# 12

# TRANSLATING MODERNITY: REMAKES IN TURKISH CINEMA

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The Turkish film industry, which had grown rapidly in the 1950s, became by the 1960s one of the largest film-producing national industries, with an average annual production of 200 movies. In 1972, just before the economic crisis that affected the movie industry severely, Turkey ranked third among the major film-producing countries, with 301 movies. Almost 90 per cent of these movies, however, were remakes, adaptations or spin-offs (Scognamillo 1973: 68). In other words, they were based on novels, plays, films and even film reviews or publicity materials of foreign origin. Furthermore, in most cases the source material for these adaptations and remakes was not credited. As in literature, the notion of plagiarism in Turkey was not identical with that prevalent in the West. So how can we define these films?

While both adaptation and remake are usually defined by their legally sanctioned use of material (whose rights the filmmakers should have purchased), in Turkey that was not the case. Veteran script-writer Bülent Oran, who wrote over 300 scripts throughout his career, remembers that there were all sorts of sources and thousands of books available for free, 'for example, a Harold Robbins novel, that Hollywood would be willing to pay millions for, was sold for 20 liras' (Oran 1973: 17). Furthermore, the appropriation of material whose sources (filmic or non-filmic) are almost impossible to identify, rendered proper legal procedures unnecessary for the filmmakers.

Different understandings of remakes might be an appropriate starting point in order to account for their popularity in Turkey. First of all, a remake may aim at paying tribute to an earlier film. This could take various forms, from 'unwavering idealisation' to 'unalloyed negativity' (Eberwein 1998: 18). For

> cinema imitated German and Arab films, now we are dealing with cheap imitations of American, Italian and French cinema. And we describe this as 'influence'. This is rather deceptive. However, everyone has to plagiarise, while we are producing 150 movies each year. In these circumstances no single filmmaker can create an original piece. Because s/he lacks both time and creativity. (cited by Özgüç 1965: 13)

For him, the motive behind remakes is the assembly-line production system that limits the time and effort spend on each production. However, as some writers suggest, there is not much difference between writing an original script and re-writing the script of an earlier film, in terms of creative energy and cost. According to Oran, the latter was even more difficult to create:

> I don't like literary adaptations. Although they seem unconstrained, they have lots of disadvantages. Remaking a movie . . . appears to be very easy. In fact, that is the most difficult and risky [of all the scenarios]. The reason for this is the difference between the sensations, worldview and understanding. (1973: 17)

As Oran suggests, remaking a movie in a culturally different context involves a lot of problems. There are a number of issues to be concerned, such as moral codes and cultural values. For example, the filming of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was halted as the movie involved an extra-marital relationship (Scognamillo 1973: 67). Therefore, it is quite doubtful whether remakes involve less creative effort or are more cost-effective compared with original films.

This discussion of definitions and possible motives for remakes cannot fully explain the phenomenon in Turkish context. So what might be the functions that remakes tend to serve? In order to answer this question, one has to emphasise the hybrid nature of these films. In this respect, it might be helpful to use the metaphor of translation to explore the remake as a cross-cultural interpretation, and, to explore initially the parallels between remakes and literary translations.

## Between Two Worlds

The first literary translations of European literature appeared in the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. They were considered as one of the means of closing the cultural and technical gap between the Empire and Europe. Significantly, the first literary texts appearing in Ottoman Turkish were popular French plays, starting with Molière's *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* (1813). In 1862, two novels, Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque* and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, appeared in Turkish. The influence of these literary forms on Ottoman literature is evident in the dominant technique of translation: naturalisation. This took many forms, from paraphrasing to abridgement. Usually the story was transposed into an Ottoman milieu, and the characters made to behave in accordance with locally acceptable customs. This technique was

described as 'translation in accordance with Turkish customs and morals' (*Türk adat ve ahlakina tatbikan tercüme*), as translator Ahmet Vefik Pasha puts it (cited by Özön and Dürder 1967: 5). These free translations also took extensive liberties, from basic omissions to adding parts or changing the title. Some novels were condensed into much smaller volumes. And, in some cases, the form of the original works was transformed into verse. Generally, the classical or syllabic verse of traditional poetry was used for plays or novels.[1]

