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Benevolent conquerors, besieged homelands, threatened state: the reproduction of political myths in cold war Turkey

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Benevolent Conquerors, Besieged Homelands, Threatened State: The Reproduction of Political Myths
in Cold War Turkey

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There has been a long period of time between the moment I decided to do a PhD and finish it. It was a complicated process with many ups and downs. Today, when I was completing the acknowledgements section, I have learned that Cüneyt Arkın, one of the most acclaimed actors in Turkish cinema, has passed away at the age of 84. He was a prolific actor acted in most of the action/adventure films in my dissertation. I believe, his dedication to what he was doing contributed a lot to the popularity of these films in Turkey. Therefore, first of all, I would like to express my appreciation to him for his idealism.

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While I was concluding with the appendix on a hot and humid night in July 2021 in Rochester, New York, my daughter Olivia Gülce Atabay was born. Today, as she approaches her first birthday, I have understood how surprising life is. This dissertation is dedicated to her. I wish she becomes the heroine of her own life.

İstanbul, June 28, 2022

PROPOSITIONS

I-Political myths explain the present by referring to the past and serve as guides for the future and as justifications for the tragedies of history. In this regard, action/adventure films with historical settings constitute a significant realm of everyday life through which nationalist political myths are reproduced.

II-According to seventy-one action/adventure films analyzed in the dissertation, during the period of the 1950s-1980, the cinematic depiction of the Ottoman/Turkish past evolved into a much more militant and aggressive one.

III-The ideal warrior depicted in action/adventure film corpus between the 1950s and 1980, also represents the idealized Turkish citizen.

IV-The transformation in the depictions of the idealized citizen happened against a backdrop of the shift in electoral balance in favor of the conservative peripheral elite, which manifested itself as the common man's representative against the 'privileged' founding elite.

V-The transformation in the representations of the ideal warrior, nationalistic space and enemies reflects the continuous and dynamic nature of Turkish nation-building.

VI-The formation of nations is not a one-off undertaking. It involves continuous re-interpretations, rediscoveries, and reconstructions of political myths as a response to new necessities.

VII- The process of imagining nationhood includes the discourses of official/formal nationalism on the one hand and popular/informal nationalism on the other. These two are always in dialogue and what comes out of this reveals different visions and manifestations of national identity by challenging non-dynamic monolithic discourses.

VIII-Much of the available literature about the Cold War focuses on Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War and adopts a political history perspective. The addition of the cultural aspect is necessary to create a more complete picture of the varieties of Turkish nationalism.

IX-Communication studies in Turkey are largely lacking a critical and interdisciplinary perspective. For instance, despite a profound academic interest in the representation of the past in Turkish cinema, many of the studies on films of the period the dissertation deals with are primarily general surveys.

X- The 'Strong man' style of leadership is flourishing in the world. This is a reflection of rising populism and growing mistrust of democratic systems driven by the sense of insecurity brought about by globalized capitalism.

XI-There are plenty of economic and security explanations for the Russia-Ukraine War of early 2022. These, however, are incomplete without taking cultural and historical underpinnings into account. A thorough understanding requires going back to points underlined by Vladimir Putin's July 2021 article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." It reproduces political myths related to Russian superiority through his vision of reviving the Tsarist Empire. This contemporary example shows why and how political myths are significant in understanding global politics.

XII-Breastfeeding is perceived as maternal duty and so taken as the hallmark of quality mothering. In this regard, breastfeeding promotion campaigns by health authorities reinforce gender inequalities and also lead to negative emotions such as guilt for those mothers who do not (exclusively) breastfeed.

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