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Luxembourgeus, T.T.E.

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Author: Luxembourgeois, T.T.E.

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Summary

Tunç Okan is an independent emigrant filmmaker born in 1942 in Istanbul, Turkey. He started his filmmaking career in 1974 with his film *Otobüs* (The Bus), which he made in Sweden, and partly in Germany. A dentist by training, Okan's cinema career started in 1965 after winning an acting competition organised by a popular film magazine. He achieved considerable fame after starring in thirteen films in a period of less than two years. Quitting his acting career in Turkey's popular commercial cinema industry *Yeşilçam* in 1967, which he accused of anaesthetising society, Okan immigrated to Switzerland the same year. His debut film *The Bus* was followed by only three other films to date: *Drôle de samedi* (Funny Saturday, 1985), *Mercedes mon Amour* (The Yellow Mercedes, 1992), and *Umut Üzümleri* (Grapes of Hope, 2013).

As an independent filmmaker who produced a limited number of films with considerable time gaps between them, his cinema has thus far received little attention. To this day, little has been written about Okan and his films, and what has been written is predominantly in Turkish. In this study, I intend to remedy this and provide a study of his films, particularly the first three of them, which I call the *Trilogy of Im/migration*. Although neither the filmmaker nor any film critic has so far referred to these three films as a trilogy, these films are sufficient-

ly unified by their dystopian narratives, themes, and their search of home and identity to constitute a trilogy. In this trilogy, each film corresponds to a different stage of migration, namely the departure, the (dis)integration, and the return. Okan's debut film corresponds to the first phase of the phenomenon, with its focus on the workers' illegal journey to Sweden; the second film, *Funny Saturday*, corresponds to the phase of (dis)integration, and the third film, *The Yellow Mercedes*, to the phase of return.

Okan is not a "typical" Turkish film director. Only half of his films take place in Turkey, and even those films feature parts that were shot abroad. More importantly, he is not a filmmaker who uses themes, cultural icons, stereotypes, narrative strategies, and filmic aesthetics that have typically been used by filmmakers in Turkey. He is also not a filmmaker who has attracted the attention of international critics. His cinema is a cinema *in-between*; it is a cinema of tensions and competing identities, visions, and interests. It invokes a split reception in the viewer. On one hand, his films can be read in relation/reaction to tendencies in national/Turkish cinema, and on the other hand, in relation to international, particularly European, arthouse cinema. Given this, the best way to understand and appreciate his works is to read Okan's films in dialogue with developments in both Turkish cinema and European (art) cinema, for his "signature" derives influences from a variety of sources in these cinemas.

Okan is neither a one-issue director nor a filmmaker who restricts himself to one format or genre. On the contrary, his films are always on the *road*, sometimes literally; his third film, *The Yellow Mercedes*, is a road movie, and *The Bus*, though not being a road movie in the strict sense, generously exploits the conventions of the genre. Figuratively, all of Okan's films are in search of new ways of expression. Indeed, they are the products of this very search. This constant search motivates him to challenge, and often cross, many established conventions and boundaries of cinema. Okan's cinema is what I call

“transboundary cinema”. I define transboundary cinema as a cinema that transgresses boundaries, be that national, cultural, political, aesthetic, generic, or still, others yet to be defined. Okan’s cinema crosses not only political and national boundaries but also the boundaries between cultures, languages, genres; between independent and commercial filmmaking practices; between writing, acting, and directing. His cinema flows through the vast and fertile territory of European film landscape, and creates his own cinema—a cinema that is nourished by rich and diverse springs and streams, and one that crosses many boundaries.

This study is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter provides a general biography of Okan, followed by an analysis of the filmmaker’s cinema in terms of its relation to Turkey’s mainstream commercial cinema, in which I will demonstrate that Okan is an independent filmmaker and an *auteur*. The second chapter focuses on Okan’s debut film, *Otobüs* (The Bus). *The Bus* follows the dystopian adventures of a bus full of would-be illegal workers from rural Turkey who are abandoned at the most central public square of Stockholm, Sweden, by an international human trafficking ring. It is effectively an unorthodox road movie. It not only combines many conventional elements that are associated with different genres and film aesthetics, ranging from film noir to absurd comedy, into a road movie, it also tests the very limits of the road movie itself, which is already considered to be the most flexible film genre. The third chapter focuses on Okan’s second film *Drôle de samedi* (Funny Saturday). *Funny Saturday* is consists of a collage of various interconnected short films. Originally made in Switzerland, in French, featuring well-known French and Swiss actors, the film was quickly dubbed into Turkish. However, the strategy Okan employed during the dubbing process exceeds the conventional limits of linguistic film translation practices, as he does not only translate the dialogue of the film from one language to another, but completely rewrites some of the dialogues in a way that causes some of the

characters to gain qualities they do not possess in the original version of the film. The fourth chapter focuses on Okan's third film, *Mercedes Mon Amour* (The Yellow Mercedes). The film revolves around a Turkish *Gasterbaiter* (guest worker) working in Germany, whose ultimate dream is to return to his village in central Anatolia with a newly bought automobile. Like Okan's debut film, *The Yellow Mercedes* is a road movie in which the filmmaker continues to explore new possibilities of storytelling by combining different road movie conventions and aesthetic approaches. The trilogy's last film is also the first film that Okan made in his country of birth, Turkey. Observing this, I compare in this chapter *The Yellow Mercedes* to two other road movies made in Turkey, namely Zeki Ökten's 1979 film *Sürü* (The Herd), and Gören's 1982 film *Yol* (The Road), and investigate why Okan's film has failed to generate much international attention while these two other road movies did.