The 'naturalisations' in these translations went so far that the differences between original works/authorship (*telif*) and translations (*tercüme*) were not easy to identify in Ottoman literature. In fact, when the adaptation took the form of creative writing, the publishers neglected to make any mention of the original author. And it is no coincidence that some of these translators were also the pioneers of Ottoman literature. Their aim was to achieve what Fredric Jameson describes as a compromise between the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction and the raw material of local social experience. This formal compromise, supported by translations from Western European literature, 'was highly unstable as form and content cannot always be welded together seamlessly' (Jameson 1993: xiii). The main reason for this compositional paradox is the contrast between irreconcilable elements.

This paradox can be defined as a 'cultural schizophrenia', according to Daryush Shayegan. Criticising Foucalt's argument in *The Order of Things* (1970) that there is never more than one episteme defining the possible conditions for all knowledge in a given culture at a given moment, Shayegan describes a context where epistemes can coexist. He argues that two different historical *epistemes*, one affecting psychic, emotional behaviour and atavistic attitudes, the other shaping the modern ideas which come from outside, can in fact coexist at a given moment, but at the cost of reciprocal deformation:

> Between them lies a *caesural fault*: a split which is especially crippling because it divides the being into two unequal segments which cannot communicate except on the most elementary level, as there is no bridge to facilitate harmonious internal dialogue. This is not to say that they have no contact, however. Indeed it is precisely where they meet that all kind of distortions arise, as the two *epistemes*, like reflecting screens facing one another, become disfigured by the mutual scrambling of their images. (1992: 72)

Such distortions are most evident in the form of literary narratives of the late Ottoman and early Republican period in Turkey. However, it might be wrong to define this coexistence as a form of deformation as Shayegan puts it. On the contrary, paradoxical intermingling of these two epistemes can appropriately be considered as a productive survival strategy.[2] To understand this compositional paradox, we could look at Franco Moretti's work, which further elaborates Jameson's formulation. Instead of a binary relationship between Western formal pattern and local content, Moretti proposes a triangular scheme: foreign *plot*,

local *characters* and local *narrative voice* (this is somewhat an adaptation of foreign form). According to Moretti, it is precisely in this third dimension that the novels seem to be most unstable: 'the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation, and when foreign "formal patterns" (or actual foreign presence for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways, then of course comment becomes uneasy – garrulous, erratic, rudderless' (2000: 65).

The Ottoman and early Turkish literatures also reflect this instability in their style. The reason for this peculiarity lies in the narrator's intention of recasting new ideas to their society. As Jale Parla comments:

> behind the inclination towards renovation stood a dominant and dominating Ottoman ideology that recast the new ideas into a mould fit for the Ottoman society. The mould, however, was supposed to hold two different epistemologies that rested on irreconcilable axioms. It was inevitable that this mould would crack and literature, in one way or another, reflects the cracks. (cited by Moretti 2000: 62)

In this sense, the translation of foreign models, or the hybridisation of what Moretti defines as foreign *plot*, local *characters* and local *narrative voice*, can be described as a form negotiation of various discourses on modernity and modernisation.

## Negotiating the Modern

Şerif Mardin, in his study of Turkish modernisation through Ottoman novels, identifies a number of problems raised by social and political change. The most important of these problems is what Mardin describes as 'super or over-westernisation'. This problem is best exemplified in Bihruz Bey, the archetypal Western fop in Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem's (1846–1913) *Araba Sevdasi* (Aspirations for Horse-Drawn Carriages) (1895). The novel satirises the superficial veneer of Westernization, which a new class has adopted in Turkey after the passing of the edict of *Tanzimat* reform of 1839. Bihruz Bey, who sacrifices his father's fortune to his compulsion for lovely horse-drawn carriages, like his Russian counterpart Oblomov, suffers from lack of identity and of roots. His most striking attitude is his infatuation with the material aspects of Western civilisation (Mardin 1974: 406–9).

