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The Role of Turkish Cinema in Collective Memory Formation Regarding the Cyprus Question

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Abstract

The Cyprus question has long been a hot topic in Turkish foreign policy. The introduction of the island of Cyprus into Turkey’s official state and public agenda as a political issue followed a series of international and domestic developments not entirely related to Cyprus itself. Although Turkey’s Cyprus policies continue to shift, nationalist and polarizing discourses and narratives pertaining to the dispute have remained consistent for decades. This paper will examine the role of Turkish cinema in collective memory formation on the Cyprus question. While films on Cyprus produced between 1963 and 1975 contributed to social and political hostilities in the perceptions of the viewer, films shot parallel with peace processes in 2000s have embraced a constructive approach that has paved the way for a recovery from the social trauma caused by conflicts on the island. This paper aims to reveal correlations between the policies and developments on Cyprus and the characteristics of relevant films in the Turkish cinema.

The Background of Turkish Policies on Cyprus: Paradigm Shifts and Continuations

Since the 1940s, the Cyprus policies of Turkey have been marked by paradigm shifts rather than continuations. An understanding of the historical background, and more importantly, the interruption of the past from Turkey’s standpoint, can help ascertain its contemporary political inclinations toward Cyprus. Despite the historical diversity of the island before the Ottoman era, the official and dominant Turkish narrative of Cyprus originates 1571, when the Ottoman Empire first conquered the island. Cyprus welcomed people from diverse ethnic origins, including but not limited to Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, who sustained a complex network of relationships both before and during Ottoman rule (Canefe, 2007). As the Ottoman Empire declined, it, in 1871, leased the island to Britain, who later declared its annexing of Cyprus as its own. Turkey recognized British rule over Cyprus in 1923’s Treaty of Lausanne, which, amid other articles, delineated the borders of modern Turkey. However, Turkey’s recognition was to become subject to international legal discussions later on (Armaoğlu, 1955). Within this scenario, Cyprus was excluded from both the agenda of the country and the Turkish national pact, Misak-ı Millî. Across their many statements and memoirs, journalists, authors, even diplomats of the period claim there was no public awareness of Cyprus up until the 1950s (An, 2003).

Awareness of and knowledge about Cyprus accelerated in the late 1940s when various pan-Turkic groups raised the point that Turkic populations beyond the state’s borders should be approached, as well (Kızılyürek, 2011). However, their call was not initially reflected in the official bodies due to the ongoing NATO membership process finalized in 1952. In subsequent years, the unification demands of the Greek Cypriots with Greece increased. Britain, which the demands were directed to, tried to involve Turkey to the issue as an additional actor of oppression against Greece (Kızılyürek, 2011).

In the 1950s, with the encouragement and support of certain Turkish nationalist lobbies, several organizations and campaigns clamoring for Cyprus were founded in Turkey. Their propaganda rang with the motto “Cyprus is Turkish.” Conversely, Turkish state officials at the foreign ministry level declared there were

Working Paper Series No. 11
not any pressing issues as the Cyprus question, yet if any amendments pertaining to the status of Cyprus should be done, Turkey’s rights to the island must be recognized (Armaoğlu, 1955).

There was an extreme lack of information regarding any Cyprus conflict on the horizon, not to mention a lack of even the most basic facts about Cyprus (Güler, 2013). It was when Greece decided to insert Cyprus’ demands for self-determination into the agenda of the United Nations (UN) that Turkey, in governmental level, grew more concerned about developments pertaining to the island. Right before the London Conference, introducing the ongoing situation in Cyprus, gathered in 1955, with the participation of Britain, Greece, and Turkey, the Turkish delegation, representing the state’s official position, launched a series of intense communiqués with Turkish Cypriot leaders to obtain knowledge and determine their point of view (Güler, 2013). However, during the conference, violent attacks against the ethnically Greek citizens of Turkey erupted in various cities across the country. The extremist attacks, known as the “Incidents of September 6 and 7,” were fueled by an irrelevant and false pretext asserted about certain disagreements between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. The London Conference collapsed without any concrete results.

After a brief period of silence on the Cyprus issue, a plan proposing a partitioning of the Greek Cypriots from the Turkish Cypriots came onto the Turkish agenda in 1956 in the form of a “concession.” The public motto of the newly adopted strategy was striking: “Partition or Death.” It is important to note that, prior to 1955, both the public and, later, the state officials proclaimed the Turkishness of the entire island. Now they were calling for the partitioning of Cyprus between the two major populations remembering the existence of Greek Cypriots, too. The question of how such a distinct shift in the political positions and discourses became possible is of keen interest.

The process in which Cyprus transformed into “the Cyprus question” aligns with the processes of the Cold War. In this light, one can easily observe the eclectic nature of the Cyprus discourse in which anti-communism, nationalism, and conservatism conjoined. The mixture of these tendencies is supported by a geopolitical-oriented approach highlighting the proximity of the island to the Turkish coast, and by the official historical narratives, which tend to present a distorted representation of the past. Additionally, one of the reasons that Turkish policies on Cyprus are marked by paradigm shifts rather than stability is not that they aimed to adjust to the changing circumstances, but that they did not harmonize with the spirit and the realities of the era (Özkan, 2014).

Erasing and Rewriting the Past and Today

Why has the Turkish public forgotten the time when there was scant knowledge and awareness about Cyprus, and started to defend the island’s Turkishness in the early 1950s? How did the Turkish people come to recognize the existence of Greek Cypriots and call for the island’s partition after 1956? The answers to these questions can be sought in the concept of collective memory.

