60 years before mankind took its first steps on it. And then came Murnau's 1922 movie *Nosferatu*, one of the masterpieces of German Expressionism, which led the way to Hollywood's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* stories in the 1930s.

However, the first examples of this genre in Turkish cinema appear much later during the 1950s, under the influence of European and Hollywood cinemas. And even though Turkish mythology is full of authentic mystical creatures, most of the fantastic movies made between the 1950s and the 1980s are Hollywood and European film adaptations. This is mainly due to the technical and financial shortcomings of Yeşilçam cinema during that period, which does not allow the producers to take the risk

of creating original fantastic characters and images. Nevertheless, those adaptations undergo a significant "nationalization" process, where iconic fantastic characters of the world cinemas are recreated to fit into a quite different and very particular cultural context. They are, once again, iconic - but this time as part of the Turkish cinema and the Turkish culture itself.

Turkish fantastic cinema is not very much talked about, especially due to its perceived "lack" of originality. It is considered a non-significant part of Yeşilçam cinema, where comedies and family melodramas take the centre stage. Yet fantastic films are an undeniable part of Turkish cinema history, and they also deserve acknowledgment. Therefore, this article aims to recount a brief history of Turkish fantastic cinema where the global meets the local, creating something both very familiar, and something entirely new all at the same time, with its domesticated *Draculas* and *Killings* and *Invisible Mans*.

2. THE HISTORY OF TURKISH FANTASTIC CINEMA

2.1. The First Years and Pioneers

The first example of Turkish fantastic cinema is director Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatre-based film *Kızkulesinde Bir Facia* (1923) (*A Disaster in Kızkulesi*). The years between 1922 and 1939 are known as the Theatre Period in Turkish cinema. During this period, the narration and acting styles of the films have very strong ties to the theatre tradition. In addition to not yet having the time and experience needed to understand this new and exciting medium, Turkish cinema during this period is shaped by a director with a theatre background, Muhsin Ertuğrul, who is known as "the only man" of the Theatre Period. Accordingly, *Kızkulesinde Bir Facia* (*A Disaster in Kızkulesi*) is a theatre adaptation, where Muhsin Ertuğrul plays not one, but two roles, in addition to directing the movie (Hakan, 2014: 45).

The source of *Kızkulesinde Bir Facia* (*A Disaster in Kızkulesi*) is a French theatre play written by Paul Autier and Clocquemin in 1905, for Paris' famous thriller and horror theatre at the time, the Grand Guignol. Ertuğrul is faithful to the original play in his adaptation, changing only the names of the characters and places, and using the three-act narration of the play almost exactly the same way. In the movie, an old lighthouse keeper's son goes mad after being bit by a rabid dog and is eventually killed by his father in the lighthouse. The way he is afraid of water and light, how he talks to spirits, the way he howls and puts a ship in danger by not turning on the light and his attack on his father are the main thriller and horror elements of the movie (Scognamillo, 2003: 48-49).

Turkish cinema develops slowly, and new ideas about and practices of cinema are not put forward until the 1940s when the Theatre Period ends and the intellectual monopoly of Muhsin Ertuğrul is over. And Turkish fantastic cinema begins to flourish during the 1950s, the most prominent example being director Mehmet Muhtar and producer Turgut Demirağ's 1953 production *Drakula İstanbul'da* (*Dracula in İstanbul*) - thirty-one years after Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and twenty-two years after Tod Browning and Karl Freund's *Dracula* (1931).

Drakula İstanbul'da (*Dracula in İstanbul*) has unique characteristics, making it a distinctive example both in Turkish and world cinemas. Although there are many similarities to Bram Stoker's original *Dracula* story of 1897, the movie is in fact adapted from a Turkish book, making it a very loose multicultural adaptation and an iconic film in its own regard.

Journalist and author Ümit Deniz adapts the script of *Dracula in İstanbul* from Ali Rıza Seyfi's book *Kazıklı Voyvoda* (*Vlad the Impaler*), published as *Dracula in İstanbul* later on. In this book, Seyfi adapts Stoker's *Dracula* into the

Turkish language and culture in a summarized way. The film's main character *Dracula* is the Wallachian Prince Voivode (III), who was famous for impaling his victims. Whereas Bram Stoker himself and the Italian-American director Francis Ford Coppola only imply this affiliation in his 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Ali Rıza Seyfi firmly establishes the connection between Count Dracula and Vlad the Impaler in his book. The movie's scriptwriter Ümit Deniz later wins the Best Script award with this work from Film Dostları Derneği (The Association of Cinema Friends) (Scognamillo, 2005: 64-65).