As Mardin notes, Bihruz Bey types reappear in Turkish literature as individuals to be made fun of or despised: 'Over and over again the same figures, whether comical or tragic, appear as traitors to their culture, whose example is to be shunned' (1974: 411–2). It would be wrong to consider the 'Bihruz Bey syndrome' as an anti-modern stance. In literature and film the syndrome had a more instrumental function for the purposes of social mobilisation. The critique of over-Westernisation was used to support a line of modernism more in consort with traditional values. In this context, the traditional terms – often represented by the country – were used to ridicule the superficiality and stupidity of over-Westernisation. Not surprisingly, the conflicts between traditional and modern

values and lifestyles are resolved in the modern environment, rather than through the restoration of a traditional order. For example, in *Sürtük* (Ertem Eğilmez, 1965) – remade by the same director in 1970 – a film that is inspired by *Love Me or Leave Me* (Charles Vidor, 1955), the Pygmalion-like educators of the film's heroine are ridiculed for their Western manners. However, it is only by completing these courses that the heroine could make her entry into the city and become successful.

This idea of a 'less radical version of modernity' is best exemplified in Ziya Gökalp's distinction between 'culture' and 'civilization'. In *The Principles of Turkism* (1923), which became a sort of blueprint for the Turkish revolution, Gökalp praises the material civilisation of Europe while opposing its non-material aspects. In order to formulate this, drawing on the ideas of the German sociologist Tönnies, he made a distinction between culture (*hars*), 'the set of values and habits current within a community', and civilization (*medeniyet*), 'a rational, international system of knowledge, science and technology'. He believed that the road to salvation lay in replacing this civilisation with a modern European one, while holding to Turkish culture (Zürcher 1993: 136).[3] In this approach, instead of 'all that is solid melting into air', a cultural continuity in the form of negotiation or resistance is predicted. Rather than discussing the model's attainability, I would like to concentrate on the ways in which the policies based on these interpretations negotiated modernity, and the hybrid forms produced as a result of this process. This negotiation might be summarised as a synthesis between the rational and humanist aspects of the West and the non-degenerated values of the East, as Sevda Şener suggests in her study of twentieth-century Turkish theatre (1971). In the context of remake, it involves the reconstruction of certain cultural practices and mores, as well as resistance to social atomisation or separation.

## Modernity and Women

The clash between modern and traditional values is often symbolised in the figure of women in Turkish literature and cinema. In this tradition, which has its roots in nineteenth-century Western literature, the female characters became ideal bearers of the corruption and decay that modernisation creates. Although the representation of women has changed through the years, this connotation remained largely intact. The clash of generations and the immorality of women following Western ways were the most popular themes in twentieth-century literature. Together with these, the decline of authority and the growth of sexual immorality continued to provide a central focus for writers and readers of novels and short stories into the 1930s (Duben and Behar 1991: 199). In the nationalist novels of the 1920s and 1930s, an alternative female character emerged in the form of a self-sacrificing 'comrade-woman' who is also an asexual sister-in-arms (Kandiyoti 1989: 149). Yet women's immoral behaviour was still considered a significant threat.

In contrast with these models, remakes offered a new type of woman who is sexually attractive yet virtuous. In classical French melodrama, unlike American melodrama, the heroine need not be a virgin (Brooks 1995 [1976]: 32). When the genre was appropriated by American filmmakers in the early twentieth century, virginity became a central theme. It was only in 1940s that the issue fell from the agenda for the desiring heroines of Hollywood movies. In this sense, Turkish remakes were much closer to the early American melodrama. For example, in *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtis, 1945), Veda Pierce blackmails Mrs Forester by saying that she is carrying Ted's baby. On the other hand, in the Turkish remake of the film, *Şoför Nebahat ve Kizi* (Nebahat the Taxi Driver and her Daughter, Süreyya Duru, 1964), her counterpart Hülya had to obey stricter rules. She warns her rich boyfriend that only after marriage they can have a sexual relationship. And when she sleeps with her mother's boyfriend, her mother thinks she can marry no one but him, in order to save her honour.