Halbwachs, who explored the concept of collective memory first (following Durkheim’s implicit ideas on the subject), shows that the memories of individuals are “recalled, recognized, and localized” within the context of the group they belong to (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). In other words, although it is the individuals who fulfill the actions of remembering and forgetting, these processes can be ascribed to the social, structural, and institutional frames. The spectrum of these societal frames includes a variety of family, social classes, nation-states, etc. Therefore, according to Halbwachs, one cannot claim a sole and universal collective memory. Rather, there are as many memories as there are groups or societies (Duruel Erkiliç, 2014). Meusburger posits a similar approach. According to the author, experiences and memory are personal processes. However, individual practices are considerably marked by social environment (Meusburger, Heffernan, & Wunder, 2011). Although the term “collectivity” is a problematic notion as it is practiced at the individual level only (Gedi & Elam, 1996), there is consensus that significant social aspects and processes would be undermined if we ignore the metaphorical uses of the concept.
The practices of forgetting and remembering present essential clues regarding the notion of collective memory. According to Connerton, most people assume that forgetting is simply a failure. However, rather than its individualistic traits, there are certain forms of forgetting implicit in the modern culture. These are, namely, repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence, and forgetting as humiliated silence (Connerton, 2008). These types of forgetting in Connerton’s categorization occur in a collective context at various levels within communities and the political system. In addition to collective forgetting, collective memory could be distorted by certain means such as distanciation, instrumentalization, narrativization, and conventionalization (Schudson, 1995).

Cinema is a suitable platform to implement these memory manipulation strategies. Because, it can lead to the loss of details regarding past and present events, depict a more interesting form of the past, support reconstruction of the past in line with contemporary interests, and highlight specific events in the past the memory makers want the viewer to remember in a certain way (Sönmez, 2015).

Symbols are of central importance in promoting social unity and cultural harmony for the collective memory of a nation. As Roudometof asserts, collective representations (i.e., symbols, signs, and images) play a major role in the way individuals establish their identities and their relationship with the past and their country. He and many other scholars in the field emphasize that public speeches, documentaries, the popular press and the media are utilized to “standardize and reproduce” collective memory (Roudometof, 2002). Cinema, another of these tools, also strongly contributes to the formation of a unified collective memory.

Cyprus films in the Turkish cinema produced between 1959 and 1975 provide a sizable body of material on how cinema can provide symbols and images of a skewed, one-sided representation of both the past and present, thus contribute to the standardization and reproduction of the Turkish collective memory on the Cyprus dispute. It should also be noted that biased depictions of the past are not unique practices intrinsic and limited to Turkey. Instead, this is a common exercise most nation-states embrace, including those on the other—the Greek—side of the Cyprus question. In other words, each sides of the dispute develop sui generis collective memories of the same subject via conflicting narratives and discourses. However, film productions unveiling the dominant collective memory patterns, such as Derviş Zaim’s Mud and Shadows and Faces, upend the conventional memory formation practices employed by most nation-states.

Cyprus Films in the Turkish Cinema between 1959 and 1975

In 1959, Turkey engaged in discussions aimed toward the foundation of an independent Cyprus state, mostly due to the pressing international incentives. In the same year, the first film depicting the Cyprus dispute was produced in Turkey. Its title was devastating: Cyprus’ Evil: The Red E.O.K.A. (Turkish: Kıbrıs’ın Belası Kızkızı E.O.K.A.). The E.O.K.A., the nationalist Greek Cypriot guerilla organization, was identified by the moniker “Red,” the color of communism. Consequently, the anti-communist trend during the Cold War era, along with the nationalist discourse, found place not only in official and dominant narratives, but also in cinema. However, Cyprus’ Evil: The Red E.O.K.A. was banned before its release due to its hostile language and theme during a period when a peaceful solution to the conflict was on the negotiation table (Tolgay, 2013). Another film, Martyr of Cyprus (Turkish: Kıbrıs Şehitleri) would be released in 1959.

In 1960, under the guarantee of Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, the Republic of Cyprus was established. However, the newly founded state did not last long. 1963 and 1964 saw violent events between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots escalate dramatically. Turkey’s attempt to intervene in Cyprus as a guarantor state was blocked by the United States. During a series of violent incidents in December of 1963 known as the Bloody Christmas, a Turkish woman and her little children were slaughtered in a bathtub, where they had been caught hiding from Greek Cypriot guerillas. The photographic images of the massacre made their way to Turkey and became a symbol of the atrocities occurring on the island. The bloody images of the victims were carried to cinema as well.
The popularity of Cyprus films in Turkey increased five years after the release of the ones produced in 1959. From 1963 to 1968, eleven more films were produced, all of which deployed hostile language against not only Greek Cypriots, but against the entire Greek identity. Moreover, historical films on the Turkish War of Independence, in which Greece was among the major adversaries, became more widespread during the 1950s and 1960s (Duruel Erkılıç, 2014). The simmering tensions between the two communities on the island cooled down in 1968, and, parallel to the temporary quietness, the fervor of Cyprus film production likewise cooled until 1974.

Although intercommunal conflict calmed down in 1968, this time disputes among differing fractions of Greek Cypriots began. In 1974, a radical paramilitary Greek Cypriot organization, the EOKA-B, launched a coup d'état against Makarios, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, with the support of the governing junta in Greece. In response to the coup attempt, Turkey intervened in Cyprus. The intervention is named by Turkey as the Peace Operation, while considered as an invasion by the Greek side of the dispute. The intervention led to the de facto division of the island. Whatever its essence, the action, legitimate or not, sparked film producers in Turkey to release ten films about Cyprus in 1974 alone.