Count Dracula's story has been adapted many times, both in Hollywood and world cinemas, each of them presenting their unique interpretation of the Impaler Lord, or the charismatic lord of the vampires. When *Dracula in İstanbul* and Tod Browning's 1931 film *Dracula* are examined together, many similarities stand out, as well as many differences. The story of *Dracula in İstanbul* is set in İstanbul as the name implies, but the main character of the film Azmi sets out to travel to the castle of Dracula to discuss the state of an estate, just like *Dracula's* main character Renfield does. Both characters are warned not to go there. Both characters' fingers are cut by the papers they are holding, so that the audience can witness the vampire Dracula's bloodlust. But, a cross is shown along with the blood in Browning's *Dracula*, whereas there is no cross in the Turkish version. Browning's oriental Dracula has three wives, whereas the Turkish Dracula appropriately has just one since the movie is of an era where Turkey is determined to move towards modernization in the Western sense. The Turkish Dracula goes after Azmi's wife Güzin and her sister Şadan, which are the Turkish versions of Browning's Mina and Lucy. Şadan and Lucy are killed. Güzin and Mina are saved. And in both movies, Dracula is killed with a stake put through his heart (Uğur and Altay, 2018). The interesting thing is that the producer of the movie

Turgut Demirağ later states that by the time he made *Dracula in İstanbul*, he had not seen the 1931 *Dracula* film, and he only watched it much later on television (Scognamillo, 2005: 64). Therefore, the similarities between these movies can be attributed to the similarities between Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Ali Rıza Seyfi's book *Kazıklı Voyvoda (Vlad the Impaler)*.

Stoker's and Browning's Mina is adorned with Turkish motifs and local elements in Demirağ's *Dracula in İstanbul*, where she even belly dances under the influence of *Dracula*. All the characters are recreated, embellished with Islamic details, and their names are translated into Turkish. Turkish idioms and expressions are used in the dialogues. The *Dracula* character, normally portrayed as a vampire in the world cinema, gains a new dimension and is referred to as the "Ghoul" - a mythological creature found in Hebrew and Islamic traditions. And through these details, the movie almost gains an original, national character. Furthermore, *Dracula in İstanbul* actually involves many "firsts" when compared to other vampire movies made up until that point both in Hollywood and in Europe - *Dracula* shows his pointy vampire teeth for the first time, the connection between Count *Dracula* and *Vlad the Impaler* is clearly emphasized for the first time as stated above, and erotic scenes are incorporated for the first time in a vampire movie thanks to the actress Annie Ball who gives life to the *Güzin* character (Scognamillo, 2005: 68).

Considering the Turkish cinema's inadequate technology and insufficient knowledge about cinema during the 1950s, it becomes evident that producer Demirağ's endeavor of adapting *Dracula* was based on a very risky and romantic decision. Nevertheless, *Dracula in İstanbul* was made and presented to the Turkish audience, and became a pioneer for Turkish fantastic cinema, despite the difficulties of making a fantastic film with an infrastructure that lacks adequate technological development (Yıldız, 2015: 45-58,

93-127). Due to the abovementioned technical inadequacies, a lot of improvisations were used instead of special effects while making the movie (Müstecaplıoğlu, 2003: 10-24). In an interview done in 1979, the film's art director Sohban Koloğlu states that even the simplest of special effects posed a problem during production and he explains how they overcame these obstacles. The most striking example of their creativity in the face of technical inadequacy is the cemetery scene. About this scene, Koloğlu says that they needed to create a fog, but because they were lacking the necessary technical equipment, they filmed a layer of smoke against the light source. And to create this layer of smoke, 30-40 members of the crew lied down under the camera, each one of them smoking 3-4 cigarettes simultaneously (Scognamillo, 2005: 66). Even with its technical deficiencies and small budget, *Dracula in İstanbul* was one of the major hit films of its time, despite the criticism it received. The ropes which were used for the landing scene of *Dracula* from the top of a building not being visible was enough for the film to be regarded as a success during those years (Ateş, 2012: 75-89).