The concept of adultery is evaluated differently in Turkish remakes. Scriptwriter Bülent Oran describes the rules of the film industry in detail:

> The woman [in Turkish cinema] could only love one man. She could only sleep with that one man. No one can touch her. If this rule is broken, the film will fail to make any money . . . In foreign films, women's excessive behaviour, extra-marital relationships, walking hand-in-hand with another man are tolerated. When it comes to Turkish films things are different. For example, in one of my scripts [*Dağlar Kizi Reyhan* (Metin Erksan, 1969), which is a take on *Love Me or Leave Me* (Charles Vidor, 1955)], we portrayed a music hall owner: an evil and cruel man. He fell for the lover of the hero. By hiding some cannabis in his clothes, he got him arrested. Finally, he married the girl. That is all fine . . . For the spectators the ending is quite certain: The hero will be released and reunite with the heroine. However, there is something wrong: in a movie, no Turkish guy could marry a woman who had sex with another man. Therefore, on the first night of their marriage, the heroine acted boldly and said: 'You bought me. You can have my body [by force], but not my soul'. So what did that evil man do? He said: 'I'll never touch you against your own will', and slept in another room. And this has gone on for some ten years until the hero is released. Obviously, this is quite illogical . . . However, the spectator accepts it, as it is morally right . . . This 'logic of the illogical' is characteristic of Turkish cinema. (Oran 1973: 24)

The 'logic of the illogical', explained by Oran, is a significant feature of the remakes. Although Mildred married Monte Beragon, Nebahat remained single in the remade version. She went out for dinner with her business partner Cengiz, but there was no implication of a sexual relationship between them. Otherwise, it would be impossible for her to remarry her ex-husband. Even widows cannot remarry in Turkish film. Therefore, it is quite significant that the Turkish filmmakers had not attempted to remake Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven*

> of the past, and of the shackles of repressive family, community and authority. However, in the intense nationalistic years beginning with the young Turk period [early twentieth century], it also came to be associated with anti-nationalism, moral corruption and even treason. (Duben and Behar 1991: 94)

The effects and conceived threats of transition from a communalistic type of society to competitive individualism were also apparent in remakes. A 'corporatist solidarity' – suggested by Ziya Gökalp – between the members of a family, workplace or district (*mahalle*) was defended against the individualistic social morals of modern society. The characters are often portrayed within their local community and receive support from their circle of friends when in need. Overall, the characters of the remakes appear to be much more contented than in the desiring heroines of American melodrama.

Supporting communal values in their social life, the characters of the Turkish remakes take a different stand when it comes to love. Marriages in the film take the form of individual choice, that of love between two individuals. Although the consent of families was crucial, it was the couples that took the decision and made the necessary arrangements.[4] However, in real life marriage based on a mutual arrangement between the bride and the groom was particular to urban culture, and a rarity in Turkey. As Duben and Behar state, in early twentieth-century Istanbul, although some sort of love relationship under the guidance and sponsorship of families was becoming more widespread, the *idea* of love carried an implicit threat to family (1991: 246). According to a study carried out in 1985–9, marriages based on mutual arrangement formed only 4.8 per cent of the total marriages, while 48.1 per cent of the couples opted for arranged marriages based on viewing the bride, and 28.4 per cent knew each other through friends and relatives (cited by Tekeli 1995: 9). Therefore, the so-called love-marriages and the portrayal of emancipated women in films should be read as the product of conflicting factors and tendencies. On the one hand, these films were a social reflection of what was taking place in 1960s Turkey, especially in an urban environment. On the other hand, as in the case of love-marriages, melodrama served as a female wish-fulfilment fantasy. Finally, such representations also registered growing anxieties created by social transformations. That is quite clear in the reconstruction of patriarchal authority in films. In the end, the love-marriage never brings individual freedom: all the female characters give up their careers when they marry.