The main characteristics of the films shot between 1963 and 1968, and in 1974, are remarkably similar. Eight films out of 22 from this period are analyzed within the framework of this study. One was filmed in 1964, two in 1966, and five in 1974. Cinematic passages featuring nationalist discourse and symbolism are the most prevalent memory-constructing or memory-destroying tools employed across these films. In three of the films from 1974, we hear radio announcements in the background informing the audience about the ongoing situation on Cyprus. Some statements mention specific names, such as President Makarios, while others stress Turkey’s commitment to protect its Turkish Cypriot kin. Turkey’s eventual decision to intervene is also highlighted by the bold newspaper headlines carried to the screen in many of the opening sequences: “EOKA to Annihilate Turkish People,” “Terrorized Cyprus,” “We Will Not Stay Silent against Rape,” “We Will Not Allow Cyprus To Be Overwhelmed,” and “The U.S. Once More Prevented Our Intervention.”

Among the most predominant symbolic components of these films are the nationalist-militarist anthems driving the images of military marches, weaponry, and scenes of war. The subject of these images are not only soldiers but also civilians who embrace soldierly practices. In the films shot between 1963 and 1968, we see jet aircraft flying in at low attitude. These filmic passages are an overt reference to Turkey’s thwarted 1964 Cyprus intervention attempt. On the other hand, the 1974 series of films mention the “Peace Operation” executed in the same year. The common characteristic of these scenes is the arrival of Turkish military aircraft and warships on the island at the precise moment the Turkish Cypriots are at their most desperate and helpless.

It is no surprise that the theme of Turkish heroism is widely interwoven throughout the majority of the films. The term “Motherland,” generally invoked to characterize the relationship of Turkey to the island, is strongly emphasized. The heroes arriving from Turkey to Cyprus are depicted as rescuing the innocent Turkish Cypriots from the oppression of the “cruel” Greek Cypriots. Some of the characters portrayed as saviors are Turkish soldiers, while others are Turkish civilians who, under normal circumstances, would not have been operated militarily on the island. Their advent and military pursuits are woven into the screenplay in such a way that Turkish Cypriots appear to have zero chance of survival other than via the heroic intervention of the Turkish heroes. In scenes that lack a sharp depictive distinction between the savior Turkish and oppressed Turkish Cypriots, one can hardly distinguish the two people. Another prominent trait of the Turkish characters is that they embody a strong will against death. Whether they are seriously wounded or awaiting death right before their execution by the fusillades of the Greek Cypriot firing squad, they shout gallant expressions such as “Long Live the Mainland!” This depiction can be interpreted as the sanctification of death, or rather martyrdom, for the sake of the homeland, which, in this case, is Cyprus. However, the actual definition and allegiances of “the mainland” remain unclear because Cyprus is, on one hand, delineated and defended as part and parcel of Turkey, while on the other, exists lower in the evident hierarchy.
Characterizations of the Greek Cypriots across the films exhibit a remarkable similarity. Most of the Greek Cypriot characters speak perfect Turkish with no trace of a dialect. The only linguistic variation occurs during interjections. Although members of the two communities may have spoken Turkish with one another, in the reality of the island, this is a too optimistic depiction. In contrast to their seeming linguistic acquiescence, the Greek Cypriots resound as gruff and inhumane characters raising irritating, laughs. The manifestations of Greek Cypriot “evilness” range from bullying children, to torturing adults, to existing as gangsters, murderers, and rapists. In 1974’s The Migration (Turkish: Gök), a Greek Cypriot priest, portrayed in dim light as a deceiver-by-religion and referring to the history, makes the claim that Turkish people can never be defeated by bravery without trickery. With few exceptions, Greek Cypriot characters are portrayed as partisans, guerillas, police, or soldiers, thus the audience is supplied with little information that could dimensionalize Greek Cypriot civilians. Two exceptions to this stereotyping include Greek Cypriot characters who are either killed by other Greek Cypriots, or adopt the religion of Islam and forever thereafter adhere themselves to the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot side. Besides, akin to the films’ treatment of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot characters, Greeks and the Greek Cypriots are presented as a homogeneous identity both in their present and past incarnations. This also transpires in 1966’s The Female Enemy (Turkish: Dişi Düğün), where a metaphorical bridge is constructed, connecting ancient history’s Byzantium Empire with the contemporary Greek identity.

As Kaes argues, cinema plays an essential role in the interruption of history, and thus in reproducing, organizing, and homogenizing collective memory (Kaes, 1989). These films present a period of history from the Turkish point of view using hegemonic narratives which, in Yetiştirkin’s words “represent the past as an uninterrupted unity” (Yetiştirkin, 2010). The metaphorical relationship established between the Byzantium and Ottoman eras and contemporary developments in Cyprus is a concrete evidence of this perspective. For instance, the Ottoman victory over Byzantium and the Turkish victory over Greece during the Turkish War of Independence are frequently mentioned in films featuring the conflict between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. That way, these films attempt to strengthen the perception that the Turkish side is and has always been able to prevail against the Greek side, with its thoroughly homogeneous identity. This cinematic approach supports Connerton’s argument that the transfer of information and images from the past into contemporary times by means of ceremonial forms and symbols contributes to the actualization of collective remembering in a predetermined way (Tuğrul, 2014). Hence, remembering is made possible through a speculative understanding of the past.