2.2. Years of Development: The Periods of Turkish Fantastic Cinema

There are only a few films that incorporate fantastic elements in Turkish cinema between the years 1930-1950. With the influence of the war, Turkish cinema gravitated towards addressing social problems with more realistic films (Biryıldız, 2002: 156-169). During this period, Turkey was struggling both with the hardships of establishing a new, republican country and with the economic and political difficulties presented by the conditions of wartime in Europe, even though Turkey itself was not a part of the war. Understandably, the cinema industry was not much developed in Turkey during that period, neither technically nor intellectually. However, we come across a few fantastic films at the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s, where horror

elements are quite dominant due to the rising popularity of Hollywood films in Turkey, along with the rest of the world (Giray, 2013: 11-23). The first example of these horror-dominated films, though not a very successful one, is *Çığlık* (*The Scream*), written and directed by Aydın Arakon in 1949. The film is about a doctor who takes shelter in a mansion during a stormy night, where he meets a young girl driven crazy by her uncle over a matter of inheritance (Scognamillo, 2003: 99).

In the 1950s, the understanding of fantasy in Yeşilçam gravitated mostly towards history, and films inspired by history were quite popular. During the 1960s and 1970s, historical fantasy films became as much popular as science fiction and action films. Movies based on historical fantasies were written and produced completely in accordance with the expectations of the audience. The conflict with the Byzantines was one of the main themes of historical fantasies during this period and there were many references to the Crusades, which is a junction point between Christian and Muslim histories.

Turkish fantastic cinema seemingly failed to produce successful examples between the 1950s and 1970s, mostly due to inadequate technical equipment, small budgets, and insufficient visual effects. But the situation gradually changed in the 1980s. The directors of the 1980s were rather different from their predecessors in terms of both their educations and their approaches to the cinema (Öner, 2015: 12-38). And the subject of discussion began to change accordingly. While historical narratives, science fiction, fairy tales, and masked heroes stood out in the previous periods, with the 1980s, films that emphasized the imagination found in the depths of the human psyche began dominating the fantasy scene as psychological movies became more common in Turkish cinema in general. When examined closely, it can be seen that a different genre becomes popular in Turkish cinema every

ten years, similar to the cinemas of the world, also affecting the tendencies of the Turkish fantastic narration. In accordance, Turkish fantastic cinema history can be divided into two main periods with its distinctive subgenres. Historical Fantasy Period and Masked Heroes Period begin around the same time in the 1960s, but Historical Fantasy Period stays popular through a longer period of time, whereas the existence of the Masked Heroes is much more short-lived. The Transition Between Space Age and Galaxy Age Period mainly comprise of the movies of 1970s and 1980s, where space travel becomes a part of the Turkish fantastic cinema's narrative.

2.2.1. Historical fantasy period

During the late 1960s, historical films become popular in Turkish cinema. And the Impaler Lord, who the Turkish audience first became acquainted with in *Dracula* in İstanbul reappears on the big screen, but this time within an entirely new context. The biggest event of the Turkish fantastic cinema during those years is the *Malkoçoğlu* series, featuring the famous blue-eyed Yeşilçam actor Cüneyt Arkın as the lead. According to Scognamillo (2003: 283), Arkın is an actor who managed to create his own personal "hero myth". The first *Malkoçoğlu* film premiers in the year 1966, and this constitutes a turning point for him. He begins establishing the said hero myth through his portrayal of historical characters, fighting with his fists, performing martial arts of the Far East, using swords, throwing spears, shooting arrows and doing somersaults mid-air. The *Malkoçoğlu* series is adapted from a serial comics with the same name created by Ayhan Başoğlu, which was first published in the newspaper Cumhuriyet in 1965 (Scognamillo, 2005: 257). The *Malkoçoğlu* character is inspired by the Ottoman raiders called Malkoçoğulları. Ayhan Başoğlu also writes the script for the first *Malkoçoğlu* film, which was directed by Süreyya Duru. The *Malkoçoğlu* series consists of five films: *Malkoçoğlu* (1966),

Malkoçoğlu Krallara Karşı (Malkoçoğlu Against the Kings) (1967), Malkoçoğlu Kara Korsan (Malkoçoğlu the Dark Pirate) (1968), Malkoçoğlu Akıncılar Geliyor (Malkoçoğlu, Raiders Are Coming) (1969) and Malkoçoğlu Ölüm Fedaileri (Malkoçoğlu, Bouncers of Death) (1971). And thus, *Malkoçoğlu* becomes the most famous semi-historical fantastic character in Turkish cinema, riding horses, falling in love with foreign princesses, and saving the Ottoman empire numerous times with Cüneyt Arkın's original and iconic fight scenes.