## Spaces of Modernity

The physical space of classical Hollywood melodrama is the bourgeois home, sanctified by patriarchal laws. In the European vein of melodrama, at the opposite of this ideal private sphere there exist the dance hall, the music hall and nightclub, where the 'fallen women' are projected as the object of the male gaze. As Ana Lopez defined with reference to Mexican melodrama, the nightclub is

a barely tolerated social space. It is 'nevertheless the part of the patriarchal public sphere where the personal – and issues of female subjectivity, emotion, identity, and desire – finds its most complex articulation' (2000: 511). This public space, though rarely featured in classical Hollywood, has a significant function in Turkish melodrama. Here, as an equivalent to nightclubs, we can identify two different types of space with distinct narrative functions. The first and more 'respectable' type is the *gazino* (music hall), which caters for family audiences. The *pavyon* (nightclub) is for predominantly male customers. Here, the female performers also serve as *consommatrices*. Similarly, sexuality, which is not systematically excluded from the narrative, appears in two different forms. The first and most widespread kind of sexuality is in the form of the heroine's performance on the *gazino* stage. While accomplishing the primary purpose of the pleasure of performance, *gazino* scenes also provide an unintentionally liberating release that the heroine achieves. The second and more erotic type of sexuality appears as a kind of violence and threat to narrative stability. This is most apparent in *pavyon* performances or in party scenes. The music featured in the former is 'traditional', whereas 'Western' dance music accompanies scenes in the latter version.

Interestingly, in Turkish melodramas when the heroines are separated from their families, they become performers instead of taking menial jobs. Their 'rise to stardom' is often achieved quite easily. As performers on stage they can also transgress socially accepted definitions of femininity, with the transgression presented as a form of sacrifice they had to bear. Once they are reunited with their family, the briefly liberated heroines return back home. In the family environment, work is set against maternity. Obviously, this 'rise to stardom' plot is both a wish-fulfilment fantasy and a narrative requirement for foregrounding musical performance.[5]

Another typical modern setting of Turkish melodramas was the home. It should be noted that all these remakes were produced and set in the cosmopolitan city of Istanbul, and thus tended to depict a modern and upper-crust environment. In these films, sets and furnishing are emphasised to such an extent that the codes of realism become secondary. This excessive luxury resembles the 1930s Italian 'white telephone' films. That genre, which took its name from the 'white telephones' which the characters use to talk to each other, catered for the modern taste for window-shopping. As Laura Nucci, an Italian actress of the period, pointed out, the art deco set designs corresponded less to actual interior designs of homes than to a popular view of modernity (cited by Hay 1987: 39). In Turkish cinema, this modern and art deco sensibility was symbolised by a number of residences on the banks of the Bosphorus, which were used over and over again in a number of films in the 1960s. These modern houses offered a fantasy space for the viewers.

## Remake and National Cinema

The idea of national cinema has long been shaped by the dominant conception of culture as a unified entity. Since Siegfried Kracauer's seminal work on German

cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), national cinemas are often evaluated in a context isolated from their mixed nature and cross-cultural or transnational disclosure. The cultural imperialism thesis, which emerged in the face of growing Hollywood domination in the world film market, questioned this confined notion of national film industries. Emphasising the cultural and economic impact of US film imports on national cinema, the cultural imperialism thesis championed an authentic cinematic expression as opposed to the threat of globalisation. However, by condemning the 'cultural imperialism' in the audio-visual field, it also assumed a unified notion of national culture, whose essence could, and should be, reflected by the creators of film. Furthermore, by focusing mainly on 'acclaimed' cinematic works and particular auteurs, national cinema studies often overlooked popular and mainstream works, which have much wider national appeal, as well as the diversity of cultural strands. In this process, inevitably, binary oppositions are established between high culture and mass culture, or between major and minor works. In most of these studies, the national cinema is proclaimed as a unique identity and a stable set of meanings, identifying a hegemonising, mythologising process, as Andrew Higson describes (1989: 37).

Analysing the intertextual and hybrid nature of the remakes, this study aims at offering a distinct approach for the study of national cinema. The most significant element of the remake is the reinterpretation and negotiation of historical and social forces of modernism in Turkey. While offering something like a homogenised picture of cultural and moral characteristics of urban Turkey, these films mobilised a resistance against some of the values depicted in original films. Asserting a localised version of modernity as opposed to the evolutionary and universalistic content of Westernisation, the remakes can be best conceptualised in the framework of 'multiple or alternative modernities'.