In the early examples of Turkish films on Cyprus, the emphasis on revenge is so strong that even children are disciplined with a sense of retaliation. Hate speech against the other side of the dispute, another common element in the films, materializes around the Greek Cypriot’s alleged cowardice, lack of war ethics, and outright thuggery. The hate speech is accompanied by a sexist discourse. On the other hand, Turkish characters imply that even when they are driven mad, they do not rape women or slaughter children, instead, they show due respect to innocents and civilians. Yet, there are plenty of scenes and images of ferocity, bloodshed, atrocity, and dismembering death caused mostly by the Greek Cypriots and rarely by the Turkish/Turkish Cypriots. Additionally, symbols such as flags, writings, photos, costumes, announcements, and religious or nationalistic signs are widely utilized, most specifically in the initial and final scenes of these films. These images and symbols, as tools of propaganda, facilitate the production of the necessary consent for and legitimacy of Turkey’s ambitions, as well as for the direct or indirect rights it claims to the island of Cyprus.

Overall, Cyprus films made between 1963 and 1975 present the audience with a set of atrocity-oriented discourses and practices, which contribute to the continuation of the conflict by focusing primarily on the experiences of the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot side rather than dealing with the island’s conflicts and adversaries objectively. This biased approach manipulates the collective memory in a way that deepens the conflict instead of offering recovery from trauma, which leads to a more traumatizing environment for
everyone. These films’ nationalist, Turk-centric discourses, far from being constructive, ignore the collective reciprocity of suffering and misdeeds wrought by both sides.

In analyzing the Turkish cinema’s corpus of Cyprus films, some questions ought to be raised and explored beyond the tragedy of the bloody incidents faced by and victimhood of the Turkish Cypriot side. Did Greek Cypriots face similar tragedy and suffering? Were crimes against humanity committed against the Greek Cypriots by the Turkish side? If we respond to these questions utilizing only the information provided by the previous selection of films, their imagery and symbolism, the answers would likely be an echoing chorus of “noes.”

Meusburger’s categorization of the information that forms collective memory offers us a convenient platform for expanding the discussion. One of Meusburger’s categories is based on the “personal experience of a certain category, cohort, or organization.” This sort of information source reflects only a part of the reality as seen from only an individual point of view. Since it excludes the other points of view, it cannot be attributed to the overall portrayal (Meusburger et al., 2011). In other words, depictions of incidents that are experienced by a member of a particular group cannot be generalized to the entire picture, even though they are not necessarily inaccurate.

**Cinema as a Means of Resolution: Two Examples of Cyprus Films in the 2000s**

In 2002, the United Nations (UN) formulated a plan for a comprehensive, peaceful resolution in Cyprus. Although the proposal, the Annan Plan, was not the first attempt for a settlement, it brought up the prospects for a resolution to the Cyprus question more intensely. However, in the same year it became clear that even though the reunification plan failed, the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot side would be granted European Union (EU) membership. In 2004, a simultaneous referendum was conducted over the Annan Plan on both sides of the Green Line buffer zone dividing the island. The plan was approved by 65% of the Turkish Cypriots, while being overwhelmingly rejected (76% dissenting votes) by the Greek Cypriots. Consequently, the plan did not take effect. One week after the referendum, the Republic of Cyprus represented only by the Greek Cypriots, became an EU member as the sole legitimate state on the entire island (Bryant & Papadakis, 2012). In Turkey, on the other hand, public interest in and knowledge of the Cyprus question reduced dramatically (Toklucu, 2004).

*Mud* (Turkish: *Çanur*), written and directed by Derya Zaim in 2003, was produced in an environment when the potential for a resolution was on the table of the UN and on the agenda of the Cypriots. Another film by Zaim, *Shadows and Faces* (Turkish: *Gölgeler ve Suretler*), was produced in 2011. Films produced after 2000 that only mention the Cyprus question as a backdrop are excluded from the scope of this research. Documentaries, including Zaim and Chrysanthou’s *Parallel Trips* (Turkish: *Paralel Yolculuklar*), are not covered in this paper.

Both *Mud* and *Shadows and Faces* are important, as they brought a new approach to the conflict and its origins, and restored the collective memory patterns established by earlier examples of the Turkish films on Cyprus. Cypriot writer and director Zaim’s two films, *Mud* and *Shadows and Faces*, adopted a new perspective focusing on peace and resolution of the Cyprus question, stressing the mutuality of suffering and misdeed rather than a biased depiction of the conflict.

**Mud: Between Disorder and Recovery**

*Mud* tells the story of Ali, who survived a massacre committed by Greek Cypriots when he was very young, and his relatives, who also try to face and overcome tragedies of their own conflict-ridden past. The period covered in the film is post-1974, when Turkey intervened on the island, and, presumably, two decades afterwards. A monologue starts the film, one reminiscent of what we heard in the earlier Cyprus films. In the last weeks of Ali’s compulsory military service, his commander reminds his unit of the tragedies of the past,
underscoring the remaining Greek threat, and then makes the soldiers repeat the words “We should be prepared.” Ali’s past traumas are strongly evoked, as is the idea that the tragic events of the past could reoccur. Thus, Ali loses, or rather, gives up his own voice as soon as he repeats the abovementioned words (Akbal Süalp, 2010). From then on, seeking to regain his voice, Ali develops an obsessive passion for the healing mud in a specific area where disabled people try to heal their disorders. He also visits several doctors, each of whom proceed to discredit the prescriptions of the one that came before, while suggesting a completely different treatment. According to Zaim, Ali’s mute silence reflects the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots’ Northern Cyprus, which share the same ambiguous muteness no prescription can heal (Zaim, 2003).