The Impaler Lord is reintroduced to the Turkish audience as mentioned above in the second film *Malkoçoğlu Kralla Karşı (Malkoçoğlu Against the Kings)* in 1967, again directed by Süreyya Duru. In this film, *Malkoçoğlu* returns home from war to find his home consisting of traditional Turkish tents burned to the ground. His wife and all his man are killed, and his only son Polat is kidnapped. He learns that the man responsible is Vlad the Impaler, called "The Red Scorpion". The Red Scorpion Vlad bears a grudge for *Malkoçoğlu* because of past events, so he kidnaps Polat and wants to use him against his father by controlling him with weird medicines and enchanted drinks. In return, *Malkoçoğlu* kidnaps Princess Yolanda, the woman Vlad wants to marry to gain control over her Dukedom. At the end of the movie, *Malkoçoğlu* kills the Red Scorpion by throwing him off a cliff.

Mythological references are used abundantly in the *Malkoçoğlu* films. For example, the scene where a woman deceives Malkoçoğlu's son is a reference to Adam being cast out of paradise after Eve tricks him into eating the apple. With this scene, the Turkish society's view of women is revisited and faithfully reinforced. Moreover, the woman deceiving Malkoçoğlu's son is portrayed as an erotic object. With these films, the use of eroticism in cinema and the use of feminine figures as objects of desire become more common

(Şentürk, 2011).

A very important feature of the *Malkoçoğlu* series is how the language is used. The characteristic fancy language of Yeşilçam that appealed more to the upper and educated classes is set aside, a simple language more familiar to the general public is used, and the comedy scenes are fictionalized in a simple and uncomplicated way (Ünal, 2013: 21-43). Thus, by using the language of the local people and the common man, the series manages to establish a direct relationship with the audience. Similarly, the representation of the noble, rich and arrogant people as desperate and cowardly also increase the interest of the audience, making them identify with and love the main character more (Şentürk, 2011).

2.2.2. The masked heroes period

Yılmaz Atadeniz is one of the most important directors of the masked heroes period. His movies *Maskeli Beşler (The Masked Five) (1968)* and *Maskeli Beşlerin Dönüşü (The Return of the Masked Five) (1968)* follow the traditions of classical western films, and especially the heroes and narrative patterns of the lone ranger saga (Scognamillo, 2005: 100). Other directors have previously tried to adapt popular masked heroes films of Hollywood to Turkish cinema during the 1940s (Şahin et.al, 2015: 14-33, 48-57, 93-122). However, these films, shot with great budgets in Hollywood, could not deliver the same effect to the audience when adapted to Turkish cinema due to budgetary and technical insufficiencies of Yeşilçam.

An important film of this period, again an adaptation of one of the blockbusters of Hollywood, is *Süpermen Dönüyor (Superman Returns) (1979)*, directed by Kunt Tulgar. *Superman Returns* is not the first or only adaptation of Superman into Turkish cinema during the 1970s (Özden, 2000: 36-54). Films such as Cavit Yörüklü's *Süper Adam (Superman)* in 1971, Yavuz Yalınkılıç's *Süper Adam*

İstanbul'da (Superman in Istanbul) in 1972 and again Cavit Yörüklü's *Süper Adam Kadınlar Arasında (Superman Among Women)* in 1972 are the earlier examples (Öner, 2015: 56-75). Considering the conditions of the period, these films can be considered as a form of competition with Hollywood films that were receiving much attention from the Turkish audience. And although the big budgets of Hollywood films were not available in the Turkish cinema industry and the technical facilities were inadequate, the Turkish adaptations of these popular Hollywood movies were quite successful with the audience, and similar to the earliest Turkish fantastic movies, the masked heroes films were also excessively localized to align better with the Turkish culture (Müstecaplıoğlu, 2003: 10-24).