Characterised by complexity, ambiguity and incompleteness in sociologist Johann P. Arnason's work (1993, 1997), the project of modernity is interpreted differently by different actors in different countries. These different routes and forms offer new insights into film studies by bringing to critical attention the variety of ways in which international films has been translated into alternative forms. As I have tried to demonstrate, this process of translation in Turkish cinema involves a defence of communalistic and patriarchal values from the threat of social atomisation and modern social relations. This 'less radical version of modernity' asserts a differentiation between 'culture' (the set of values and habits current within a community) and 'civilisation' (a rational, international system of knowledge, science and technology). Praising the material civilisation of the West, the Turkish approach opposes its non-material aspects. The hybrid product of this synthesis is quite apparent in the way in which remade movies reflect the transmutation and negotiation of the dominant model of modernity.

## NOTES

1. Translators appropriated similar practices of domestication during the French and English Enlightenment, and later elsewhere. For example in Egypt, free transposition of the foreign literature was not called 'translation' (*tarjama*), but 'adaptation' (*iqtibas*), 'arabization' (*tar'ib*) or even 'egyptianization' (*tamsir*) (Jacqemond 1992, and Cachia 1990). In China, a common way of tampering was to paraphrase the whole novel to make it a story with Chinese characters and Chinese background. Also dynamic motifs are retained while static ones were left out, making Western novels sketchy and speedy, and more like Chinese traditional fiction (Zhao 1995: 229–30).
2. I owe this idea to Nezih Erdoğan's comments on Shayegan's work.
3. There are significant similarities between Gökalp's model and Partha Chatterjee's differentiation between the material – the domain of the economy and statecraft, of science and technology – and the spiritual, an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. Chatterjee argues that in this latter domain the nation can remain sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power (1993: 5–6).
4. According to a research by Emine Demiray, 75 per cent of the couples marry for love in Turkish films produced between 1960 and 1970. The decision of marriage is usually taken jointly by the couples; only 17 per cent of the couples have arranged marriages (Demiray 1994: 43).
5. In Turkish melodrama – as is the case in Indian and Egyptian melodramas – the music is foregrounded as a form of spectacle. This overemphasis on music is apparent in the situating of major characters, especially women, in the role of singer. But here verisimilitude is of central importance, as the characters never burst into song in their ordinary environment and social reality cannot be magically transformed via music.

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# 13

# MUTE BODIES, DISEMBODIED VOICES: NOTES ON SOUND IN TURKISH POPULAR CINEMA

Nezih Erdoğan

## A Paradigmatic Shift

In 1997, veteran film star Tanju Gürsu won the award for best male actor at the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival for his role in *Köpekler Adast/Isle of Dogs* (Halit Refiğ, 1997). The jury's decision provoked heated debate because Gürsu's character had been post-dubbed by another film and theatre actor, Müşfik Kenter. It was questioned whether an actor who borrowed someone else's voice should be honoured with such an award. In connection with this, a newspaper published a series of interviews with various well-known personalities, who expressed a range of opinions on the matter. Burçak Evren, film historian and critic, claimed that dubbing 'prevented film from naturalness and it became something artificial'. The young film director Mustafa Altioklar emphasized the concept of 'credibility': 'When a film is post-dubbed it is no longer convincing – hence the lack of sincerity. When you shoot the film with sound the player feels the magic more easily.' Şener Şen, the star of Yeşilçam, the mainstream cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, and now superstar of the New Turkish Cinema, referred to the difficulties of dubbing: 'The player forgets the feelings of that particular moment of the shoot and during the dubbing he tries hard to remember them'. Altioklar argued further that: 'Cinema is 50 per cent sight and 50 per cent sound; ignoring the sound means we start filming with only the remaining fifty per cent'.[1] This chimes with the claim made by the television celebrity Cem Özer, that 'the Yeşilçam actor is 60 per cent absent from the cinema'.

From *Screen*, 43: 3, pp. 233–49.