Ali’s sister, Ayşe, is a gynecologist whose specialty is embryo transfer. She not only helps people such as a mother who lost her daughter during the incidents, but also helps herself when the film’s narrative puts her in the desperate situation to be described below. The theme of artificial insemination speaks to a human’s ability to overcome even the most overwhelming conditions, says Zaim (Zaim, 2003).

Another key character in Mud, Temel, had killed some Greek Cypriots in retaliation for the massacres he witnessed when he was young and buried them in an area near a salina (salt lake), the location of some healing mud. He cannot bear to visit the salina because it evokes his devastating memories. Though he confesses his crimes into a video recorder from time to time, Temel ultimately chooses to destroy the tapes. Therefore, he tries to convince Ahmet—a war veteran who also witnessed the massacre committed by the Greek Cypriots—to tell the incidents to a video recorder for a project, because Temel is not ready to confront his own sins. However, Ahmet refuses, saying that Temel already knows what happened anyway. Instead of confessing, Temel organizes several inter-community peace projects to exorcise his insufferable memories. Among these projects are an exchange of sculptures of people forced to abandon their homes on the opposite side of the Green Line, an exchange of to-be-preserved sperms between the two communities, and the establishment of a sewage treatment plant designed to supply both Greek and Turkish Cypriots with fresh water for agriculture. Over the course of the film and Temel’s endeavors, we observe the signs of Temel’s ongoing dilemma between confession and silence.

In some of the scenes—the opening one in particular—Mud conveys instances of official narratives, such as television announcements that ignore the human dimension of the Cyprus dispute. The polarity of the personal versus the official draws the viewer into the tension between the individual experiences of ordinary people—especially Ali—and the distant, but booming voice of the dominant state discourse. While seeking the recovery of his lost voice in the healing muds, Ali discovers an antique Cybele sculpture buried in the mud and decides to have it delivered to his sister, Ayşe, for good luck. He entrusts the delivery of the sculpture to Ayşe’s fiancé, Halil, who, after discovering how valuable it is, decides to sell it to a mafia of antique smugglers. Meanwhile, it is revealed that the muddy area once hosted an ancient temple where people sought remedies for their illnesses by offering a mold of their diseased organs as a votive, prompting Ali to attempt the same method. Eventually, the combination of Ali’s mud obsession and Halil’s greed brings a calamity to Mud’s characters. After a series of events, Ayşe loses her unborn baby because of the mud. Temel, who had no choice but to go to the salina to help Ayşe, enters a new phase of confrontation with his heartbreaking past as he manages to step on the site.

Perhaps, one of the most striking scenes in Mud is the one in which, during a confrontational meeting, traumatized Turkish Cypriots assume the viewpoint of Greek Cypriots who engaged in violence. Ali tells Temel’s story as if it were his own, describing the actions taken against the Greek Cypriots: “We looked for Greeks out of revenge. There were people who could not escape. We found them. We took the Greeks to the mud—to the well. We shot them in the head. Shot and threw, shot and threw... We buried some of them. Their heads stayed out. We got stuff from the corpses, clothes, watches...” Ahmet protests, saying that Ali’s tale is a complete lie, and that the event went entirely the opposite way, with Ali himself laid down amid 80 corpses—one of whom was his own father. Ahmet then inquires whether the Greeks would be willing to put themselves in their Turkish Cypriot shoes. Convinced that the Greeks would not, he storms out of the room.
Temel continues, confessing how he killed two random Greek Cypriots simply out of revenge, at a time when he was just a 16-year-old “kid.” Assuming Ali was dead too, he placed photos of his dead relatives into the cold hands of the Greek Cypriots he had killed, and buried them near the mud. Temel punctuates his confession with these words: “We only have as much as freedom as we are able to control our own destiny.” As part of his emotional confrontation, Ali again travels to the salina to exhume the molds of his diseased organs he buried in the mud. Meanwhile, Halil’s encounter with the smuggler-mafia goes awry, and they chase him back in order to retrieve the valuable antiques—and take Halil, Ali, Temel, and Ayşe hostage. In an attempt to save Halil, Temel diverts the smugglers to a location that he says the valuable antiques are buried. However, instead of the sculptures, his frantic digging into the soil reveals the skeleton of a person he once killed. The last few sequences of Mud bring death to all the main characters except Ayşe, who eventually transfers an embryo created utilizing the sperm Ali had donated to the intercommunity project and the eggs of the late daughter of a mother who had followed a similar procedure earlier. In the final scene of the film, Ayşe, her twin children, and a sculpture from Temel’s project rest beside the sea: The sculpture turned toward the camera, and the human others turned towards the sea. Hope remains.

Does Mud Recover Traumas?

Mud’s writer/director, Derviş Zaim, who could not visit his own home, located in Southern Cyprus, for 26 years after Turkey’s 1974 intervention, give clues about the interpretation of the film in his interviews. Zaim employs a hybrid narration, which consists of surrealism, symbolism, realism, and irony, to more clearly convey the complex social background of the “reality” explored in the film. This hybrid narration is utilized to draw a more accurate portrayal of Cyprus compromising social, spiritual, and physical aspects (Zaim, 2003). It is in this context, Mud’s themes of sickness and health become the overarching symbolic narrative of Cyprus’ traumatic past.