The Turkish interpretation of Clark is the most important character of the masked heroes films. Just as in the original Supermen story, Clark is a journalist, and his parents are not his birth parents. But the way Clark kisses his father's hand respectfully, and the way he is portrayed as a child who is in love with his mother, reflects the elements of the Turkish culture in the film. This is an effort to make the character accommodate the needs of the Turkish audience in terms of cultural background. The laceworks that Clark's mother pulls out of the dowry chest, the rugs hanging on the walls in a way typical to traditional country houses, and the travel allowance that his mother gives him are other examples of Turkish culture that make their way into the story. In the Hollywood version of Superman, Clark stands out with his extremely handsome, muscular body. However, in the Turkish version, Clark is portrayed as a more family-oriented, respectful, and traditional man in accordance with Eastern culture. The Turkish Superman adheres to the traditions and rules of society. In an exemplary scene, the woman passing by while Superman walks on the corridors of the World Newspaper building is shown in a bikini, even though he

could have seen her naked. This indicates that Clark is a traditional man who respects the values of society.

The Superman movies were not only adapted from Hollywood (Ateş, 2012: 75-89). After a long period of Hollywood adaptations, the scriptwriters shifted their directions towards Italy. The most important example of those adaptations was Italo Martinenghi's *Süpermenler (Supermen)* from 1979. The nonexistence of bureaucratic complications in Turkey made filmmaking easier, which made the Italian director want to work with Turkish producers (Müstecaplıoğlu, 2003). One of those producers was Türker İnanoğlu. İnanoğlu agreed to work with Martinenghi and they began shooting Supermen in İstanbul. Unfortunately, this new Supermen was much more mediocre in portrayal than the previous ones. The film was unable to go beyond Cüneyt Arkın's costumed karate scenes, and was full of absurd jokes and dialogues. There was no explanation as to why the villain was evil. Unnecessary erotic scenes were added only to attract attention. The superhero was overly localized and overly adorned with Turkish expressions. Nevertheless, these elements succeeded in attracting the attention of the audience once again (Ünal, 2013: 21-43).

Comedies, thrillers, action films, psychological and erotic films were among the many films made during this period, apart from the various Superman adaptations. *Üç Dev Adam (Three Giant Men)* directed by T. Fikret Uçak in 1973 was an example of such films, incorporating sadistic, erotic, comedy, and thriller elements all at the same time. Captain America, Spider-Man, and El Santo characters were brought together in this film and they were overly localized just like the adapted characters of other films of the Masked Heroes period. The attention of the audience was kept alive with sadistic and thrilling elements, while trying to remain faithful to the sensibilities of the Turkish society by handling

the erotic scenes very carefully, and relying more on detective scenes and on music. *Three Giant Men* was considered successful compared to the other films of the period and genre.

Another one of the most important series of the period is "Kilink", which is an adaptation of a photo novel character first published in Italy in 1966 with the name "Killing". Killing gets published in Turkey as a photo novel almost simultaneously with Italy, and the Turkish audience instantly adores it. The character's popularity is the main reason director Yılmaz Atadeniz decides to adapt the character to the cinema. Atadeniz explains how he decided to adapt the Italian Killing character to cinema as:

I was on the ferry when I realized everyone was reading the paper Son. But they were only looking at one page of the paper, and then they were setting it aside. What they were reading was a photo novel: Killing. Then it occurred to me. Since everyone was reading it with such interest, I thought a good movie could come out of Killing (Türk, 2013: 204-205, cited from Akçura, 2013).

Kilink İstanbul'da (Killing in İstanbul) was presented to the Turkish audience in 1967, and later on became a fantastic cult classic with its sequels (Göral, 2008: 43-56). In this film, a man trapped in a skeleton costume still manages to stay a ladies' man. Women especially love his lips, the way he knows how to make women happy, and his macho personality. But he employs the characteristics of an anti-hero and the film can be regarded as a sado-erotic film (Giray, 2013: 11-23). Here, nationalism and Turkish culture are not emphasized as much compared to the earlier years of Turkish fantastic cinema. Eroticism and lust are kept within acceptable limits following the norms and values of Turkish society, in an attempt to prevent a negative reaction from the audience (Sarı, 2015: 25-42).