Referring to Kaplan and Wang’s categorization of viewer as films position them, the hybrid method is of great importance in deterring viewers from ignoring empathy with the survivors of trauma (Kaplan & Wang, 2004). Because, the viewer could be repulsed from the shocking effects if the trauma is keenly presented by film. However, combination of symbolism and surrealism, among others, draw the audience into an atmosphere in which to approach trauma in an empathetic manner. One example is the symbolic inherent in Ayşe transferring an embryo to herself to sustain her lineage, or Ali seeking a remedy by mud in the vicinity where Greek Cypriots are buried. This filmic techniques enable a narration of events that would be intolerable if conveyed in a realistic style. Nevertheless, criticisms indicating that Mud does not leave any room for the viewer to interrupt the film due to its intense chain of meanings should not be underestimated (Pay, 2009). Hence, Mud carries traumatic incidents occurred in Cyprus in a relatively bearable manner, while its complex narration may cause different complications on the viewer’s side.

The vivid light illuminating the film’s atmosphere becomes a key symbol of remembering and forgetting as it both reveals the stark reality of the situation and confines it into a state of limbo due to its extreme brightness (Akbal Süalp, 2010). In Mud, space is as essential to the film as the characters. The physical composition of a salina, which is actually located in Anatolia, and actual images of Cyprus are additional elements of the surrealistic narrative (Pay, 2009). The sewage treatment plant and the place where sculpture and sperm installations are conducted, are also important constituents of both the film and the transformative arc of the trauma-and-recovery process experienced by the characters (Pay, 2009).

Mud itself carries a dual symbolism in the film. Because, if used properly, it can heal disorders; if used improperly, it can even end up in death. To overcome the traumas, illnesses, and deaths caused by the, taken literally, “muddy” situation in Cyprus, Cypriot mud would be addressed ironically (Akbal Süalp, 2010). Likewise, the Cybele sculpture that Ali sends to Ayşe for good fortune turns out to be a deadly mistake when exploited for the sake of mundane ambitions. Hence, both mud and Cybele may bring constructive or destructive consequences aligned with the intentions—good, greedy, or malevolent—of the people applying them.
The belief reflected in Temel’s words “We only have as much as freedom as we are able to control our destiny” is conspicuous across the entire film including in the metaphor of artificial insemination. It is also revealed in the final scene, in which Ayşe and her children turn their faces towards the sea. As Yüksel mentions (referencing Volkan), the recognition of victimization as a problem is a step toward recovery. This process also comprises recognizing the existence of the “other” as a human being, and the fact that the others also suffer. In order to recover and pave the way for a common future, communities need to remember past events and mourn for the losses caused by the conflict (Yüksel, 2010). Mud demonstrates that victimization, being a problematic pattern, involves both Cypriot communities—although the film conveys its perspective only through the eyes of the Turkish Cypriots. Attempts by the characters to confront their problematic past can be deemed as progress toward healing which is likely to spread across the actual context of the island itself.

Shadows and Faces: From Common Life to Conflict

Shadows and Faces is a continuation of Derviş Zaim’s films, in which a specific traditional theme is treated. The metaphorical focus of the film is Karagöz and Hacivat, a traditional Turkish shadow puppetry. The play is a common tradition shared by both Greeks and Turks. In Shadows and Faces, the curtain of the shadow play is raised as a representation of the past, present, and future, and their temporal synchrony. Another metaphor employed in the film, cave, is an inspiration borrowed from the philosopher Plato’s “Allegory of The Cave” (Zaim, 2010). The cave metaphor is presented as the sole channel of relation of the characters in the film, similar to Plato’s philosophy. Another point that Zaim emphasizes is the sometimes-precarious balance between human beings’ mysterious and evil side and their ability to curb and control it. Shadows and Faces tells the escape story of Salih, a shadow puppeteer, and his young daughter Ruhsar, caught in the context of the escalating tension of Cyprus in 1960s.

The film begins with a conversation between the two shadow puppets, Karagöz and Hacivat, who are discussing what people would do if they were invisible. The conclusion they come to is that people would even commit massacres unless they seized control of the darkness within them. Meanwhile, Greek Cypriot police raid the village of Salih and Ruhsar, who are Turkish Cypriots, and evacuate all Turkish Cypriot villagers without cause. Salih is too old and feeble to walk the distance to the city where they have been sent, so he and his daughter alter their route toward their relative Veli’s nearby village, a place where people from the two Cypriot—Greek and Turkish—communities coexist peacefully despite what the local graffiti, “EOKA” or “Partition,” might indicate. For example, Anna, a Greek Cypriot and Veli’s neighbor, welcomes Salih and Ruhsar sincerely, while Anna’s son, Hristo, objects to his mother’s friendship with the Turkish Cypriots, although he contradictorily—and perhaps tellingly—continues his habit of gambling with Veli.

Many scenes in Shadows and Faces highlight the common life and culture shared by members of the two communities. They share food, greet one another in both languages, (used to) fall in love with one another, and (used to) play shadow puppetry together. Unlike in the earlier Cyprus films, the two groups cannot be distinguished by their appearance—Greek Cypriot police officers being the sole exception—and there is little, if any, overt symbolism in terms of appearance. In contrast to the films produced before 1975, Zaim’s film depicts Turkish Cypriots speaking in their distinctive dialect of Turkish, and sometimes in Greek with their neighbors. He depicts Greek Cypriots speaking Greek among themselves and Turkish when necessary.