Türk (2013: 217-219) explains Kilink's popularity among the Turkish audience through four main

points. The first reason for this popularity is that Killing is originally a photo novel. According to Türk, Kilink would not be this popular if it was a comic book, because photographs gave the Turkish audience the feeling of "real people". The second reason is also related to Kilink being a photo novel. According to Türk, photo novels, which constitute a gateway to cine novels, generated a feeling of acquaintance for the Turkish audience when they saw the character on screen. The third reason is Kilink's erotic content. At a time when the Turkish society was beginning to debate and negotiate certain things, Kilink was offering ultimate alternatives for the society's latent erotic energy in an entertaining way. Another reason for the Turkish society's embrace of Kilink, especially considering its erotic content, could be the fact that Kilink was ultimately a "stranger", therefore he was the subject of a distant and detached uncanniness. According to Türk (2013: 219), it is significant that Kilink was never fully adapted into the Turkish culture in these films, whereas other adapted superheroes such as Superman were.

2.2.3. Transition between space age and galaxy age period

Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam (The Man Who Saved The World) (1982) was written by the film's lead actor Cüneyt Arkın and directed by Çetin İnanç, one of the important directors that left a mark on Turkish fantastic cinematography. *The Man Who Saved the World* was made under the influence of Star Trek, which was referred to as the storm of the 1970s (Coşkun, 2011: 27-68). It is one of the most important examples of space adventures and fantastic space road adaptations seen in Turkish cinema. Scognamiglio (2006: 155) states that for a movie to become a "cult", what is needed is to disregard all existing rules of filmmaking completely and disfigure the form and work with very limited resources. And *The Man Who Saved the World* does all three.

Mankind comes face to face with its own demise on earth, where nuclear frenzy has removed all discriminations, and a primitive life has prevailed (Biryıldız, 2002: 156-169). The audience is given clues as to what will happen in the film with voice-over narration (Batur, 1998: 93-118). Voice-over allows the audience to feel as if they themselves are in the galaxy age. However, the constant cosmologic information given throughout the movie creates a schizophrenic state in the audience.

Images from *Star Wars* (dir. George Lucas, 1979) are shown while two Turkish spacemen roam the depths of outer space, giving the movie a kitsch character. Questions such as "what happened to the world?" and "has the universe disappeared already or is it disappearing now?" echo in the minds of the audience. The world is in desperate need of a hero to save it from an enemy that wants to tear it into pieces. Those heroes are Turkish warriors, brought to life by actors Cüneyt Arkın and Aytekin Akkaya. The villain, called Magician, is the equivalent of Darth Vader from *Star Wars*, and is portrayed by actor Hikmet Taşdemir. A local fantastic adventure comes to life, with images combined with scenes from *Star Wars* to by-pass the technical inadequacies still present in Turkish cinema.

Details like Cüneyt Arkın shattering rocks with his fists and kicks, the pilot portrayed by Metin Akkaya trying to cross the speed of light saying "I am landing" as he bends his head to get away from other spaceships, and Egyptian scenes shot in Cappadocia all add more oddities to the series (Püsküllüoğlu, 2015: 17-36). Actor Hüseyin Peyda, who brings the old master to life, is the representative of faith and the Eastern world. In a world full of faithless people who are out of control, the presence of the old master creates a spiritual field where the audience can feel safe and at ease. Since mankind does not have the means to deal with or resist all this

space technology, the film attempts to give the message that faith can save people even in the most difficult of situations by creating a sense of faith within the audience. Because regardless of how developed the technology is, there are times where everything seems impossible (Adanır, 2006: 28-63). To create a sense of hope and faith, the audience is prompted to believe in their ancestors' civilization and beliefs. As long as the hero does not give in and be confused by other perspectives, he can find the truth and power within himself and overcome his enemy. And when the hero of the film attacks and defeats the Magician, it is because he is full of faith.

Another successful example of space adventure films of the period is undoubtedly director Hulki Saner's *Turist Ömer Uzay Yolunda* (*Tourist Ömer on Space Road*) (1973), where actor Sadri Alışık plays the lead role. *Tourist Ömer on Space Road* is also a loose adaptation of *Star Trek*, similar to *The Man Who Saved the World*. In addition to the fantastic elements that normally stand out in Sadri Alışık's films, the absurd comedy elements used in the film were also quite successful (Dorsay, 2003: 111-134,145-156). And although the film is an adaptation of a space film, it was produced and received as an absurd comedy at the time. The scriptwriter of the film, Ferdi Merter, later explained that his purpose was not to make a space film but to make people laugh with absurd comedy (Karabayraktar, 2010: 36). And Sadri Alışık, who continuously appeared before the audience with his roles in absurd-fantastic genre films during the 1960s, was uniquely suited for his role in this film.

The humor and the robots used in *Star Trek* were completely Turkified in *Tourist Ömer on Space Road*. And regardless of the failure of the decor, the costumes, make-up, and the story itself, the acting of Sadri Alışık and the dialogues were quite successful (Ünal, 2013: 21-43). The hero of the film, *Tourist Ömer*, comes from a pure and naïve Turkish neighborhood life. His general

attitude towards the scientifically advanced aliens, and the way he makes the aliens accept his lifestyle is narrated comically. The film successfully depicts the struggle between modern life and rural life through the relationship between Mr. Spock and Ömer. The audience supports Tourist Ömer throughout the movie. And this support is understandable, considering the way the Turkish society itself is perpetually stuck between the East and the West, feeling neither completely Westerner nor Easterner (Ünal, 2013: 21-43). The disagreements between Mr. Spock and Tourist Ömer resemble the quarrels of traditional Turkish theatre characters Kavuklu and Pişekar (Müstecaplıoğlu, 2003: 10-24), bringing the film that much closer to Turkish culture.

2.3. Towards a Contemporary Turkish Fantastic Cinema

Turkish cinema's evolution takes a faster turn in the 1990s, with the screenwriters gravitating towards art cinema as traditions of Yeşilçam fade away. Art movies begin to stand out as if trying to make the audience forget Yeşilçam movies entirely, and fantastic films are pushed further aside until the new wave of Turkish horror cinema is born in the early 2000s.

The early Turkish horror films of the 2000's mainly follow the narrative tradition of Hollywood horror genre with predictable plot lines and stereotypical characters. Two of the earliest Turkish horror films are Durul Taylan and Yağmur Taylan's comedy/horror film *Okul* (*The School*) (2004), which is about a group of teenagers being haunted by the ghost of their deceased friend, and *Orhan Oğuz's Büyü* (*The Spell*) (2004), which incorporates some cultural aspects, but generally follows the narrative conventions of Hollywood slasher movies. Another film from this initial period, Togan Gökbakar's *Gen* (*The Gene*) (2006) follows the horrific events in a psychiatric facility in a quite Western fashion, while Biray Dalkıran's *Araf*

(*The Abortion*) from the same year (2006) is a stereotypical example of the revenge of the dead child trope, and the characters, settings and the movies' reflection on abortion are all compatible with Western sentiments. Ahmet Yılmaz and Kamil Aydın's *Kutsal Damacana* (*The Holy Water Bottle*) series that span from 2007 to 2011 are Turkish parodies of Hollywood horror films incorporating priests, haunted paintings, werewolves, Vlad the Impaler yet again (the subtitle of the series' third film is *Dracoola*) and exorcism scenes which follow the conventions and iconography of Hollywood films in a comical fashion. Talip Ertürk and Murat Emir Eren's *Ada: Zombilerin Düğünü* (*Island: Wedding of the Zombies*) (2010) follows a group of people in a remote island being haunted by zombies, which have no place either in Turkish folklore or in Islamic tradition.

However, with the advent and exponential growth of the Islamic horror films, such as director Hasan Karacadağ's *Dabbe* series that span from 2006 to 2015, and director Alper Mestçi's *Musallat* (*Haunted*) films from 2007 and 2011, the characters, narratives, iconographies and visual conventions begin to change. *Dabbe* films, which were quite popular with the Turkish audience at the time, set the example for a strong wave of Islamic horror films to follow, making the sub-genre dominate the Turkish fantasy and horror scene from 2013 forward. These films are completely unique both in terms of narrative and characters, as well as the visual cues and colour palette used. And the themes and characters are firmly rooted in Islamic folklore. There is an interesting scene in the first *Dabbe* (2006) film, where the audience is faced with the horrific monster (or monsters) quite early on during the first quarter of the movie, which is unusual for a horror film in the traditional, Western sense. When we look at the conventions of Hollywood horror films, the audience rarely gets a good look at the monster before the last quarter of the