Another scene shows Salih’s need to reach the city’s hospital with Ruhsar. They also plan to tell the Turkish organization in the city that they need armaments. Their needs convince Anna to drive them to the city, but, en route, a police barricade foils their plan. Salih and Ruhsar escape the police officers, who then assault Anna as a punishment for helping out these two Turkish Cypriots. The father and daughter decide to hide in a cave. After a while, Salih exits the cave to see if the danger has past, but, dramatically, he does not, rather cannot, return. The desperate situation prompts Ruhsar to return to Veli’s village to enlist help in finding her father. Anna, herself very upset over the loss of the old man, tries to recover from her guilt over
her failure to prevent this event, and to help Ruhsar. Still, Ruhsar despises Anna, as well as the rest of the Greek Cypriots.

Veli makes a strong plea to the younger members of his community, to calm them down in the face of the simmering tensions on the island, and to refrain from taking up arms. The plea is mirrored on the Greek Cypriot side. The elder members of both communities call on their young to exercise restraint, and they even make an oral agreement to continue to do so. However, curbing the young’s passions, especially in Ahmet and Hristo’s case, proves complicated, and it’s easily observed throughout the film that this conflict takes the form of the extremist, nationalist, and violent practices of the younger people—unlike the elders, they do not even attempt to establish a dialogue. Furthermore, their growing perception that the other side bears arms and their general fear of attack aggravates the situation. Ruhsar manages to make it to the city to ask around for her father. The Turkish Cypriot villagers follow the advice given to Ruhsar by a Turkish commander in the city to try to appear stronger than they really are. Ironically, this posturing increases the Greek Cypriots’ perceived threat and further escalates tensions.

Ruhsar assumes Salih is dead, and is determined to fulfill his last wish by burying the Karagöz figure—otherwise it would cause bad luck. Veli charges Cevdet, an innocent and cheerful shepherd, with burying the figures. However, Hristo, believing that Cevdet is digging in order to hide armaments, decides to call the police, an action which results in a policeman shooting Cevdet to death, with Hristo helplessly looking on at Cevdet’s ghastly demise. Anna directs her deep sorrow and rage at her cousin, the chief of police, fearing that the Turkish Cypriots will now kill someone on their side out of retaliation.

The Ruhsar character resonates as a manifestation of both innocence and ferocity. She attributes the misdeeds of some Greek Cypriots to the entire lot of them, including those who are the most peaceful and sincere. Initially, at Cevdet’s funeral, she rejects Dimitri, an innocent and moderate Greek Cypriot shepherd and driver, but later, together with Ahmet and the other young fellows, she approaches him to demand the identity of Cevdet’s murderer. Although Dimitri presents a wise attitude toward the younger group, the resulting discussion escalates into Dimitri’s murder, triggering a new and bloody phase in the intercommunity conflict, a chain reaction of deadly clashes triggered by fear-driven revenge as a reaction to a perceived threat. It is important to note that revenge and fear in Shadows and Faces, paradoxically, sustain each other.

In the final scenes, the bloody incidents move from the vacant fields back to the village. While escaping the police, Ahmet, out of panic and fear, shoots an innocent Greek Cypriot. Police kill a person who tries to convince them to stop. Ahmet’s gunfire kills Anna, who had been trying to calm her son, Hristo, who has also taken up arms. Ahmet is wounded by Hristo’s bullet. Veli attempts to persuade Hristo and the police officers to stop their violence, but cannot manage to control them. As the conflict raises, the Turkish Cypriot villagers try to escape in every direction, however many of them lose their lives in the crossfire. Finally, Hristo kills Veli. The Turkish Cypriots led by Ahmet take a group of Greek Cypriots in a bus hostage, but set them free in return of their dead and wounded. Retaining the bus, the group arrives at a secure place in the city where other Turkish Cypriots are sheltered. However, a social calamity of which perpetrators and victims remain unclear is left beyond.

In the first place, the killing off of the two most innocent characters, Cevdet and Hristo, indicates that conflicts affect people regardless of their background, and that people who commit murder are not necessarily “bad people,” but, instead, are human beings unconsciously acting out while caught up in an overwhelming chain of violent incidents. There is no doubt that this state of unconsciousness sets neither individuals nor communities free from the responsibilities of their misdeeds. The essential point here is the nature of the context in which perceived threats turn into discourse, discourse turns into action, and, finally, action turns into large-scale conflict. Events resulting in the loss of loved ones of the people who launched them reveal the unpredictability of conflicts spurred by nationalistic delusions. When participating in the armament activities, Hristo remains oblivious that he is opening up a process that will eventually kill his mother. Likewise, Ahmet and Ruhsar, who could not remain cold-blooded, did not know that they were gambling on their relatives’ lives, as Veli.
Ruhsar suddenly hears the sounds of the shadow play, specifically Salih speaking through the Karagöz puppets, when she heads toward the garden of the building where a group of Turkish Cypriots have taken shelter, with the intention of burying the Karagöz figures to fulfill her father’s wishes. Salih, via the voice of the puppets, tells the tale of how he became separated from his daughter. As they come together after a long separation, Salih continues the shadow play, singing touching lyrics (gazel), which implies a hope to finally reach the necessary balance of mind, soul, and ambition, to escape the “cave,” free from our fears. But one can hardly describe the final scene of the film as “relieving” since the scenes of the separation of Ruhsar and her father, Salih, the puppeteer, were placed front and center earlier in the narrative, but became subordinated over time.

Faces Behind the Curtain

Cevdet, one of the more chaste characters in the film, narrates how, when he was a child, he was so curious about what lay behind the Karagöz and Hacivat curtain, that he actually pulled the curtain down to see what lay behind, prompting a strong slap to his cheek by the puppeteer. After delivering the slap, however, the puppeteer compliments him for questioning what he saw on the surface, and for his desire to see what lay behind. Cevdet sought the truth in his own way. With that in mind, if the earlier examples of Cyprus films reflect only the shadows, what Shadows and Faces does is seek to reveal the “face,” so to speak, of the truth, as Cevdet did by pulling back the curtain. Dealing with Cyprus’ bitter and traumatic past is not possible without measures of confrontation—not only with the other but also with the self, which could prove devastating. Shadows and Faces enables the cycle of processes Kaptanoğlu refers to: Mourning, confrontation, and recovery (Kaptanoğlu, 2009). Zaim, who believes the film to have contributed to the peace process on Cyprus, expresses a similar thought by highlighting the importance of remembering in order to forgive (Zaim, 2010).

According to Kaplan and Wang, trauma-based films can adopt various strategies to position their viewers. We may infer from their categorization that Shadows and Faces positions its audience as “witness,” neither re-traumatizing them, nor casting them in the role of “voyeur”. Instead, the film leads the viewer to empathize with the subject of the trauma in a mediated way, thus recalling the common sense and mental distance that the trauma hinders (Kaplan & Wang, 2004). Such a narrative and testimony clear the way for the mourning, confrontation, and recovery of traumatized individuals and communities. This, again, reveals that collective goodness or badness does not exist. Instead, each individual and collective harbors the two within their being.

Shadows and Faces examines how a set of disputes turns into a deadly social conflict without representing one of the sides as evil. How did Hristo and Veli, who once shared the same table, even for gambling, come to shoot each other? How did the most decent characters, Cevdet and Dimitri, become the first victims of the conflict? The film offers a remarkable body of material to respond to these types of questions. Zaim’s constructive efforts to answer the question of “how” keenly distinguish him from the reductive discourse of nationalist Cyprus films produced in the 1960s and 1970s. The findings will likely support dealing with the tragic past and setting a foundation of a future in which the same mistakes will not be repeated.

Although Shadows and Faces avoids a pronounced “us” vs. the “other” polarity, it depicts the conflict primarily as seen through the eyes of the Turkish Cypriots. The film’s subjectivity in this sense does not call its constructiveness into question since it stresses the relativity of victimhood and aggression. More importantly, neither Greek nor Turkish Cypriot characters are described within uniform patterns that would ascribe to them certain stereotyped tendencies such as “wise,” “heroic,” “good,” or “evil.”
Conclusion

The Cyprus question has evolved not only because of the dispute between the two major communities on the island, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, but also due to the involvement of state actors, such as Turkey, Greece, and the United Kingdom. The Cyprus policies of Turkey have been marked by paradigm shifts rather than by long-term continuity. Before the 1940s, there was a dearth of knowledge about and interest in the island at both the official and public level. Despite this intellectual distance, over time, Turkey became one of the main actors on the issue commonly known as the Cyprus question. The strategies that Turkey has pursued regarding Cyprus was approved and strongly supported by the grassroots up until the period initiated by the 1974 intervention. However, during the process whereby a comprehensive resolution was brought to the negotiation table circa the 2000s, the Turkish public and officials failed to show the same interest. In this regard, this paper examined the role of cinema in social and political transformations related to Cyprus based on the reconstruction of collective memory in Turkey.

Collective memory is a concept built upon traditions, myths, symbols, and images transmitted by means of institutions, national holidays, the media, public speeches, documentary films, and the cinema. Collective memory can also be reformulated in accordance with the contemporary “requirements” of a given period. Therefore, knowledge borne of this notion can take different forms, though certain agendas are thought to be implicit in it. Cinema is an essential vehicle by which the representations constructing collective memory are set up and eventually transformed by the passage of time. There is a notable correlation between the curve of political developments on Cyprus and the curve of film production on the issue. This relationship is bolstered by the strong discursive congruence demonstrated by films produced during the 1960s and 1970s. As discussed, the more polarizing narratives and discourses exhibited in the earlier Cyprus films transformed into the more equitable, peace-oriented perspective of the 2000s, in compliance with that era’s social and political climate. Accordingly, the characteristics of the information that influenced Turkish public perception toward one side or the other of the dispute, particularly toward Greeks and the Greek Cypriots, transformed into the positive and constructive, rather than back into the divisive and negative.

Mourning, confrontation, and narration of traumatic events are of great importance for a society’s recovery from them. However, a sense of revenge does not provide an actual confrontation. Instead, it sustains the disagreement and deepens those same traumas. In this context, earlier Cyprus films within the Turkish cinema, with their embracing of revenge and atrocity, ran the dispute into a deadlock that would prove devastating to all sides. However, due to their moderate tone and content, later Cyprus films such as Zaim’s *Mud* and *Shadows and Faces* provided a common symbolic terrain for dialogue and empathy, fertile in its calls for a shared future based on the pillars of mutual understanding and trust of the other. These films do not seek a distinct side to accuse of oppression or atrocity. Rather, they embrace individuals and communities within their collective bitter pasts. Zaim’s films, at their core, maintain a faith in people’s capacity to adjust their fates and build a more desirable future.

In conclusion, cinema, as a tool of collective memory construction, can be instrumentalized both for the continuation of a problematic past and to create a more peaceful, hopeful future. This paper focused on the social codes that sustain a conflict rather than concentrating on the “rights” and “wrongs” of the opposing sides—in this case, the Turkish and Greek Cypriot actors in the Cyprus question—within the framework of collective memory and cinema. The main incentive of this pursuit is to unveil the sociopolitical function of cinema as it pertains to the construction of collective memory and to serve the mobilization of that function into a dialogue-oriented context.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