movie, and even then, the monster is not seen long enough or clearly enough to be completely "known" by the audience. In the first *Dabbe* film, on the other hand, the audience unexpectedly sees a large number of shadow-like creatures roaming freely around in town throughout a long period of time, taking away the element of surprise when the characters actually face the monster(s). Here, and in other Islamic horror films that followed, the fear does not stem from the unknown, as is tradition with Hollywood, but rather from the knowledge that these monsters or creatures, these "evil forces" are all out there, roaming our streets in big crowds whether we see them or not, waiting for us to make a mistake that would let them in, making these stories "cautionary tales" about how to behave according to Islamic rules.

As the initial interest of the audience in the horror boom of the 2000s subsided towards the second decade of the new millennium, an entirely new and promising Turkish fantastic storytelling has begun to flourish on Netflix in the form of series with successful and original examples such as *Hakan: Muhafız (The Protector)* (2018-2020), *Atiye (The Gift)* (2019-2020) and *Şahmaran (Shahmaran)* (2023), all rooted in Turkish and Anatolian folklore rather than Islamic traditions. *Hakan: Muhafız (The Protector)*, which is the first Netflix original series filmed in Turkey, follows the story of a young man in İstanbul, who finds out after the death of his father that he is part of an ancient secret society tasked to keep the city safe. The story goes back and forth between the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. A small but interesting detail that ties the story to Turkish history and folklore beyond the Ottoman Empire is the name of the main character, Hakan, which means "the ruler of rulers", a title that was traditionally used for Turkish, Mongolian and Tatar rulers. *Atiye (The Gift)* is about a young artist who has been obsessively and instinctively drawing the symbol of abundance and fertility without knowing its true meaning. The story

unfolds in Göbeklitepe, which is a Neolithic archaeological site dating back to c. 9500-8000 BC, located in modern Şanlıurfa. The story has many references to ancient Turkish shamanic practices, with the "knowledge" or "wisdom" of the spirits or the ancestors being passed down from mother to daughter for many generations. And finally, *Şahmaran (Shahmaran)*, which debuted in 2023, follows the story of a young woman, Şahsu, who goes to Adana to face her grandfather after the death of her mother, where she finds out that the Mar people had been waiting for her as the reincarnation of the Shahmaran, their long lost queen. Shahmaran is a common mythological figure from Anatolian (Turkish, Persian, Iraqi and Kurdish) verbal folklore. According to the folklore, Shahmaran is the Queen of Serpents, with a body of half woman and half snake. The details and the ending of the story differ from variation to variation, but the central theme in all versions is that Shahmaran is betrayed by her human lover, causing her demise, even though she had given him the secret of immortality along with her love and trust.

Even though these last examples are Netflix series rather than movies intended for the big screen, it is evident that since 2018, the narratives of Turkish fantastic productions in general have been moving away from Islamic traditions and relying more on Turkish and Anatolian folklore, which may in turn inspire Turkish moviemaking to follow in the same narrative route as well.

RESULTS

From Yeşilçam to the present day, Turkish fantastic cinema has left seventy years behind. Naturally, there can be no comparison between the Fantastic Turkish films directed seventy years ago and the fantastic films of the 2000s, especially in terms of form, subject, technique, and visual effects. Turkish cinema, in general, is undoubtedly in a much better condition now - almost able to compete with the foreign productions.

Despite the technical and budgetary restrictions of the past, Turkish filmmakers and audiences have always shown an interest in fantastic films. And the efforts to overcome these obstacles have in turn given way to creative and unique solutions that deserve respect in retrospect. These past examples, with their adaptations of foreign films and comic books on the verge of being entirely kitsch, are completely unique in their own regard. It can even be said that these movies were postmodern cinema examples, even before postmodernity existed as a concept.

It is apparent that Turkish scriptwriters, directors, and storytellers of all kinds have had and still has a special place for fantastic narration in their hearts since Yeşilçam years, and fantastic films and series will continue to be a part of the Turkish audience's lives for years to come with better budgets, better technological means, better audio-visual and special effects, and finally original, domestic stories that stem from the Turkish history and culture.

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